

WINGATE ORDNANCE DEPOT

1850 - 1958

Compiled by Elaine W. Higgins

Information for this history was taken from official depot records, old records in the National Archives, historical works of Bancroft and Twitchell, and personal experiences related by Frances E. Fitzpatrick and Ted R. Switzer, both of whom have worked at the depot more than 30 years.

Wingate Ordnance Depot traces its history back through three locations and the colorful events of New Mexico to 1850 when a post was established by the United States War Department at Cebolleta (Seboyeta), where a small mission had been established by Don Joachin Codallos y Rabal in 1746 for christianizing the Indians. The post was abandoned by troops in 1851 but was maintained until 9 September 1862 when it was moved to El Gallo on the south bank of the Rio de Galto, 21 miles southwest of Mount Taylor, near the present site of San Rafael (five miles south of Grants). This latter was the second Fort Wingate, as established by Brig. General James H. Carleton in the fall of 1862. Quarters were furnished for six companies of men, but the first garrison actually consisted of 2 companies. It was named for Captain Benjamin Wingate of the 5th Infantry who was killed in the Battle of Val Verde near Socorro, New Mexico.

For many years after the American occupation of New Mexico, the Navajo Indians were most persistent trouble-makers. Their thieving operations along the Rio Grande extended from the upper settlements down to the vicinity of Socorro and west to the Copper Mines (Santa Rita). In spite of many expeditions against them and many treaties of peace, the Navajos were unwilling to respect the rule of the white man.

An examination of the sites of Cebolleta and of two other outposts, Abiquiu and Defiance, shows they were located to protect settlements rather than cross-country travelers. In fact, there were but few such travelers in the region until the late fifties. Although the country west from Albuquerque to the Colorado River had been seen by many mountain men and had been explored by Beckwith in 1849, by Sitgreaves in 1851, by Whipple in 1853, by Beale with the famous camels in 1857-58, and by Ives late in the latter year, that northern route to California remained unpopular for some ten years following Beckwith's journey. Even the contractors who carried the mail to California in the winter and spring of 1859 had found the country just east of the Colorado to be impracticable for wagons and had been compelled to use pack trains. In those days there were but two ways to get across New Mexico to California - the easy southern road via Tucson and Yuma, and the more difficult northern track that has since developed into Highway 66 and the route of the Santa Fe Railway. Miles, speed, rations and forage all had to be counted carefully in deciding which way to go. Ox teams averaged ten or twelve miles a day under good conditions. The hardships of the northern road for many years inclined most travelers to use the time-consuming route through Tucson, but in spite of difficulties, travel must have increased on the northern route, because in 1860 the Department Commander proposed to create a new army post at Ojo del Oso, on the northern trail to the west.

Possibly there were other spots on this trail that would have served

the purpose as well as the one selected, but Ojo del Oso (Bear Springs, called Shash 'titgo by the Navajo) was well and favorably known - here was a traditional rendezvous for the Navajos; here Manuel Antonio Chavez and a civilized Navajo boy had stopped in 1834 to tend wounds received in a battle with the Navajo at Canyon de Chelly. This battle resulted from a raiding party of New Mexicans seeking Navajo captives to sell as slaves. Unfortunately for them, their small party of 50 men encountered a huge ceremonial encampment at Canyon de Chelly and all were killed except Chavez and the Navajo boy. The boy died at Bear Springs. It was the site of the first peace conference between the Navajos and the United States, and here the first treaty between the United States and the Navajo Nation was reached in November 1846, when Col. Alexander W. Doniphan of the First Missouri Volunteers met with the chiefs of "The People" at Bear Springs.

Doniphan was serving under Gen. Kearney, who was engaged in the war of expansion against Mexico. Kearney had promised the New Mexicans protection against raiding Indians in return for their support of the United States in the war, and so ordered detachments of Doniphans' men out to put teeth in the pacification efforts with the Indians - to invade the Navajo country, release captives, reclaim stolen property and awe or beat the Indians into submission. It was after the march of these detachments through the Navajo country, during which they won grudging admiration from the Indians, that the meeting took place at Bear Springs during which the treaty was signed. The whole campaign lasted only six weeks.

