Fort Omaha and the winning of the West

Walter C. Sharp

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PORT OF OMABA AND THE WINNING OF THE WEST

A Thesis
Presented to the
Department of History
and the
Faculty of the College of Graduate Studies
University of Omaha

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
Walter C. Sharp, Jr.
February 1967
Accepted for the faculty of the College of Graduate Studies of the University of Omaha, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts.

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PREFACE

In the preparation of this brief general history of Fort Omaha during the frontier period, emphasis was placed on those matters not generally known and which frequently have been incorrectly reported regarding the post. No effort was made to "rehash" the details of the various campaigns and expeditions in which the Fort Omaha garrison participated. To do so would be beyond the scope of this paper. Furthermore, such detail is considered unnecessary, as thousands upon thousands of words have already been written on the Big Horn and Yellowstone Expedition, Crook's Rosebud Campaign, the Battle of Wounded Knee, and the Federal Government's handling of the frontier Indian problem.

The writer's purpose is simply to show why Fort Omaha was established, briefly describe post buildings and facilities that existed during the frontier period, indicate the troops that were actually stationed at the post, and explain why these troops were there and what they did to help accomplish the United States Army's mission in the West.

In order to present an accurate history of Fort Omaha, considerable weight was given to official documents and records and to statements contained in autobiographies and the accounts of persons who had first-hand knowledge of events mentioned in the text. Secondary works were, in general, used merely for background purposes and as a guide to primary sources of information. Although all locally available newspapers covering the period were consulted, they were often found to be inaccurate and
incomplete regarding events that involved Fort Omaha and the Department of the Platte. Newspapers, therefore, are quoted or cited only in those instances where they appear to be based on factual knowledge and parallel official documents and reports. They frequently do, of course, provide additional detail for the story.

During the preparation of this paper, the writer became indebted to many persons. His gratitude is especially extended to Don Mickey, Jr., for steering him toward the National Archives and to the Fort Omaha Post Surgeon's medical journals. Invaluable assistance was also provided by Merrill J. Mattes, the historian with the Midwestern Regional Office of the National Park Service, who made available the Park Service library and furnished other valuable information for this history.

The writer is, in addition, indebted to Miss Catherine Beal and her staff at the Omaha Public Library; to the Love Library of the University of Nebraska; and to the Gene Eppley Library of the Municipal University of Omaha. The assistance provided by Miss Ella Jane Dougherty in securing source material through the inter-library loan system, and the aid rendered by Mr. Verne Hazelwood in locating government publications not available at the Gene Eppley Library, is deeply appreciated.

The writer also wishes to thank the Nebraska State Historical Society for the use of both their library and their microfilm copies of archival material pertaining to the Department of the Platte.

Thanks must also be extended to Doctor and Mrs. Julius Steinberg, of Omaha, for the use of their valuable scrapbooks and records; to Commander Arthur D. Bismitt, U.S.N., the present commanding officer of Fort Omaha, for a wide variety of assistance; and to Mr. Fred Wallace, who personally witnessed much of the post-1896 history of Fort Omaha, and
who proved to be a valuable consultant. Mr. Wallace's knowledge helped immensely in determining exactly what post facilities existed at any given date from 1896 through the World War II period.

The writer is also indebted to Doctor Frederick W. Adrian for his encouragement and constructive criticism of the draft, and to Mrs. Virginia Clark for the final typing of the paper. Finally — and probably the greatest debt of all — is owed to my wife, Mary Louise, who not only helped in reviewing the paper, but who so graciously tolerated Fort Omaha as the predominant subject of conversation in our home for nearly a year.

W. C. C., Jr.
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INTRODUCTION

Fort Omaha can attribute its foundation to the geographical location and strategic importance of Omaha, Nebraska, in the winning of the West. The post was established in 1868 to support the Headquarters, Department of the Platte, and to house a tactical reserve for that geographical command. Because of its location, Fort Omaha and its garrison provided valuable administrative and logistical support for military posts, camps, and stations located further to the west; protected survey and work crews engaged in the construction of the Union Pacific and the Northern Pacific Railroads; participated in many of the major Indian wars fought on the northern plains; and, on numerous occasions, aided civilian authorities in their difficult task of maintaining law and order in the rapidly developing and highly individualistic frontier.

Although Fort Omaha played a vital role in accomplishing the post-Civil War mission of the United States Army in the West, its story has been neglected. Perhaps this oversight results from a failure on the part of many writers to appreciate the significance of support-type troops and installations in a military operation. The spectacular too often overshadows the routine. This, unfortunately, results in overemphasis of a battle itself and underemphasis of the many other important factors that affect the campaign. Such things as the employment of reserve and logistical type units and the significance of terrain, transportation facilities, time, distance, climate, and supply, plus many other factors, usually determine success or failure on the battlefield.
The mission of Fort Omaha, during the period 1868 to 1896, was somewhat similar to that of Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. Each of these installations marked the threshold of a natural route of travel and communications with the West. As such, each became an important military headquarters and the logistical base for a large territorial command, and each provided a centrally located point for its departmental reserve. The citizens of Omaha, Nebraska, can justifiably refer to their city as "The Gate City" — the gateway to the West. Although the old Oregon and Santa Fe Trails — and later the Kansas Pacific Railroad — began near Leavenworth, the shorter Mormon (or Emigrant) Trail and the first transcontinental railroad began near Omaha.

Following termination of the Indian wars, the tactical importance of Fort Omaha ceased. The post then became inactive, on a more or less "standby basis," from 1896 until 1905. In 1905, the Fort received a new lease on life when it was taken over by the United States Army Signal Corps. At first it was a signal school for non-commissioned officers; later, during the World War I period, it served as the U. S. Army Balloon School. After World War I, Fort Omaha was used to house officers and enlisted men assigned to Headquarters, Seventh Corps Area. Then, in 1941, it became an important support installation for the Seventh Service Command.

With the end of hostilities, the Seventh Service Command was abolished and the Army had no further need for the proud old post. In 1947, however, the United States Navy came to its rescue and Fort Omaha became an important personnel and reserve training center. A Flag Officer of the Navy occupied the quarters formerly used by the old Indian
fighter, Major General George Crook, and the buildings that once housed infantrymen and cavalrymen now house sailors and marines. Otherwise, Fort Omaha still plays an important role in both the Armed Forces and in the Omaha, Nebraska, community. Its mission today, however, is a far cry from what it was when the Fort was first established.
CHAPTER I

THE MILITARY IMPORTANCE OF OMAHA, NEBRASKA

Long before 1860 and the establishment of Fort Omaha, the Omaha-Council Bluffs area was known to mark an important passageway to the West.\(^1\) With the arrival of Brigham Young and his pioneer company at Council Bluffs on June 14, 1846, the short Platte Valley route to the Rocky Mountains became firmly established. Within the next few decades, approximately 100,000 "Mormon Saints" plus untold thousands of "Gentiles" passed through the area en route west along the Mormon Trail.\(^2\) In 1853, Grenville M. Dodge made preliminary surveys for a transcontinental railroad and verified the Great Platte Valley Route as the shortest and best possible avenue to the West.\(^3\) Abraham Lincoln, as early as 1859, was

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\(^1\) The Lewis and Clark Expedition had encamped in the area during July of 1804. At an early date, the American Fur Company established a trading post at Bellevue (a point just south of present-day Omaha), to serve the Upper Missouri River area. Although abandoned in 1827 in favor of Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, Fort Atkinson had been erected in 1820, just north of present-day Omaha, to control the upper Missouri Valley; and, in 1842, General John C. Fremont had led a surveying expedition up the Platte River Valley. Harrison Johnson, *Johnson's History of Nebraska* (Omaha: Published by Henry Gibson, Herald Printing House, 1880), pp. 34-39.


\(^3\) Major General Grenville M. Dodge, *How We Built the Union Pacific and Other Railroad Papers and Addresses* (1st reprint ed.; Denver: Sage Books, published by Alan Swallow, 1965), pp. 5-6. In commenting on this route, General Dodge stated: "The Lord had so constructed the country that any engineer who failed to take advantage of the great open road from here [Omaha area] west to Salt Lake would not have been fit to belong to the profession; 500 miles of it up a sinew valley without a grade to exceed fifteen feet; the natural pass over the Rocky Mountains,
familiar with Dodge's findings and the importance of this route. On November 17, 1863, after Congressional passage of the 1862 railroad bill and after having again consulted General Dodge, President Lincoln fixed the "Eastern terminus of the Union Pacific Railroad within the limits of the township of Iowa opposite to the town of Omaha."

In the meantime, the Mormon migrations and the gold rushes of 1849 and 1859 had resulted in thousands of emigrants having settled in hundreds of small, widely scattered communities throughout the Rocky Mountains, the high plains, and the Great Salt Lake Valley. The Indians, of course, resented such wholesale intrusions upon what they considered to be their own domains, and they grew increasingly hostile. During the pre-Civil War period, Federal troops had provided some protection to these settlers and their primary routes of travel by establishing a network of scattered but lightly garrisoned military posts. The Civil War, however, had forced the withdrawal of Regular Army units for service in

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4Ibid., p. 11. In August, 1859, Lincoln visited Council Bluffs on a personal business matter; and, while there, he met Dodge and learned the results of his Platte Valley surveys.

5Ibid., pp. 11-12. In the spring of 1863, General Dodge was called to Washington to further discuss his surveys with President Lincoln.

the East, and the forts were taken over and manned by local militia and by volunteer troops. The Indians, well aware of the weakness of the scattered forts and untrained volunteers, soon began a series of uprisings that continued — with varying degrees of intensity — until the last decade of the nineteenth century.

The Indian uprisings indicated the military importance of Omaha as a base of operations. Not only was Omaha a starting point for the important Platte Valley Route to the West, but it was the territorial capital, and the immediate area contained the bulk of the inhabitants of a vast but sparsely populated region. When President Lincoln issued his second call for three-year volunteers, Omaha became a hub of military activity. Nebraska had been assigned a quota of one regiment, and the 1st Volunteer Infantry was quickly organized under the command of Colonel John M. Thayer. Between June 11 and July 22, 1861, the regiment's ten companies were formed and mustered into the Federal service.

7Colonel William Addleman Genoe, The History of the United States Army (New York: D. Appleton - Century Company, 1942), pp. 244, 299. In 1860, 183 out of 193 companies in the service were scattered throughout the West. They were all withdrawn by 1862.

8Johnson, pp. 150, 169-171. Of a total Nebraska population of 28,841, the seven eastern counties — from Washington south through Richardson — contained 19,882 persons, of whom not more than one-fourth were males qualified for military service. Most of this population was concentrated within fifty miles of Omaha.

9U. S., Works Progress Administration for the State of Nebraska, A Military History of Nebraska, a Federal Writer's Project sponsored by the National Guard of Nebraska (Lincoln, 1939), p. 22. (Mimeoographed) Cited hereafter as: WPA, A Military History of Nebraska.

10Companies A and B were the first units mustered. There being no military camp established in Omaha on June 11 (the date of the muster), Company A was quartered in the Herndon House and Company B stayed in the Territorial Capitol Building. The Nebraska Republican (Omaha), June 13, 1861.
By August 15, the new regiment had moved by steamboat to St. Louis, Missouri, and assembled at Pilot Knob, as a part of General John C. Fremont's forces in that area.\(^{11}\)

Shortly after departure of the 1st Nebraska Volunteer Infantry, another unit — the Curtis' Horse Cavalry — was organized, in Omaha. It was a four company battalion and became a part of the 5th Iowa Cavalry. Companies A, B, and C were completely mustered into the Federal service, in Omaha, between September 14 and October 3, 1861; Company D was mustered at St. Louis, Missouri, on October 30, 1861.\(^{12}\) For the next four years, the unit served with its parent organization in Kentucky, Tennessee, and Alabama.\(^{13}\) Thus, the Nebraska Territory was largely denuded of troops.

For a short period immediately following departure of the Nebraska units to fight in the South, conditions on the Northern Plains remained relatively peaceful. The first serious alarm came during the summer of 1862, when Santee Sioux uprisings in Minnesota spread over into the upper Missouri region.\(^{14}\) To meet the threat, Governor Saunders

\(^{11}\)PA, A Military History of Nebraska, pp. 22-24. After several months of minor action in Arkansas and Missouri, the 1st Nebraskans participated in the siege of Fort Donaldson (February, 1862), and the Battle of Shiloh, or Pittsburg Landing (April, 1862). On October 11, 1863, the regiment was mustered by Special Orders No. 270, Headquarters, Department of the Missouri, and the following month, by Special Orders No. 304, of that same headquarters, it was reorganized and designated the 1st Nebraska Cavalry. Ibid., p. 31; Johnson, pp. 150-151.

\(^{12}\)Johnson, pp. 157-159.

\(^{13}\)PA, A Military History of Nebraska, pp. 26-31.

\(^{14}\)Don Rickey, Jr., Forty Miles a Day on Beans and Hay (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1963), pp. 5-5.
directed "... all male residents of the Territory between the ages of 21 and 45 to enroll forthwith in independent militia companies of not less than 35 or more than 64 persons each."  

The territorial government then requested and obtained authority from the War Department to organize a militia.  

Early in November, at Omaha, the first units of the 2nd Nebraska Cavalry were mustered into the service for nine months. By February of 1863, the organization of the regiment was completed.  

In April, it moved to Sioux City, Iowa, where it joined the 6th Iowa Cavalry, under the command of General Alfred Sully, in an expedition against the rebellious Sioux. The expedition moved north along the Missouri River and decisively defeated the Indians at the Battle of White Stone Hill, on September 3, 1863. Its tour of duty having been fulfilled, the 2nd Nebraska Cavalry then returned to Omaha and was mustered out of the service on November 30, 1863. A new four company militia unit was

15 WPA, A Military History of Nebraska, p. 59.

16 Ibid.


18 Ibid.

19 WPA, A Military History of Nebraska, p. 59.

20 For a daily record of the 2nd Nebraska's part in the expedition, see Richard D. Rowen (ed.), "The Second Nebraska's Campaign Against the Sioux," Nebraska History, XLI, No. 1 (March, 1953), pp. 3-53.

formed from its ranks and designated the 1st Battalion of Nebraska
Veteran Cavalry.22

The victory of White Stone Hill did not end the danger of Indian
raids along the upper Missouri and the overland trails, nor did it quiet
the fears of isolated settlers. To meet the threat, the newly organized
7th Iowa Cavalry23 was transferred to the western plains. Eight companies
of the regiment arrived in Omaha on September 19, 1863 — well mounted,
wearing new uniforms, but poorly armed.24 The wind blew constantly on
the day of their arrival, and Captain Ware (then a lieutenant) of Company
F wrote:

We were camped out on the western edge of town; our tents
were in rows double-guyed to resist the wind, and with holes dug
in the ground in which to cook, so that the wind would not blow
the fire out over the tents. We got our camp made about sun-
down, ... 25

The 7th Iowa remained in Omaha less than two weeks. As soon as
individual companies were ready, they continued on to their destination
at Fort Kearny, Nebraska. Each unit moved separately, "... one at a
time, so that we might scatter along the road in the progress west, and

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22Johnson, pp. 156-157.

23Captain Eugene F. Ware, The Indian War of 1864, introduction
and notes by Clyde C. Walton (Bison Book ed.; Lincoln: University of
Nebraska Press, 1960), pp. xi-xii. The 7th Iowa was a twelve company
regiment, organized between April 27 and July 25, 1863.

24Ibid., p. 6. The remaining four companies — I, K, L, and M —
were already serving in Dakota Territory and were based upon Fort Randall.

25Ibid., p. 7. Many writers use the year 1863 in connection with
the establishment of Fort Omaha and base their date upon so-called "Mili-
tary Posts of Omaha." Strictly speaking, this is an error. What they
probably had in mind was the temporary tent camp established by the 7th
Iowa Cavalry.
have better grass and forage than if they all went together.\textsuperscript{26} Regimental headquarters was established at Fort Kearny and, by the end of November, a new post had been constructed at Cottonwood Springs, near the forks of the North and South Platte Rivers.\textsuperscript{27}

At the time that the 7th Iowa Cavalry was providing protection along the overland trail between Fort Kearny and Cottonwood Springs, the 2nd Battalion, 11th Ohio Cavalry, arrived from Fort Leavenworth.\textsuperscript{28} This unit reinforced the 1st Battalion of that same regiment, which was already present in the Fort Laramie area.\textsuperscript{29} During April of 1864, the 11th Ohio Cavalry received a large number of new recruits and from them organized an additional battalion.\textsuperscript{30}

Nebraska did not lag behind in providing active service troops to protect the overland trail. Having completed its three years of voluntary service, the 1st Nebraska Cavalry returned to Omaha in June of 1864, and its personnel were either furloughed or mustered out of the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{26}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 13.
\item \textsuperscript{27}\textit{Ibid.}, pp. 44-51. The 7th Iowa called their fort "Cantonment McKeen," but it was popularly known as Fort Cottonwood, and formally designated Fort McPherson. \textit{Ibid.}, p. 61.
\item \textsuperscript{28}\textit{Ibid.}, pp. 443-449.
\item \textsuperscript{29}\textit{Ibid.}, pp. 100, 443-449.
\item \textsuperscript{30}\textit{Ibid.}, pp. 119-120, 449. Companies I, K, and L were organized at Fort Laramie on June 30, 1864, and comprised the 3rd Battalion. Lieutenant Colonel William O. Collins commanded the regiment. Some historians erroneously show April, 1864, as the arrival date of the 11th Ohio Cavalry at Fort Laramie. Troops comprising the 1st Battalion of that unit, under Colonel Collins, had been at Laramie ever since May of 1862. Troops from the 11th Ohio guarded trails, patrolled and repaired the telegraph line, and erected many new military posts throughout the Rocky Mountain region — to include Fort Mitchell, Nebraska. \textit{Ibid.}, p. 257.
\end{itemize}
service. On August 15, the 1st Nebraska Cavalry reassembled from furlough, at Omaha, and were reconstituted as the 1st Nebraska Veteran Cavalry. The new regiment was then sent to Fort Kearny, Nebraska, and its units were distributed all along the Emigrant Trail. With the arrival of these additional troops, Company F of the 7th Iowa Cavalry moved further westward and constructed a new post — Fort Sedgwick — near Julesburg, Colorado.

The arrival of these new units along the overland trail occurred none too soon. Throughout the spring and summer of 1864, roving bands of Indians robbed, murdered, and committed other mischief in the Platte Valley. Then, beginning on August 7, the Cheyenne, Sioux, and Arapaho made simultaneous attacks on stagecoaches, wagon trains, emigrants, and isolated stage stations and ranches throughout the central and western portions of the Platte Valley. Fear of an impending Indian war spread

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32 *Ibid.*, p. 10. The 1st Battalion, Nebraska Veteran Cavalry (the militia unit formed from the old 2nd Nebraska Cavalry) was also mustered into the service at this time. Its commander, Lieutenant Colonel George Armstrong, became commanding officer of the newly organized 1st Nebraska Veteran Volunteer Cavalry.

33 Ware, pp. 235-238. Throughout the Civil War period, new military posts had to be constructed to meet growing hostility of the Indians and protect increased travel across the plains. On the Northern Plains, alone, the number increased from three, in 1860, to twenty-eight by the end of 1864. Ray H. Mattison, *The Army Post on the Northern Plains, 1865-1885* (Gering, Nebraska: Oregon Trail Museum Assoc., 1982), p. 2.

34 Foreman, pp. 422-424.

35 Olson, pp. 141-142. Captain Ware states there was no Indian activity in the neighborhood of Julesburg itself, but that "... great inroads made upon the ranches along the line between Kearney and Cottonwood." Ware, p. 229.
as far east as Omaha. "It is a fact [wrote Sorenson] that quite a number of the citizens became so frightened that they went over to Council Bluffs, where they remained till the scare subsided."36

By the close of 1864, Brigadier General Robert B. Mitchell commanded the Military District of Nebraska, with his headquarters in Omaha.37 His district included the Emigrant Trail from Omaha to Fort Laramie, Wyoming, and thence west to the Great South Pass.38 To protect the entire route, General Mitchell's total force numbered only fifty-four officers and 1,201 enlisted men.39 The road from Omaha to Julesburg was the joint responsibility of the 1st Nebraska and the 7th Iowa Cavalry Regiments; the road from Julesburg to South Pass was guarded by the 11th Ohio Cavalry.40

Colonel Chivington's surprise attack against Black Kettle's tribesmen at Sand Creek, Colorado, on November 29, did little to help the situation. Word of the massacre spread rapidly, and throughout the winter of 1864-1865 Indian war parties ravaged the Platte Valley — burning

36 Sorenson, p. 423.

37 The District of Nebraska was a subordinate geographical command of the Department of Kansas. Major General Samuel R. Curtis commanded the Department of Kansas, with his headquarters at Fort Leavenworth. Other military districts under Curtis were: the District of South Kansas, Hq. at Paola; District of North Kansas, Hq. at Fort Leavenworth; District of Upper Arkansas, Hq. at Fort Riley; and the District of Colorado, Hq. at Denver. Ware, pp. 310-311.

38 Ware, pp. 309-310.

39 Ibid., p. 311. A similar shortage of troops existed throughout the West. For example, Colonel John M. Chivington of the District of Colorado had only nineteen officers and 297 active duty enlisted men belonging to five different companies of Colorado cavalry.

40 Ibid., p. 310.
ranches, raiding overland stage stations, and causing other depredations.\footnote{Olson, pp. 142-143. See also Ware, pp. 324-329.}

Then, on February 1 and 2, they crossed the Platte, completely overran Julesburg, and tore up telegraph lines for several miles on either side of that point.\footnote{For a first-hand account of the Julesburg affair, see Ware, pp. 362-379.}

On January 30, a military reorganization merged the Department of Kansas with the Department of Missouri and placed Major General Grenville M. Dodge in command of the new department.\footnote{J. R. Perkin, Trails, Rails and War: The Life of General G. M. Dodge (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1929), p. 171.} General Dodge quickly moved his headquarters from St. Louis to Fort Leavenworth, and then sent the following order to all of his District commanders:

> Place every mounted man in your command on the South Platte route; repair telegraph lines, attack all bodies of hostile Indians large or small; stay with them and pound them until they move north of the Platte or south of the Arkansas.\footnote{Ibid., p. 173.}

In the meantime, however, General Mitchell and the troops along the Platte were already "in the saddle." By February 13, the telegraph line was restored, and a few days later the stage line was operating again from Denver to Omaha.\footnote{Ware, pp. 380-391.}

Two months later, the war between the North and the South ended.

In the territories west of the Missouri, however, the old war between Indian and white man grew in intensity.

Thus, after Appomattox, Federal military authorities were confronted with a complex problem. Not only must they garrison the recently
defeated Confederate States and protect the Mexican frontier against any possible designs of Napoleon III and his puppet Emperor Maximilian, but they had to gain control of the Indians and help establish some degree of law and order in the Western territories. All of this had to be accomplished in the face of a rapidly demobilizing army. To the Civil War veteran, the war was over and he was ready to go home. An economy-minded Congress concurred with the volunteers and immediately began a continuing pressure to reduce the size of the Army and to limit the amount of appropriations for its support.

