

**The
Military History
of
Fort Missoula**

Wallace J. Long



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4-14-1905

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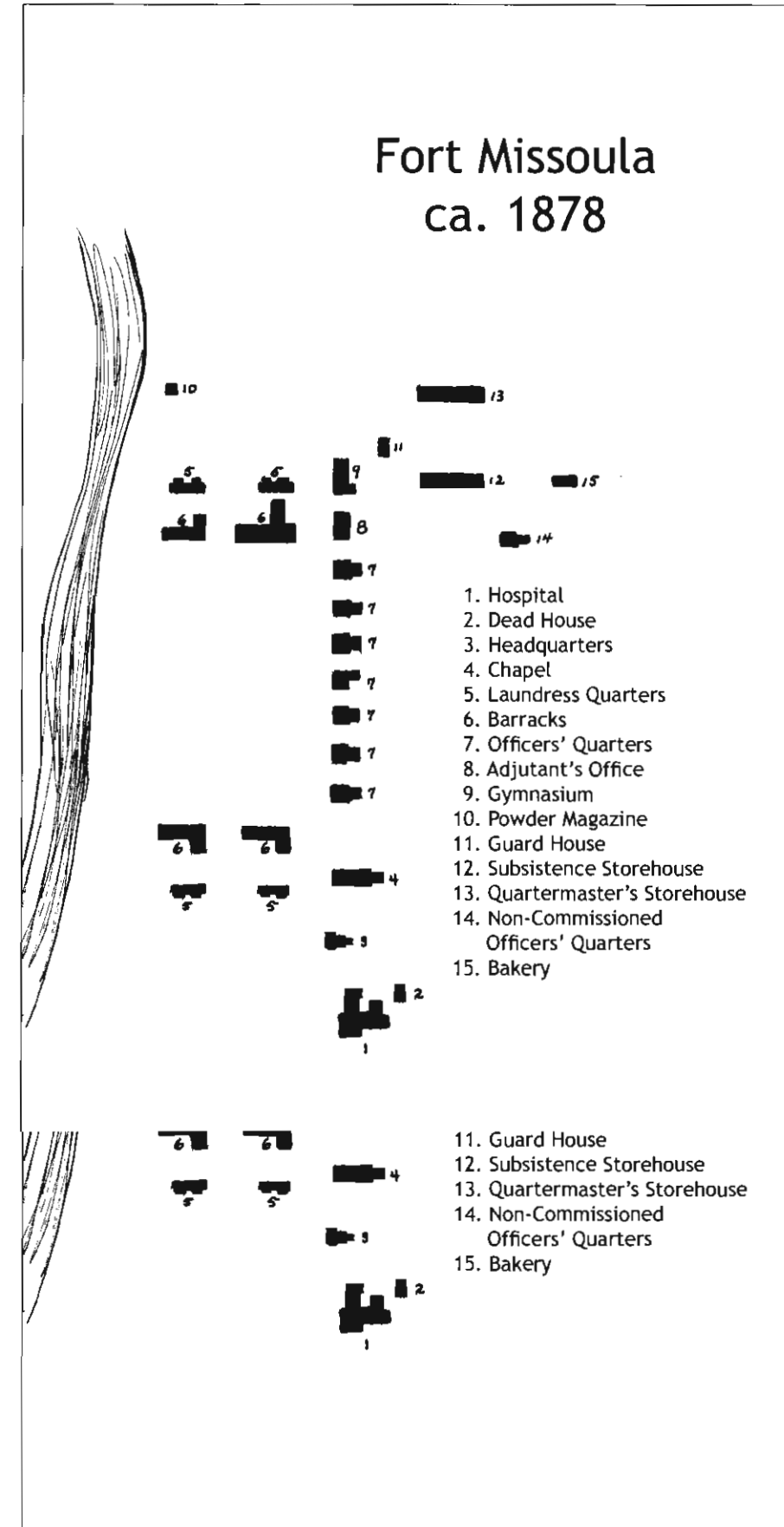
Cover Photo
Members of 25th Infantry Bicycle Corps ca. 1897
B.I. j-3, Elrod Collection, K. Ross Toole Archives
The University of Montana-Missoula