Commanding one of the detachments into the heart of the Navajo country was a Captain Reid, with 30 picked men. This handful of soldiers traveled always under a suspended sentence of massacre. Hundreds of Navajos were on all sides of them, sometimes traveling and camping with them. What saved the soldiers was the very audacity of their venture - it vindicated the rumor now traveling the whole Indian country that this breed of whites had better be respected.

As Reids' thirty men got farther into the Navajo country, the Navajo came by the hundreds to look them over. They had danced with some of the Pueblo Indians over Navajo scalps; now, finding a party with some fresh Pueblo scalps, they shuffled with the Navajos in the vengeance dance. They joined the Navajo games and gaped at the sham battles. They traded their worn out horses for fresh mules, got buckskins to replace their tatters and sat around campfires while hundreds of Navajos danced, sang, and related incidents of their great valor. Reid finally collected more than 800 Navajos, harangued them and got their promise to meet Doniphan and make a treaty. He returned then to the encampment which had been moved to Cubero. The Navajo, who had agreed to follow them, took up the trail, but on the way met other Indians who predicted that Doniphan would

massacre them, and so turned back and were not among the Indians who finally signed the peace treaty.

Doniphan reached the Bear Springs rendezvous on November 21, 1846, and hordes of Navajos came to listen to "Long Knife", so called because of his long saber of command. There followed the slow, stately and preposterous ceremonies by which the Indians and the army officers were accustomed to reach agreements - parades, feasts, drama and endless oratory. The Navajo claimed alliance with the Americans who had come here to make war on the New Mexicans, and when the Americans asked the Indians not to do the same, they could not understand. With some difficulty Doniphan got that point cleared up and the New Mexicans classed as Americans who must not now be murdered and robbed.

A treaty as formal as one with a major power was drawn up. By its terms the Navajos agreed to cherish the New Mexicans and the Pueblos as well. Doniphan, Jackson and Gilpin signed it on behalf of James K. Polk, the White Father in Washington, and no less than 14 Navajo Chiefs lead by Sarcillo Largo, a young Navajo chief of prominence, scratched their crosses underneath. After it was over, Doniphan made a detour to Zuni Pueblo and signed a treaty with them also. It proved to be worth a little more than the Navajo treaty, for the Zunis were less warlike.

Such was the history of the site at which, in August, 1860, a new post was established for the protection of the whites, designed for a garrison of eight companies, and named Fort Fauntleroy. Colonel Thomas Turner (Little Lord) Fauntleroy was Department Commander when this post was named for him. As it was hardly customary thus to honor a living officer, it is quite likely that some back-slapping went on, because we find that at about the same time this happened, Fauntleroy himself recommended that another new post in his department be named Fort Floyd, in honor of the then Secretary of War. (Both were from Virginia and both "went South" during the Civil War). A provisional reserve of 100 square miles was laid out at that time, with east Bear Springs as its center. Occupying the region at about the time of the American entry was a band of Navajo Indians led by Chief Mariano, who used this section as an agricultural and watering place. Lake Mariano to the north was named for this Chief, whose descendents still live in this vicinity.

Fort Fauntleroy had a short and troubled existence. The month following its establishment, Indians attempted to stampede the mule herd, and not long after, Major H. H. Sibley (as a Confederate he commanded the troops that captured Santa Fe) used the post as a base for his campaign against Indians in the Chusca Valley. On the first of January, 1861, the garrison consisted of Companies C, D, F, G and K, Fifth Infantry, commanded by Captain N. B. Rossell, Captain William Chapman and Captain Henry R. Selden (in that order), but

great events were impending and this force was steadily diminished until by summer all the regulars were gone. Their places were taken by four companies of New Mexico volunteers. In September there was an unfortunate "collision" between the volunteers and Navajo Indians at the post over a horse race. A Lt. Ortiz rode a horse belonging to the Post Surgeon, F. E. Kavanaugh, against an Indian pony. The Indians' halter broke, his horse veered off the track, and he lost the race. In the ensuing argument about the validity of the race, a shot was fired and the soldiers turned artillery on the Indians, killing men, women and children indiscriminately.