In the meantime, the condition of the Army in the West was deplorable. The widely scattered military posts were badly run down and in need of repair. Post garrisons were so small that they were ineffective against hostile Indians, and their isolation made supply and mutual support a virtual impossibility. One army wife, describing Fort Kearny, Nebraska, in 1865, stated that "the old, dilapidated houses afforded scanty quarters for the officers and their families." She also described.

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46 Gano, pp. 298-301.


Fort Sedgwick, Colorado, as follows:

The quarters were very dilapidated and nothing was in sight but the river bottom and sandy plains; wood was $1.05 a cord and potatoes $8 a bushel, with other things in proportion. To raise vegetables in that sandy soil was declared impossible. 50

In the spring of 1866, Lieutenant General William Tecumseh Sherman, commanding the Division of Mississippi, 51 made a personal inspection of the Western territories for which he was responsible, and sent a report of his findings to General Grant. His comments are much stronger than those of Mrs. Burt.

At Kearny he reported the buildings are fast rotting down, and two of the largest were in such danger of tumbling down that General Wessels had to pull them down, and I will probably use it to shelter some horses this winter, and the next year let it go to the prairie dogs. 52

General Sherman also visited Fort Sedgwick and was not at all pleased with the conditions he found.

The post he wrote was first built of sods, and now looks like hovels in which a negro would hardly go. Surely, had the southern planters put their negroes in such hovels, a sample

50Ibid., p. 45.

51The Military Division of the Mississippi included all states north of the Ohio River and all states and territories north of Texas and west of the Mississippi River to the Rocky Mountains. The Division also included Montana, Utah, and New Mexico. The Platte Valley and the old Oregon Trail were the responsibility of Major General John Pope, commanding the Department of the Missouri, with his headquarters at Fort Leavenworth. U. S., Congress, House, Annual Report of the Secretary of War, 39th Cong., 2nd Sess., 1866-1867, House Exec. Doc. No. 1 (Serial 1285), pp. 13-19. Cited hereafter as Annual Report of the Secretary of War, 1866-1867.

52Letter from General Sherman to General J. A. Rawlins, Chief of Staff to General Grant, August 21, 1866, and included in Protection Across the Continent, p. 5.
would, ere this, have been carried to Boston and exhibited as illustrative of the cruelty and inhumanity of the man masters.\textsuperscript{53}

Sherman further stated that "... we have no business to put men out here unless we give them food and shelter, and all things but sand and water must be hauled from one to four hundred miles."\textsuperscript{54}

Generals Sherman and Grant and the Western commanders were all fully aware of the situation. Only by strict adherence to the old military principles of "economy of force" and "mobility" could conditions be rectified. Reorganization of the Regular Army was pushed in order to bring units up to authorized strength and to transfer them — as rapidly as conditions in the South would permit — to the Western territories where they were needed.\textsuperscript{55} Efforts were made to keep emigrants out of Indian territory, to restrict Western travel to the main trails, and to encourage self-protection among the settlers.\textsuperscript{56} Meanwhile, the Army gave every possible assistance to the construction of transcontinental railroads.\textsuperscript{57} It was correctly believed that the railroads would help provide the solution. Through their completion, not only would civilian travel

\textsuperscript{53}\textsuperscript{Letter from Sherman to Rawlins, August 24, 1866, \textit{Ibid.}, p. 6. Forts Kearny and Sedgwick were not isolated examples of a few rundown posts. They but typified the deplorable conditions under which troops existed on the Western frontier.}

\textsuperscript{54}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 7.

\textsuperscript{55}\textit{Annual Report of the Secretary of War, 1866-1867}, pp. 17-18.

\textsuperscript{56}General Order No. 27, Headquarters, Department of the Missouri, St. Louis, Missouri, February 23, 1866, and included in \textit{U. S. Congress, Senate, Letter of the Secretary of War, 40th Cong., 1st Sess., 1867, Senate Exec. Doc. No. 2 (Serial 1308)}, pp. 2-4.

\textsuperscript{57}\textit{Dodge}, pp. 18-19.
be improved and more easily controlled, but the logistical support of western forts would be greatly facilitated. Supplies would be cheaper and rapid troop movements would provide concentrated striking power by the more easily trollied, but the lariat legal support of Western forts would greatly facilitate. Furthermore, the territory lying between the Union Pacific and the Kansas Pacific Railroads would then become settled and "... permanently separate the hostile Indians of the north from those of the south, and allow us to direct our military forces on one or the other at pleasure, if thereafter they continue their acts of hostility."

According to General Sherman,

The construction of the Union Pacific Railroad was deemed so important that the President, at my suggestion, constituted on the 5th of March, 1866, the new Department of the Platte, General P. St. George Cooke commanding, succeeded by General C. C. Augur, headquarters at Omaha, with orders to give ample protection to the working parties and to afford every possible assistance in the construction of the road, and subsequently in like manner the Department of Dakota was constituted, General A. H. Terry commanding, with headquarters at St. Paul, to give similar protection and encouragement to the Northern Pacific Railroad.

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59 General William T. Sherman, Memoirs (2nd ed.; New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1886), II, p. 412. Brevet Major General Cooke officially opened the Department of the Platte on May 2, 1866. It consisted of the state of Iowa; the territories of Nebraska and Utah; that portion of Dakota lying west of the 104th meridian; and that part of Montana containing the road between Fort Laramie and Virginia City. On January 23, 1867, following the Indian massacre of Captain William J. Pettersen and his troops near Fort Phil Kearney, General Cooke was relieved from command of the department, and it was turned over to General Augur. "Annual Report of the Adjutant General of the Army," contained in the Annual Report of the Secretary of War, 1866-1867, p. 3; Annual Report of the Secretary of War, 1868-1869, pp. 31-32; Otis E. Young, The West of Philip St. George Cooke, 1809-1895 (Glendale, Calif.: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1955), pp. 340-353; and Major General Grenville M. Dodge, Personal Recollections of President Abraham Lincoln, General
By the spring of 1863, construction of the Union Pacific had reached and passed Laramie and Fort Sanders and was well on its way toward either Salt Lake City or Ogden, Utah. This altered the military situation, and General Sherman considered it no longer necessary to maintain the forts along the Bozeman Trail. On May 9, he informed General Grant of his plan to withdraw troops from Forts C. F. Smith, Phil Kearney, and Reno back to Forts Fetterman and Laramie, and to protect the railroad, thereafter, by detachments. During the summer, General Augur would quarter the troops in tents, but abandonment of the forts would leave him short of quarters for one regiment during the winter. This gave him opportunity to do something about the horrible living conditions in the Western forts and get rid of some posts that had become obsolete through completion of the railroad, and he could have a military reserve.

We have never [wrote Sherman] had reserves in hand for the clamors that always open with spring, and instead of pushing our troops out so far, I am convinced he [General Augur] should have a regiment at Omaha in winter, to send out on the railroad to

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60 Dodge, How We Built . . .


63 Ibid.
meet these cases. Instead of building these expensive posts out here, I will recommend that we build cheap barracks for one regiment in or near Omaha. Parties have more than once offered the necessary land, and General Augur will, on his return to Omaha, endeavor to secure a site of about 100 acres near Omaha, and proceed to build these quarters for a regiment.64

General Grant approved and forwarded General Sherman's recommendations to the Secretary of War on May 20, 1868.65 Sherman could now follow the "true military policy" and have reserves kept "... at such points as Omaha and Leavenworth during the winter and shuttled back and forth across the plains in the fighting season."66

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64Ibid. It is interesting to note that, in 1866, General Cooke wanted to construct a public building for his headquarters — and possibly one company — in Omaha, but that General Sherman disapproved the plan, on the basis that it was too far to the rear. Protection Across the Continent, pp. 9-10. In 1866, General Sherman's reasoning was certainly correct, as both the paucity of troops and the time-distance factors involved required both commanders and military units to be further to the west. Two years later, however, when the railroad reached the Rocky Mountains, the situation was entirely changed.

65Ibid., p. 3.

66Attearn, p. 203.
CHAPTER II

OMAHA BARRACKS, 1868-1870:
ESTABLISHING THE POST

In May, 1868, General Sherman reported to General Grant that, on more than one occasion, the people of Omaha had offered to donate land for an Army post in that city. A few weeks later, General Augur submitted a similar report to the Adjutant General. Then, on May 27, 1868, a group of seventy-nine prominent Omaha citizens met with Augustus Kountze and signed the following agreement:

"We, the undersigned, hereby agree to pay the sum of seven thousand eight hundred and twenty-five dollars, each to pay share and share alike, in payment for forty-two and a half acres of land . . . to be used by the United States for a Government Fort or Garrison, with the provision inserted in the deed that said land shall revert to us, share and share alike, in case the Government abandon the same, or convert it to any other use than that above specified."

The government could not accept title to this land because of the limitations imposed regarding control and use of the property.

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1 Letter from General Augur to General E. D. Townsend, May 25, 1868, U. S. National Archives, Records of the War Department, United States Army Commands (Record Group 93), Department of the Platte, Letters Sent, April 2, 1866-October 30, 1877 (Books 23A, 24, 25, 26), Ms., microfilm. Cited hereafter as Department of the Platte, Letters Sent, 1866-1877.

2 In 1868, Augustus Kountze was a prominent Omaha banker and one of the founders of the First National Bank of Omaha. Sorensen, pp. 132 et passim.

Blaufuente, therefore, as trustee for the civic group, leased the forty-two and one-half acres to the government for a period "... of ten years with the privilege of renewal for ten years at the pleasure of the United States."4

General Sherman personally inspected the site chosen by General Augur for the new barracks and informed the Secretary of War that it met with his approval.

The ground Sherman wrote is well located for the purpose, but in my judgment is insufficient in extent. At considerable risk we got Mr. Kountze to procure an additional 40 acres, making a parallelogram of 30 acres actually eighty-two and one-half acres, and agreed to pay for the same the sum of $8,000, being at the rate of $200 an acre. In order to secure the ground I had to give General Augur an order for the quartermaster to pay for the same at once.5

Sherman requested confirmation of his actions, and they were approved by the Secretary of War. At the same time, the Secretary informed him that

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4Ibid. On October 2, 1863, the lease was changed to permit "... renewal for any number of years at the pleasure of the United States." In 1878, the Government renewed the lease for only one year; but, on October 2, 1879, the lease was extended for another twenty years under the same conditions. The following year, Mr. Kountze petitioned the Douglas County Court for an order enabling him to convey absolute title for the property to the United States Government. The court rendered such a decree on March 28, 1882, and by a deed dated April 17 of that same year, the forty-two and one-half acres was conveyed to the United States. Ibid., pp. 168-171.

the buildings could be regarded as not being "of that permanent kind requiring special legislative authority." 6

The establishment of a new military post at Omaha was hailed without exception by the local press as a measure that would greatly enhance the prosperity of the community. According to the Omaha Weekly Herald,

the intention is to winter troops here engaged in service on the plains, and to make it [Omaha] the chief depot for the purchase, storage and re-shipment of Army supplies to the West. It will cause large and continuous disbursements of money, increasing local trade, and giving increased market facilities for the products of the state at large.7

The Omaha Weekly Republican expressed similar views. It went further, however, and pointed out that "the permanent establishment of a military post here, at which will be concentrated, and from which will be distributed, the troops for military operations on the plains and in the mountains, will be a benefit immensely greater than this." 8

In 1868, the new fort was located three miles north of Omaha City; one and one-half miles south of Florence, Nebraska; and approximately one and one-half miles west of the Missouri River.9 There were

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6 Ibid., pp. 2-3.
7 Omaha Weekly Herald, July 29, 1868. It had been announced earlier, in May, that a quartermaster depot and a commissary depot would be established in Omaha, to purchase all supplies required by the Department of the Platte. Omaha Weekly Herald, May 13, 1868; Omaha Weekly Republican, May 27 and June 17, 1868.
8 Omaha Weekly Republican, August 26, 1868.
9 U. S., National Archives, Records of the Adjutant General's Office (Record Group 94), Medical History of the Post of Fort Omaha, Nebraska, for the period 1866-1874 (Book 219), Ms., microfilm, p. l. Cited hereafter as Medical History, Fort Omaha (Book 219).
no trees on the reservation nor in its immediate vicinity. There did
exist, however, a variety of shrubs common to the local area. The
site was described, in 1870, as being rectangular in shape, with
the long axis running north and south. The western side is
elevated and overlooks the reservation and the city of Omaha.
The country west and south is rolling, while east, toward the
city, it is nearly level. The soil consist of a rich black
vegetable mold from two to five feet in thickness, containing
some sand, but entirely free from stones and gravel; it is
easily plowed and very fertile. The subsoil is a yellowish
clay, not impervious to water.

Throughout the summer and fall of 1868, time became an increas-
ingly important factor for completion of the new post. On May 19, General
Augsur officially issued his order for the abandonment of the Powder River
country. Rumors of such a move had already reached Fort C. F. Smith
and the people concerned. Then, according to an Army wife who partici-
cipated in the move, on "... July 29, when all was packed and the

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11 Ibid. It was soon found that the composition of the subsoil created a vexatious water problem. The water contained a very large
amount of organic matter, resulting from its having filtered through an
ancient peat bed. This gave the water a nauseating odor, a disagreeable
taste, and made it so hard that it was "almost impossible to form a
lather with soap when cold and before boiling the water." Medical His-
tory, Fort Omaha (Book 219), p. 69.

12 Special Order No. 80, Headquarters, Department of the Platte,
Omaha, Nebraska, dated May 19, 1868. A copy of the order was published
in The Omaha Republican (daily), May 21, 1868, and in the Omaha Tri-Weekly
Republican, May 27, 1868.

13 Mattes, p. 165.
bugler sounded assembly," evacuation of the post began. "The soldiers fell into ranks in heavy field outfit for the 324 mile march to the railroad and civilization."14 During August, the abandonment of Fort C. F. Smith, Fort Phil Kearney, and Fort Reno was completed, and Generals Sherman and Augur needed winter quarters for the troops that had garrisoned these forts.15

It was not until late August that the Department of the Platte Quartermaster advertised for bids to erect the new post, with work to begin on September 1 and be completed by November 15.16 Time and weather conditions, unfortunately, worked against the contractors, and construction was not yet completed when the first troops arrived.

The internal arrangement of the new post was similar to that of other military reservations constructed during the same period. The principal buildings surrounded, and faced, a rectangular parade ground that ran in a north-south direction.17 Troop barracks were located on

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14 Ibid., p. 157. This book presents an excellent picture of garrison life in the Bozeman Trail forts and a good description of their evacuation, from the viewpoint of a Regular Army wife who was present at the time.

15 Letter from General Augur to Brevet Major General W. A. Nichols, Assistant Adjutant General, Headquarters Military Division of the Missouri, October 14, 1863, Department of the Platte, Letters Sent, 1866-1877.

16 Omaha Weekly Republican, August 26, 1868. The delay in beginning construction may have resulted from legal technicalities. Title to the forty acres purchased by the Government was not transferred until August 26 and September 4, 1868. Also, the forty-two and one-half acres purchased by the citizens of Omaha for use as a fort could not be accepted by the Government and was not formally leased until September 25, 1868.

17 See Fig. 1, p. 121.
the northern and southern ends of the parade ground. The headquarters building, guardhouse, sutler's store, post bakery, and the quartermaster and commissary warehouses occupied the eastern side of the parade ground; the officers' quarters faced them from the higher ground across the rectangle.

The barracks consisted of ten single-story, brick-lined, wooden buildings, constructed to accommodate an equal number of companies then comprising an infantry or a cavalry regiment. Five of the barracks were placed on each end of the parade ground, and a separate building — located behind each barracks — contained the company mess and kitchen. No troop bathing facilities were available on the post. Two pit-latrine buildings were provided for the troop billets. They were located behind the center barrack building, at each end of the parade ground.

It was customary, during this period, to have the enlisted men's wives provide troop laundry services and wash the hospital linens. Such services were highly important to the cleanliness and the health of the command. Two frame buildings, each measuring one hundred and fifty-four feet by thirty feet, provided nine sets of quarters for the laundresses.

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19 Ibid.; Fig. 6, p. 126. The kitchens were twenty-one feet long by twelve feet wide, and the size was considered adequate by the post surgeon. Medical History, Fort Omaha (Book 219), p. 12.

20 Troops were expected to bathe in either the Missouri River — one and one-half miles distant from the post — or use a small lake, located about three-quarters of a mile east of the garrison. Medical History, Fort Omaha (Book 219), p. 73.

21 Ibid., p. 12. Each of the latrine buildings was sixteen by fifty feet in dimension.
and their soldier husbands. Each set consisted of two rooms, fifteen feet square.\textsuperscript{22}

The housing for officers consisted of fourteen buildings. These, also, were of wood construction "lined with brick, plain batten finish, and painted a dull yellow color."\textsuperscript{23} Ten of these structures were single story duplexes with attics, and each building was expected to accommodate the one captain and two lieutenants normally assigned to a company. Each building contained "two parlours, two (2) bed rooms, two (2) dining rooms, two (2) kitchens, and four attics\textsuperscript{7}."\textsuperscript{24} Many domestic problems must have arisen, as the two junior lieutenants and their wives shared the same parlor, dining room, and kitchen.

There were three single houses for field grade officers. These, too, were one-story buildings with attics, but they were somewhat more comfortable than those provided for the junior officers.\textsuperscript{25}

The commanding officer's quarters was an impressive two-story house, centrally located on the line of officers' quarters.\textsuperscript{26} It not

\textsuperscript{22}Ibid., p. 9. Because the wives of so many soldiers worked as laundresses, the enlisted men's housing area was usually referred to as "soapsuds row."

\textsuperscript{23}W.D., F.C.O., Circular No. 4 (1870), p. 329; Fig. 2, p. 122.

\textsuperscript{24}Medical History, Fort Omaha (Book 219), p. 9.

\textsuperscript{25}The first floor consisted of a ten by fifteen foot entrance hall, a large living room to its immediate left, and two back rooms — each measuring fifteen feet square. The attic contained two fifteen by twenty foot rooms, each with a connecting ten foot square closet. W.D., F.C.O., Circular No. 4 (1870), p. 329.

\textsuperscript{26}This building measured forty by fifty feet, with a porch across the front and on part of both sides. A long narrow hallway (forty by seven feet) led from the front entrance toward the rear of the building. To the left of the hall was a large parlor, fifteen by thirty-six feet.
only contained the only indoor bathroom and water closet on the post, but it also claimed the only cistern and coal-burning stove — complete with grates. When finished, the quarters were occupied by General Augur, the Department of the Platte commander.  

With the exception of the commanding officer's home, wood-burning stoves were installed in all quarters throughout the post, and in the troop barracks. Each set of officers' quarters included a small separate kitchen and storeroom structure, plus a pit-latrine, located immediately behind the main building.

An important facility on any military installation was the hospital. It was located on the northwestern end of the post, just behind the enlisted men's barracks. The post surgeon, Brevet Major Samuel M. Horton, described the building, in 1869, as follows:

It comprises two (2) wards. Each 66 feet long by 24 feet wide by 15 feet high, to the eaves, and 3½ stories high and is between the wards. The Kitchen is attached to the Administration Building, in the rear.

At the extremity of each ward, are one room for the attendants and one Knapsack room. Each room, 11 feet by 9 feet.

in size. To the right of the hall were two rooms, connected by folding doors. Further to the rear were two smaller rooms, a water closet and the kitchen facilities. The second floor contained four rooms, each fifteen by fifteen and one-half feet, plus three smaller rooms, a bath-


28 Ibid. The post surgeon recorded that the barracks were heated by two large box stoves, with a smaller stove for the First Sergeant's room. "The fuel," he wrote, "is chiefly cotton-wood and when thoroughly dry, makes good fuel." Medical History, Fort Omaha (Book 219), p. 79.
There being no quarters at the Post for married Hospital Steward, a part of the upstairs of the Administration Building, has of necessity to be appropriated for him and his family, provided he is to be of any use to the Hospital Department. There are five (5) rooms upstairs in the Administration Building with two (2) Small Halls.  

The post hospital had a bed capacity for forty-eight patients, twenty-four beds per ward, and was heated by wood-burning stoves. The hospital contained no indoor water closets, so the patients had to use an outdoor pit-latrine. It was located approximately eighty feet from the main building.  

With the exception of the hospital and the post stables, all of the principal administrative and support facilities on the post, during 1868 and 1869, were located on the east side of the parade ground. The post bakery was a small brick structure, situated on the southeast corner of the quadrangle. The others were all single-story buildings, of frame construction.  

29 Medical History, Fort Omaha (Book 219), p. 13; Fig. 6, p. 126.  

30 W.D., S.O.O., Circular No. 4 (1870), p. 330. The wood stoves were the same as those used in the troop barracks. The outdoor pit latrine was "13 feet long, 6 feet wide by 11 feet high." Medical History, Fort Omaha (Book 219), pp. 12, 79.  

31 Omaha Weekly Herald, December 23, 1868.  

32 The post headquarters building was thirty-one feet square and contained a large orderly room, thirty by fifteen feet; an office for the adjutant, sixteen by fifteen feet; and the post commander's office, a room fifteen feet long by twelve feet wide. The quartermaster storehouse, and that of the commissary officer, were each eighty feet long by thirty feet wide. One deficiency of the quartermaster warehouse was that it lacked a cellar. Medical History, Fort Omaha (Book 219), pp. 12, 19. The post bakery was a one-room structure, forty by twenty and one-half feet in dimension, with a large brick oven in the rear of the building. The guardhouse measured forty-eight and one-half feet by forty-three and one-half feet. The front portion of the building was divided by a narrow hallway extending sixteen feet toward the rear of the building, from
The new military post was named "Omaha Barracks." The first troops to be stationed there were members of Battery C, 3rd U. S. Artillery, and they came directly from Fort Kearny, Nebraska. To the dismay of some members of Battery C, they found that considerable work was yet to be done before Omaha Barracks could provide the comfort they had expected. The barrack buildings were finished, but they were "damp and cold, even when the stoves were kept well going." The officers' quarters were still incomplete, so two of the officers moved into a mess room in one of the unoccupied barracks. The hospital was only half finished, and the sick had to remain in the company barracks. According to the post surgeon, it was "totally uninhabitable"; and, for lack of better facilities, he established a temporary hospital in one of the company mess halls. As a result, one sick soldier "died for want of a central entrance. To the left of the hallway was a sixteen foot square room for the officer of the guard; to the right of the hall was a twenty-two and one-half by twenty-one foot room for the guard. Prisoners were confined in the rear of the building. The confinement area was separated from the guard area by a heavy door at the end of the corridor. W.D., C.G.O., Circular No. 4 (1870), p. 330.

In its November 13, 1868, issue, the Omaha Weekly Republican announced it would be called "Sherman Barracks," in honor of General William T. Sherman. Many other writers also state that the post was first named Sherman Barracks and later changed at the request of that distinguished soldier. Although there may be some basis for these statements, the post surgeon's journal refers to it only as "Omaha Barracks" beginning with his first entry in November, 1868.

33Medical History, Fort Omaha (Book 219), p. 1.
35Ibid., pp. 1, 97.
36Ibid., p. 97.
37Ibid.
38Ibid., p. 101.
comfortable accommodations."

