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Fort Douglas and the Soldiers of the Wasatch: A Final Salute

LYMAN C. PEDERSEN, JR.*

In July, 1967, orders from Secretary of Defence Robert S. McNamara to deactivate Fort Douglas were carried out and an important as well as colorful period of Utah's history came to a close. It had been 105 years earlier, with the Civil War fifteen months old, that Colonel Patrick Edward Connor, a veteran of Buena Vista during the Mexican War, assembled troops of the Second and Third California Volunteers near Stockton, California, and prepared them for a long march across the Nevada desert. The Utah Column finally lumbered forward on July 12, 1862, the day after Henry W. Halleck assumed command as general-in-chief of the United States Army.

NAMED FOR STEPHEN A. DOUGLAS

While eastern soldiers fought for a second time at Bull Run, stubbornly repelled Lee's invasion of Maryland, and suffered staggering losses at Antietam and Sharpsburg, the California Volunteers stubbornly, with many night marches, crossed the parched desert, stopping at Fort Churchill, and spending about a month in the Ruby Valley. On October 18 they crossed the Jordan River with some apprehension, and the California troops proceeded with caution north into the valley of the saints. A suitable location was found on the high benchland east of the city, and on October 26, 1862, Camp Douglas was officially founded, honoring the Illinois senator, Stephen A. Douglas, whose death had occurred in Chicago the year before. The garrison was permanently established and redesignated Fort Douglas in 1878.

Few western military posts have exerted a greater influence upon the society and economy of a sizeable nearby community than has Fort Douglas. The California soldiers arrived in Utah

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at an inauspicious time, with the last campfires of Johnston's army only recently having flickered out. The saints had wanted nothing more than isolation in the fastness of the mountains; yet within fifteen years after their initial arrival in Utah, two invading armies had camped in Deseret, not counting the deluge of fortune hunters plodding the California trail. At least many of the latter left gold with the saints, many of them much more than they ever found in the Bearflag state.

Only the most astute could have guessed that the desert soldiers from California would initiate a transformation in Mormon society and economy, surpassed in the Nineteenth Century only by the coming of the railroad with its swift possibilities in areas like mining and immigration, and perhaps the revolution in communication.

Some Mormon leaders predicted the rapid demise and early departure of the California boys, but in the meantime, Connor prepared for the duration. With months slipping by, and no apparent departure in sight, the saints were not long in perceiving that Uncle Sam's soldiers could contribute in a direct way to the city's economy, particularly when the paymaster made one of his infrequent visits. Newspapers of the time re-



Looking southwest at Old Camp Douglas in 1868. (By courtesy of the Utah State Historical Society.)

cord an infinite variety of inducements for the dollar, including some which presumably attracted no large Mormon clientele, like Sunday horse races and the often condemned Valley Tan.

The real problem, of course, was how to separate the soldier from his money without at the same time absorbing any gentile influence. Although the community was enriched by government and individual spending during the Civil War years, and it was only a beginning, the second question, that of finding some compatibility, escaped any real solution until after the war.

The presence of U. S. soldiers only a few miles from the Mormon capital, which during the war years engendered so much hostility, became in succeeding decades a source of security as well as an even greater financial boon. Shocking reports of Mormon girls marrying soldiers in the 1860's became less shocking and hardly newsworthy by the 1880's. This was equally true of the soldier who occasionally became a Mormon convert. The large building programs on the post during the 1870's and 1880's put thousands of dollars into the hands of local contractors and workmen.

INFLUENCE ON COMMUNITY

The influence of Fort Douglas upon the society and community life of Salt Lake City was immensely important. The soldiers, perhaps unconsciously and simply by their presence, provided a means of transition for the Mormon theocracy to move from the suspicious and expatriated decade of the 1860's to the nationally oriented and optimistic decade of the 1890's. By the time of the Spanish American War, Utah had genuinely taken her place among her sister states. That transition was at least made easier by a military garrison which had proved its basic friendliness and gained Mormon confidence. Differences that remained were increasingly considered community problems rather than a conflict between the soldiers and the Mormons. Other factors would of course include the passing of the generation which had suffered persecution in Missouri and Illinois only to be invaded by an army in Utah, and also the increasing importance of the non-Mormon in Utah.