In September, also, a general order of the Department of New Mexico changed the name of the post from Fauntleroy to Lyon, to honor General Nathaniel Lyon, who had been killed at the Battle of Wilsons' Creek a few weeks earlier. Fauntleroy had resigned his commission in the army in March 1861 to join the South. Lyon and Canby, the latter now Department Commander, had served together for many years as junior officers in the Second Infantry. A letter from a soldier at Fort Lyon, dated late in September, states that the garrison consisted of Companies A, B and C, Second New Mexico Volunteers, commanded by Captains Manuel D. Pino, Jose D. Sena and Manuel Baca y Delgado. Lieutenant Colonel Manuel Chavez was Post Commander, the same Manuel Antonio Chavez who had bathed his wounds at Bear Springs in 1834. He had been rescued by Mexican shepherds, taken to Cebolleta and in 1860 was commissioned Lt. Colonel in the Second Regiment New Mexico Volunteer Infantry and sent to Fort Lyon. The writer complained bitterly of the activities of the sutler, one R. T. Gillespie, a "Secessionist". Early in November the troops comprised four companies of the Second and Third New Mexico Volunteers but before the end of December they were gone. General Canby was assembling all his available force to meet Sibleys' threat from the south and southwest. Fort Lyon was abandoned, and the troops moved to the fort at San Rafael. No record has been found of the physical aspects of old Fort Lyon.

Two old leather bound books found in 1957 in the District Court Clerks vault in Albuquerque give interesting sidelights on the life of the troops at these old posts. They are a day-book and ledger of F. E. Kavanaugh, sutler, stationed with the troops at Fort Fauntleroy and Fort Lyon, and later at a union supply depot and small garrison of 42 men at Cubero (also spelled Covero in some of the letters written from the post), 60 miles west of Albuquerque.

Kavanaugh was sutler, post surgeon and confederate spy - he operated the post exchange, selling the soldiers "spirits" in considerable quantities, horse blankets, chances on raffles, red flannel drawers, etc; doctored their ailments; and swore secret allegiance to the Confederacy. Among his customers in the Fort Fauntleroy days were many well known

New Mexico military men, including Colonel E. R. S. Canby, Captain Benjamin Wingate and Captain H. B. Selden. In those days, a few civilians were hired by the post; interpreters at \$40.00 per month and 1 ration for Navajo interpreters and \$50.00 per month and 1 ration for Spanish interpreters; teamsters at \$40.00 and 1 ration, herders at \$20.00 and 1 ration and wagon masters at \$50.00 and 1 ration.

On March 3, 1862, the garrison at Cubero was surrendered to four confederate civilians - none other than R. T. Gillespie, of whom the soldier complained, Dr. F. E. Kavanaugh, and two others, George Gardenhier and R. T. Thompson. Kavanaugh took charge of the post until a detachment of confederate soldiers arrived from Albuquerque on March 5, and business continued as usual at the post exchange.

Concentration of the troops at Fort Wingate (San Rafael) increased the garrison there to three companies, including one of California Volunteers and two of the First New Mexico Volunteer Infantry under the command of Lt. Colonel Chavez. It was occupied late in September by Companies D and G, First Cavalry (Old First Dragoons), under Captain H. R. Selden, then of the Fifth Infantry but who later died in the service as Colonel of the First New Mexico Volunteer Infantry and who is best remembered at that old ruined fort on the river near Radium Springs. In 1862, Chavez and his men accompanied Colonel Pino to Val Verde and took part in that battle.

Old Fort Wingate saw much activity. Major Edward B. Willis, First Infantry California Volunteers, left here on Nov. 7, 1863, to establish Fort Whipple in Arizona. It was one of Kit Carson's bases in the highly successful and ruthless campaign waged by General Carleton against the Navajo and saw the departure of the greater part of that nation for Bosque Redondo (Fort Sumner). Orders received by Lt. Colonel Chavez read in part "--after that day (July 20, 1863), every Navajo able to bear arms will be attacked and destroyed or captured unless he comes in before July 20th. The rule is a plain one and needs no future correspondence to define its meaning."