On December 4, 1868, approximately one-half of the 27th Infantry Regiment arrived from the plains, including Companies B, D, F, G, I, and K, plus the regimental headquarters. The presence of these units caused some discomfort at the unfinished post and, on December 10, a member of Battery C complained — through the *Omaha Weekly Herald* — about conditions as he saw them. Upon investigation, the newspaper reported that, although none of the buildings were fully completed, work was progressing as rapidly as the situation permitted. The *Herald* further stated:

The men are a fine looking, soldierly set of fellows, and observed all the regulations exacted by the strictest code of discipline. They are all supplied with blankets and bedding, and very many of them were possessed of large buffalo robes brought from the plains.

In spite of the *Omaha Weekly Herald*'s optimistic report, however, considerable work remained before Omaha Barracks was completed. Not only was the hospital "totally uninhabitable" and less than half finished, but there were no quarters for officers and married enlisted men; company kitchens and mess halls were incomplete; there were insufficient bunks in

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40 *Ibid.*; p. 1. Following withdrawal from the Bozeman Trail, the regimental headquarters and six companies of the 27th Infantry patrolled the Republican River country; the remaining companies guarded the Union Pacific Railroad. Letter from General Augur to Brevet Major General W. A. Nichols, October 14, 1868, *Department of the Platte, Letters Sent, 1866-1877*.

41 *Omaha Weekly Herald*, December 16, 1868.

42 *Omaha Weekly Herald*, December 23, 1868.
the barracks to take care of the troops; and several of the buildings, to include the quartermaster warehouse and the stables, had not yet been erected.\footnote{Indicated by a close comparison of the December 16 and 23 articles that appeared in the \textit{Omaha Weekly Herald} with the post surgeon's reports, as contained in the \textit{Medical History, Fort Omaha} (Book 219), \textit{passim}, and \textit{W.D., S.G.O.}, Circular No. 4 (1870), pp. 329-330.}

In January, 1869, three additional units of the 27th Infantry arrived at the new post. They were Companies A, E, and H.\footnote{\textit{Medical History, Fort Omaha} (Book 219), p. 2.} By the end of January, all units of the 27th Infantry — less Company C\footnote{Company C was stationed at Fort Kearny, Nebraska. On June 22, 1869, the company lost its identity and its personnel were absorbed by Company E, 9th Infantry, during the consolidation of the 9th and 27th Infantry Regiments. See infra, p. 35.} — were assembled at Omaha Barracks. Also present, of course, was Battery C of the 3rd United States Artillery.

Some people believed that the proximity to Omaha of such a large number of soldiers — especially after their long absence on the plains — might create disciplinary problems that would affect the local community. To forestall any such difficulties, on January 2, 1869, Brevet Brigadier General Luther P. Bradley, the post commander, petitioned the Douglas County Commissioners to deny liquor licenses to anyone wishing to sell liquor within a distance of one-half mile from the post.\footnote{\textit{Omaha Daily Republican,} January 10, 1869. "Irresponsible persons [according to the newspaper] were setting-up shanties near the post, for that purpose, and it was sure to result in public disturbances of peace."} His action, however, did not completely eliminate the problem. Seven "gin shops"
operated in the vicinity of the post, and they were described as "detestable places" in which the liquor sold was "usually of the worst possible description."\(^{47}\) In spite of the nearby saloons, few disturbances normally occurred except on paydays, and then they were quickly controlled.\(^{48}\) The morals of the troops stationed at Omaha Barracks were as good as those found elsewhere.\(^{49}\)

The 27th Infantry Regiment, together with Battery C, 3rd Artillery, comprised the Omaha Barracks garrison from December, 1868, until the spring of 1869. In March, Battery C departed for the Department of the Missouri.\(^{50}\) During March, April, and May, the regimental headquarters and seven units of the 27th Infantry left to guard the Union Pacific Railroad and to protect other areas threatened by the Indians.\(^{51}\) Only Companies B and F remained as the permanent post garrison.

In the meantime, Omaha Barracks performed many of the functions later assigned to World War II replacement depots. A number of units

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\(^{47}\) Medical History, Fort Omaha (Book 219), p. 19. In one of the saloons on the southern side of the garrison, a soldier from Company H, 27th Infantry, was found beaten to death on March 12, 1869. Ibid.

\(^{48}\) Ibid.

\(^{49}\) Ibid., p. 70.

\(^{50}\) The Omaha Barracks surgeon recorded that Battery C departed on March 23, 1869. Medical History, Fort Omaha (Book 219), p. 2. General Augur, however, reported that the unit left the Department of the Platte on March 11. Letter from General Augur to Brevet Major General George L. Hartsuff, Assistant Adjutant General, Military Division of the Missouri, October 23, 1869, Department of the Platte, Letters Sent, 1866-1877.

\(^{51}\) Companies A, D, E, and K, 27th Infantry, departed Omaha Barracks on March 30; the regimental headquarters and Companies B and H left on April 13; and Company I left on May 27. Medical History, Fort Omaha (Book 219), pp. 2, 70.
arrived which were destined for areas much further to the west, and they temporarily remained while awaiting transportation and completing final preparations for their trip.

Between April 13 and 26, the entire 12th Infantry stopped at the post\(^{52}\) while on route from Washington, D. C., to California, Arizona, and Nevada. The regiment traveled west from Omaha by the Union Pacific Railroad to the end of the track. From there, it made a forty-five mile march to the easternmost point reached by the Central Pacific Railroad, where cars carried the troops to San Francisco.\(^{53}\)

While six companies of the 12th Infantry still remained on the post, two battalions of the 21st Infantry arrived, on April 17, 1869.\(^{54}\) The twenty-first had departed Richmond, Virginia, five days earlier and was then on route to Arizona — by way of San Francisco, California.\(^{55}\) One battalion left Omaha Barracks on May 4, and the other departed on May 8.\(^{56}\) The trip from Omaha to San Francisco was made by the recently completed Union Pacific and the Central Pacific Railroads, and this

\(^{52}\) Companies A, E, G, and I arrived on April 13 and departed on April 16; Companies B, C, D, F, H, and K arrived on April 15 and departed on April 26, 1869. \textit{Ibid.}, p. 2.


\(^{54}\) \textit{Medical History, Fort Omaha} (Book 219), p. 2.

\(^{55}\) Rodenbough and Haskins, p. 675.

regiment claims the distinction of being the first such unit to complete the entire journey by rail.57

On May 9, one day following departure of the last elements of the 21st Infantry for California, the 7th Infantry Regiment arrived from Florida.58 Their recent service in that state had resulted in an outbreak of intermittent fever; and, upon reaching Omaha Barracks, sixty-five cases were admitted to the post hospital.59 The 7th Infantry had been transferred to the Department of the Platte, and all of its units were then en route to the Wyoming and Utah Territories. Upon arrival at their destinations, they were to be consolidated with the elements of the 36th Infantry to form a new 7th Infantry.60 Approximately one-half of the regiment departed the post on May 26, and the remainder left on June 1.61 Another transient unit that passed through Omaha Barracks at that time was Company D of the Engineer Corps. It arrived on May 26 and departed three days later.62

On May 25, 1869, the regimental headquarters and the band, 2nd

57 Rodenbough and Haskins, p. 675.
59 Ibid., p. 121.
61 The regimental headquarters and Companies C, E, G, and K departed on May 26; the remaining units, Companies A, B, D, F, O, and I, left on June 1. Medical History, Fort Omaha (Book 219), p. 2.
62 Ibid.
U. S. Cavalry, arrived at Omaha Barracks. At that time, all of the combat elements of the regiment were widely distributed across the plains, so the permanent post garrison was greatly reduced and consisted of only Companies B and F of the 27th Infantry, plus the band and a few headquarters troops from the 2nd Cavalry.

The unit designation of the two infantry companies, however, was soon changed. An Army appropriation bill passed by Congress on March 3, 1869, reduced the number of authorized infantry regiments from forty-five to twenty-five, and directed the Secretary of War to consolidate existing units as rapidly as possible. Because of this act, the 27th Infantry lost its identity and was consolidated with the 9th Infantry, which was, in turn, ordered to the Department of the Platte from the Department of California. On June 20, 1869, Company B of the old 27th Infantry became a part of Company A, 9th Infantry; in like manner, Company F was

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63 Ibid.

64 Four companies were in Montana under control of the Department of Dakota. General Augur reported the others located as follows:

"... one company between Forts Laramie and Fetterman; one between Sanders and Steele; one about Russell; one about Sidney Station; one about Ogallala Station; one about Plum Creek Station; one north of the Pawnee Agency and on the northwestern frontier of the Nebraska settlements; and one in the Wind River Country." Letter from General Augur to Brevet Major General George L. Hartsuff, October 23, 1869, Department of the Platte, Letters Sent, 1866-1877.


absorbed by Company C of the same regiment. 67

All transient troops billeted at Omaha Barracks were not seasoned veterans. Many were new recruits who were on route to join units stationed further to the west; others were discharges on their way home or traveling to some other locality. For example, three recruit detachments totaling two hundred and sixty-eight men, on their way to Fort Ellis, Montana Territory, arrived at the post on July 29 and August 1 and remained there until August 14. 68 Other large detachments of recruits were quartered at Omaha Barracks during the summer and fall of 1869. 69 Then, too, some men were physically and mentally unable to cope with the rigors of military life on the frontier and were declared unfit for further service. One such group of seventeen insane patients arrived on October 23, from the 14th Infantry, and were temporarily quartered at the barracks, while being escorted to Washington, D. C. 70

The post surgeon very aptly described the role of Omaha Barracks as a billet for transient units and personnel.

This post [De wrote] has been a temporary rendezvous for all troops going out west, on the plains. Even those to California and the Pacific Coast. Also, those on route eastward. They have


68One hundred of these recruits belonged to the 2nd Cavalry, ninety-eight were for the 13th Infantry, and the remainder were recruited for the 14th Infantry. Medical History, Fort Omaha (Book 219), p. 2.

69One hundred and twenty recruits arrived on August 27 and departed on August 29, en route to the 12th Infantry in California. Another 371, belonging to the 13th Infantry, passed through Omaha Barracks in October en route to Fort Ellis. Ibid.

70Ibid., p. 142.
have usually come here to receive transportation, rations and rest, before proceeding further. The convenience of its proximity to the line of travel, its large roomy barracks, and being close by Department Head Quarters render it peculiarly fitted for the temporary collection of troops of the different arms of the Service coming in or going out of the Department and also for the wintering of troops coming off the plains.\(^7^1\)

This, precisely, was one of the principal reasons for establishing the installation. It was located on natural routes of travel that permitted it to support units further to the west. Major Horton's statement — made after the post had been operating for nearly a year — indicates that Omaha Barracks was satisfactorily performing its mission.

Transient troops passing through a military installation rarely, if ever, enhance the physical condition of the post. Omaha Barracks was no exception to the rule; and, in spite of the buildings being new, the transients left them "very much dilapidated." The barracks suffered many broken windows and had their doors torn off the hinges; the kitchens and barracks were usually dirty; and even the officers generally left their quarters "detestably unclean."\(^7^2\) With the arrival of Thanksgiving Day, 1869, however, "... by dint of much and frequent repairing by the carpenters and the police force..." the buildings were repaired, clean, and comfortable.\(^7^3\)

During November, the post garrison underwent a change from "infantry blue" to "cavalry gold." On November 13, three companies of the 2nd Cavalry arrived, and they were followed a few days later by

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\(^7^1\) Ibid., p. 3.
\(^7^2\) Ibid., pp. 10-12.
\(^7^3\) Ibid., p. 10.
Company I of the same regiment. The close of 1869 found most of the 2nd Cavalry Regiment in winter quarters at Omaha Barracks, along with the two companies from the 9th Infantry. Brevet Brigadier General Innis Newton Palmer, commanding officer of the 2nd Cavalry, also commanded the post.

Throughout 1869, basic post construction had continued, while, at the same time, the troops made many improvements of their own. The laundresses' quarters, the officers' quarters, the quartermaster and commissary warehouses, and the stables were all completed, and by November they were completely habitable and serviceable. By the end of February, the hospital was sufficiently finished to admit a few patients and to permit the storage of medical supplies. The health of the command, in general, had been good. A few cases of malaria had developed,

74 Companies B, C, and M arrived on the 13th; Company I arrived on November 16. Ibid., p. 146.


76 Annual Report of the Secretary of War, 1869-1870, pp. 154-155. General Palmer, a native of New York, and an 1846 graduate of the United States Military Academy, had served in both the Civil War and the Mexican War. He was promoted to Colonel, Regular Army, on 9 June 1868, as commander of the 2nd Cavalry. Ditman, I, pp. 66, 767.

77 Medical History, Fort Omaha (Book 219), pp. 11-12.

78 Ibid., pp. 13, 110. Although the surgeon began to use the hospital on March 1, the dispensary was not completed until June. The hospital received its initial supply of bedding, clothing, furniture, and medical appliances and instruments from medical officers stationed on the plains. Most of this had to be inspected and condemned, but a sufficient quantity remained to meet post requirements. Ibid., pp. 13, 105, 110, 125.

79 Ibid., pp. 15, 75. Only five soldiers and one civilian died
because of a swamp located on the southern and eastern sides of the post. By the end of October, however, it had been drained and the grass cut through the use of prisoners and fatigue details from the garrison.

One continuing problem that harassed the post, from its very beginning and well into 1870, was that of potable water. Originally, wells had been dug between every two barracks and between alternating sets of officers' quarters. By November of 1859, however, all of the wells — except two — had to be abandoned, because they were "... so abominably nauseous and disgusting to the smell and taste, ..." Efforts to dig other wells failed, and the only solution appeared to be cisterns.

Troop billets, when completed and furnished, were arranged in the customary military manner.

Every barracks has, on both sides, a row of double bunks with good gun racks at the foot of them. Each bunk accommodates four (4) soldiers, two (2) in the upper and two (2) in the lower section. They are made of pine wood and are well constructed.

Some men used bed sacks, filled with hay, to add to their comfort, while a few others used buffalo robes. Plenty of blankets were available, during the first year of the post. Interments were made at the Omaha City Cemetery, located about two and one-half miles southwest of Omaha Barracks. Ibid., p. 17.

In general, the arrangement of troop barracks was similar throughout the Army, although the comfort varied greatly according to the location and permanency of the post. For a good basic discussion of a soldier's life in barracks, see Rickey, pp. 31-32, et passim.

Medical History, Fort Omaha (Book 219), p. 77.
however, and the bedding was usually clean and frequently aired outside the barracks.\textsuperscript{85}

Troop messes at Omaha Barracks were consistently reported as excellent by the post surgeon in his weekly inspection reports. There was always a sufficient quantity of food, and the quality was considered good.\textsuperscript{86} It was "well and thoroughly cooked, and served partly in delf and partly in tin plates and dishes" purchased from the unit funds.\textsuperscript{87} The food consisted of ordinary soldier's ration, plus such fresh vegetables and dairy products as potatoes, onions, cabbage, lettuce, turnips, cauliflower, milk, butter, and eggs, plus fresh fruits, jams, and even pickles.\textsuperscript{88}

After the departure of the 27th Infantry, Brevet Lieutenant Colonel Henry Haymond\textsuperscript{89} temporarily commanded Omaha Barracks, until the arrival of Colonel I. W. Palmer. On May 30, he published an order\textsuperscript{90}

\textsuperscript{85}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{86}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{87}Ibid., p. 80.
\textsuperscript{88}Ibid., pp. 16, 80. According to the surgeon, no "desiccated vegetables" were served in the messes, and the many extra items furnished were purchased from unit funds. It can be assumed, however, that many were produced in the post garden, located adjacent to the hospital. Ibid., p. 13.
\textsuperscript{89}Colonel Haymond was on detached service from the 27th Infantry. Like many other officers, he had served with the 18th Infantry during the Civil War and became a member of the 27th Infantry when it was organized from the 2nd Battalion, 18th Infantry. Heitman, I, p. 515; Rodenbough and Haskins, p. 653.
\textsuperscript{90}Special Order No. 17, Headquarters Post, Omaha Barracks, May 30, 1869, quoted in Medical History, Fort Omaha (Book 219), p. 76.
establishing routine duties at the post, as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sunrise</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:30 A.M.</td>
<td>Breakfast call</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:00</td>
<td>Surgeon's call</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:00</td>
<td>Fatigue call</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:30</td>
<td>Guard Mounting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:30</td>
<td>Recall from fatigue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:00 M</td>
<td>Dinner call</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:45 P.M.</td>
<td>1st Sergeant's call</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:00</td>
<td>Fatigue call</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5:30</td>
<td>Recall from fatigue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:00</td>
<td>Retreat. Sundown. 1st call, one-fourth hour before.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:30</td>
<td>Taps</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Normal garrison duties, apparently, centered around a daily guard mount and fatigue. Whenever weather permitted, company drill was conducted — usually in the morning. During warm weather, retreat parades were held each evening, and there was a monthly inspection — both accompanied by the band. An important daily fatigue duty had to be the hauling and distribution of water, drawn from the only two serviceable wells on the post. In addition, there were the usual beautification projects, such as the building of fences and "...the hauling of trees from the woods north of the post to plant out on the edges of the parade ground and of sodding the terraces, ..." There is no indication of any major disciplinary problems at Omaha Barracks during its first year of operation. For the more serious

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91 See daily list of calls, supra.
92 Medical History, Fort Omaha (Book 219), p. 74.
93 Ibid., pp. 14, 17, 71.
94 Ibid., p. 77.
95 Ibid.
breaches of military discipline, punishment always included confinement in the guardhouse. For other types of misconduct, the offender was frequently required to walk back and forth in front of the guardhouse, carrying a log or piece of timber. All prisoners were required to perform extra fatigue duty.\(^{96}\)

The average number of prisoners confined in the guardhouse, during the period January to June, 1869, was twenty-six.\(^{97}\) This number of men restricted to the close confines of the building described on page 23 did, of course, require plenty of ventilation. Such ventilation was lacking, and the surgeon consistently reported the deficiency on his weekly sanitary reports. Finally, after considerable delay, the post quartermaster sent a carpenter to construct three ventilators. The surgeon recorded the results:

The above holes with gratings were recommended to be 18 x 3 inches, but by some stupidity they were made (in the month of August, 1869) about 2 feet square. The consequence was, that up to the 10th Nov, 1869, about 25 prisoners escaped from the guard house and went off.\(^{98}\)

Religious services were rarely held, during the years 1868 and 1869, at Omaha Barracks.\(^{99}\) There was no chaplain assigned, and the cost of transportation between the post and Omaha City practically precluded

\(^{96}\)As was customary in the Army at the time, deserters confined to the guardhouse were required to wear a ball and chain. The weight of the logs carried as punishment never exceeded fifty or sixty pounds. \(\textit{Ibid.}\, p. 14.\)

\(^{97}\)\(\textit{Ibid.}\, p. 11.\)

\(^{98}\)\(\textit{Ibid.}\, pp. 130-131. According to Horton, there were "from two (2) to six (6) carpenters employed in the quartermaster department at the post. Also a civilian clerk in the same department. All others occupied at the Post are in the military service." \(\textit{Ibid.}\, p. 72.\)

\(^{99}\)\(\textit{Ibid.}\, p. 17.\)
regular church attendance. Occasionally, when a passing clergyman visited the post, public worship was held in a ward room in the station hospital.

The proximity of Omaha Barracks to Omaha City naturally provided many opportunities for off-post recreation. Some of the opportunities were bad — such as the seven nearby "gin factories" and saloons. Others, however, were good, and a fine relationship developed between local citizens and the garrison personnel stationed at the post. Organized on-post recreational activities included the usual baseball games, band music, and amateur plays and performances. "There is a 'variety theater' and a 'minstrels' every few weeks, sometimes oftener," wrote Horton. "This was initiated in September, 1869, and the entertainments are increasing in interest." The officers and ladies of the garrison, with local civilian guests, were entertained weekly by a "hop," held in one of the mess halls; each company commander alternated, in turn, as the host for the occasion.

There was no post library at Omaha Barracks during 1868-1869. Instead, each permanently assigned unit had one of its own. Companies A and C of the 9th Infantry each had a small number of books, and a regi-

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The round trip cost of a double-seated conveyance from the post to Omaha City was at least eight dollars. Ibid.

Burkley, p. 167.

For an excellent discussion of the normal recreational activities of a frontier soldier, see Rickey, pp. 135-213.

Medical History, Fort Omaha (Book 219), p. 77.

Ibid., p. 155.

Ibid., p. 71.
mental library was maintained by the 2nd Cavalry. In addition, the hospital was "... well supplied with medical works, all that are allowed on the Supply Table." No periodicals were subscribed to by company-size units, but the post headquarters received copies of three daily and one tri-weekly newspaper — all of which were available to everyone.

By the end of 1869, Omaha Barracks had become reasonably well established and was performing many of the functions that General Sherman had predicted. Although there were insufficient troops to firmly establish a regimental-size reserve, General Augur and General Sheridan did have a strategically located installation at which a force — up to that size — was assembled, whenever units were not actively engaged on the plains. This, in effect, did constitute a small reserve, and completion of the transcontinental railroad expedited movement of these troops to areas where they were needed. The practicality of such employment was successfully demonstrated that summer by the movement of regimental units and large numbers of recruits through Omaha Barracks to points as far west as California. Furthermore, the troops were better housed, better fed, and "remarkably healthy," and morale was constantly improving.

The importance of Omaha Barracks as a winter quarters and reconditioning center was also being demonstrated. The 27th Infantry was

106 Ibid.
107 Ibid., p. 79.
109 Ibid., p. 74.
quartered there during the winter of 1868-1869, after it had been with- 
drawn from its untenable position along the Bozeman Trail. Now — during 
the winter of 1869-1870 — and following a year of rigorous service in 
which "man and animal suffered severely," the 2nd Cavalry was stationed 
at the Barracks, where it could be remounted "during the winter to have 
it in readiness for work in the approaching spring."110
CHAPTER III
OMAHA BARRACKS, 1870-1878:
INDIANS, RAILROADS, AND RIOTS

General Sherman, of course, had stressed the strategic importance of Omaha, Nebraska, as early as 1866. He had pointed out that it was not only the gateway to the Platte, but it was a focal point for water navigation to the upper Missouri country.¹ He stressed the importance of the Union Pacific Railroad and predicted that it would drive a wedge between the Indian tribes of the northern and southern plains and restrict them to areas on either side of the Platte Valley. Appropriate measures, he believed, could then be taken to secure control of the hostile tribes and to restrict their activities to specified areas, or reservations.²

The year 1869 saw the Union Pacific completed; the years 1870 to 1873 saw the fulfillment of Sherman's prophecy. Throughout that period, Indian depredations gradually decreased along the Platte Valley itself, but increased with growing intensity in areas to the north. This change was brought about as additional miners and settlers invaded the Indian territories seeking gold and other minerals in the Dakotas, in Montana,

¹Athearn, pp. 39-40.
and in Idaho while, at the same time, survey and work crews pushed westward their construction of the Northern Pacific Railroad. Although the intruders violated existing Indian treaties, they demanded and received Federal support.

"That Northern Pacific Road is going to give you a great deal of trouble, ..." wrote Sherman to Sheridan. "Yet I think our interest is to favor the undertaking of the Road, as it will help to bring the Indian problem to a final solution." Francis Walker, the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, held similar views regarding the value of the railroad. "Columns moving north from the Union Pacific, and south from the Northern Pacific," he wrote, "would crush the Sioux and their confederates as between the upper and nether millstone."