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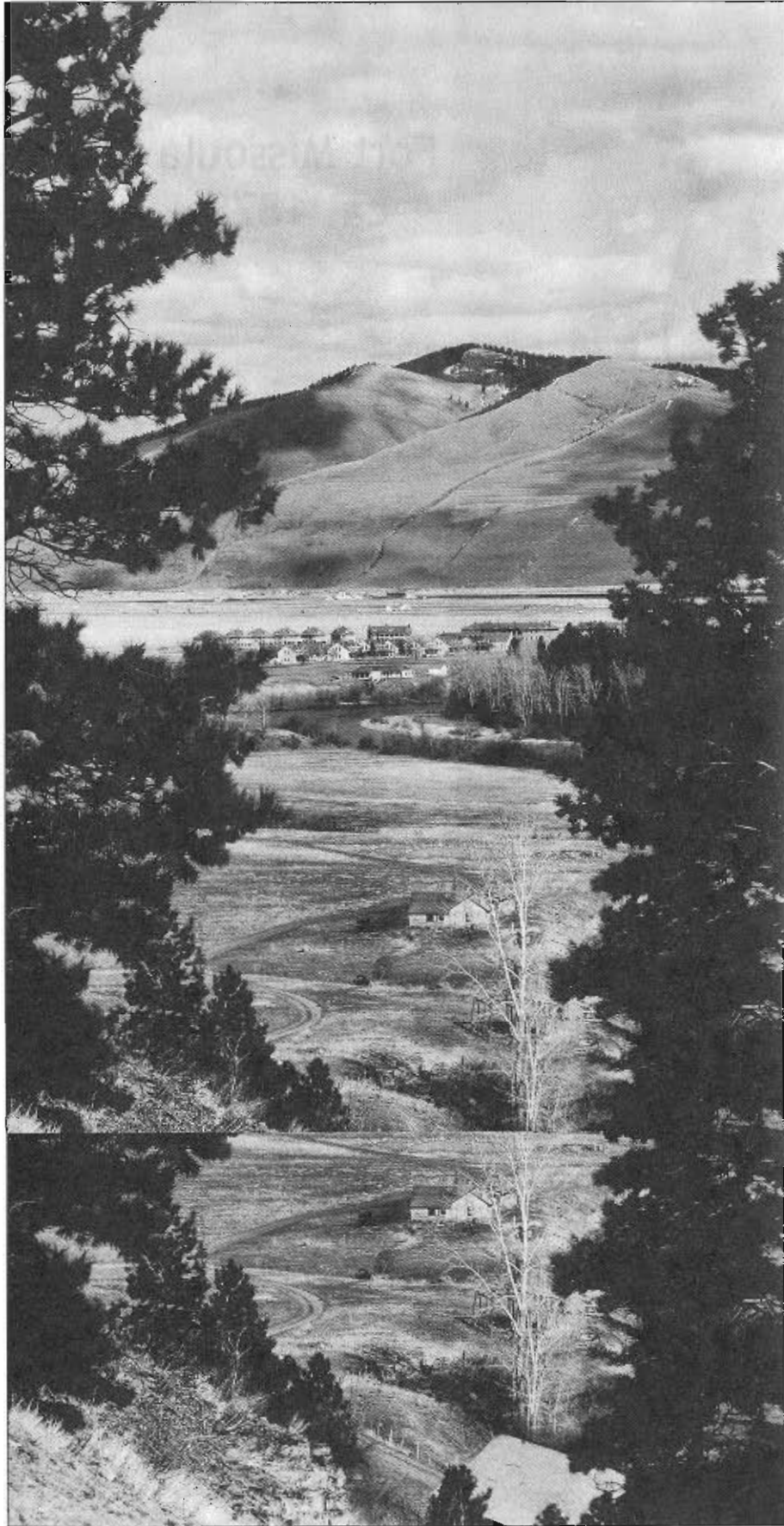
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1878 plan of Fort Missoula