Kit Carson arrived at Wingate on 10 July and remained three days receiving supplies for his command. He left two companies of his men there to await two supply trains and pushed on to Ojo del Oso where he stayed from July 16 to 19 to rest his mules before continuing on his march to Canyon de Chelly.

Discovery of gold near Prescott in 1863 brought much traffic over the western road, which had to be protected; the next year it was the base for an expedition against Apaches on the Gila and San Carlos Rivers. After the departure of the Navajos for the Pecos, the garrison of Wingate averaged rather small and experienced frequent changes - regulars, New Mexico Volunteers,

both foot and horse, and units of the California took their turn at the post. Among the New Mexican Commanders were Jose M. Sanches, Conaciana Montoya, Nicholas Hodt, and Strongard. The last annual return shows all regulars - four companies of the 37th Infantry and Third Cavalry, six officers and 286 men. The volunteers had gone home.

In 1868, after languishing four years on the reservation at Fort Sumner until broken in spirit and ready to conform to white mans laws, the Navajos were permitted to return from their exile on the Pecos, but it was felt that "old" Fort Wingate was too far from the Indian villages to permit efficient supervision of the inhabitants so the location on the Rio de Galto was abandoned, after a period of use of only six years, and "new" Fort Wingate was established on the site of old Fort Lyon (Fauntleroy) at Ojo del Oso.

President Ulysses S. Grant declared a military reservation ten miles square, corresponding to the provisional reserve of 1860 on February 18, 1870. Boundaries were announced in General Order No. 7, Department of Missouri, 1870. Upon recommendation of several military authorities, including Robert Todd Lincoln, Secretary of War, an addition of thirty square miles to the south was made on March 26, 1881, to furnish fire wood and building materials for the fort. Boundaries for this additional tract were set by General Order No. 7, Department of Missouri, 1881. During the following year the post served as a base for ethnological and archeological expeditions in this region.

The original plan for "new" Fort Wingate was unique. It consisted of a circle within a square. Living quarters were to be built around the circle, facing the parade ground in the center, while shops, storehouses and stables lined the exterior wall that formed the square. Economy experts made the plan, but they forgot about future expansion, so after a brief start on the odd design, it was dropped and the place emerged in the rectangular form that is so familiar to the old army.

Altogether, Wingate was a good post. Blest with a good location and a fine climate, it appealed to soldiers and Indians alike because it furnished the necessities of a good camp - a spring of water, wood in the hills and grass in the valleys, and in the early days, plenty of game. The surgeons report for the early seventies shows that there was considerable sickness but very few deaths from disease. Fevers, respiratory ailments, dysentary and venereal trouble account for most of the illness, with only three deaths from those causes in a four year period. The food situation appears to have been good despite the comparative isolation of the place - the Zunis and nearby Navajos were farmers and probably supplied what was needed to supplement the dry issues from the commissary. In any event, the Army Scurvey Report for the period shows only three cases of that tell-tale disease at Wingate in seven years. Washington Mathews, who later became Surgeon General of the United States, served at the post hospital for many years in

the 1880's. General Cushing was at the fort during the time Mathews was stationed at the hospital, coming in with the Powell Expedition to explore the Green, Grand and Colorado Rivers.

About 1870, the old road to the east through Laguna and Albuquerque was augmented with a short cut that ran directly east from the post to the Rio Grande, where it crossed at San Felipe. At that time, mail to Washington required from nine to ten days - the stage met the railhead in Kansas.

The post was abandoned between 1910 and 1918 except for a short period during 1914-15 when it was garrisoned for the purpose of guarding 4,000 Mexican troops and families who fled the Pancho Villa uprising, entering Texas at Eagle Pass and being escorted to Wingate for refuge. It was during these years that a portion of the reservation was made the Zuni District of the Manzano National Forest (now Cibola), by General Orders No. 80, WD, 1911.