As new Indian problems developed in the north, the Department of the Platte gradually shifted its military efforts in that direction. Because of its strategic location, Omaha Barracks played an important role in this new phase of the Indian campaigns.

In January of 1870, however, conditions were peaceful throughout the Department of the Platte and at Omaha Barracks. With the approach of winter, the Indians usually withdrew to the hills and rivers north of the Platte Valley and remained relatively quiet until the following spring. Colonel I. N. Palmer, the Omaha Barracks commander, and his

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3 Atcham, p. 327.


5 Letter from Brigadier General C. C. Augur to Brigadier General E. D. Townsend, Adjutant General, U. S. Army, October 25, 1870, Department of the Platte, Letters Sent, 1866-1877.
post engineer used this slack period in hostilities to inaugurate several
post improvement projects.

One such project was a new barracks for the regimental band. It
was erected on a site located between the commissary warehouse and the
post bakery. Designed as an "L" shaped building, it had its own dining
room, kitchen, and storeroom, with separate quarters for the band
sergeant.\(^6\)

At the same time, a new ice house was constructed just to the
right of the quartermaster storehouse.\(^7\) When completed, it was filled
with a good quality product — fifteen inches thick — secured from the
Missouri River.\(^8\)

Two new buildings were erected to provide additional quarters
for the laundresses and the married enlisted men. They were located in
the northern section of the post, between the hospital and the barracks.
Each building contained five sets of quarters, and they were similar to
those constructed the previous year.\(^9\)

Some improvement was also made to the enlisted men's barracks.
A small addition, fifteen by twenty feet in size, was erected to connect

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\(^6\)Medical History, Fort Omaha (Book 219), p. 154. The band quar-
ters measured thirty by twenty feet; the dining room and kitchen was
twenty-five by fifteen feet; the sergeant's room was twelve by eight
feet; and the storeroom was ten by eight feet in dimension. Ibid.;
Fig. 1, p. 121.

\(^7\)The ice-house was twenty by forty, and twelve feet high. It
was a double-walled structure, insulated with sawdust, and capable of
storing 250 tons of ice. Ibid.

\(^8\)Ibid., p. 155.

\(^9\)Ibid., p. 154.
each company kitchen to the main building. The structure was added to provide additional sleeping space,\(^{10}\) as the enlisted men's barracks were overcrowded at that time. One unit — Company C, 9th Infantry — had 106 enlisted men quartered in a building designed to accommodate seventy-five soldiers.\(^{11}\)

A new sixteen foot square ammunition building was also started during the month. It was located just behind the adjutant's quarters. All of the new buildings were of frame construction and were erected upon a sixteen inch brick foundation.\(^{12}\)

Considerable excitement was aroused on the post in January of 1870 when a fire broke out at the station hospital. Although the building itself suffered but little damage, it was difficult to extinguish the blaze because of an icy roof and the inadequacy of the fire ladders.\(^{13}\) One soldier suffered a compound fracture of the thigh when he fell twenty feet from the roof.\(^{14}\) The fire occurred because of inadequate protection of the woodwork through which an exit had been cut for a stovepipe.

\(^{10}\)Ibid.

\(^{11}\)All of the buildings had been constructed, in 1868, to accommodate seventy-five men. War Department, Surgeon General's Office, Circular No. 4 (1870), p. 329. Although that space was adequate to meet requirements of the then existing tables of organization for an infantry of cavalry company, the authorized strength of such units was increased by an Army reorganization of 1869 to 100 men. Heitman, II, pp. 306-307; Annual Report of the Secretary of War, 1869-1870, Table A, facing p. 150.

\(^{12}\)Medical History, Fort Omaha (Book 219), p. 154.

\(^{13}\)The ladders were too short to reach the roof. Ibid., p. 153.

\(^{14}\)The soldier was immediately confined in the hospital, and he was still there fourteen months later, in March of 1871. Ibid., pp. 211-212.
Normal garrison activities continued throughout the winter of 1869-1870. The existing good post-community relationship was further enhanced by a large "military ball," organized by the bachelor officers and held on George Washington's birthday, in the barracks formerly occupied by the regimental band. Approximately 250 guests attended the affair. The enlisted men of the various companies later held several similar "balls" at the same location.15

Recruiting was one of the administrative services performed at Omaha Barracks for units stationed further to the west. The preferred method was to enlist a man for a direct assignment to a specific unit. In this way, commanders were more certain of receiving good soldiers than if they relied upon a general recruiting depot.16 During the period immediately following completion of the Union Pacific Railroad, the quality of men applying for enlistment at Omaha Barracks had, apparently, declined.

Thirty-nine (39) recruits wrote the post surgeon7 have been examined of which thirty-three (33) were accepted and six (6) rejected. The class of men desiring to enlist at this station is not generally good, being principally composed of old soldiers and railroad employees discharged up the country, have spent all their money in one prolonged debauch and when entirely destitute present themselves for examination in various stages of nervous prostration from the effects of their habits.17

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15 Ibid., p. 157.

16 Rickey, p. 22. For an excellent discussion of the Army's system of recruiting, together with the training and assignment of new men to military units, see Ibid., pp. 17-53.

17 Medical History, Fort Omaha (Book 219), p. 150. The post surgeon was Joseph K. Corson, who had replaced Brevet Major E. M. Horton on November 20, 1869, when Major Horton was transferred to the Department of the East. Joseph Corson, a Pennsylvanian, had entered the service in
By the end of May, however, the same surgeon reported that a higher caliber of men were presenting themselves for enlistment.13

To Brigadier General Christopher C. Augur, one of the most important missions of his command was to preserve the Union Pacific Railroad intact against all types of Indian depredations.19

What troops have to do, then [he wrote], is not only to be in position and condition to repel any actual attack upon the road, but they must be distributed in such a way as to give a sense of security to employees. The passing of Indians north and south across the road began very early in the spring [1870], and caused a general apprehension that the road would be much annoyed by them during the coming summer.20

To meet such a threat, Company I of the 2nd Cavalry was transferred to Medicine Bow Station, Wyoming, on April 6, and Company A of the same regiment was sent to Rawlins Springs, Wyoming, on April 9.21 In addition, Company E, 2nd Cavalry, was placed on outpost duty to guard the railroad at Ogallala Station, Nebraska.22 On June 14, Company E captured a hastily abandoned camp belonging to about 150 Indians and, after a thirty-mile pursuit of the occupants, engaged them in a "lively

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1861 as an enlisted man and rose to the rank of Brevet Major of Volunteers in 1865. He became an assistant surgeon, Regular Army, in 1867. Later, in 1899, he was awarded a Medal of Honor for his gallantry in action at Bristol Station, Virginia, while serving as an assistant surgeon with the 35th Pennsylvania Volunteers. Heitman, I, p. 326.

13 Ibid., p. 159.

19 Letter from General Augur to General F. D. Townsend, October 25, 1870, Department of the Platte, Letters Sent, 1866-1877.

20 Ibid.

21 Neither unit returned to Omaha Barracks in the fall. Company I remained at Fort Sanders, and Company A was later transferred to Fort Fred Steele, Wyoming. Lambert, pp. 111-112.

22 Lambert, p. 111.
skirmish" at North Platte River on June 13th.23

Every spring since 1865, the southwestern frontier settlements of Nebraska had suffered Indian attacks. General Augur wished to bring them to a halt once and for all; so, on April 4, 1870, he sent Captain Edward J. Spaulding with Company C, 2nd Cavalry, to the area, in order to forestall the annual Indian depredations. On May 15, a party of about fifty Indians made their usual appearance, but were surprised and quickly dispersed by the troops. In reporting this action, General Augur wrote: "The killing of one man was all the injury done. No other Indians have been seen in this vicinity during the entire summer. The settlements have filled up and extended very sensibly in consequence."24

The frontier section of northwestern Nebraska was also the scene of annual Indian raids. To end them, General Augur sent Captain James Ryan and Company K, 2nd Cavalry, to establish a camp in the area.25 The company departed Omaha Barracks on April 16 and not only protected the white settlers in the assigned area but, on October 6, went in pursuit of a group of Sioux Indians who had attacked the Pawnees on their own reservation. The troops chased the Sioux for fifty-five miles and killed

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23Ibid.

24Letter from General C. C. Augur to General B. B. Townsend, October 25, 1870, Department of the Platte, Letters Sent, 1866-1877. A few days later, on May 17, Sergeant Patrick Leonard and four men of the same company encountered approximately sixty Indians near Spring Creek, Nebraska. "After a severe one and one-half hour fight," wrote Lambert, "the Indians were drawn off, leaving one dead and seven wounded." The gallantry of the men earned all of them the Congressional Medal of Honor. Lambert, pp. 111, 291-292.

25Ibid.
at least one warrior. General Augur was pleased with Company K’s success, and later reported:

... Not a hostile Indian has interfered with this frontier during the year until within ten days past, when a party of Sioux came down to attack the Pawnees whose reservation is near. ... but Captain Egan, with his command, soon dispersed them. There has been no interference with the settlers.27

With most of the 2nd Cavalry units in the field protecting the railroad and the frontier settlements, the strength of the garrison dropped to eleven officers and 217 enlisted men.28 In August, however, it was again increased, by the arrival of a few units from the 14th Infantry,29 and again on September 17, by the assignment of a third company from the 9th Infantry.30

Upon completion of their temporary field service, Companies C, E, and K of the 2nd Cavalry returned to Omaha Barracks for the winter.31 By the end of October, 1870, the strength of the garrison was twenty

26Lambert, pp. 111-112.

27Letter from General Augur to General Townsend, October 25, 1870, Department of the Platte, Letters Sent, 1866-1877. The Sioux attack against the Pawnees mentioned by General Augur was the one described as being made on October 6, 1870.

28Medical History, Fort Omaha (Book 219), p. 179.

29Letter from General Augur to General Townsend, October 25, 1870, Department of the Platte, Letters Sent, 1866-1877.

30Company K, 9th Infantry, arrived at Omaha Barracks by rail from North Platte, Nebraska. Brown, p. 100. Most of the personnel of Companies A and C, 9th Infantry, had been at Omaha Barracks ever since the post was first established in 1868. Prior to being absorbed by the 9th Infantry, they had been members of the 27th Infantry, and among the first troops to arrive at the post.

31Lambert, p. 112.
officers and 461 enlisted men.\textsuperscript{32} It was composed of the Regimental Headquarters, Band, and four companies of the 2nd Cavalry; three companies of the 9th Infantry; and two companies of the newly assigned 14th Infantry. Colonel I. N. Palmer, 2nd Cavalry, commanded the entire garrison.\textsuperscript{33}

General Augur remained pleased with the situation within his command. On October 25, he wrote: "I am happy to report the troops in this department in good condition in every respect, healthy, well supplied, in good tone, and willing for any service."\textsuperscript{34}

The winter of 1870-1871 and the ensuing spring and summer proved to be another relatively peaceful period in the Department of the Platte. The garrison at Omaha Barracks was still large, and post facilities were somewhat overtaxed,\textsuperscript{35} but these were only temporary conditions that existed during the winter months. With the coming of spring, the garrison units again moved to field locations where they could be in position to guard the railroad and protect the growing frontier settlements.

In March, Companies F and G, 14th Infantry, were relieved from assignment to Omaha Barracks, and they left for Fort Laramie, Wyoming.\textsuperscript{36}

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\textsuperscript{32}Medical History, Fort Omaha (Book 219), p. 139.


\textsuperscript{34}Letter from General Augur to General Townsend, October 25, 1870, Department of the Platte, Letters Sent, 1866-1877.

\textsuperscript{35}The post guardhouse was overcrowded, and the pit latrines were filling up. The average mean strength from November through February was twenty-one officers and 744 enlisted men. Medical History, Fort Omaha (Book 219), pp. 200, 202, 204, 206-209.

\textsuperscript{36}Ibid., p. 212. The headquarters, 14th Infantry, had been at
In May, the four 2nd Cavalry units moved to Grand Island, Nebraska, and from there departed to patrol the frontier. Company C, 9th Infantry, also moved to Grand Island and accompanied one of these units. Together with Company E of the 2nd Cavalry it established a base camp on the Loup River and scouted as far as the Pawnee reservation, sixty miles to the northwest. Only Companies A and K, 9th Infantry, remained at Omaha Barracks.

That summer, while most of the garrison was absent from the post, several improvements were made to the station hospital. A veranda was erected around the entire building except the kitchen. At the end of the veranda, a fifteen foot by ten foot bathroom was installed. A

Fort Seward ever since the regiment's arrival in the Department of the Platte from Fort Randall, Dakota, in August of 1870. Seward was considered no longer necessary, and the regiment was transferred to the Fort Laramie area. Rodenbaugh and Haskins, p. 666; letter from General Augur to Lieutenant Colonel James B. Fry, U. S. Army, Headquarters Military Division of the Missouri, Chicago, Illinois, October 2, 1871, Department of the Platte, Letters Sent, 1866-1877.

37 Medical History, Fort Omaha (Book 219), pp. 213, 217.

38 Brown, pp. 100. The Department of the Platte's overall plan of defense for the railroad and the settlements of northwestern and southwestern Nebraska in 1871 was similar to that of the previous year. For a brief account of the plan, see Letter from General Augur to Lieutenant Colonel Fry, October 2, 1871, Department of the Platte, Letters Sent, 1866-1877.


ratproof and frost-proof cellar was dug under the main part of the building, and a water cistern was approved for the hospital.\textsuperscript{41}

The year 1871 was relatively uneventful, so far as the Department of the Platte was concerned. "Not a white man has been killed by the Indians within this department during the past year," General Augur reported. He noted further that "under its happy effects the frontier settlements have strengthened and extended; . . . and an unprecedented increase of immigration has followed."\textsuperscript{42}

In early October — whether because of Mrs. O'Leary's cow, or for some other reason — the rambling, wood-constructed city of Chicago became engulfed in flames. General Sheridan's headquarters was there; and, on October 9, he telegraphed the Department of the Platte to send the two companies of regulars from Omaha Barracks, with one hundred tents, for rescue operations and guard duty.\textsuperscript{43} Companies A and K, 9th Infantry, departed the following day and remained in the fire-stricken city until the twenty-fifth of the month.\textsuperscript{44} Shortly after their return from Chicago, Company K was transferred to Fort Fred Steele, Wyoming, and Company A was sent on temporary duty to Fort McPherson, Nebraska.\textsuperscript{45}

\textsuperscript{41}The cellar was fourteen by thirty-five feet, and eight feet from floor to ceiling, and capable of storing 200 bushels of potatoes plus a few other vegetables. The cistern was to have a 500 barrel capacity. Ibid., pp. 218-220; War Department, Surgeon General's Office, Circular No. 8 (1875), p. 355.

\textsuperscript{42}Letter from General Augur to Lieutenant Colonel Fry, October 2, 1871, Department of the Platte, Letters Sent, 1866-1877.

\textsuperscript{43}The Omaha Weekly Herald, October 11, 1871.

\textsuperscript{44}Brown, p. 101.

\textsuperscript{45}Company A departed Omaha Barracks on November 20 and remained
In October, Company K of the 9th Infantry joined the Omaha Barracks garrison. The company had been stationed previously at Fort Kearny, Nebraska, but that old post was no longer of any real military value and was being abandoned. As early as 1866, General Sherman had written that both Fort Kearny and Fort Sedgwick were "located on the wrong side of the Platte." The railroad had sounded the death knell for both of these former guardians of the old Oregon Trail. Furthermore, they were so badly run down they were not worth repairing.

With the approach of the winter season, Company C, 9th Infantry, and the 2nd Cavalry units returned to Omaha Barracks. The garrison remained under the command of Colonel Innis Palmer, but there was a change of departmental commanders. On December 11, 1871, Brigadier General E. O. C. Ord replaced General C. C. Augur as the Commanding

at Fort McPherson until January 21, 1872; Company K left Omaha on November 13, but did not return. Ibid., pp. 101, 104.

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46 Ibid., pp. 100-101.
47 Letter from General Augur to Lieutenant Colonel Fry, October 2, 1871, Department of the Platte, Letters Sent, 1866-1877.
48 Atchison, pp. 59, 63.
49 Letter from General Augur to Lieutenant Colonel Fry, October 2, 1871, Department of the Platte, Letters Sent, 1866-1877.

50 U. S., Congress, House, Annual Report of the Secretary of War, 42nd Cong., 2nd Sess., 1871-1872, House Exec. Doc. No. 1, Part 2 (Serial 1563), pp. 92-93; Brown, p. 101. The average daily strength of the Omaha Barracks garrison for the month of December, 1871, was eighteen officers and 270 enlisted men. This was a considerable drop from the previous year, when the strength of the garrison for the same month was twenty-three officers and 713 men. Medical History, Fort Omaha (Book 219), pp. 200, 245.

51 Annual Report of the Secretary of War, 1871-1872, pp. 92-93.
General of the Department of the Platte.  

The year 1872 opened with a gala social event that did much to enhance the prestige of military personnel with the local citizens. On January 17, the Grand Duke Alexis — brother of the Czar of Russia — arrived in Omaha, as a guest of General Sheridan. They were en route to the plains on a buffalo hunt, and were appropriately welcomed by a large crowd and honored with a brilliant dinner and reception. It was attended by all of the local military and civilian leaders of the community. Among the principal participants were: General E. O. C. Ord, with the senior members of his staff; Colonel I. W. Palmer, the Omaha Barracks commander; Colonel George A. Custer of the 7th Cavalry; "Buffalo Bill" Cody; plus the Governor, the Mayor, and many other celebrities.

In the spring of 1872, units of the Omaha garrison again moved to the field to protect the growing frontier settlements and to guard the railroad. Company C of the 9th Infantry, for example, returned to

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53 "I must not fail to stress the happy relations that existed between the Army and the Omaha citizens. Very distinguished Army officers, Engineers, and others bringing the outside world with them enriched the life of Omaha," said Mrs. Anna Bourke Richardson, in an interview conducted by Doctor Frederick Adrian and Miss Emily L. Keller in April, 1958. Captain John G. Bourke, The "I Remember" Series, Interview No. 2, The Greater Omaha Historical Society, p. 5. Mrs. Richardson was the daughter of Captain Bourke, General George Crook's aide during that period when Crook commanded the Department of the Platte. Mrs. Richardson re-emphasized this close military-civilian relationship to this writer during an interview on April 27, 1966.

54 *Omaha World Herald*, January 17, 1872.
the Grand Island, Nebraska, area and remained there until the 9th of November. Only Companies A and F of the 9th Infantry and the regimental headquarters and band, 2nd Cavalry, remained at Omaha Barracks during the summer.

That fall, a change of command occurred at Omaha Barracks. On October 10, after three years of service at the post, the regimental headquarters, 2nd Cavalry, was transferred to Fort Sanders, Wyoming. Colonel John H. King, 9th Infantry, then became the garrison commander. By the end of the year, Colonel King had four of his own 9th Infantry units at Omaha Barracks, and the garrison troops numbered thirty-one officers and 558 enlisted men.

The year 1872, like the two preceding years, had been relatively quiet. Some scattered Indian raids had occurred in the western part of the Department. With the exception of those cases near the extensive Indian district north of the North Platte, the natives had been pursued and the stolen stock recovered.

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55 Brown, p. 104.


57 Lambert, p. 112.


59 Medical History, Fort Omaha (Book 219), p. 293. Companies A, B, C, and F, 9th Infantry, were all at Omaha Barracks. Company B had joined the garrison on November 9, after having made a seventy mile march from Red Willow, in southwest Nebraska, to Fort McPherson and the railroad. Brown, p. 104.

60 Letter from General Ord to Lieutenant Colonel Fry, September 30, 1872, Department of the Platte, Letters Sent, 1866-1877.
In the latter part of April, 1873, word reached Omaha that General Ulysses S. Grant would visit the city on April 30, while returning from a western tour. General E. O. C. Ord and the Mayor of Omaha immediately arranged an elaborate reception. It was to include a full-dress military parade and artillery salute by the garrison of Omaha Barracks, under the command of Colonel John H. King. Unfortunately, however, a violent rainstorm delayed the arrival of the presidential train until 11:00 P.M., completely disrupted all plans for the reception, and even prevented General Grant and his party from detraining. Instead of the elaborate welcoming ceremony that had been planned, a small group of rain-drenched officers and local citizens called upon the President, after which the special train proceeded eastward.61

Just prior to General Grant's stop in Omaha, the War Department announced extensive arrangements for the protection of engineering parties then making a survey for the Northern Pacific Railroad between the Missouri River and the Rocky Mountains.62 The survey parties were to be escorted by a large composite military force under the command of Colonel D. S. Stanley of the 22nd Infantry. The 9th Infantry was to provide six units for the operation — named the Yellowstone Expedition — and two of these units were Companies A and E,63 then stationed at Omaha Barracks.

61*Omaha Daily Herald*, April 29, 30, and May 1, 1873; Burkley, pp. 334-335.

62*Omaha Daily Herald*, April 29, 1873.

63*Odenbough and Haskins*, pp. 583, 634-635. The other 9th Infantry units that participated in the expedition were Companies D, F, H, and I. *Ibid.*
Both companies left the post on May 24 and moved by rail to Yankton, Dakota. At Yankton, they embarked on the steamer *Western* and continued on to Fort Rice, where they joined the other units making up the expedition.

To some extent the Indian menace still remained during the spring of 1873, so precautions had to be taken to safeguard the Loup River area. Responsibility for patrolling that trouble spot was again assigned to Company C of the 9th Infantry. On June 9, the company departed Omaha Barracks and traveled by rail to Grand Island, Nebraska. From there, it marched forty-one miles northward and established a base camp for the summer.

That fall the Yellowstone Expedition was terminated at Fort Lincoln, Dakota Territory, and from there participating units returned to their home stations. The Department of the Platte contingent, under the command of Lieutenant Colonel L. P. Bradley, 9th Infantry, moved by steamer to Yankton and, at that point, transferred to another river boat to continue its journey to Omaha. One soldier who had participated in the expedition described their reception in the "gate city."

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64Brown, p. 105.

65Ibid. The summer camp was named "Camp Canby," probably in honor of General E. R. S. Canby, who had been murdered by Captain Jack and his Modocs on April 12, while attending an Indian peace parley in connection with the Modoc War. Athearn, pp. 300-301.

66Rodenbough and Haskins, p. 685.

67*Omaha Daily Herald*, October 5, 8, 9, 1873. Colonel Bradley's command consisted of Companies A, B, E, F, H, and I of the 9th Infantry, plus Companies B, C, F, and H of the 9th Infantry.
We were ragged and dirty [he wrote], the tails of our blouses had been cut off by the cartridges in our homemade thimble belts, and the brims of our hats were gone. . . . As we waded through the yellow sand from the boat . . . people gathered about us and jeered.

The 9th Infantry band came down to meet us. . . . We fell in, counted off and broke to the right in fours. The band played "Home Again," and as we came to the next corner we formed company front and wheeled into a leading street like six tall gates.