Fort Missoula ca. 1918

Richard & Prudence Smith Collection HM@FM

Fort Missoula

Chief Red Cloud's war against the forts along the Bozeman Trail, especially Fort C.F. Smith in the Montana Territory and Fort Phil Kearney in the Wyoming Territory, caused panic among Montana citizens in 1867. This panic resulted in a deluge of telegrams from acting Governor Thomas F. Meagher to Secretary of War Edwin Stanton requesting additional federal troops and permission to call out the Montana militia. Neither request was officially granted. The militia, however, took up arms and roamed about the countryside. They accomplished very little in the process, other than to run up a bill for \$1,100,000 which was forwarded to the War Department. After a series of investigations, the territorial government was reimbursed \$515,343 in 1872, but the military built no forts for the defense of western Montana.

In the spring of 1874, Indian problems again prompted the citizens of Missoula, Governor Benjamin Potts, and Territorial Delegate Martin Maginnis to issue a series of petitions and testimonials to Congress. President Ulysses Grant ordered the removal of the Flathead Indians from the Bitter Root valley to the Jocko valley. Chief Charlo refused to leave, raising the possibility of hostilities. The petitions requested a new military post to be located in Missoula, ostensibly to control the Indians of the area. The local newspapers; however, stated in editorials that the presence of soldiers would "invite immigration..., stimulate the development of resources..., and would be an advantage to business." Variations of this theme appeared all through 1874 and 1875.

Bowing to political pressures, the War Department sent Lieutenant Colonel Wesley Merritt, 9th Cavalry, to the Missoula valley in January, 1876. He examined a number of potential locations and in a report dated February 8, 1876, recommended that a one or two company post be built at or near Hellgate Pass. After his superiors approved the recommendation, Lieutenant Colonel Charles C. Gilbert,

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Indian losses were estimated to number about 80 men, women, and children. Army and civilian volunteer casualties were 29 dead and 36 wounded. Companies A and I, augmented by Companies D and G, left the Big Hole battlefield August 15th and returned to the post at Missoula a few days later.



Ambulance from Fort Missoula

Helen Peregoy Collection HM@FM

A year later, during the summer of 1878, the garrison at Fort Missoula took part in the last action against the Nez Perce. It was also the last real military activity that the Fort would see for twenty years. A band of free-roving Nez Perce, who had crossed into Canada and were returning to the ancestral homeland, killed some whites in the Rock Creek area east of Missoula and fled toward Idaho. First Lieutenant Thomas S. Wallace mounted a detachment and pursued them. He stripped the post of all available horses (16) and set out with 13 soldiers and two or three civilians. Overtaking the Indians on the Middle Fork of the Clearwater River in Idaho Territory, the men gave battle for two hours on July 21, 1878. Six Indians were killed and three were wounded. There were no white casualties. This was the last real military activity that the 3rd Infantry would see for the next ten years.

Meanwhile, on November 8, 1877, the post had officially been named Fort Missoula. Companies B, D, H, and I, 3rd Infantry Regiment, had replaced the 7th Infantry garrison on November 14. Newly arrived from Texas, these men lived in tents until frame barracks and non-commissioned officers' quarters were completed in February, 1878. The officers continued to rent quarters in Missoula, four miles away, until their quarters were completed in mid-summer 1878.

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25th Infantry Band in front of Florence Hotel ca. 1895

HM@FM

Life in an army at peace is characterized by isolation, boredom and monotony. The men found the necessary daily fatigues and guard duties extremely monotonous and they welcomed any kind of diversion. They found relief in gardening, playing cards, singing, dancing, horse and foot racing, field sports, baseball, temperance organizations, fraternal orders, amateur theatricals, and reading. Of course, those forms of recreation common to all armies – bad liquor and worse women – were also very popular.