The Ordnance Department took over the reserve in 1918 for the storage of high explosives and redesignated it Wingate General Ordnance Depot. The construction of magazines and buildings started approximately 1 mile west of the site of the administrative area of the present Wingate Ordnance Depot. All buildings were of wood construction. During that year Ordnance began storing TNT on the depot, using two cowboys on horseback as guards. It was, at that time, the largest storage depot of high explosives in the world. Records of the depot contain several plaintive letters from depot Commanders to Washington inquiring as to their rights in attempting to keep cattle away from the storage magazines, understating their problem somewhat by dubbing the cattle "a perfect nuisance". At the time, the depot was handled by two non-commissioned officers, two mounted guards and 13 Indians.

By 1921, 163 magazines of portable wooden barracks type and one underground magazine had been constructed and the post was designated Wingate Ordnance Reserve Depot. Also in 1921, M. J. Connally and Company entered into a contract with the government to manufacture 9,000,000 cartridges, using picric acid from this depot. Their plant was located just outside of the area fence at the McCune Spur.

From 1920 to 1930, Depot Commanders included Major E. C. McCune, for whom the McCune Railroad Spur into the depot was named, Captain Harvey A. Clark, Warrant Officer John McDonald and a Captain Lewis.

In 1925 a school for Zuni and Navajo children was established at the fort, utilizing the existing buildings for classrooms and dormitories, and reserving certain military housing for the depot personnel. Congress appropriated \$500,000.00 for the school and there were approximately 700 children placed in it by the following year. The barracks were made into dormitories and the square where soldiers once had drilled was converted into a ball field.

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In 1928 about 9,000 acres of the reservation lying on the north side of the railroad tracks were turned over to the Interior Department as an addition to the Navajo Indian Reservation. Also in 1928, the depot was changed from a dead storage basis to an active status and repacking and shipping of explosives began in July and is still going on, as required. The magazines area where explosives were stored by the army comprised in 1936 about 5,000 acres with 114 storage buildings.

Installation Commanders during the period 1930-40 were Master Sgt. Elmer E. Kemp (1930-32), Technical Sgt. John C. Vaughan (1935-37), and Technical Sgt. John C. Wilson (later promoted to Lieutenant and then to Captain), under whose command the entire stock of TNT at the depot was sold to the British Purchasing Commission for export to Britain in 1940. Although representatives of the commission had been to the depot and secured samples of the TNT for testing, this order hit the small work force at the depot as a complete surprise. All their equipment was obsolete, there were only three old trucks (1 Ford, 1 Dodge, and 1 Reo) available, no materials handling equipment except a roller conveyor with steel rails and wooden rollers, and 1 telephone which was operated through the switchboard at the old fort. Navajo labor was recruited by the simple method of looking over available applicants, choosing the healthiest and strongest looking (often by flashlight for the early morning or midnight shift) and putting them to work. Paper work could come later, when the shipping order had been met. The task was made even more difficult by rattlesnakes. It became standard procedure to open the magazine doors, listen for the whirring of rattles, then search through the building with flashlights before starting operations. Often four or five of the deadly reptiles were killed in one magazine.

In spite of the lack of equipment, the shipping order was filled on time, establishing a precedent which has resulted in a record for the depot of never missing a shipping deadline. Crews of six to eight men were known to load 60 one-hundred-pound boxes of powder by hand in five minutes. Officials of the depot learned several years later that none of this TNT ever reached its destination, but was sunk by submarine action.

Surveys were started for new buildings in November 1940, after Captain Evan M. Johnson IV (1940-42) assumed command of the post. Construction on the administrative buildings and igloos at the present site started on February 25, 1941 and was finished on December 5th of that year. The first shipment of ammunition for storage arrived at this depot from King Powder Co., Kings Mills, Ohio, on October 17, 1941, consisting of several carloads of spotting charges for practice bombs. It is interesting to note that of the 128 civilians employed in November 1941, 37% received less than \$100.00 per month, 54% less than \$200.00 per month and 9% less than \$300.00 per month.