There was silence on the sidewalks, the jeering had ceased, and one of the natives shouted: "By God, they are soldiers all right." 68

Upon arrival at Omaha Barracks, all of the 9th Infantry units remained as part of the permanent garrison, but the four 8th Infantry units were scheduled to continue on to Fort D. A. Russell. 69 The assignment of these units placed all companies of the 9th Infantry at Omaha Barracks with the exception of Companies G and K. 70

Many officers and men of the newly assigned units had been previously stationed at Omaha Barracks as members of the old 27th Infantry before that regiment lost its identity during the reorganization of 1869. They were glad to return. "To be at Headquarters with General King was a great pleasure," wrote the wife of one company commander.

"Omaha was a large city at that time compared with the western towns near which our lot had lately been cast. The people [Omaha citizens] were hospitable and added greatly to the sociability and safety of our

68William Gurnett, 9th Infantry, quoted from an undated copy of the National Indian Wars Veterans' newspaper, Winners of the West, published at St. Joseph, Missouri, 1922-1944.

69Omaha Daily Herald, October 8, 1873.

Living conditions at Omaha Barracks were enhanced a bit during the summer of 1874 by an improvement to the water system. Cisterns were provided for each set of quarters, and they permitted a good supply of charcoal- and sand-filtered water. No longer was it necessary for the housewife to boil all the water used by her family.

In the fall of 1873, the Indian agencies for both Red Cloud and Spotted Tail were located within close proximity to each other on the upper part of the White River. Spotted Tail was located at the junction of Beaver Creek and the river, just south of the Nebraska-Dakota boundary; Red Cloud was approximately forty miles further to the southwest. During October the northern Indians came to these agencies in large numbers, and in an angry mood, from the Powder River country. Throughout the summer they had attacked and constantly harassed the Yellowstone Expedition. The construction of the Northern Pacific Railroad — like the Union Pacific, a few years previously — threatened the very existence of the hunting grounds. There was even open talk of war, and the Indians moved freely "back and forth, from one agency to the other, fiercely demanding beef and blankets in unlimited quantities and forcing the agents and their men to fill all their requirements."  

71 Mattes, p. 183. The Army wife quoted was Mrs. Andrew Burt, wife of Captain Burt, Company H, 9th Infantry. Captain Burt and some of the members of his company had previously been stationed at Omaha Barracks for a short period, from January until April, 1869, as members of the 27th Infantry.

72 War Department, Surgeon General's Office, Circular No. 8 (1875), p. 364.

Word of difficulty at the agencies reached Colonel John E. Smith, the post commander at Fort Laramie; and, on February 5, he reported it to the Department of the Platte. A few days later, Lieutenant Levi H. Robinson and Corporal Coleman, of the 14th Infantry, were killed near Laramie Peak by a group of warriors suspected of being from Red Cloud. At about the same time, a Hunkpapa warrior murdered a young clerk at the Red Cloud agency, and Doctor J. J. Saville, the agent, requested troops from Fort Laramie. Colonel Smith telegraphed the Department of the Platte for assistance and then promptly led a strong force to the White River country, where he established a new fortified post near Red Cloud.

In order to forestall any possible Indian interference with the railroad, and to protect the frontier settlements, part of the Omaha Barracks garrison was moved to the field. On February 15, Company E, 9th Infantry, departed by rail for Sidney Barracks; and, on March 9, Company C of the same regiment moved to Grand Island, Nebraska. From Grand Island, the company proceeded to the North Loup country. It was ordered to take along all of its company and general equipment, 200 rounds of ammunition per man, and a thirty day supply of rations. In addition, the company was provided with four wagons and teams, plus

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74p. 190; Hyde, p. 195.
75p. 191; Hyde, p. 195.
76Ibid. The clerk, Frank Appleton, was shot by error. The Hunkpapa had intended to kill Doctor Saville, the agent. The new post established by Colonel Smith was named Camp Robinson, in honor of Lieutenant Levi H. Robinson. Ibid.
77Brown, p. 106.
sufficient horses and ponies to mount twenty men.73

A short time later, the remainder of the 9th Infantry was ordered to Fort Laramie and to the Indian agencies. The transfer was unexpected at Omaha Barracks and, quite naturally, caused some disappointment.

If a thunder cap from a clear sky had burst upon my ears the surprise could not have been greater [wrote Mrs. Burt7]. Not the faintest rumour of an intended move had been heard. We had settled down for the summer feeling secure. Then to go back west where we had just spent eight years was most astounding. . . . In a few days some of the companies started.79

On June 22, Companies A, D, F, and I of the 9th Infantry departed by rail for Fort D. A. Russell, on route to the Red Cloud and Spotted Tail agencies.30 On August 10, Colonel King, with the regimental headquarters, band, and Companies E and H, left Omaha Barracks for Fort Laramie.31

The departure of Colonel John H. King and the six companies left Omaha Barracks without a senior officer in command and reduced the garrison by more than one-half.32 These conditions, however, were soon rectified by the arrival of a new regiment. The 8th Infantry had relieved the

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73Letter Order, dated March 6, 1874, from Headquarters Department of the Platte to Captain Munson, Company C, 9th Infantry, Omaha Barracks. Private collection of Mrs. Grace Steinberg, Omaha, Nebraska.

79Matus, p. 191.

80Brown, p. 106; Omaha Daily Herald, June 23, 1874.

81Brown, p. 107; Matus, pp. 191-193. Mrs. Burt, wife of the Company H commander, remained at Omaha Barracks until shortly after the birth of a son, Reynolds Johnston Burt, on August 2, 1874. Both the husband and son later became general officers in the United States Army.

82At the end of May, the garrison had numbered twenty-six officers and 516 enlisted men; at the end of August, it was eleven officers and 240 men. Medical History, Fort Omaha (Book 219), pp. 315, 328.
23rd Infantry in the Department of Arizona, and the Twenty-third was then on route to new stations in the Department of the Platte. At the regimental headquarters and three companies arrived at Omaha Barracks in early September, 1874, after having traveled by rail from San Francisco, California.

Colonel Jefferson C. Davis was the regularly assigned commander of the 23rd Infantry. At the time of the transfer, however, Davis was on detached service as commanding officer of the Department of Columbia, and he was busy engaged with Captain Jack and the Modoc War. Lieutenant Colonel Richard I. Dodge, 23rd Infantry, temporarily commanded the regiment and Omaha Barracks, in the absence of Colonel Davis.

Companies E and K, 2nd Cavalry, again returned to Omaha Barracks during the early fall. Both units had been at Fort Laramie and had

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84 Letter from Headquarters Department of the Platte to the Commanding Officer, Omaha Barracks, September 2, 1874, Department of the Platte, Letters Sent, 1866-1877.

85 Seitzman, I., p. 122. Colonel Davis entered the Army from Indiana and served in both the Mexican War and the Civil War. He had been honorably mustered out of the service, as a Major General of Volunteers, on September 1, 1866, and commissioned a Colonel in the Regular Army. He was given command of the 23rd Infantry in that same year. Ibid., pp. 353-359.

86 Annual Report of the Secretary of War, 1874-1875, p. 57; Fairfax Downey, Indian-Fighting Army (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1941), pp. 151-152; Dance, pp. 332-334. Colonel Davis, according to Downey, had fought for the Union in the Civil War with an abiding personal resentment against the Confederacy's President for bearing the same name.” Downey, p. 151.

87 Annual Report of the Secretary of War, 1874-1875, pp. 72-73.
participated in Colonel J. E. Smith's march to the Indian agencies on March 1, following the murders of Lieutenant Robinson, Corporal Coleman, and Frank Appleton. With the arrival of these units, the garrison of Omaha Barracks during the winter of 1874-1875 consisted of the Regimental Headquarters, Band, and Companies A, B, C, G, I, and K of the 23rd Infantry, plus Companies E and K of the 2nd Cavalry. The post was commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Dodge.

Things went along as usual in 1875 with a few interruptions. The year was ushered in with a prison riot at Lincoln, Nebraska. It began about 4:00 P.M. on January 11, when the leaders of the outbreak took advantage of an absence of Warden Woodhurst to overpower his deputy and kidnap the Warden's family. The prisoners then held Mrs. Woodhurst and her two small children as hostages, gained possession of the arsenal, and assumed control of the prison. According to a Lincoln resident at the time:

The governor wired for a detail from the regulars, stationed at Fort Omaha [Omaha Barracks], and with all possible haste they were rushed to the scene. They were soon in charge of the situation, and negotiations were begun for a restoration of normal conditions, which result was attained in three days' time.

83 Ibid., p. 6; Lambert, p. 113; Omaha Daily Herald, August 26, 1874.

89 Annual Report of the Secretary of War, 1874-1875, pp. 6, 13, 73-73.


91 Bell, p. 132. Mrs. Woodhurst and her children were secured, without harm, from the rioters, and the incident ended without any loss of life. Ibid., p. 133.
January also brought an enlargement and renovation of the Department of the Platte headquarters in downtown Omaha. General Ord, however, did not have long to enjoy his new office. On April 6, he relinquished his command and was transferred to the Department of Texas. His replacement was Brigadier General George Crook, who assumed command of the Department of the Platte on April 27, 1875.

During the winter of 1874-1875, a new military post — Fort Hart-suff — was established in the Loup Valley, and an old existing sub-post was officially recognized at North Platte Station. On April 3, 1875, Company B, 23rd Infantry, departed Omaha Barracks for North Platte Station, and on April 14 Company A of the same regiment left for Fort Hart-suff.

92Omaha Weekly Republican, January 9, 1875. The headquarters still remained at the same location — the Withnell Building, on the corner of 15th and Harney Streets. The building was first occupied by the Department of the Platte on November 3, 1868. Omaha Weekly Republican, November 4, 1868.

93The change in command had been made pursuant to the provisions of paragraphs 2 and 3, General Order Number 15, War Department, 1875 series. During the interim period, between April 6 and April 27, command of the department was officially exercised by the Commanding General of the Military Division of the Missouri. Letter from Major George D. Ruggles to Brigadier General George Crook, Headquarters of the Platte, Omaha, September 16, 1875, Department of the Platte, Letters Sent, 1866-1877.

94Ibid. Troops had actually used these locations for some time. Fort Hart-suff was situated at Willow Springs, near the forks of Calamus Creek and North Loup Creek, and troops stationed there had the mission of protecting settlers and the Pawnee reservation from roving bands of Sioux. North Platte Station had been a sub-post of Fort McPherson, Nebraska. Prucha, pp. 73, 95.

95U. S., National Archives, Records of the Adjutant General's Office (Record Group 94), Medical History of the Post of Fort Omaha Nebraska, for the period 1875-1890 (Book 221), Ms., microfilm, p. 5. Cited hereafter as Medical History, Fort Omaha (Book 221).
On May 5, after having spent the winter at Omaha Barracks, Companies E and K, 2nd Cavalry, departed for the Indian agencies in the western part of Nebraska. On the day following, Company G, 23rd Infantry, left for temporary duty at the Pawnee agency, ninety miles west of Omaha, and remained there for the next three months.

While at the Pawnee agency, Company G had an opportunity to protect their wards from an attack by an Ogallala war party. The Sioux had left their reservation in June, and the Pawnee agency was immediately forewarned of an impending raid, by a telegraphic report from Fort Laramie, sent through the Department of the Platte headquarters. As a result of the timely warning, the department adjutant general was able to report that the Pawnees, "protected by troops, repulsed their assailants with loss to the attacking parties."

With the possible exception of a fire on September 15, during which a quantity of hay was destroyed, the remainder of 1875 passed quietly at Omaha Barracks. There was no further change in the garrison until November, when two additional units of the 23rd Infantry arrived on the post. Company D reported on November 4, and Company H joined the garrison the following day. The arrival of these units provided a

96 Ibid., p. 6.
97 Ibid., pp. 6, 10.
98 Letter from Major Fuggles to General Crook, September 16, 1875, Department of the Platte, Letters Sent, 1866-1877.
99 Ibid.
100 Medical History, Fort Omaha (Book 221), p. 16.
post garrison composed of the regimental headquarters, the band, and six companies of the 23rd Infantry — all under the command of Colonel Jefferson C. Davis.\(^{101}\)

During the period 1870 to 1875, living conditions had gradually improved at Omaha Barracks. Not only had the changes already mentioned occurred, but the trees set out around the parade ground were growing luxuriously; the heating of all the quarters had been converted from wood-burning to coal-burning stoves; and the enlisted men's barracks had been "wainscoted to the bottom of the windows, and ceiled with half-inch tongued and grooved boards."\(^{102}\)

The story of Omaha Barracks during the year 1876 is similar to that of every other Army post located within the Department of the Platte and the Department of Dakota for that same period. Although a long distance from the Black Hills, its garrison was inextricably a part of the Big Horn and Yellowstone Expeditions. Following Colonel J. J. Reynolds' failure to hold the Indian village he had captured on the Little Powder River and General Crook's forced withdrawal to Fort Fetterman,\(^{103}\) "all

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\(^{101}\)U. S., Congress, House, *Annual Report of the Secretary of War*, 44th Cong., 1st Sess., 1875-1876, House Exec. Doc. No. 1, Part 2 (Serial 1674), pp. 47, 146-147. The Secretary of War's report was based upon unit returns as of September 30, 1875, and listed only four companies: C, G, I, and K. It did not show the arrival of Companies D and K in November.

\(^{102}\)War Department, Surgeon General's Office, *Circular No. 3 (1875)*, pp. 363-364.

\(^{103}\)Colonel Reynolds, with six companies of the 2nd and 3rd Cavalry Regiments plus some "half-breed scouts," surprised and captured an Indian village on March 17, 1876. Reynolds failed to place a security force on a ridge that dominated the village while his troops were looting and destroying the lodges, so he remained under hostile fire. He then withdrew
the available men in the Departments of the Platte and Dakota were placed in readiness to take the field.104 Crook "took to the field" again on May 29 and moved north from Fort Petterson on what was to become known as his Rosebud Campaign.105

In the meantime, the Indians became very "ugly" and "bold" and attacked ranches and communications throughout the Department of the Platte — even as far eastward as the Loup Valley.106 To halt such attacks and to replace cavalry units badly needed for the coming campaign, Companies C, G, I, and K, 23rd Infantry, departed Omaha Barracks on May 10 for stations farther to the west.107 Company H of the same regiment left on May 28 to help protect the road between Fort Laramie and the Black Hills.108 Throughout the remainder of 1876, only one infantry


106Bourke, pp. 283-285. In the Loup Valley, one band of Sioux raided horse and cattle ranches. They were pursued by a small detachment of men from the 23rd Infantry — mounted on quartermaster mules — who compelled the Indians to stand, fight, and lose their plunder. Ibid., p. 295.

107Medical History, Fort Omaha (Book 221), p. 22.

company with Colonel Davis and his headquarters, plus some small house-keeping detachments belonging to units that had moved to the field, remained at Omaha Barracks. Also present, of course, were the dependent women and children of personnel temporarily absent in connection with the Black Hills and Yellowstone Expedition.

Company B, 23rd Infantry, was the unit that remained behind. Personnel assigned to that unit, however, had no holiday, as most of the normal garrison functions necessarily continued with an increased tempo. For example:

The losses to our troops in the Sioux War necessitated increased activity in recruiting for the cavalry. Omaha Barracks was designated as a recruiting rendezvous and since the end of the month August eighty-five recruits have been examined.

In addition, with the absence of other troops, the individual members of the garrison had a greatly increased number of tours on post guard duty, prison guard details, and essential fatigue duties, such as the distribution of water, post sanitation, and routine post maintenance. One consolation, however, was expressed by the post surgeon. "The growth of weeds was luxuriant," he wrote, "and though the small garrison prevented proper eradication of them yet there was few persons present to render them hiding places for filth and slops."

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110 Medical History, Fort Omaha (Book 221), p. 23.

111 Ibid., p. 24.
Judging from the post surgeon's journal, the overall health of troops with General Crook was not seriously impaired. On September 10, a party of twenty patients arrived at the post from his command. Their prevalent disease was diarrhea; and, with but two exceptions, they were treated without medicine and returned to duty. They were all temporarily hospitalized, but their treatment consisted of a bath, "clean clothes and plenty of wholesome food."

On November 13, Omaha Barracks was almost emptied by the withdrawal of Company D. Only the regimental headquarters and band, 23rd Infantry, remained, plus the previously mentioned detachments and civilian dependents. A short time later, on December 9, it was reinforced a bit by the arrival of Company H of the 4th Infantry, but was almost immediately diminished again by the departure of Colonel Jefferson Davis and the remaining elements of the 23rd Infantry on December 17, 1876.

Although the year 1876 ended with Omaha Barracks almost deserted, it was not to remain so very long. Back in 1874, when major problems first developed at the Red Cloud and Spotted Tail agencies, Colonel John H. King, 9th Infantry, had been ordered, with his headquarters and band, to Fort Laramie. At Laramie, King had assumed command and that post became the headquarters for a new Black Hills District which included Camp Robinson and Camp Sheridan, near the agencies.

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112 Ibid.
113 Ibid., p. 25.
114 Supra., p. 65.
115 Mattes, p. 191.
In early November, 1876, the headquarters, field staff, and band, 9th Infantry, plus Company H of that same regiment, were moved from Fort Laramie to Sidney Barracks, Nebraska, where they remained until January 10, 1877. On January 10, these same units left Sidney Barracks and proceeded to Omaha Barracks, where they arrived the next day. Three days later, on January 14, Companies B, D, F, I, and K of Colonel King's regiment arrived on the post from Cheyenne and the Powder River Expedition. Thus, after an absence of nearly two and one-half years, the 9th Infantry was back in Omaha. Also present in the garrison was Company D of the 4th Infantry.

All of these troops, with the exception of personnel assigned to the headquarters and to Company H, had just completed two months of strenuous field service with General Crook's Powder River Expedition. In spite of their recent exposure to a severe winter on the plains, the men were in excellent condition when they reached Omaha Barracks. According to the post surgeon,

The men were hardy and miffed. The change from the field to barracks caused numerous "colds." Not sufficiently serious to disqualify them from duty but requiring something unexpected. There were eight cases of frost bite most of them occurring at the post.

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116 Ibid., p. 234; Brown, pp. 124-125.
118 Ibid.
119 Brown, pp. 124-125; Bourke, p. 389. Although Company H had not been a part of the Powder River Expedition, it had taken an active role in General Crook's earlier Black Hills and Yellowstone Expedition, from February through September, 1876.
120 Medical History, Fort Omaha (Book 221), pp. 25-26.
The new garrison arrived in Omaha during a period of especially severe weather. "We were at once greatly chagrined to find the weather so cold that all the water for the garrison's use was frozen in the supply barrels and that scrubbing had to be done with melted snow," recorded Mrs. Andrew Burt, the wife of the commander of Company H.\textsuperscript{121}

Mrs. Burt did not have long to wait, however, before something would be done about the water barrels. Construction of a new gravity-flow water system was begun in May, and it was in operation by the end of the year. It consisted of a deep well, from which water was pumped by steam power into a 2,200 barrel capacity reservoir located on the hill behind the officers' quarters. From the reservoir, the water flowed through pipes to fire hydrants and yard hydrants throughout the garrison.\textsuperscript{122}

On July 15, 1877, a wave of strikes started among the employees of the Baltimore and Ohio, the Pennsylvania, the Erie, and the New York Central railroads. These roads were highly important to the national welfare, as they constituted the main trunk lines between the eastern states and the Mississippi Valley. Thousands of Pennsylvania coal miners joined the railway employees; and, for a while, the strike resulted in riots that reached the status of armed insurrection. Order could not be restored, nor could the pillage and destruction of property be prevented, until Federal troops were called out to assist the various state militias.\textsuperscript{123}

\textsuperscript{121}Woodrow Wilson, \emph{A History of the American People} (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1902), V, p. 141.
Traffic was still tied up and an estimated ten million dollars worth of property had been destroyed\(^{124}\) when, on July 24, Colonel King and the eight companies of infantry stationed at Omaha Barracks were ordered to Chicago.\(^{125}\) The troops marched to Omaha and from there made the 516 mile trip by rail. They arrived the following day and remained until the latter part of August, "guarding public property endangered by the strike of the railroad employees."\(^{126}\)

During the absence of King's force, a new departmental reserve was reconstituted at Omaha Barracks. Five companies of cavalry and three companies of infantry were withdrawn from points further west on the railroad, and they remained at Omaha until the return of the regular garrison from Chicago.\(^{127}\) The rapidity of these troop movements again demonstrated the strategic importance of Omaha as a base from which sizeable forces could be moved — in almost any direction — throughout the West.

Colonel King's force returned from Chicago during the third week in August, and the eight units comprising the temporary garrison returned

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\(^{124}\) Ibid.

\(^{125}\) Medical History, Fort Omaha (Book 221), p. 26. The troops were ordered to Chicago by Special Order No. 61, Headquarters Division of the Missouri. Mattes, p. 239. The units involved were Companies B, D, F, H, I, and K of the 9th Infantry, plus Companies D and H, 4th Infantry. Ibid., pp. 25-27; Brown, p. 125.

\(^{126}\) Brown, p. 125.

to their home stations.\textsuperscript{128} Within less than ten days, however, most of the troops at Omaha Barracks were again on the move. This time, the infantry replaced cavalry units and made the mounted troopers available to pursue Chief Joseph and his elusive Nez Perce.\textsuperscript{129} Only two companies remained as the post garrison. They were Company H of the 9th Infantry and one company of the 4th Infantry Regiment.\textsuperscript{130}

Of the five infantry units sent out in August, only two returned for the winter. Company B arrived from Fort Russell on November 3, and Company I returned from Sidney Barracks later that month. Another unit, however, did join the post garrison. It was Company G, 9th Infantry. On November 4, Company G left Camp Robinson, Nebraska, and marched 120 miles to Sidney Barracks. From there, the unit traveled by train to Omaha, arriving on November 11.\textsuperscript{131}

There were no other major changes at Omaha Barracks until the spring of 1878.\textsuperscript{132} Colonel King continued as the post commander and his troops consisted of the headquarters, the band, and six companies of the

\textsuperscript{128}\textit{Ibid.} Companies B, D, F, H, and I left Chicago on August 19 and arrived in Omaha the next day; Company K made the same move one day later. Brown, p. 125.

\textsuperscript{129}\textit{Medical History, Fort Omaha (Book 221)}, pp. 26-27. The 9th Infantry units were distributed as follows: Company B, Fort D. A. Russell; Company D, Cheyenne Depot; Company F, Fort McPherson; Company I, Sidney Barracks; Company K, Fort Sanders; Company H remained at Omaha Barracks. Brown, p. 126.

\textsuperscript{130}\textit{Ibid.}

\textsuperscript{131}During November, Company D was transferred from Cheyenne Depot, Wyoming, to Sidney Barracks; Company F's permanent station was changed from Omaha Barracks to Fort McPherson, Nebraska; and Company K remained at Fort Sanders, Wyoming. Brown, p. 126; \textit{Medical History, Fort Omaha (Book 221)}, p. 27.

\textsuperscript{132}\textit{Medical History, Fort Omaha (Book 221)}, pp. 27-29.
9th Infantry, plus Company D of the 4th Infantry. The weather was so mild during December and the early part of January that the troops were unable to cut ice for the coming summer until the latter part of the month. It then became so cold that the Missouri froze rapidly to a thickness of from seven to eight inches, and the ice cutting began.