The Twentieth Century, and particularly the World War I and World War II periods, witnessed an even more vast influ-

ence upon Utah's economy, while at the same time, the social influence reached full circle. From the rapprochement of the 1880's and 1890's, Fort Douglas moved to an absolute and sentimental comradeship with Salt Lake City by the 1960's. October editions of local newspapers during those years, honoring anniversaries of the founding of the fort, bear ample witness to the place which Fort Douglas had won in the hearts of Utah citizens—one such article appropriately recalling that "Old Soldiers Never Die."

As the history of the State of Wyoming would be incomplete without including Fort Laramie and Fort Bridger, so would a similar study of Utah be incomplete without including Fort Douglas. While Fort Bridger closed its career with the entrance of Wyoming into statehood in 1890, Fort Douglas, having served the Utah frontier for thirty-four years during its territorial existence, continued for seventy-one years after statehood. The old fort, unique in many respects, has remained one of the oldest continuously occupied posts west of the Mississippi River. During its entire existence it remained an integral part of the U. S. military system.

In 1853 the old system of numbering military districts and departments in use since 1813 was replaced by establishing departments with descriptive names. From that year until the outbreak of the Civil War there were no military divisions, and each department reported directly to the headquarters of the army. The Department of Utah was created in January, 1858, though during the Civil War years Camp Douglas fell under the jurisdiction of the Department of the Pacific. During the summer of 1865 a special district called the District of the Plains was created, containing the old districts of Utah, Colorado and Nebraska, Connor, having been promoted to Brevet Brigadier General, was named commander.

In 1866 a new organizational structure was developed encompassing the continental limits of the United States. Originally it consisted of two divisions, that of the Missouri and that of the Pacific, with subordinate departments under each, and an additional eight independent departments. The latter group controlled most of the United States east of the Mississippi River. With some adjustments this system prevailed until the 1890's. The Division of the Missouri contained the Depart-

ments of Arkansas, the Missouri, the Platte (of which Fort Douglas was a member), and Dakota.

In 1891 the Divisions of the Atlantic, the Pacific, and the Missouri were discontinued and eight military departments were retained. One of these was the Department of the Platte, which included Iowa, Nebraska, Colorado, South Dakota south of the 44th parallel, Wyoming except Fort Yellowstone, Idaho east of a line formed by the extension of the western boundary of Utah to the northeastern boundary of Idaho, and the Utah Territory. Two years later the Department of Colorado was created which included Colorado and the Territories of Arizona, New Mexico and Utah. Thus in 1893 Fort Douglas' long association with the Department of the Platte was finally terminated.

SOLDIERS ARRIVE IN 1862

Connor's announced purpose for his arrival in Utah in 1862 was to guard the Overland Mail Route, but in addition to this, the government hoped to keep a watchful eye on the Mormons, whose loyalty was under some suspicion. The territory of Utah was in a key position on the Overland Mail Route, and its secession would have meant a dangerous separation between the East and the West, as well as a costly outlay of money and manpower to reroute the telegraph, mail, and stage lines. In view of the recent occupation of and departure from Utah of U.S. troops, and of the possibility of preserving polygamy by uniting with the departed South, it was not beyond comprehension that the Mormons might follow the South out of the Union.¹ Despite Brigham Young's message of loyalty in 1861 upon the completion of the telegraph,² some doubts were entertained about the Mormon leader's intentions.

The Civil War years mark the most bitter period of strained relations between the soldiers on the Wasatch Bench and the Mormon citizens and leaders in Salt Lake City. The situation was explosive and dangerous with both sides guilty of creating misunderstandings. Fortunately both Brigham Young and Patrick Connor, seeing the strength as well as the weakness in each

¹For Southern bids to Utah for support see Orson F. Whitney, *History of Utah* (Salt Lake City: George Q. Cannon & Sons, 1892-94), p. 93.