With the outbreak of World War II in 1941, the depot became highly active, with incoming and outbound shipments climbing from five cars per day in 1941 to 60 or more per day in 1943, with approximately 1550 civilians and 13 officers. Storage of ammunition other than TNT began in 1942 when Lieutenant Colonel R. S. Barr was in command (Jan.-Dec. 1942). Colonel Barr was the first commander to live in quarters furnished at the present depot headquarters.

One of the worst problems encountered during these war years was maintaining good housekeeping at the work sites as a part of the safety program. Ninety percent of the work force was made up of Navajo Indians, only five percent of whom could speak English, and to whom sweeping was squaws work. They refused to have any part of it, and the accident rates were high. The problem was finally solved by inducing a Medicine Man, in full regalia, to come out to the depot and do some sweeping. From that time on, the braves swept with a will and the depot took several coveted safety awards.

Recruiting took some doing in those days, too. One labor recruiter from the depot took a trip onto the reservation hunting Navajo men to supplement the work force. Sighting a hogan, he stopped to see if there were any able-bodied men interested in a job and was told that the man could not possibly leave home - a large bear was raiding the sheep and tearing up the cornfield. Someone had to be there to protect them. Two men in neighboring hogans were having the same trouble. Returning to Gallup, the recruiter acquired a gun and two helpers, tracked the bear down and shot him. As soon as that little matter was safely attended to, so the squaws could take care of the home front, all three men signed on to work at the depot.

Commanders during this period included Lt. Colonel Clark C. Witman (1942-46), Lt. Colonel Alfred H. Hall (1946-48), Lt. Colonel Frank Eccles (1948-51), Lt. Colonel Kenneth E. Knudson (1952-53), Colonel William Menoher (1953-55), Colonel Martin F. Shaughnessy (1955-56) and Colonel Robert R. Judson (1956 -).

Staffing fell off abruptly at the end of World War II, but picked up again during the years between 1950 and 1954 when the depot was engaged in shipping ammunition for the Korean Police Action. Since then, the depot has been active in the maintenance, modification and renovation of stored ammunition, to keep it in first class shape and ready for issue and use by the armed forces at any time. The actual strength of the depot dropped to around 300 civilians and five commissioned officers by 1958. Prominent among the civilians was Frances E. Fitzpatrick, called Bel-la gaun'ah-ts'io (White Man with Big Belly) by the Navajos, who was named Ordnance Man of the Year in 1957 and was presented the Department of the Army Award for Exceptional Meritorious Civilian Service in 1958.

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Baca y Delgado, Capt. Manuel
Barr, Lt. Col. R. S.
Canby, Col E. R. S.
Carleton, Brig. Gen. James H.
Carson, Kit
Chapman, Capt. William
Chavez, Lt. Col. Manuel
Chavez, Manuel Antonio
Clark, Capt. Harvey A.
Connelly, M. J.
Cushing, Gen.
Doniphan, Col. Alexander W.
Eccles, Lt. Col. Frank
Fitzpatrick, Frances E.
Gardenhier, George
Gillespie, R. T.
Hall, Lt. Col. Alfred H.
Hodt, Nicholas
Johnson, Capt. Evan M. IV
Judson, Col. Robert R.
Kaavanaugh, F. E.
Kemp, Master Sgt. Elmer E.
Knudson, Lt. Col. Kenneth E.
Lewis, Captain
Mathews, Washington
McCune, Major E. C.
McDonald, Warrant Officer John
Menoher, Col. William
Montoya, Conaciana
Pino, Capt. Manuel D.
Reid, Captain
Rossell, Capt. N. B.
Sanches, Jose M.
Selden, Capt. H. B.
Selden, Capt. Henry R.
Sena, Capt. Jose D.
Shaughnessy, Col. Martin F.
Silbey, Major H. H.
Strongard
Switzer, Ted R.
Thompson, R. T.
Vaughan, Tech Sgt. John C.
Willis, Major Edward B.
Wilson, Tech. Sgt. John C.
Wingate, Capt. Benjamin
Wingate, Capt. Benjamin
Witman, Lt. Col. Clark C.