The families of military personnel stationed in the West had always considered Omaha Barracks an especially desirable assignment. Living conditions on the post were good, the post was convenient to Omaha, and the garrison formed a congenial Army community.

The winter passed pleasantly among so many agreeable people, including General and Mrs. Crook, General Lieutenant Colonel and Mrs. John H. King, General Major and Mrs. Luther P. Bradley, Major and Mrs. Edwin Townsend, General Lieutenant Colonel Robert Williams, Lieutenant and Mrs. Jesse Lee, Major and Mrs. Alfred Norton and many others. Mrs. Williams had been a reigning belle in Washington as Miss Cutts and later as Mrs. Stephen A. Douglas. She was our neighbor and a charming woman who, though now the busy mother of six children, still possessed the same characteristics that marked her brilliant career in the capital.

In the early part of 1878, General Crook moved his Headquarters

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133 U.S. Congress, House, Report of the Secretary of War, 45th Cong., 2nd Sess., 1877-1878, House Exec. Doc. No. 1, Part 2 (Serial 1794), pp. 20-21, 36-37. This report (pp. 36-37) does not reflect the change of stations of Companies G and K, 9th Infantry, during November, 1877.

134 Medical History, Fort Omaha (Book 221), pp. 27-28.

135 Mattes, pp. 238-239. All of the officers mentioned by Mrs. Burt were either assigned to the 9th Infantry Regiment or were members of General Crook's staff. The corrections in rank indicate their actual Regular Army status as of the time Mrs. Burt referred to them. Although officers were frequently referred to by the temporary brevet rank they held during the Civil War, it was no longer their official title. Brevet uniforms were not permitted to be worn on duty after 1870, although brevet insignia could be worn on the collar of the coat. After 1872, the use of brevet rank in official orders was prohibited. Ganoe, p. 331.
and staff from the Withnell Building in downtown Omaha to Omaha Barracks.\textsuperscript{136} One of the older post buildings was used temporarily to house the Department of the Platte headquarters until a new structure could be erected on the north end of the parade ground.\textsuperscript{137} Along with the Department of the Platte headquarters came the staff officers and their families.\textsuperscript{138} General and Mrs. Crook lived in a set of wooden quarters until such time as a new brick home — authorized by Congress in an Army appropriation bill on June 18, 1876 — could be completed.\textsuperscript{139}

The conclusion of the Sioux War and the stabbing of Crazy Horse on September 5, 1877, did not mean rest and relaxation for troops assigned to the Department of the Platte. Neither did the defeat of Chief Joseph and the Nez Percé in the Bear Paw Mountains on October 4, 1877. There were still approximately 375,000 Indians to be kept on their reservations, and "Sitting Bull across the border in Canada was collecting a combined force of the tribes already there and of those who had taken refuge from the United States. The whole mass might strike at any moment."\textsuperscript{140}

There were, in addition, still a large number of stray hostiles to be rounded up in the northern section of the Department, while, at the same time, the Bannock Indians to the northwest, in the Department of Oregon,

\textsuperscript{136} Burkley, p. 388.

\textsuperscript{137} Ibid., pp. 386, 392. Construction of the new headquarters began in May, 1875, and was completed by early fall of that year. \textit{Medical History, Port Omaha} (Book 221), pp. 34, 36.

\textsuperscript{138} Burkley, p. 388; Mattes, p. 238.

\textsuperscript{139} \textit{Sunday World-Herald} (Omaha), October 24, 1965, p. 1-F.

\textsuperscript{140} \textit{Cancer}, p. 349.
had started a new war. 

During the summer and fall of 1878, precautions were taken to offset the threat. An observation force was organized under the command of Lieutenant Colonel L. P. Bradley, 9th Infantry, and stationed in the Little Missouri country and in the northwestern section of the Black Hills. On May 13, Major E. F. Townsend took Companies B, H, and I, 9th Infantry, from Omaha Barracks to Fort Laramie as part of Bradley's expedition. In the meantime, Company F of the regiment had arrived at the post from Fort McPherson, and Company D of the 4th Infantry had departed for Fort Laramie. These troop changes during the month of May reduced the garrison to only two infantry companies, plus Colonel King's headquarters and the band.

There were no further changes in the garrison until September 13, when Company G departed Omaha for a field camp near Sidney, Nebraska. Company G was part of a task force organized to pursue a band of Cheyenne Indians — led by Dull Knife, Wild Hog, and Little Wolf — which had broken away from the Indian Territory on September 9 and were raiding

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141 Schmitt, pp. 221-223; Downey, pp. 254-261.
142 Rodenbough and Haskins, p. 529.
143 Medical History, Fort Omaha (Book 221), p. 29; Brown, p. 127; Mattes, p. 239.
144 Ibid. Company F arrived on the post May 14; Company D departed on May 16.
145 The two companies remaining at Omaha Barracks were Companies F and G, 9th Infantry. Brown, p. 127.
146 Brown, p. 128.
north through Kansas and Nebraska in an effort to join their uncaptured northern cousins and the Sioux. In early October, the Cheyenne crossed the danger line of the Union Pacific Railroad without interception and then split into two groups and disappeared into the sand hills of Nebraska. After the Indians crossed the railroad, Company G was no longer essential to the chase, so it returned to Omaha Barracks.

The only other changes within the post garrison during the remainder of 1878 were the return of Company H from Colonel Bradley's observation force, on October 27, and the departure of Company F for Fort McKinney, Wyoming Territory, on November 15. As the year 1878 drew to a close, Omaha Barracks was almost depleted of regimental-type units. Only Colonel John H. King, the commanding officer, remained, with his headquarters, the band, and Companies G and H of the 9th Infantry. Also present on the post, of course, was General Crook, with his headquarters and staff.

On November 20, 1878, Omaha Barracks celebrated its tenth anniversary. On December 30 of that same year, it received a new name — Fort Omaha.

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147 Rodenbough and Haskins, p. 528; Bourke, p. 425; Schmitt, pp. 223-226.

148 Dull Knife and his band of 149 men, women, and children later surrendered during a heavy snowstorm on October 23, 1878; Little Wolf and his band were later apprehended, on March 25, 1879, in the Department of Dakota. Company G departed Sidney on October 15 and arrived at Omaha Barracks the following day. Brown, p. 129.

149 Brown, pp. 129-130.


151 Prucha, p. 96.
CHAPTER IV
FORT OMAHA, 1879-1896:
The Last of the Frontier

Fort Omaha began the year 1879 with an outbreak of fever among the children of the post. At first diagnosed as "roseola," the epidemic proved to be scarlet fever, and two youngsters died from its effects.\(^1\) The scarlet fever plague ended in March, but it was immediately followed by malaria. Although scarlet fever attacked only children, the malaria affected all personnel, and it continued unabated until late in the fall.\(^2\)

The post surgeon attributed the malaria to an "extensive excavation" dug to provide a firm foundation for the new Department of the Platte headquarters building then under construction on the northern portion of the parade ground. Work began on the building in May, 1879, and, according to the surgeon, "... it is probable that the emanations from the large quantity of loose earth thrown out, have been a prolific source of the malarial troubles now prevailing."\(^3\)

\(^1\)Medical History, Fort Omaha (Book 221), pp. 32-33. Both children were the daughters of the 9th Infantry quartermaster, Major Alfred Horton. The disease began among the laundresses' families, living on the southeast corner of the garrison, and rapidly spread to the other children residing on the post.

\(^2\)Ibid., pp. 33-39.

\(^3\)Ibid., p. 34. Malaria, however, had long been a problem in the Fort Omaha area; and, in July, the surgeon recorded: "The experiences of last summer and the present has clearly demonstrated that a malarial influence prevails at this post." Ibid., p. 35.
Another health problem attributed to the new structure was a shortage of water. The surgeon recorded that insufficient rainfall, together with the large quantity of water needed to erect the big brick and concrete building, caused "... apprehension that the well supplying the fort would fail. On the 1st of July the water was quite low and had to be obtained from other sources for building purposes." To solve the water problem, construction of a new deep well was begun on July 12. It was located approximately twenty feet south of the engine house and when completed, in October, was ninety feet deep.

In addition to the new headquarters, Fort Omaha had another permanent building under construction at that time. It was the Crook house. An Army appropriation bill, approved on June 18, 1878, authorized a new set of quarters for the department commander. Through the use of troop labor, the cost of the brick structure was reduced to $7,716.00. The house was completed during the spring of 1879 and immediately occupied by General Crook and his family. The General had been living in one of the old wooden sets of quarters ever since his arrival on the post in July of 1878.

\[3^4\text{Ibid., p. 35.}\]

\[5^5\text{Ibid., pp. 35, 39. The surgeon reported the water "abundant and softer than that obtained from the old well." Ibid., p. 39. The post water system was later described as follows: "The water supply of the post is obtained from two shallow communicating wells of about 25 feet depth and from another well, bored through the bottom of one of the former 86 feet deep. The deeper water is pumped into one of the shallow wells and thence to a reservoir on the hill for general distribution." Ibid., p. 53.}\]

During the spring of 1879, two events occurred within the Department of the Platte that aroused widespread interest. In both of them, Fort Omaha played some part. The first of these was a murder trial at Hastings, Nebraska, and the second was an Omaha court case involving General George Crook and a Ponca Indian Chief named Standing Bear.

The Hastings trial provided all the Hollywood motion picture trimmings of a war between cattlemen and homesteaders. During the winter of 1878-1879, a wealthy Nebraska cattlemen — Ira P. Olive by name — attempted to locate some cattle thieves who had been stealing from his herds along the South Loup River. He suspected at least one of the "sod-house nestors" who were fencing in their quarter-section homesteads and interfering with the open range along Clear Creek, in Custer County. In an effort to eliminate both cattle thieves and settlers, Olive had a warrant issued for the arrest of his suspect, named Ami Ketchum. At the time, Ketchum lived with another homesteader named Luther Mitchell.

While attempting to arrest Ketchum, a gun battle ensued between a four-man sheriff's posse and the two homesteaders. In the gun fight, Olive's brother, Bob, was mortally wounded, and the homesteaders escaped. Ira then offered a $700.00 reward for their capture, as he considered them his brother's murderers. Later, after both Mitchell and Ketchum had voluntarily surrendered and were being returned to Custer County, where their custodians could collect the reward money, Olive and several of his friends managed to gain possession of the prisoners. The two home-
steadiers were then taken to a canyon near Olive's ranch, where the posse hanged the prisoners and burned their bodies. 7

The brutal murder of Mitchell and Ketchum aroused such strong public reaction that Ira Olive and another member of the group, named Frederick Fisher, were arrested and brought to trial, in Hastings, Nebraska. Cattlemen and homesteaders both took sides, and the presiding judge noted "that the town and the courtroom were rapidly being overrun by desperadoes and tough-looking cowboys, all packing six-shooters." 8

The crucial day of the trial was April 11, when the prosecution intended to present its key witness, a confessed member of the gang, named Bion Brown, who had turned state's evidence. To prevent bloodshed and to safeguard justice, the Governor requested and obtained military assistance from General Crook. 9 Although acting without authority, on April 11 Company H of the 9th Infantry was quickly dispatched by rail from Fort Omaha to Hastings. 10

The court opened at 9:00 A.M., and Company H arrived a short time later. 11 The effect the troops produced on the proceedings can be best described by John M. Thurston, a member of the prosecution, and later a

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7 Solomon D. Butcher, Pioneer History of Custer County (Broken Bow, Nebraska: Privately printed by Solomon D. Butcher and Ephraim S. Finch, 1901), pp. 43-62.
8 Mattes, p. 240; Butcher, pp. 53-54; Schmitt, pp. 230-231.
9 Ibid.
10 Company H remained at Hastings until the termination of the trial on April 18. Brown, p. 130; Schmitt, p. 231.
11 Mattes, p. 240.
United States Senator from Nebraska.

Well, court opened and the crisis was at hand. I stood up and made some motion, the nature of which I do not now recall, but it was only made to give me a chance to talk against time and I commenced an argument. At ten o'clock I was still speaking and nothing was heard from the troops, so it continued on until eleven and we were getting quite desperate, but I kept on talking and at about fifteen minutes after eleven we heard Uncle Sam's bugle blowing down the street. I think that was the sweetest music I ever listened to. The court did not stop to order a recess, but everybody in the building rushed out the front doors and here, coming up the street, was the finest sight my eyes ever fell upon. Ninety-two regulars marching with steady swinging steps with a Gatling-gun and squad, and at their head was the man we used to call Little Andy Burt, a captain in the regular army, and over all the old flag.

On came the ninety-two regulars and deployed upon a vacant block diagonally across from the courthouse, ammunition was passed out and the Gatling-gun squad stood ready for action....

I never saw so surprised and so quiet a crowd of men in all my life as those cowboys were. They would cheerfully have attacked five hundred untrained militia men, but ninety-two regular soldiers with a Gatling-gun and the flag, and Little Andy Burt in command, put the fear of God in them in two seconds. Trouble was all over. We went back into the court room and the trial was resumed.12

The second event that attracted attention to Omaha and military authorities was the famous case of Standing Bear vs. Crook. Not only was it an important test case to determine the legal rights of the Ameri-
can Indians, but the action was unique in that the defendant — General George Crook — had deliberately encouraged the plaintiff to challenge his own military authority. Briefly, the case was as follows.

In 1877, the Indian Bureau had unjustly ordered the removal of the peaceful Poncas from their reservation in southern Dakota and sent them to the Indian Territory in what is now the state of Oklahoma. The Poncas did not thrive at all well in the new area. By the end of 1878 all of their cattle were dead; and, out of 748 tribesmen sent to the territory a year earlier, only 430 Poncas were still alive. Chief Standing Bear himself had lost several relatives and a daughter and then, finally, his only son. The old chief was grief-stricken and attempted to carry his son's bones back to the Ponca burial ground in Dakota. Accompanied by a small group of men, women, and children, Standing Bear left the Indian Territory in January, 1879, and peacefully made his way northward to the Omaha Reservation, where he was cordially welcomed.

Federal authorities in Washington, however, were determined not to permit such conduct on the part of Standing Bear to pass unnoticed and gave General Crook the disagreeable task of securing custody of the runaways and holding them for return to the Indian Territory. Crook, of course, had to comply with his orders, so the Indians were arrested

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13 Thomas Henry Tibbles, Buckskin and Blanket Days (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1957), pp. 193-196. Mr. Tibbles, a crusading editor of the Omaha Herald, wrote that General Crook "was the most anxious person I ever saw to have a writ of habeas corpus served on him." Ibid., p. 199.

14 Ibid., p. 194.

15 Ibid., p. 195; Schmitt, pp. 231-233; Bourke, pp. 427-428.
and placed at Fort Omaha under the custody of Lieutenant W. L. Carpenter of the 9th Infantry. While at the Fort, the Indians were very cooperative and were highly commended for their "excellent character for sobriety and good behavior of every kind." 

The trial, presided over by Judge Elmer S. Dundy, began on April 30 and lasted two days. Although he was technically the defendant in the case, General Crook supported the Indians in every manner possible and was among the first to congratulate Standing Bear when Judge Dundy ruled that the government was illegally detaining him and ordered his release.

The new departmental headquarters building was completed at Fort Omaha in September, and it was described as "quite an imposing structure." On July 10, Omaha's first telephone exchange began operation, and one of the instruments was soon installed in the new building. Frank J. Burkley, the telephone-telegraph operator at the headquarters, described the novelty of the new means of communication as follows:

The telephone . . . was placed in my office and was the object of considerable interest not only on the part of the Fort

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16Bourke, p. 428.
17Ibid. The Indians were quartered in tents and, according to Tibbles, most of them suffered from malaria. Tibbles, p. 196.
20Burkley, p. 392; Medical History, Fort Omaha (Book 221), p. 36; Fig. 5, p. 125.
22Burkley, p. 388.
Omaha residents, but also by the people of Omaha, many of whom were curious to talk over a wire five miles long and to get me to play the mouth organ so that they and their friends could hear music by wire this great distance away.  

Although it did not affect the garrison itself, an Ute uprising at the White River Agency in Colorado during September of 1879 did involve the departmental headquarters located on the post and required immediate control of troops stationed at such distant posts as Fort D. A. Russell and Fort Fred Steele. Furthermore, the timely action taken by General Crook's headquarters again stressed the strategic importance of Omaha as a railroad and communications center.

Briefly, the story is this. For quite some time, the Utes had been growing increasingly hostile toward their agent because of his malignant practices at their expense. The antagonism of the Utes resulted in Major Thomas A. Thornburgh, 4th Infantry, and approximately 200 men being ordered to that agency from Fort Steele. While still en route to White River, Thornburgh's force was attacked by a superior number of Utes, Thornburgh was killed, and the remnants of the force — under its second in command, Captain John S. Payne — were completely trapped.  

A telegraphic report of Captain Payne's plight reached Fort Omaha shortly after 3:00 A.M. on September 30, 1879. Burkley received the report, and described the action taken by Crook's staff to relieve the beleaguered troops:

23 Ibid., pp. 388-389.
24 Gance, pp. 350-351; Bourke, pp. 426-427; Burkley, pp. 390-399; Schmitt, pp. 226-228.
25 Burkley, pp. 392-393.
Immediately messages began to fly to the different forts throughout the department. . . Long before daylight orders had been sent to every post in the department for a strong relief expedition in charge of General [Colonel] Wesley Merritt of Fort Russell. Special trains were moving on the Union Pacific railroad to take troops who were to be massed at Rawlins [Wyoming], as follows: Five companies from Fort Russell, about 100 men from Fort Sanders, four companies from Camp Douglas [Utah], two companies from Fort McPherson [Nebraska], and one company from Fort Petterson. 

Within two days, Colonel Merritt had assembled over 400 troops at Rawlins and was on his way to rescue Payne's command. Two days later, after a 170 mile march, Merritt reported that, at 5:30 A.M. on October 3, Payne's relief was completed. Merritt's troops were reinforced from posts as far distant as Fort Clark, Texas, and, by the end of October, numbered 1,500 men. The Utes were duly impressed, and their outbreak ended.

General Crook was not only pleased with the performance of his staff and troops during the Ute uprising, but he praised the value of the railroad during such times of emergency. He wrote,

The promptness, energy, and intelligence with which the managers and officials of the Union Pacific Railroad have co-operated with the military service in pushing troops and material to the front during the Ute war, and at all other times since I have been in command of this department, have been of the greatest value in contributing to the success of all movements inaugurated, . . .

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26 Ibid., p. 395. All posts except those indicated otherwise were located in Wyoming Territory.

27 Ibid., pp. 395-397.


On November 1, 1879, General and Mrs. Ulysses S. Grant arrived in Omaha for a three-day visit. The Grants had just completed an extended round-the-world tour and had traveled from the West Coast aboard the Union Pacific Railroad. The entire Fort Omaha garrison participated in the reception. Upon his arrival, General Grant was elaborately entertained in Omaha by the Governor, the Mayor, and other local officials. Mrs. Grant, however, went directly to the post as the guest of Mrs. Crook. Later, General Grant also joined the officers and their ladies at the Crook house.

On the day following her arrival, Mrs. Grant held a reception for the Fort Omaha officers’ children. Later that same evening, Mrs. Crook held a large informal reception for General and Mrs. Grant in the large west parlor of her home. Music for the occasion was provided by the 9th Infantry orchestra. The Grants departed on November 3, in a special train, for Galena, Illinois.

The latter part of 1879 and the ensuing decade was a relatively peaceful period for the Department of the Platte and for Fort Omaha. Only an occasional strike or civil disturbance broke the routine monotony of garrison life. For all practicable purposes, the Indian threats were drawing to a close. Military commanders and staffs, therefore, could devote more attention to such matters as organizational planning,

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30Medical History, Fort Omaha (Book 221), p. 39.
32Both military and local civilian guests attended the reception. General Crook, however, could not be present, as he had to leave for Chicago that afternoon. Burkley, pp. 336-337.
modernization of equipment, training, and improving living conditions at their respective posts.33

One of Fort Omaha's early efforts in the way of garrison improvement was a new post hospital. For several years the surgeons had fought a losing battle attempting to maintain the building in a satisfactory condition. On September 5, 1879, the post surgeon initiated action to have the hospital condemned and secure a new, modern facility.34

Among other improvements at that time was the conversion of the old quartermaster storehouse — on the east side of the parade ground — into an ice house. The nearby commissary warehouse was similarly converted, for the use of Crook's headquarters.35 Also during 1880, the troops at Fort Omaha enjoyed their first indoor hot and cold water bathing facility. In March, a ten by twenty foot building was erected with three shower rooms for enlisted men and one for the officers.36


34A letter was addressed to the Adjutant General, Department of the Platte, recommending that a board of officers be appointed to report upon the condition of the hospital. Such a board was appointed by paragraph 1, Special Order No. 79, Headquarters Department of the Platte, Fort Omaha, Nebraska, dated September 11, 1879. The board met at the hospital on September 13, and its report recommended that the hospital be condemned. Medical History, Fort Omaha (Book 221), pp. 36-38. The post surgeon then addressed a letter to the Adjutant General, U. S. Army, Washington, D. C., in which he called attention to the unserviceable condition of the building and submitted estimates for a new twenty-four bed regimental hospital, to cost approximately $10,382.50, excluding unskilled and semi-skilled labor. Ibid., pp. 62-65.

35The old ice house on the south end of the post was retained. The three ice houses provided approximately 1,500 tons of ice, an amount more than sufficient to meet post requirements. Ibid., p. 40.

36Ibid., p. 49.
By 1880 there was considerable room for improvement at Fort Omaha, as the condition of the buildings and other post facilities was showing the hard usage they had received during the Indian wars. There had been a rapid turnover in personnel, with the result that the barracks and officers' quarters were badly run-down and lacked modern conveniences, the post sewage and drainage systems were totally inadequate, and the post hospital had been condemned. During July of that year, General Sherman and General Sheridan inspected the post, and both were well aware of its condition.

In order to rectify the situation, legal action was started to make the entire Fort Omaha post a permanent government-owned military installation and thus permit the construction of new facilities. The government, at that time, owned only forty acres of the reservation. The remainder was still under lease from Augustus Kountze, the agent representing the civic group that had originally purchased the land for a fort in 1868.

On August 10, 1880, Kountze filed a petition in the Douglas County District Court outlining the circumstances under which the forty-

37 Ibid., et passim.
38 General Sheridan inspected the post on July 14; General Sherman arrived on July 20. Ibid., p. 71.

39 On September 19, 1868, the Quartermaster General had informed the Secretary of War that no permanent buildings could be constructed at Omaha Barracks "... until the written opinion of the Attorney General shall be in favor of the validity of the title to the land or site." U. S., Congress, House, Letter from the Secretary of War, "Purchase of Land at Omaha," 40th Cong., 3rd Sess., 1868-1869, House Exec. Doc. No. 27 (Serial 1372), p. 2.
two and one-half acres of land had been purchased for the post. The petition recited the fact that the government could not legally erect permanent facilities on the property unless it held a clear title to all the land. The petition further pointed out that the original 1868 agreement for purchase and donation of the land to the government did not provide for such an absolute conveyance of title. Kountze, therefore, petitioned the court to render a decree that would enable him to convey complete ownership of the land to the government. Until the Federal government had such control of the property, very little could be done to modernize the post.