So it went until May 26, 1888. Following orders for a change of garrison, the 25th Infantry officers, non-commissioned staff, band and companies G, H, I, and K began to arrive. This unit was composed of black soldiers and non-commissioned officers under the command of white officers and was one of four such groups formed in 1866. The other three were the 24th Infantry, and the 9th and 10th Cavalry Regiments. Eventually all of these regiments, or parts thereof, served in Montana. Only units of the 24th and 25th were assigned to Fort Missoula.

Considering the attitude of the nation as a whole, the relationship between these black soldiers and the community was excellent. The lack of incidents recorded in the police blotters and the Army court-black soldiers and non-commissioned officers under the command of white officers and was one of four such groups formed in 1866. The other three were the 24th Infantry, and the 9th and 10th Cavalry Regiments. Eventually all of these regiments, or parts thereof, served in Montana. Only units of the 24th and 25th were assigned to Fort Missoula.

Considering the attitude of the nation as a whole, the relationship between these black soldiers and the community was excellent. The lack of incidents recorded in the police blotters and the Army court-martial proceedings indicates a high level of self-discipline and integrity among these men.

Normal routine was interrupted in November, 1890, by the departure of Companies F and H for Pine Ridge, South Dakota. Although



25th Infantry Band, ca. 1897

B.I. j-4, Elrod Collection,
K. Ross Toole Archives, UM-Missoula

they were not involved in the fighting there, they policed the Sioux Reservation until order was restored at the end of January, 1891. Between 1892 and 1895, conflicts involving unions, mine owners and railroads kept the 25th moving to points in Idaho and Montana, with orders to protect the mail, and public and private property.

Fort Missoula became the home of the 25th Infantry Bicycle Corps in 1897. Most of the world's armies were looking for some means to replace or augment the horse in military transportation, and the bicycle became an object of intense experimentation. Despite the grandiose title, the Corps was authorized initially to have one lieutenant, one sergeant, one corporal, one musician, and five privates. A maximum strength of twenty-four men was reached before the Corps was disbanded in May, 1898.

Second Lieutenant James A. Moss commanded the unit. Under his leadership, the men were soon able to drill, scale fences up to nine feet high, ford streams and ride forty miles a day. Each bicycle carried a knapsack, blanket roll and shelter half-strapped to the handlebar. A haversack went under the horizontal bar, and a cup was kept in a guthouse unit; the corps was authorized initially to have one lieutenant, one sergeant, one corporal, one musician, and five privates. A maximum strength of twenty-four men was reached before the Corps was disbanded in May, 1898.

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Bicycle Corps ca. 1897

73-31, K. Ross Toole Archives, UM-Missoula

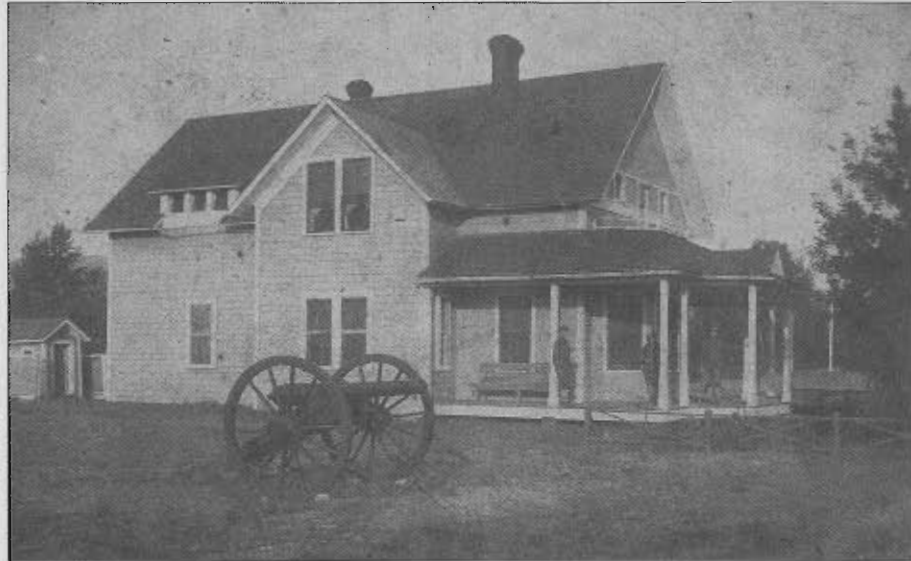
War with Spain put an end to this bicycle training. The 25th Infantry Regiment was the first regular unit called for duty. A large crowd gave these men a warm and hearty send off as they marched out of Fort Missoula for the last time in April, 1898.