²Andrew Neff, *History of Utah* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1940), p. 730.

other, usually exercised caution and judgment. Although verbal battles occurred with some regularity, the saints and the soldiers restrained themselves from physical violence; and while the Mormon kingdom remained intact, Camp Douglas also became a permanent part of the Utah frontier.

PUBLISHED CAMP NEWSPAPER

From 1863 to 1867 a camp newspaper, the *Daily Union Vedette*, was published at Camp Douglas. In addition to carrying official military information, the paper acted as the voice of the post. It carried news of the Civil War, announcements of important visitors to the Territory, departures and arrivals of wagon trains, and also reported the progress of mining in the Territory. Articles were often quoted from California, the Midwest and the East. An editorial in the first edition of the paper declared that:

We have no ends to serve, save the public good and our country's welfare; we have no enemies to punish; no prejudices to indulge; no private griefs to ventilate.³

Despite this friendly salutory, the Mormon-Gentile conflict was thoroughly aired in the pages of the *Vedette*. Appropriate portions of General Conference sermons were often included, with editorial comment.

Although the original *Daily Union Vedette* ceased publication in 1867, during three other short periods of the post's history it was revived, the most recent being from October, 1965, to July, 1966. It was terminated on the later date through a lack of funds.

During the early years of Camp Douglas, the Volunteers made the initial discoveries of ore-bearing deposits in Bingham Canyon and in various other places throughout the Territory and were instrumental in the founding of Utah's mining industries. General Connor himself was among the foremost leaders in this enterprise. The mining town of Stockton, Utah, was settled by him, being named for his home in California.

Connor's men explored and surveyed new routes of travel through Southern Utah, especially to the Colorado River, in

³*Union Vedette*. November 20, 1863.

anticipation of an expanding trade with California via that route. This Colorado scheme adds an exciting and imaginative part of the history of Fort Douglas. Connor pleaded its cause, and soldiers of his command marched to carry the plan out. A feasible wagon road from Fort Douglas to the head of navigation on the Colorado River was surveyed by Captain George F. Price in 1864. The enterprise was generally successful, but was doomed to oblivion with the coming of the railroads.

In addition to exploring these southern routes, parties from the post surveyed parts of southern Idaho, eastern Nevada, and also eastern Utah through the Strawberry and Uinta Valleys and on to Denver by way of the Berthoud Pass.