During this same year, a few changes occurred within the post garrison. On July 6, Company K, 9th Infantry, arrived from the Wyoming Territory, and on the following day Company G left the garrison en route to Fort Robinson, Nebraska. On October 3, Captain Andrew Burt of Company H departed for recruiting duty in Chicago, and three days later his company left for Fort McKinney, Wyoming Territory. The departure of Company H temporarily reduced the military strength of the garrison to seventy-five men. This, however, was soon increased again by the arrival

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40 Kountze v. Stephens & Wilcox, et al., Complete Record Book "U," 180-195 (1880). Seventy-nine persons had participated in the purchase of land in 1868. Because of the lapse of time and the fact that many of the original donors had either died or moved away from the Omaha area, nearly two years elapsed before the Douglas County Court was able to render a decision on the Kountze petition.

41 Medical History, Fort Omaha (Book 221), pp. 70-71. Company K had been located in a camp on the Snake River, engaged in repairing roads and bridges between Rawlins and the White River, and performing guard and fatigue duty in support of Colonel Merritt's force at the Ute Agency. Brown, pp. 134-135.

42 Ibid., pp. 80-81; Brown, p. 135; Mattes, p. 241.
of Company D, 9th Infantry, on November 9.  

Just prior to the departure of Company H from the post, the members of that unit had an opportunity to see President Rutherford B. Hayes. The President, accompanied by Mrs. Hayes and their two children, General Sherman, Secretary of War Alexander Ramsey, and a number of other dignitaries, arrived in Council Bluffs on September 3. The Presidential party was met there by a distinguished group of local citizens which included Colonel John H. King, the Fort Omaha commander. Following a short tour of Omaha, Colonel King conducted President Hayes and his party to the Fort for a reception.  

The next year was also a rather quiet one for both Fort Omaha and the Department of the Platte. Considerable emphasis was placed upon marksmanship, and General Crook was especially pleased with the "skill and ability" of Lieutenant W. L. Carpenter, 9th Infantry, the instructor. Crook also noted that the three Fort Omaha companies, all of which belonged to the 9th Infantry, showed the highest proficiency in this type of training.  

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43Medical History, Fort Omaha (Book 221), pp. 80-81, 83, 87.  
44Ibid., p. 78; Mattes, p. 239; James W. Savage and John T. Bell, History of the City of Omaha, Nebraska (New York: Munsell and Company, 1894), p. 163. President Hayes, accompanied by his family, General Sherman, and the Secretary of War, was making a tour of the West, and departed Omaha at 1:00 P.M. that same date. Ibid.; Athearn, p. 336.  
46Ibid. Lieutenant Carpenter accompanied the Department of the Platte Rifle Team to Fort Snelling, Minnesota, during the period October 13-27, 1881. Medical History, Fort Omaha (Book 221), p. 124.  
47Ibid., pp. 96-97. The 9th Infantry companies stationed at Fort
On September 27, 1881, the Department of the Platte moved its headquarters from Fort Omaha to the Strang Building in downtown Omaha. General Crook then moved his own residence to 960 Wheaton Street, and the commander's quarters were occupied by Colonel King, the post commander. 48

King did not have long to enjoy his new quarters, however, as he retired on February 20, 1882. He was officially succeeded by Colonel James Van Voast, who had served as a quartermaster lieutenant in the regiment from July, 1855, until June, 1858. 49 Colonel Van Voast, however, never actually joined the regiment, 50 as he was injured in a stagecoach accident while en route from Fort Concho, Texas, to his new command. 51 In his absence, the ranking officer at the Fort was Major William T. Gentry, 9th Infantry, who exercised command of the post.

One of Major Gentry's first command problems, during the spring of 1882, was a series of riots in downtown Omaha. The riots accompanied

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48Lindt, "A Brief History of Crook House." The Strang Building was located on the corner of 10th and Farnam Streets, and the Department of the Platte headquarters remained there until 1889, when it moved to the fifth floor of the new Bee Building, on 17th and Farnam Streets. Savage and Bell, p. 160; Wakeley, I, p. 191. Wheaton was a short street running north from Cuming to Indiana Avenue. J. M. Wolfe, Wolfe's Omaha City Directory (Omaha: Herald Printing, Binding and Electrotyping House, 1881), pp. 51, 155.

49Heitman, I, pp. 99-100, 599, 984.

50Rodenbough and Easkins, p. 529.

51Medical History, Fort Omaha (Book 221), pp. 143-144.
a large strike among employees of James Stephenson, a contractor engaged
in improving Burlington and Missouri River Railroad property in the
eastern section of the city. When strike negotiations broke down, the
railroad attempted to complete the project itself by transporting workers
to and from Plattsmouth on a daily basis. The strikers refused to per-
mit the transient workers to do their job; and, on March 9, a large mob
attacked the railroad employees. Several shots were fired and three of
the Plattsmouth men were injured. 52

Upon request of local authorities, the Governor ordered out the
Nebraska National Guard and, at the same time, asked President Arthur to
employ Federal troops to protect workers and public property. The Pres-
ident complied with the request, and troops were sent from both Fort
Omaha and Fort Sidney, Nebraska. 53

Every day from March 11 to March 16, Major Gentry led the major
portion of his garrison to Omaha to help maintain law and order and pro-
tect public property. It was, perhaps, fortunate that the troops did
not have to use their weapons, for included in Gentry's force was the
Department of the Platte Rifle Team, under the command of Lieutenant
W. L. Carpenter. 54 By March 20, the strike was over, and all troops had

52 Wakeley, I, pp. 436-437.

53 Ibid., pp. 437-438. Two companies of the 5th Cavalry, plus
Lieutenant W. B. Pease and nineteen men from Company F, 9th Infantry,
were sent to Omaha from Fort Sidney, Nebraska. Ibid., p. 438; Brown,
p. 136.

54 Medical History, Fort Omaha (Book 221), pp. 96-97. The Fort
Omaha troops did not remain in the city overnight, but returned to the
post at 7:00 P.M. daily, after the workers had departed for Plattsmouth.
Shortly after the Omaha labor disturbances, on March 28, the Douglas County District Court ruled that Augustus Kountze could convey complete ownership of the land — comprising one-half of Fort Omaha — to the government. The transfer was made on April 17 with the land question settled, General Sheridan recommended to the Secretary of War that Fort Omaha be rebuilt and made into a permanent ten-company (regimental) size post. General Sherman concurred with Sheridan and wrote that "all alterations and repairs of barracks and quarters should be of brick or stone of the most permanent character, meant to last forever." For the next several years, continuing efforts were made to recondition Fort Omaha and to modernize its facilities.

August of 1882 brought new commanders to both Fort Omaha and the Department of the Platte. At Fort Omaha, the change resulted from the assignment of a new regiment to the post.

On August 9, Colonel William F. Carlin, together with his headquarters, band, non-commissioned staff, and Company G of the 4th Infantry,

57 War Department Document No. 246 (1916), p. 327.
58 The Omaha Herald, May 5, 11, 1882.
59 Annual Report of the Secretary of War, 1882-1883, p. 12. The Quartermaster General estimated that $162,892.00 was needed for the renovation at Fort Omaha. Ibid., p. 19. Detailed plans for the new buildings and post improvements were reported as having been prepared by the Department of the Platte and forwarded to Washington on May 4, 1882. The Omaha Herald, May 5, 1882.
arrived at Fort Omaha and assumed command. On the following day, Major Gentry departed for Fort Niobrara, Nebraska, with the headquarters, non-commissioned staff, band, and Company C of the 9th Infantry. During the next three months, Companies D and K, 9th Infantry, also left the post, and five additional units of the 4th Infantry — plus Company D, 9th Artillery — joined the garrison. These changes doubled the average troop strength of Fort Omaha from 147, in August, to 303 in December.

On August 29, shortly after the arrival of Carlin, General Crook relinquished command of the Department of the Platte and was transferred to the Department of Arizona. Crook's replacement was Brigadier General

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60 Medical History, Fort Omaha (Book 221), p. 147; Brown, p. 137. The 4th Infantry had served almost continuously in the Department of the Platte since 1867. Colonel Carlin was assigned to command the regiment on April 11, 1882, following his promotion from the lieutenant colonelcy of the 17th Infantry. During the Civil War, Carlin had attained the rank of a Major General of Volunteers and was mustered out of the service, in 1865, to revert to his permanent rank of Major in the 16th Infantry. Later, on July 1, 1872, he was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel and transferred to the 17th Infantry. Bodenbough and Haskins, pp. 464-465; Heitman, I, pp. 88, 112, 114, 232.

61 Company K departed for Port McKinney, Wyoming Territory, on August 23, and Company D left for Fort Douglas, Utah Territory, on September 18. The newly assigned 4th Infantry units were as follows: Company K arrived from Fort D. A. Russell on August 15; on September 30, Company B came from Fort Thornbaugh, Utah Territory, and Company E came from Fort D. A. Russell; on October 14, Company I also joined from Russell; and on November 27, Company D arrived from Fort Laramie, Wyoming. Company D, 5th Artillery, reached the post from Fort Schuyler, New York Harbor, on September 12. Medical History, Fort Omaha (Book 221), pp. 147-154; Brown, p. 137. Although none of its units were again stationed at Fort Omaha, the 9th Infantry continued to serve in the Department of the Platte until July of 1886, when it was transferred to the Department of Arizona. Bodenbough and Haskins, p. 529; Brown, pp. 137-140.

62 General Crook was reassigned to Arizona because of new difficulties with the Apaches. Crook had left the Indians relatively peaceful in 1875, but "the Indian Agents in Arizona had so harshly mishandled the Apaches" that they were again on the warpath. Gano, p. 358; Bourke, p. 433.
O. O. Howard, who assumed command on September 5, 1882.63 The Howards temporarily lived at Fort Omaha, until they found an "old barn of a house" closer to the General's downtown headquarters.64 One of Howard's first distinguished guests was the Marquis of Lorne. The Marquis and his wife, Princess Louise, stopped in Omaha for a few hours on September 8, and General Howard entertained the Canadian Governor General at Fort Omaha.65

After General Crook's headquarters returned to downtown Omaha in September of 1881, the large brick structure erected for its use at the post was occupied by the hospital. Although the building was new and conveniently located near the center of the parade ground, it had many disadvantages. The large hallways, high ceilings, and lack of insulation made the structure difficult to heat in winter and to keep cool in summer. Furthermore, not having been designed as a hospital, the internal arrangements required considerable modification. The surgeon, therefore, made an extensive study of the building, drew up a list of changes necessary to convert it into an acceptable hospital, and submitted his plan to Washington on July 2, 1883.66 Although General Sheridan did not

63 During the short interim period between the departure of Crook and the arrival of Howard, the Commanding General, Division of the Missouri (General Sheridan), officially exercised command of the Department of the Platte. U. S., Congress, House, Annual Report of the Secretary of War, 48th Cong., 1st Sess., 1883-1884, House Exec. Doc. No. 1, Part 2 (Serial 2182), pp. 124-125.


65 Wakeley, I, pp. 444-445; Savage and Bell, p. 164.

66 Medical History, Fort Omaha (Book 221), pp. 178-189, 196-197.
concur in the plan, it was finally recommended for approval by the Surgeon General, forwarded to the Quartermaster General, and approved by the Secretary of War, who authorized $951.00 for general repairs, plus $1,623.00 for a steam heating system. This sum approximated the amount requested for the project. \[68\] Work began immediately on the building, and by Christmas the modifications were about completed. \[69\]

Included in the plans for rebuilding Fort Omaha was a new guardhouse. The old one, built in 1860, was too small, thoroughly rotten, and infested with vermin. \[70\] A new one-story brick building was erected for this purpose, and occupied in February of 1884. "It is warm, well ventilated, commodious and convenient," wrote the surgeon. \[71\]

\[67\]Ibid., p. 189. Sheridan's reason for disapproving the plans is unknown. He must have been familiar with the project, as both he and General Howard visited the fort and inspected the hospital on June 9. Ibid., p. 191.

\[68\]Ibid., pp. 189, 197, 203.

\[69\]Among the more important modifications was the inclusion of steam heat and the double sashing of the windows on the north side of the building. Indoor bathing and latrine facilities were provided, and the kitchen was improved by piping water from an outside cistern. An elevator was installed between the basement and the top floor, to carry food and medicine to the wards. In addition, a "lock-up ward" was provided in the basement, to segregate inebriates and sick prisoners from the other patients. A parlor was added on the second floor, and the interior of the building was completely redecorated. "The woodwork," wrote the surgeon, "is painted dark red and the walls of the long wards balsamined lilac." Ibid., p. 212.

\[70\]The old guardhouse was so overcrowded, rotten, and the odor so foul that the guard occupied a small outbuilding and the officer of the guard used a tent. Following removal of the guard from the building, the old guard rooms were used for garrison prisoners. Ibid., p. 192.

\[71\]Ibid., pp. 218-220, 223. The brick guardhouse, built in 1883-1884, still stands today and is one of the oldest buildings at Fort Omaha. Another post improvement, made in December, 1883, was the introduction of an abundant supply of Missouri River water from the Omaha City Waterworks. Ibid., p. 212; Fig. 4, p. 124.
Although the prisoners had good quarters, the troops did not. According to the surgeon, the barrack floors were rotten and contained wide cracks from which nauseating odors arose whenever the floors were scrubbed. The roofs leaked in all barracks and, as a result, the men's equipment became saturated with water. Furthermore, the barracks were damp and cold after every rain, and the enlisted men's health suffered from the poor conditions.\textsuperscript{72}

In addition to the unwholesome barracks, other health problems were encountered during 1884. An epidemic of measles and diphtheria occurred among children living on the post, and the latter disease caused at least one death. The post surgeon attributed the disease to a lack of ventilation in the old hospital building — then being used as a post school — and to the fact that the children drank the water from an old abandoned well nearby.\textsuperscript{73} There was also some typhoid among recruits received from Jefferson Barracks, Missouri.\textsuperscript{74}

Even though living conditions at Fort Omaha still left much to be desired, from the viewpoint of military operations the year 1884 was an uneventful one. A state of quiet existed throughout the West, and Secretary of War Robert Todd Lincoln reported that "the army has enjoyed almost complete rest from active field operations, . . . there having been reported during the year no disturbance to cause the firing of a

\textsuperscript{72}Ibid., pp. 204-205.
\textsuperscript{73}Ibid., pp. 220-222.
\textsuperscript{74}Ibid., pp. 230-231.
In early spring, therefore, General Howard was granted a leave of absence to visit Europe, and on March 6 Colonel John Gibbon, 7th Infantry, temporarily assumed command of the department.

Operationally, the year 1885 also began as a rather quiet one. To keep troops occupied and to provide some field training, General Howard devised camps of instruction at which tactical exercises would be conducted during the month of September. The Fort Omaha garrison was scheduled to attend one such camp near Fremont, Nebraska. Instead of the planned exercises, however, an Indian scare intervened to provide some field training of its own.

Throughout the late spring and early summer, rumors reported sizeable groups of Cheyennes leaving the Indian Territory, creating depredations in parts of Kansas, and heading north toward Nebraska. To meet such a threat, General Howard was directed, on July 9, to prepare fifteen companies of infantry for field service. On the following day,

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77Report of the Secretary of War, 1884-1885, p. 115.

78Report of the Secretary of War, 1885-1886, pp. 146-147.

79Ibid., p. 147.

80Ibid., pp. 145-146.
Companies D, G, and K, 4th Infantry, left Fort Omaha by rail for Kansas City en route to Crossfield, Kansas, the terminus of the Kansas Southern Railroad.\(^81\) The remaining units were concentrated at Cheyenne, Wyoming, and moved from there to Crossfield via Denver, Fort McPherson, and Wellington, Kansas. At the same time, nine troops of the 9th Cavalry were sent from North Platte to Ogallala, on the Union Pacific Railroad, to head off the Indians and protect the settlements.\(^82\)

The three Fort Omaha companies, under the command of Captain William H. Powell, reached their destination about midnight on July 12. It was a desolate, dry area, with neither wood nor a Cheyenne to be found. Powell telegraphed General Howard and reported: "It will be hard work to supply twelve or fifteen companies here. We have difficulty in supplying three companies."\(^83\) Regardless of the report, the other units arrived, and the entire force remained in the vicinity of Crossfield until August 6, when units were ordered back to their home stations.

Captain Powell and the three 4th Infantry companies reached Fort Omaha on August 7. The Omaha Republican reported that "the boys were bronzed and travel-stained and appeared glad to return to their permanent

\(^{81}\)Ibid., p. 146; Medical History, Fort Omaha (Book 221), p. 254; The Daily Republican (Omaha), July 11, 1885, p. 8.

\(^{82}\)Ibid.; The Daily Republican (Omaha), July 12, 1885, p. 5.

Ogallala was located on what had long been a favorite route followed by the Cheyenne when migrating between their northern hunting grounds and the Republican River area.

\(^{83}\)The Daily Republican (Omaha), July 14, 1885, p. 8; Medical History, Fort Omaha (Book 221), pp. 257-258.
quarters. Though they killed no Indians . . . the troops bear ample evidence of having seen service, such as it was. 84 General Howard considered the field service adequate, and Crossfield ended Fort Omaha's tactical training for 1885. 85

The new Secretary of War, William C. Endicott — together with the Adjutant General, the Judge Advocate General, and General Howard — visited the post on May 19. 86 They saw the condition of Fort Omaha. The buildings had become so bad that the post surgeon made them the subject of a special report. His report stated:

The buildings occupied by married men, except those recently built for the non-commissioned staff, are not fit for occupation, being much out of repair and infected with vermin. The troops should have new barracks, and the old buildings occupied by the married men should be pulled down. 87

A similar report was addressed to the post commander on November 1 by Surgeon J. Morris Brown. Colonel Carlin, of course, concurred in both reports and forwarded them on to higher headquarters. 88

Only one change occurred in the Fort Omaha garrison during 1885.

84. The Daily Republican (Omaha), August 8, 1885, p. 8.
85. Report of the Secretary of War, 1885-1886, p. 147. According to an Omaha newspaper report, Criswell, Kansas, was the base of operations, and a supply depot was established at that point. Infantry units were used to guard the railroad, and cavalry was used to patrol the country for traces of the Indian uprising. The Daily Republican (Omaha), August 8, 1885, p. 8.
86. Medical History, Fort Omaha (Book 221), p. 248.
87. Letter from Assistant Surgeon H. S. Haskins, Post Hospital, Fort Omaha, July 31, 1885, to the Post Adjutant, Fort Omaha. Ibid., pp. 255-256; Fig. 6, p. 126; Fig. 9, p. 129.
88. Ibid., pp. 256, 263-264.
On December 4, Battery D, 5th Artillery, was transferred to Fort Douglas, Utah, and it departed the post the following day. 89

During the spring and summer of 1886, the Department of the Platte and Fort Omaha underwent another change of commanders. On April 13, General Howard relinquished command of the department, and on April 28 it was again assumed by Brigadier General George Crook. 90 Three months later, the garrison changed at Fort Omaha, and with it the command of the post. During July, the 4th Infantry was transferred to the Department of the Pacific and replaced by the 2nd Infantry Regiment. 91 The 2nd Infantry had been scattered at Boise Barracks, Idaho Territory; Fort Klamath, Oregon; and Fort Townsend, Washington Territory. 92 At Fort Omaha, the regiment was united under its commander, Colonel Frank Wheaton, who became the commanding officer of the post. 93


During the interval, the department was officially commanded by Major General A. H. Terry, Division of the Missouri. Ibid. Howard had been promoted to the rank of Major General and assigned to the Division of California. Howard, II, pp. 545-546. General Crook was relieved from command of the Department of Arizona and reassigned, upon his own request. Schmitt, pp. 261-266.

Report of the Secretary of War, 1886-1887, p. 124; Rodenbough and Haskins, pp. 431, 465.

Rodenbough and Haskins, p. 431.

Colonel Frederick B. Shaw, One Hundred and Forty Years of Service in Peace and War: History of the Second Infantry, United States Army (Detroit: The Strathmore Press, 1930), p. 352. Colonel Wheaton entered the service in 1855 as a lieutenant of cavalry. He served during the Civil War and attained the rank of a Major General of Volunteers. He was mustered out of the volunteer service in April, 1866, and assigned to the 39th Infantry as its Lieutenant Colonel. Upon deactivation of
According to his biographer, General Crook found the Department of the Platte very quiet upon his return to Omaha. "With no Indian fighting on his hands," wrote Schmitt, "the General devoted his official energies to the usual peacetime problems . . . barracks, quarters, inspections, rifle practice, and drill." Crook was an enthusiastic exponent of "the Army's renaissance," and he laid great stress upon training and the improvement of garrison housing conditions. "Quarters which had seemed comfortable when compared with the trials of a winter campaign on the plains were now discovered to be 'illy built and unhealthy.'"

To provide facilities for marksmanship training, a new rifle range was officially established on May 19, 1886, near Bellevue, Nebraska, and designated the "Bellevue Rifle Range for the Department of the Platte and Fort Omaha." The 2nd Infantry made maximum use of the range, and on April 28, 1887, approximately one-half of the regiment moved to Bellevue to begin their annual firing.

Crook's interest in improving living conditions was not new at Fort Omaha. For several years, beginning in 1880 when Augustus Kountze

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the 39th Infantry, in March of 1869, Colonel Wheaton was assigned to the 21st Infantry. He was promoted to colonel and assigned to command the 2nd Infantry, on December 15, 1874. Beitzman, I, pp. 84, 119, 1022.

94 Schmitt, pp. 267-268.

95 Report of the Secretary of War, 1886-1887, p. 123.

96 Companies A, B, C, E, and G, totaling nine officers and 167 enlisted men, went to Bellevue. This was approximately one-half of the garrison, which had been averaging just under 400 men. Based upon the average present for duty strength of the garrison, the regiment conducted its firing during May, June, and July of 1887. Medical History, Fort Omaha (Book 221), pp. 296-300.
filed his petition with the Douglas County Court, efforts had been made
to rehabilitate the installation and make it into a permanent regimental-
sized garrison. By 1887, however, no tangible results had been accomplished.

In the meantime, increased Army-wide emphasis was being placed
on organization, officer training, modernization of equipment, and the
tactical training of both the individual soldier and regimental units. 97
General Crook liked this. "Close approximation to campaign conditions,
especially on the plains," was the type of training that Crook believed
in. He "wanted his soldiers fit for combat, not for parade," wrote his
biographer. 98 The eighty-two and one-half acres comprising Fort Omaha
was obviously too small for such training. Furthermore, with but few
exceptions, all of the buildings were so badly deteriorated that they
were no longer repairable. Typical sanitary inspection reports ran as
follows:

... the post is in a sad condition, as there never has been
any sewage, and almost no surface drainage, the soil everywhere
is saturated with the contents of old privy vaults and the at-
mosphere is laden with the odors from the same. A portion of
many of the buildings rests directly on the ground, are rotten
and therefore emit odors, no basements, no area walls, and hence
the ground air ... passes up through the buildings as through
flues ... . The officers' quarters are generally old and di-
lapidated with none of the conveniences of modern civilization.
... only one bath house for the whole command, and that quite
inadequate to the necessities. 99

A similar report, written two months later, emphasized the

97 Dance, pp. 355-363.
98 Schmitt, p. 268.
99 Letter from Major Albert Hartsuff, Post Surgeon, Fort Omaha, to
the Post Adjutant, July 23, 1889, Medical History, Fort Omaha (Book 221),
p. 335.
deplorable condition of the enlisted men's quarters. An extract of the report states:

... the sanitary condition of the buildings on this post is bad. ... many should have been condemned long ago as unfit for human habitation. The post is crowded and every apology for a roof is used as quarters. ... The quarters occupied by the married soldiers are a reproach and disgrace to civilization.