A locally recruited company of volunteers re-occupied the post through the month of May. These men underwent drill and instruction in military life under the leadership of Captain Frank Higgins,



Officers' Row, 1918

82-219, K. Ross Toole Archives, UM-Missoula



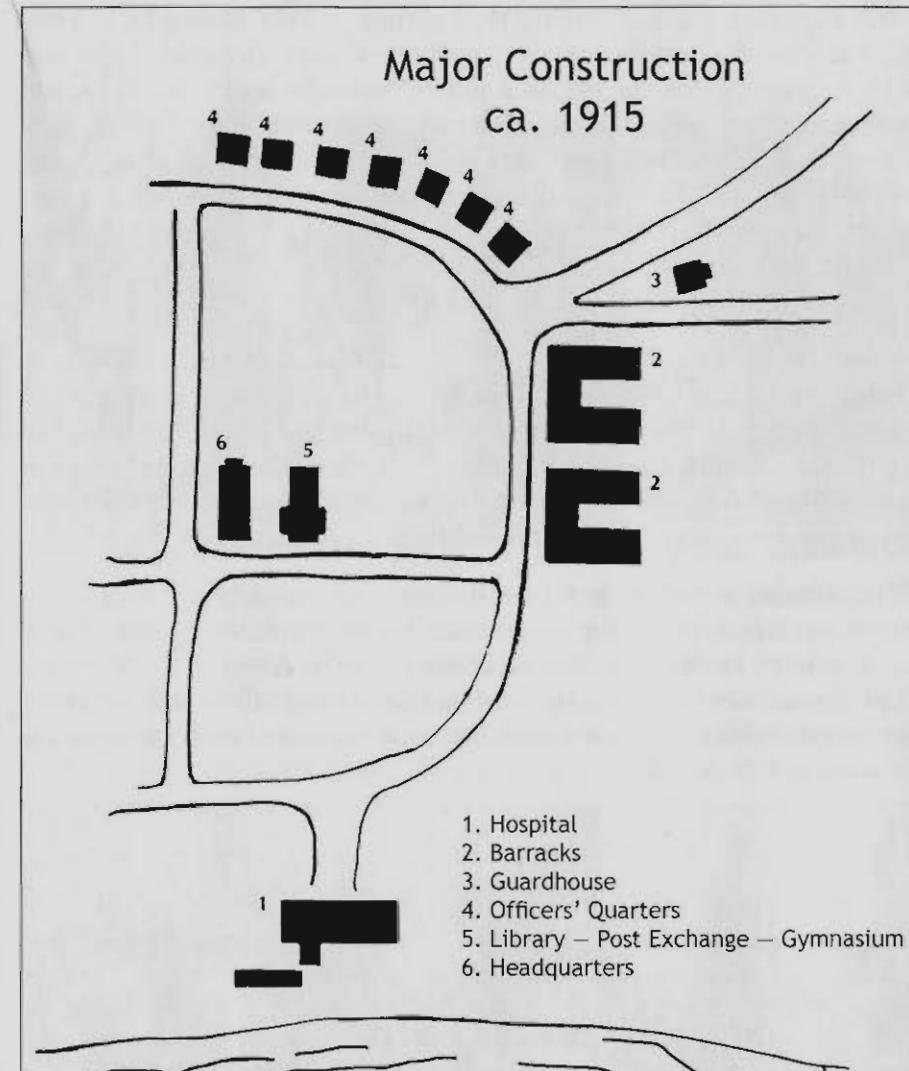
Commanding Officer's home ca. 1915

Walter Gilbert Sullivan
Memorial Collection HM@FM

son of one of Missoula's founders. They eventually became Troop F, 3rd United States Volunteer Cavalry. By the end of May, they were sent to Camp Thomas, Georgia. Once there, they fell victim to heat, disease and official neglect. They returned to Missoula in September, 1898, with one man dead and many ill, a result of unsanitary conditions in the camp.