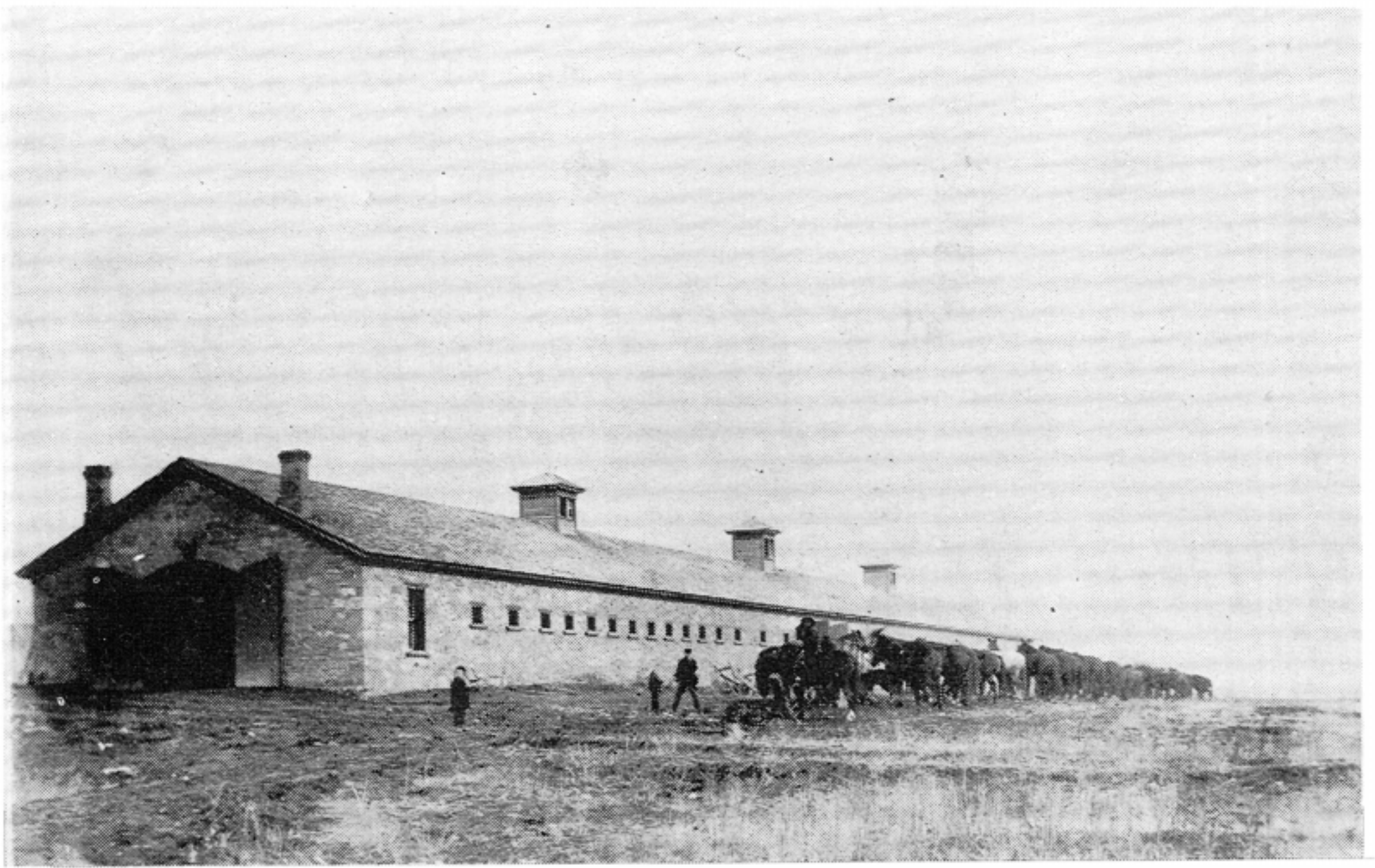
SOLDIERS AND INDIANS

Soldiers from Camp Douglas played a significant role in various Indian campaigns from the 1860's to the 1880's, being either directly or indirectly involved in the Battle of Bear River, the Powder River Campaigns, the Black Hawk War, the Sioux uprising of the 1870's, including the Big Horn Expedition, and many smaller engagements. General John Gibbon, commander of the post in 1869 and 1870 and leader of the famous "Black Hat" Brigade in the Civil War, was later to be one of the main participants in the Nez Perce War of 1877.

In fighting Indians, surveying and exploring, and opening the mining frontier, the men from Camp Douglas established a number of subsidiary posts. These included Camp Connor, near Soda Springs, Idaho; Fort Connor, Wyoming; Camp Conness, in Rush Valley, Utah; Fort Cameron, near Beaver City, Utah; and Fort Rawlins, near Provo, Utah. (Arthur MacArthur, father of General Douglas MacArthur, once served near Fort Rawlins during the Indian Wars.) Fort Douglas also maintained a very close relationship to Forts Thornburgh and Duchesne in northeastern Utah.