... /Water/ has never been introduced into the houses so that they are without bath and water facilities.100

To rectify the situation, Senator Charles F. Manderson introduced a bill in Congress, on December 13, 1887, authorizing the Secretary of War to sell the existing Fort Omaha, and to build a completely new post.101 "Not less than 320 nor more than 640 acres" was to be purchased, approximately ten miles from Omaha. On it would be constructed "the necessary buildings, with appurtenances, sufficient for a ten-company military post, to be known as Fort Omaha."102

Senator Manderson's bill passed through Congress and was signed by President Cleveland on July 23, 1888.103 Passage of the bill, of

100 Letter from Major Hartsuff to the Post Adjutant, September 30, 1839, Ibid., pp. 344-345.

101 U. S., Congressional Record, 50th Cong., 2nd Sess., 1888, XIX, Part 1, 48. Senator Manderson had many close friends among the military officers stationed in Omaha. He had served with the 19th Ohio Infantry during the Civil War and was mustered out of the service in May, 1865, as a brevet brigadier general of volunteers. He moved to Omaha in 1869 and practiced law in that city until his election to the United States Senate in 1883. Mattes, p. 239; Heitman, I, p. 687; Sorensen, p. 366. In 1882, as a member of the legal firm of Manderson & Congdon, General Manderson had represented Augustus Kountze in his court action to transfer complete ownership of Fort Omaha to the government.

102 U. S., Congressional Record, 50th Cong., 2nd Sess., 1888, XIX, Part 6, 5972.

103 U. S., Statutes at Large, XXV, 339.
course, meant that no permanent improvements could be expected at the existing Fort Omaha. The garrison would have "to bear the ills they had" until a new Fort Omaha could be constructed ten miles south of the city, near the Bellevue Rifle Range.

In the meantime, the 2nd Infantry carried on the best that it could with its training. On April 30, one-half of the regiment moved to the Bellevue range for its annual target practice. Upon return of the first group to Fort Omaha, on June 17, the remainder of the regiment repeated the process. Upon completion of their marksmanship training at Bellevue, the entire regiment moved to Kearney, Nebraska, for nearly two months of field training.

On April 6, 1888, General Crook was promoted to the rank of Major General, and on May 4 he relinquished command of the Department of the Platte to Brigadier General John R. Brooke, in order to take command of the Division of the Missouri. In his annual report, General Brooke pointed out that: "At Fort Omaha, even though the new post should be

104 Companies D, F, E, I, and K moved to the range under the command of Major Edmond Butler, 2nd Infantry. A surgeon and medical assistant accompanied the group. Medical History, Fort Omaha (Book 221), p. 311.

105 Companies A, B, C, E, and G went to the range on June 16 and returned to the post on July 27. Unfortunately, four days after Major Butler returned to the post, his wife, Kate, died of a heart attack. Ibid., pp. 313, 314.

106 Companies B, D, E, G, and I left the post on August 16. The field staff, band, and the remaining units departed two days later. The entire regiment returned to Fort Omaha on October 10. Ibid., pp. 316-320.

completed within two years, considerable repairs are now needed to make many of the officers's quarters habitable during the coming winter."108 Toward the end of the year, $6,500.00 was allotted for this purpose; and, according to Brooks, it "enabled some repairs, but the condition of the buildings are so bad that other repairs may be needed before the post is abandoned."109

In May, 1889, Secretary of War Proctor, General of the Army Schofield, the Quartermaster General, General Crook, and General Brooke inspected both — Fort Omaha and some of the land ten miles south of the city recommended for the new post.110 As a result of the visit, a 545.67 acre tract, adjacent to the Bellevue Rifle Range, was purchased for the erection of the "new Fort Omaha."111 Shortly thereafter, a survey was made and "plans and estimates" prepared for the new post.112

In the spring of 1889, the 2nd Infantry again went to the Bellevue Rifle Range for their annual marksmanship training.113 Marksmanship

108 Ibid., p. 175.


110 Medical History, Fort Omaha (Book 221), p. 160; Omaha World Herald, n.d., Magazine Section, p. 20-C, from a scrapbook in the private collection of Mrs. Grace Steinberg, Omaha, Nebraska.


112 Ibid., p. 200.

113 Medical History, Fort Omaha (Book 221), p. 327.
was followed, on August 11, by the regimental headquarters, field staff, band, and six companies moving to Camp George Crook, Nebraska, for field maneuvers. 114

Major General George Crook did not live long enough to see the new post, as he died on March 21, 1890, from a heart attack. 115 Brigadier General Nelson A. Miles, then commanding the Division of the Pacific, was promoted to the rank of Major General and replaced General Crook. 116 Miles, an old Indian fighter like his predecessor, assumed command of the division on September 15, 1890. 117

I had hoped that I had heard the last of Indian depredations and war [he wrote], yet I had scarcely assumed command when I began to hear rumors of disaffection and unrest and a threatened uprising of the different tribes scattered over the western half of our country. 118

What Miles heard were not just rumors. For several years following the defeat of the Cheyennes and the Sioux, during 1878-1879, the Indians had remained on their reservations, fairly peaceful under military

114Camp George Crook was located near Fort Robinson, Nebraska. Of the four companies that did not attend the maneuvers, Companies A and F went to Fort Madison, Iowa, and Companies H and X went to West Union, Iowa. Medical History, Fort Omaha (Book 221), pp. 339-341.

115Following Crook's death, on March 3, 1891, Congress changed the name of the projected new post from Fort Omaha to Fort Crook and appropriated $500,000 for improvements. U. S., Statutes at Large, XXVI, 977.


control. By 1890, however, they had become dangerously aroused because of hunger and the mismanagement of their affairs by the Indian Bureau.\textsuperscript{119} This resentment was unwittingly increased by a Paiute Indian — named Wovoka — who preached a new religion promising salvation for his people. Included as part of the worship was a highly emotional "ghost dance" that spread over the plains like wild-fire.\textsuperscript{120}

The Indian agents soon lost control of the situation; and, as usual, the Department of the Interior called upon the Army for help. On November 17, 1890, General Brooke was ordered to the Rosebud and Pine Ridge agencies with all available troops within the division.\textsuperscript{121} Included as part of this force was the 2nd Infantry, from Fort Omaha.

Major Edmond Butler left Fort Omaha with the 1st Battalion on November 18 and arrived two days later at Pine Ridge. Colonel Wheaton followed, on November 23, with the regimental headquarters and the 2nd Battalion.\textsuperscript{122} Only a small housekeeping detachment, under the command

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{119}Report of the Secretary of War, 1891-1892, pp. 132-140.
  \item \textsuperscript{120}Ibid., pp. 140-144. Wovoka promised that a messiah and a doomsday were coming, and when the day arrived all of the bad white men would be destroyed and the spirits of the Indian ancestors — together with the buffalo and wild game — would return to earth. "The fanaticism and superstition of these people were taken advantage of by their disaffected and designing leaders to encourage them to assume hostilities toward the Government and white people," reported Miles. Ibid., p. 142.
  \item \textsuperscript{121}Ibid., pp. 144-145.
  \item \textsuperscript{122}Ibid., p. 352. When the 2nd Infantry departed for the Pine Ridge Agency, it consisted of only eight companies — two battalions of four companies each. A recent reorganisation of the regiment had eliminated Companies I and K, and personnel from the two units had been transferred to other companies within the regiment. Report of the Secretary of War, 1890-1891, p. 199.
\end{itemize}
of Lieutenant H. E. Williams, was left behind at Fort Omaha.\textsuperscript{123}

Upon arrival at Pine Ridge, the 2nd Infantry was initially employed to defend the agency itself and to prevent any further hostile departures to the Bad Lands.\textsuperscript{124} After the "Wounded Knee" affair and the resulting large exodus of Indians, Colonel Wheaton and the 2nd Infantry were used to pressure the recalcitrant Indians back to the agency.\textsuperscript{125} Also present with the 2nd Infantry was the Fort Omaha post surgeon — Major Hartsuff. According to Thomas H. Tibbles, the Omaha Herald correspondent present at Pine Ridge, Major Hartsuff worked long hours treating both Indian and troop casualties until "he was almost ready to fall from nervous exhaustion."\textsuperscript{126}

By the middle of January, the entire mass of nearly 4,000 rebellious natives had surrendered, and the large military force was no longer

\textsuperscript{123}Ibid., p. 353.

\textsuperscript{124}Report of the Secretary of War, 1891-1892, p. 148. General Brooke personally commanded troops in the immediate vicinity of the agency. With him there were eight troops of the 7th Cavalry, under Colonel J. W. Forsyth; a battalion of the 9th Cavalry, under Major Guy Henry; a battery of artillery under Captain Allyn Capron; one company of the 8th Infantry; and the entire 2nd Infantry, under Colonel Wheaton. General Miles was present, in overall command, and he personally controlled the encircling force that was gradually forcing the runaway Indians back to the agency. After Colonel Forsyth's unfortunate fight at "Wounded Knee," Miles exchanged positions with Brooke. General Miles did this in order to exercise a tighter personal control over the potentially dangerous situation at the agency as the Indians were forced back to that point. \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 148-151.

\textsuperscript{125}Shaw, pp. 353-358.

\textsuperscript{126}Tibbles, p. 323. Major Butler also did all that he could to assist the wounded Indians. Practically all of the Indian casualties were women and children who had managed to survive Colonel Forsyth's mishandling of the situation at "Wounded Knee" on December 29, 1890. \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 321-324; \textit{Report of the Secretary of War, 1891-1892}, pp. 150-151.
needed at the agencies. "Advantage was taken of the return of troops to locate them in regimental posts," reported General Miles.\textsuperscript{127} The 2nd Infantry then returned to its own regimental post, at Fort Omaha, on January 27, 1891.\textsuperscript{128}

The short Sioux uprising of 1890-1891 and the resulting "Battle of Wounded Knee" marked the end of the Indian wars.

It has been more than twenty years since that time wrote General Miles, and not a single hostile shot has been fired between the government forces and the Indians. Nearly all the great warriors have passed on to the Happy Hunting Ground, and the young men of today have ceased to know even the skill and experience of the hunter.\textsuperscript{129}

With the end of the Indian wars, garrison life at Fort Omaha became routine. In 1891, the War Department published separate sets of drill regulations for infantry, cavalry, and artillery,\textsuperscript{130} and troops were kept occupied with the new training. Occasionally an important civic event broke the monotony. For example, on May 13, 1891, President and Mrs. Harrison made a six-hour stop in Omaha while en route to the East, and they were elaborately entertained as the guests of the city. A twenty-one gun salute was fired, and the entire 2nd Infantry Regiment

\textsuperscript{127}Forts Keogh and Assiniboine, Montana; Fort Douglas, Utah; Fort D. A. Russell, Wyoming; and Fort Sheridan, Illinois, in addition to Fort Omaha, all became regimental posts. \textit{Report of the Secretary of War, 1891-1892}, p. 154.

\textsuperscript{128}\textit{Shaw}, p. 358. During their stay at Pine Ridge, the regiment suffered only one casualty. First Lieutenant John Kinze, the regimental adjutant was wounded during a Sioux attack on December 29, 1890. \textit{Ibid.}, p. 352.

\textsuperscript{129}Miles, p. 247.

\textsuperscript{130}\textit{Gano}, pp. 366-367.
participated in the welcoming procession. Then again, on October 18, 1892, the headquarters, band, and four companies of the 2nd Infantry left Omaha to participate in the dedication exercises for the Chicago World's Fair (World's Columbian Exposition) and returned to the Fort on October 24.

Shortly after the Indian affair at Pine Ridge, Fort Omaha received a new commander. On April 18, 1892, Colonel Wheaton was advanced to the rank of Brigadier General, and seven days later he was replaced by Colonel John C. Bates. Colonel Bates himself had just been promoted from the lieutenant colonelcy in the 20th Infantry, based upon the vacancy created in the 2nd Infantry by the reassignment of Wheaton.

Following Colonel Bates' arrival, nothing of major importance occurred at Fort Omaha until the spring of 1894. In June of that year, the country was confronted with one of the most serious industrial strikes in its history. What began as a local strike among employees of the Pullman Palace Car Company, located near Chicago, quickly grew into an industrial rebellion that affected the entire nation. Its growth occurred when the strikers received the active support of Eugene V. Debs.

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131 The Omaha Daily Bee, May 14, 1891, p. 1.


133 Rodenbough and Haskins, p. 431; Heitman, I, pp. 84, 118, 1022. Colonel Bates entered the service on May 14, 1861, as a Lieutenant in the 11th Infantry, and became a Brevet Lieutenant Colonel on April 9, 1863, for gallantry and meritorious service during the Battle of Rich mond. Later, during the Spanish American War and the Philippines Insurrection, Bates achieved the rank of a Major General of Volunteers. On February 1, 1906, he became the Lieutenant General of the Army. Heitman, p. 199; Shaw, p. 358; Fig. 8, p. 128.
and his American Railway Union, plus the Knights of Labor. 134 Passenger
and freight service came to a virtual standstill in the western part of
the nation, and "the entire business of the country was paralyzed in con-
sequence," wrote General Miles. 135 Following a White House conference
that included President Cleveland, General Miles, and various members of
the Cabinet, the Army was used to enforce law and order. 136

General Brooke was responsible for the protection of railroads
within his department, and "by Monday, July 9th, soldiers were at all
the strike points on the Union Pacific," wrote Wakeley. 137 Colonel Bates,
together with his staff and Companies C, D, F, and G of the 2nd Infantry,
were moved to Montana, where they protected the railroads and mail in
that area. 138 The prompt use of troops soon restored order, and General
Miles wrote to his wife, stating that "the revolutionists have seen the
teeth of war and want none of it." 139 Colonel Bates and his force re-
turned to Fort Omaha on August 3. 140

The next twenty months was a routine period at Fort Omaha. With
the large garrison and the run-down condition of the post, the living ac-
accommodations were not good, but these were only temporary inconveniences

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134 Wakeley, I, p. 439.
135 Miles, p. 252.
136 Ibid., pp. 253-258; Spaulding, pp. 371-372.
137 Wakeley, I, p. 440.
138 Ibid.; The World Herald (Omaha), August 4, 1894, p. 3.
139 Virginia Johnson, p. 308.
140 The World Herald (Omaha), August 4, 1894, p. 3.
to be endured until completion of the new installation just south of the city.\(^4\)

In May of 1895, the Department of the Platte received a new commander. Brigadier General J. J. Coppinger replaced General Brooke, who was, in turn, transferred to the Department of Dakota.\(^2\) A year later, on June 13, 1896, General Coppinger received a telegram from the Secretary of War that terminated the frontier mission of Fort Omaha. The fort was to be immediately deactivated, and its garrison was ordered to another department. Instead of the 2nd Infantry moving from Fort Omaha to Fort Crook, as had been expected, the 22nd Infantry was ordered to Crook from several scattered posts within the Department of Dakota. The 2nd Infantry was directed, in turn, to take over the Dakota posts vacated by the Twenty-second.\(^3\) A detachment of two officers and thirty-five enlisted men was to remain and dispose of Fort Omaha's moveable property, in preparation for its final abandonment as a military installation.\(^4\)

Although many members of the 22nd Infantry were happy about the change of stations,\(^5\) this was not true of the 2nd Infantry. The

\(^1\)The garrison consisted of twenty-seven officers and 536 enlisted men present for duty during the fall of 1895. The department commander reported: "The buildings at Fort Omaha, though all but a few of them are greatly dilapidated, can be made to last until Fort Crook, which is admirably constructed, . . . shall be completed." U. S., Congress, House, Report of the Secretary of War, 54th Cong., 1st Sess., 1895-1896, House Exec. Doc. No. 2, pp. 88-89, 167.

\(^2\)Ibid., p. 162.


\(^4\)Ibid.; The World Herald (Omaha), June 27, 1896, p. 7.

\(^5\)Upon arrival at Fort Crook, members of the 22nd Infantry were delighted with the new, comfortable facilities and "were well posted as
Second had been concentrated at Fort Omaha for a full decade, and its personnel had made many local friends. According to The World Herald, "the officers and their families are very popular in Omaha, and much regret is expressed at the departure of the regiment."\(^{146}\) The change, of course, also meant that the regiment would again be scattered over a wide area.

Regardless of whether or not they relished the change, "the men were set to work at once arranging for the departure."\(^{147}\) By Sunday evening, June 28, all units at Fort Omaha had completed packing, and their equipment was loaded aboard trains ready for movement to their new stations. Fort Omaha, according to The World Herald, "had a very desolate appearance" on that Sabbath day.\(^{148}\)

On the following morning, at 8:30 A.M., Lieutenant Colonel Wherry and Companies B and C departed for Fort Harrison, Montana. At 3:30 P.M., Captain Charles Keller left for Fort Yates, North Dakota, with Companies

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146 The World Herald (Omaha), June 29, 1896, p. 2.
147 Ibid.
148 Ibid. The World Herald (Omaha), June 29, 1896, p. 2. This paper also noted "that the officers and men who go to Fort Harrison were not feeling much distressed in spirits, as that is a new fort, near one of the best cities in the northwest." Ibid. Fort Harrison was located four miles from Helena, Montana. Heitman, II, p. 506.
D and C, and Colonel Bates departed for Fort Keogh, Montana, with his
staff, band, and Companies A, E, F, and H. Only Lieutenant Penn,
the regimental quartermaster, together with Captain E. E. Clark and the
thirty-five man "clean-up" detachment, remained at Fort Omaha, to dis-
pose of moveable post property.

As later events were to show, Fort Omaha was never abandoned.
It was temporarily deactivated because of its poor condition and its in-
ability to meet training and housing requirements for a modern infantry
regiment. In less than a decade, the proud old fort was reactivated and
rebuilt to begin another chapter in its colorful history. The departure
of the 2nd Infantry merely marked the fulfillment of Fort Omaha's pri-
mary mission of twenty-eight years earlier — that of safeguarding the
first transcontinental railroad and providing military support for the
conquest of a vast unsettled trans-Mississippi empire.

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149 Report of the Secretary of War, 1896-1897, p. 137; The World
Herald (Omaha), June 30, 1896, p. 5.

150 Report of the Secretary of War, 1896-1897, p. 171; The World
Herald (Omaha), June 27, 1896, p. 7.
Fig. 1

OMAHA BARRACKS, 1876

Drawn from Outline Descriptions of the Posts in the Military Division of the Missouri, Commanded by Lieutenant General P. H. Sheridan (Chicago: Headquarters Military Division of the Missouri, 1876), p. 33.

Legend
1. Commander's Qtrs
2. Major's Qtrs
3. Company Officers
4. Surgeon's Qtrs
5. Hospital
6. Barracks
7. Q.M. Stables
8. Artillery Stables
9. Q.M. Storehouse
10. Butler's Store
11. Guard House
12. Adjutant's Office
13. Commissary
14. Band Quarters
15. Bakery
16. Blacksmith
17. Carpenter
18. Laundresses' Qtrs
19. Stables
20. Ice House
21. Engine House
Fig. 2. Courtesy of the North Omaha Sun.

COMPANY OFFICERS QUARTERS, 1868-1896

Mr. Fred B. Wallace points to a frame residence that once served as a company officer's quarters at Fort Omaha. Built in 1868, the structure was sold and removed from the post after Fort Omaha was abandoned in 1896.
Constructed in 1879, as the Department of the Platte Commanding General's quarters, the home was used by Brigadier General George Crook until the fall of 1881. Following the return of the Department of the Platte headquarters to downtown Omaha, the "Crook House" became the Post Commander's quarters.
Constructed during the fall and winter of 1883-1884 to replace an unserviceable post guard house, this building is still in use at Fort Omaha. Following renovation, it now provides "on-post" housing for a naval officer and his family.
Constructed in 1879, this building housed the Department of the Platte headquarters until September, 1881. After General Crook moved his headquarters to downtown Omaha, the building was modified and served as the Post Hospital until Fort Omaha was abandoned in 1896. It is still in use today and provides "on-post" housing for married personnel assigned to the Fort.
Fig. 6.

Courtesy of the World-Herald (Omaha).

FORT OMAHA, 1893

This photo, taken from the roof of General Crook's old headquarters building, shows the northern area of Fort Omaha. In the foreground are three of the enlisted men's barracks. In the upper left of the picture, a portion of the old post hospital (constructed in 1868) is visible. Between the hospital and the barracks, two buildings may be seen that were erected in 1870 to provide additional housing for the post laundresses and the married enlisted men. In the center of the picture — along the northern edge of the reservation — six five-room frame dwellings are visible. These houses were erected, during the 1880's, to provide quarters for married Non-Commissioned Staff Officers.
The above photo shows Lieutenant Colonel William M. Wherry, 2nd Infantry, and his daughter, Rita, standing in front of the Wherry quarters on "Officers' Row". The frame houses were erected in 1868 and used until the post was abandoned in 1896. Also visible is the "Crook House", which at that time was occupied by Colonel John C. Bates, 2nd Infantry, the post commander.
The above photo was copied from a print that belonged to General John L. Hines, former Chief of Staff, United States Army. It shows the following Fort Omaha officers standing, from left to right, in front of the old "Crook House": Lieutenant William J. Lutz; Major J. L. "Jackie" Smith; Lieutenant Colonel William M. Wherry; and Colonel Bates. General Hines' photograph lists the other officers as being a General Eppenger, Colonel Schwain, Captain Benham, Captain Aker, and Captain Crambie.
 CONDITION OF THE ENLISTED MEN'S BARRACKS

The above photograph shows the deteriorated condition of the barracks after their abandonment in 1896.
Erected adjacent to the Crook House, in the mid-1880's, this duplex provides an excellent example of the type of officer's quarters planned for Fort Omaha under General Sheridan's and General Crook's reconstruction program of 1882. It was the only building of its type constructed at Fort Omaha and, after renovation, is still used as an officer's quarters.
The exact date of this photograph is unknown, although it was probably taken during the period that the 2nd Infantry was stationed at Fort Omaha. In the background, some of the administrative buildings along the eastern side of the parade ground are clearly visible.
Regimental Band, trooping the line, in front of General Crook's old headquarters building. Whenever weather permitted, Retreat Parades were held on a daily basis and a "full dress" regimental inspection was conducted each month.
This historic old building has been occupied by all of the senior commanders at Fort Omaha, ever since it was built in 1879. Many United States Presidents — from General Grant through Grover Cleveland — were entertained in the Crook House, as were other influential citizens and public officials. The building today, in 1966, is occupied by Rear Admiral Dennis C. Lyndon, U.S.N., Commander of the Naval Reserve Training Command at Fort Omaha.
Map I.

From U. S., Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Soldier and Brave, following p. 16.
Map II.  

From U. S., Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Soldier and Brave, following p. 48.
Map III.


The Military West, 1874

COLUMBIA

CALIFORNIA

ARIZONA

TEXAS
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