

IDAHO STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

REFERENCE SERIES

FORT SHERMAN

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While on an inspection tour in 1877, General William Tecumseh Sherman camped by Coeur d'Alene Lake and was so impressed by the scenery of the area that he recommended it as a site for a fort. Sherman's recommendation received attention the following year, and on April 16, 1878, a military post known as Camp Coeur d'Alene was established. The name was changed to Fort Coeur d'Alene on April 5, 1879, and finally to Fort Sherman, April 6, 1887. Supplies reached the new post by steamboat on the Columbia and Snake Rivers to Texas Landing and thence by wagon route via Spokane Bridge, Washington Territory. This latter point, situated ten and a half miles from the post, was the nearest post office location for the new installation.

Camp Coeur d'Alene had three reasons for its existence: (1) keeping the peace in northern Idaho, (2) protecting railroad and telegraph crews, and (3) guarding the border with Canada. The first two objectives occupied the troops most of the time, as there were few problems on the northern border.

Troops stationed at the post must have found it in some ways an ideal duty station, because they were seldom called upon to take the field against threatening forces. In fact, only twice were they summoned to protect the interests of North Idaho citizens. On July 12, 1878, the troops took the field to participate in the Bannock Indian War. However, the extent of their involvement turned out to be only a hurried march to Fort Lapwai as they were back at their duty stations on August 1. (The Bannock campaign never got even close to North Idaho.) During the Coeur d'Alene mining troubles of 1892, the troops received a call to restore order. The soldiers, under the command of Colonel William P. Carlin, left the fort on July 12, 1892. They were equipped in heavy marching gear which consisted of eight rations and 100 rounds of ammunition per man. They were transported on the Northern Pacific Railroad Company's steamer to Harrison and thence by rail to Wardner. At this point a command post was established. Upon arrival the troops aided the civil authorities in making arrests and preserving martial law. In September of 1892, sub-posts were created at Wallace, Burke, Gem, and Wardner, under the command of Lt. Colonel H. C. Cook, Fourth Infantry. The sub-posts were disbanded in November, 1892.

Many considered Fort Sherman to be one of the most scenic posts in the United States, but the soldiers stationed there

sometimes took a dimmer view of the situation. The site was only five feet above the level of the lake, which periodically flooded the parade grounds. The floods caused numerous problems for the troops, as noted in the following remarks entered in the May 1894 monthly report:

The water of the lake and river Coeur d'Alene continued rising during the month and on the 25th instant the dike protecting the post from the overflow of the river broke, and a great part of the reservation became submerged. The water continued to rise and on the same day the lake overflowed its banks and further inundated the post, only a narrow strip of ground on the parade and along the lake showing above the flood. Officers quarters except No's 5, 6, 7, and 18 being flooded from one to five feet deep, the guard house, hospital, storehouses and other public buildings being uninhabitable. Water surrounds all the company barracks.

Obtaining good water for the fort also caused a problem from the beginning, and \$7,000 had to be spent on a pump and pipe system.

The departure of the command on April 21, 1898, for participation in the Spanish-American War signaled the demise of the fort. A small detachment remained; but in April 1901, when the reservation was turned over to the Interior Department, they relocated at Fort George Wright, Washington. In the summer of 1905, the reservation was sold at public auction. Before selling the land, the government set aside twenty acres for a park and twenty acres for a cemetery as the property of the city of Coeur d'Alene. The Stack and Gibbs Lumber Company purchased a large share of the land. Much of the site today is occupied by the North Idaho College. Only a handful of the original 52 structures now remain.

POST COMMANDERS

Lt. Colonel Henry C. Merriam, 2nd Infantry:	4/16/1878-8/13/1879
Colonel Frank Wheaton, 2nd Infantry:	8/14/1878-7/6/1886
Colonel William P. Carlin, 4th Infantry:	7/7/1886-5/19/1893
Colonel Robert H. Hall, 4th Infantry:	5/20/1893-9/1896
Colonel Hugh A. Theaker, 16th Infantry:	10/1896-4/21/1898

After the departure of colonel Theaker, the post was occupied by a detachment that varied in strength from fifteen to twenty men. The following were the commanders of the post and detachment left behind:

1st Lt. Beaumont B. Busk, 16th Infantry: 4/21/1898-5/6/1898
 2nd Lt. Lucius R. Holbrook, 4th Cavalry: 5/7/1898-9/16/1898
 (On detached service to the post from Fort Boise.)
 2nd Lt. Stuart Heintzelman, 6th Cavalry: 7/11/1899-12/8/1899
 1st Lt. Daniel F. Keller, 24th Infantry: 12/9/1899-Last Monthly
 Report, 7/1900

(The 24th Infantry was stationed at Fort Wright, Washington; detachments from this group rotated duty assignments at Fort Sherman.)

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