CAMP DOUGLAS BECOMES FORT DOUGLAS

The years between 1878, when Camp Douglas became Fort Douglas, and 1900, were transitional years and many changes occurred at the Utah post, as well as other posts of the West. Post improvements included rebuilding almost the entire post



Old Fort Douglas stables about 1885. (By courtesy of the Utah State Historical Society.)

during the 1870's. This building program was carried out under the capable leadership of Colonel John E. Smith, who commanded the post as well as the Fourteenth U. S. Infantry. By the end of this period a new spirit of cooperation had developed between the military, the Church, and the citizenry. During the 1890's military education was added to the University of Utah curriculum and officers from Fort Douglas were called upon to guide the program. By the time of the Spanish-American War, Utah National Guardsmen, in contrast to the spirit of the 1860's, were given full use of fort facilities for training camps. By the turn of the century Fort Douglas had in fact become part of Utah's heritage and tradition.

In addition to chasing Indians, riding escort duty, serving in mapping, exploring and survey parties, and repairing wagon roads, Utah troops found garrison duty at the post to include cultivating company gardens, attending classes of instruction with lectures under such titles as "The Monitor and the Merimac," and enduring regular rifle instruction, housekeeping duties, weekly inspections and parades.

Soldiering in the 1880's and 1890's on the Utah frontier left pleasant memories for men like Captain Stephen P. Jocelyn, who was assigned to Fort Douglas from 1888 to 1891 and

recorded with camera and journal the life of a soldier in Utah.⁴ Jocelyn was on hand each year for the annual "practice march" to Strawberry Valley, the largest maneuver of the year. In 1889 Jocelyn and men from Fort Douglas attended a grand review and parade in the vicinity of Fort Robinson on the Niobrara River. Major General George Crook was present to review the troops, and Jocelyn, the man from Fort Douglas, recorded the events of the day, saying:

General Crook is an unpretending person, quite the opposite of General Brooke. He came off from Chicago forgetting to bring his regulation Major General's sash of buff silk and amused us by appearing on parade with a corn colored affair, borrowed from Mrs. Worth. Then his trousers refused to keep company with his shoe tops and his drawer strings broke loose. Altogether he was rather a funny spectacle, galloping down the lines on a strange and not imposing horse at the head of his staff, escort and orderlies, numbering perhaps a hundred. But he's one of the best of men and best of soldiers and universally liked.⁵

In addition to fighting Indian wars, men from Fort Douglas were summoned to the front in the Spanish-American War and during both World War I and World War II. Being a prisoner-of-war barracks and a general hospital were among the important functions of the post during both of the later periods. Such notable units as the Fourteenth, Eighteenth, Twenty-first, Twenty-fourth, and Thirty-eighth Infantry Regiments spent extended tours of duty at Fort Douglas. Not only infantry commanders directed the post, but also cavalry, artillery, quartermaster, and coastal artillery officers as well. A Negro regiment, the Twenty-fourth Infantry, was serving at the post when the Spanish-American War broke out. Thousands of Salt Lake citizens lined the street to cheer these departing troops when they left for the war.⁶

Following the Spanish-American War the garrison strength of Fort Douglas was severely reduced and remained so until 1901 when the Eighteenth Infantry Regiment made its appear-

⁴Stephen P. Jocelyn, *Mostly Alkali* (Caldwell: Caxton Press, 1953). Jocelyn served in the army for 44 years and retired with the rank of Brigadier General. He died in 1920 at the age of 78.

⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 326-327.

⁶A. Prentiss, *The History of the Utah Volunteers in the Spanish-American War* (Salt Lake City: Tribune Job Printing Co., 1900), pp. 23-24. See also *Journal History*, March 15, 1898, p. 2.

ance. Except for several short periods, the post thereafter and until 1914 housed a strong garrison, some years almost reaching the 1,000 level. In November, 1914, the entire Twelfth Infantry Regiment, which had been on maneuvers in Texas for a full year, was dropped from the official *Post Returns*.

SEVEN THOUSAND SOLDIERS

After the great surge of men in 1917, which reached a high of 7,081 in August of that year, the post settled down to an annual average aggregate for 1921 of 302 men. By June of that year, with the arrival of the famous Thirty-eighth Infantry Regiment, the "Rock of the Marne," the garrison numbered over 800. These infantrymen of World War I fame were to remain at Fort Douglas until 1940, making a lasting impression upon the community with their dress parades, band concerts, and military maneuvers.

For many years an annual Citizen's Military Training Camp was sponsored by the post, giving thousands of young men training in military subjects, leadership, and citizenship. Young men of the 1930's will always carry memories of the Basic, the Red, the White, and the Blue courses of the annual training camps at Fort Douglas.

The 1920's and 1930's were to bring community relations a long way from what they were in the 1860's. Colonel Alfred Hasbrouck, commanding the Twentieth Infantry Regiment and the post in 1918, expressed the feelings of many by saying that:

Fort Douglas is about the most desirable place from a military standpoint at which I have ever been stationed. It is healthful, is surrounded by beautiful scenery, and our relations with the civilian authorities and people of Salt Lake City have been most cordial. Salt Lake will ever have a warm spot in the hearts of both officers and men.⁷

During World War II, Fort Douglas served as headquarters for the Ninth Service Command and as such directed not only coastal operations but activities in all western states from the Rockies to the Pacific. In addition, Fort Douglas directed the repair and salvage of military vehicles and equipment within the entire region. From 1942 to 1946, Fort Douglas was indeed

⁷Quoted by E. L. Merritt, "Fort Douglas, Utah," *The New West Magazine*, IX, No. 6 (June, 1918), 6.

the nerve center of the military in the western part of the United States.

With the coming of the war, the post was expanded to include a reception center, an induction station, a separation center, a hospital, and a prisoner-of-war camp. During the peak year of 1943, the military population of the post reached 1,000, with about 2,000 civilians also being employed. The reception center was organized in December, 1940, in a little tent village which had formerly been used by Civilian Military Training Camp trainees during the summer months. Under the direction of Colonel H. P. Kayser, new frame buildings were erected and the center was expanded. By February, 1941, the center was fully equipped to receive, clothe, classify, and assign new men inducted from a three-state area.

BECOMES INDUCTION STATION

The induction station, originally established at the army recruiting headquarters in downtown Salt Lake City, was moved to Fort Douglas in January, 1944, where it continued to operate. In November of that year the separation center was established and, during the demobilization period that followed the war, it served as the last stopover on the road home for thousands of GI's who received their discharges there. Before the termination of this service, more than 56,000 enlisted men and over 7,000 officers were processed there for release from active duty.

At one time during the war, the post housed 220 WAVES and had a detachment of WACS assigned to it; and in 1942 alone, the Finance Office at the fort made a total distribution of a little less than \$100,000,000.

In 1946 the Ninth Corps Headquarters was returned to the Presidio of San Francisco and the separation center at the fort was ordered to close. But troops from Utah, Nevada, Montana, and Idaho still continued to be inducted through Fort Douglas, and by the end of 1946 the separation center was once again opened.

In 1947, Fort Douglas was declared surplus to the needs of the army, although various agencies continued to operate on the post, and it still remained a military garrison. During the succeeding years, agencies such as the Veterans' Administration,

the Bureau of Mines, the Forest Service, and the United States Geological Survey found housing on the post.

In 1954, the Defense Department returned the Finance Office to Fort Douglas and the post continued to operate as an important agent for army affairs throughout the intermountain area. Throughout the early 1960's the post continued to function as headquarters for reserve and national guard units, and in 1962 the Defense Department established the Deseret Test Center, where representatives of the navy, army, air force, and marine corps, together with officers of the United States Public Health Service, performed tests in conjunction with research work conducted at the Dugway Proving Ground.

In November, 1964, the post commander, Colonel Joe Ahee, announced the decision of the Secretary of Defense to inactivate Fort Douglas, along with a number of other military installations. The expansion of Salt Lake City and the changed needs of the army wrote the final chapter in the history of Fort Douglas. The post was ordered to be completely inactivated as a military garrison by July, 1967.

In accordance with the orders, Utah's governor, Calvin L. Rampton, appointed a special committee to make a study concerning the disposal of fort property. The findings of this committee, headed by David K. Watkiss, have become the official position of the State of Utah. The committee recommended that the best use for the fort would be to maintain it as a military installation. With only a slim chance existing for this alternative, other recommendations were made for various portions of post property according to need, demand, and feasibility of preservation.⁸

HISTORIC BUILDINGS

A number of old, historic buildings, including the fine old post chapel, dating from the 1870's and 1880's, as well as from later periods, and of course Stilwell Field, remain in an excellent state of preservation. It is the hope of the Utah State Historical Society that many of these buildings, as well as the old parade ground, be preserved. It appears that these hopes will largely be fulfilled. It also seems likely that the University of Utah will obtain a good portion of Fort Douglas property.

⁸For a discussion of these needs, demands, and recommendations, see Lyman C. Pedersen, Jr., "History of Fort Douglas, Utah." Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Department of History, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, 1967.

The economic impact of Fort Douglas throughout its long history upon the community of Salt Lake City and upon the state as a whole has been one of the most remarkable features of the post's existence. Its passing signals the loss of a valuable asset to the State of Utah.

One hundred and five years have passed since Colonel Connor and his dusty volunteers crossed the Jordan and warily approached the city of the saints. The early years of mistrust, suspicion, and hostility gradually eased into decades of mutual respect and admiration. Over the years citizens of Utah have gained a love for the old fort and consider it an important part of the state's heritage. Although General Connor has been pictured as a Mormon hater and Brigham Young as an implacable foe to soldiers in Utah, neither concept is wholly true. While both were unquestionably suspicious of the motives of the other, the general admired Mormon industry and efficiency and the Church President was impressed with Connor's determination.

Soldiers sent to the Wasatch frontier were no different than those sent on countless Indian trails in the West, to the Philippines, the Argonne Forest, Bastogne, Seoul, or the Mekong Delta. Most of them who came to Utah bore no particular



Fort Douglas from Headquarters about 1885. (By courtesy of the Utah State Historical Society.)

grudge against the Mormons either before they came or after they departed from Fort Douglas. Mormon writers have generally overemphasized the corruptive influence of the soldiers and the vindictive pressure of their leaders, while more often than not non-Mormon writers have been overly defensive of the military and have generally failed to understand the causes which forced the Mormon people to seek a remote home in the western mountains.

The history of Fort Douglas has been incompletely and often improperly understood. As late as 1964 an article appeared in a Utah publication stating that Fort Douglas was occupied from 1862 to 1866, "and intermittently until the present."⁹ Rather than intermittently, Fort Douglas operated continuously as a regular western garrison during all of that long period of time, and monthly post returns were forwarded regularly showing garrison strength and activities for each month. This same article stated that no troops were garrisoned at Fort Douglas during 1921; yet the *Post Returns* list the garrison strength for every month of that year.

Old Fort Douglas as a garrisoned post is gone, but from its height on the Wasatch Bench, it still commands a sweeping view of the broad valley of the Great Salt Lake, with the twisting Jordan River flowing from the south to the salty shores of the lake. Red Butte Canyon in its unspoiled beauty still rolls behind the fort, and trees still shade the graves of the fallen heroes of Bear River, including General Connor himself who died in 1891. Although on most days the busy city noises can be heard, in the still of the evening the solitary visitor can still hear a roll of muffled drums, the tramping feet of the California Volunteers, or far away music from an evening concert by the boys of the Thirty-eighth.

In many ways the spirit of old Camp Douglas still lingers on. Among the shadows of Stilwell Field, old soldiers of the past still march in review and then disappear among yesterday's "Boys in Blue." Officers of the last command still render a lingering salute when passing the grave of Patrick Edward Connor, a Volunteer of long ago.

⁹Thomas G. Alexander and Leonard J. Arrington, "The Utah Military Frontier, 1872-1912," *Utah Historical Quarterly*, XXXII, No. 4 (Fall, 1964), 330.