Except for small detachments varying in size from six to sixteen men, Fort Missoula was unoccupied until 1901. In that year, the principal buildings and grounds of the Fort consisted of four frame barracks, two at each end of the parade ground, and one single set and six double sets of wood frame officers' quarters along the north side of the parade ground, facing the river bank. The parade ground was rectangular, approximately 850 by 400 feet. Surrounding facilities included N.C.O. Quarters (one still in existence), a powder magazine (still in existence), laundresses' quarters, stables, corrals, sheds, shops, storehouses, hospital, dead house, guardhouse, bakery, and the post gardens. A target range at McCauley's Bluff, three-quarters of a mile west of the post, and a 1577-acre timber reserve in Pattee Canyon, six miles east of the post, completed the facilities.

In August 1901, a regular garrison arrived, Company C, 8th Infantry Regiment. This was the first of a series of units ranging in strength from one to four companies that occupied the Fort.



Post Hospital ca. 1880

K. Ross Toole Archives, UM-Missoula

The significant event during this period of Fort Missoula's development was the building of a virtually new post. Between 1908 and 1915, officers' quarters, enlisted men's barracks and a post hospital were constructed of concrete and steel. Brick was used for the new quartermaster's storehouse (now the home of Historical Museum at Fort Missoula) and the headquarters building. A post exchange, root cellars, coal sheds, a new bakery and a guardhouse were also added. The Spanish-style architecture which was in vogue at the time is especially evident in the hospital building.

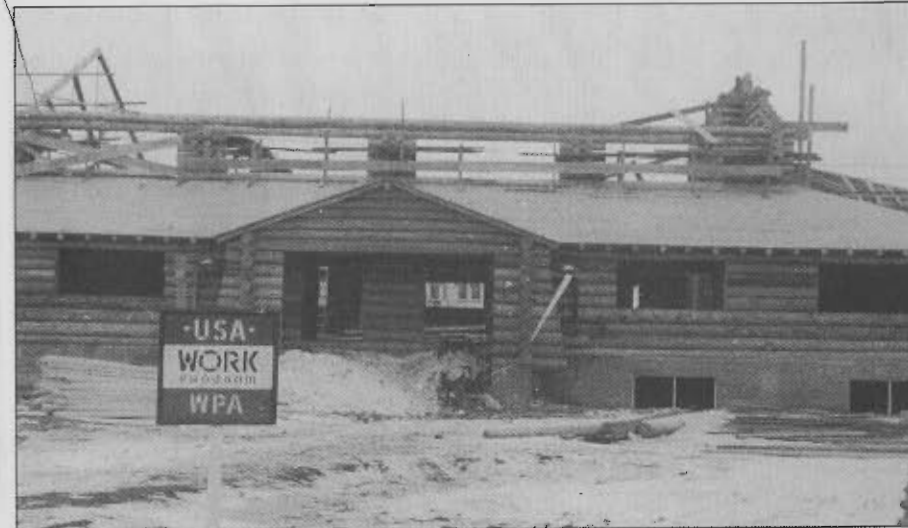
With the work completed in 1915, Fort Missoula was abandoned. World War I almost bypassed the Fort. Some of the buildings housed soldier-students. The University of Montana had been authorized to conduct a school for motor vehicle mechanics. The curriculum centered around courses in wartime emergency repairs of trucks and passenger cars. Several hundred soldiers passed through the school.

The Armistice put an end to any large scale activity until 1921. At that time, the Army assigned the 1st Battalion, 58th Infantry Regiment, to duty at the Fort. A restructuring of the Army in 1922 resulted in the unit being re-designated as the 1st Battalion, 4th Infantry Regiment. Under the new name, the unit remained at Fort Missoula for the next 19 years.



4th Infantry marching ca. 1930

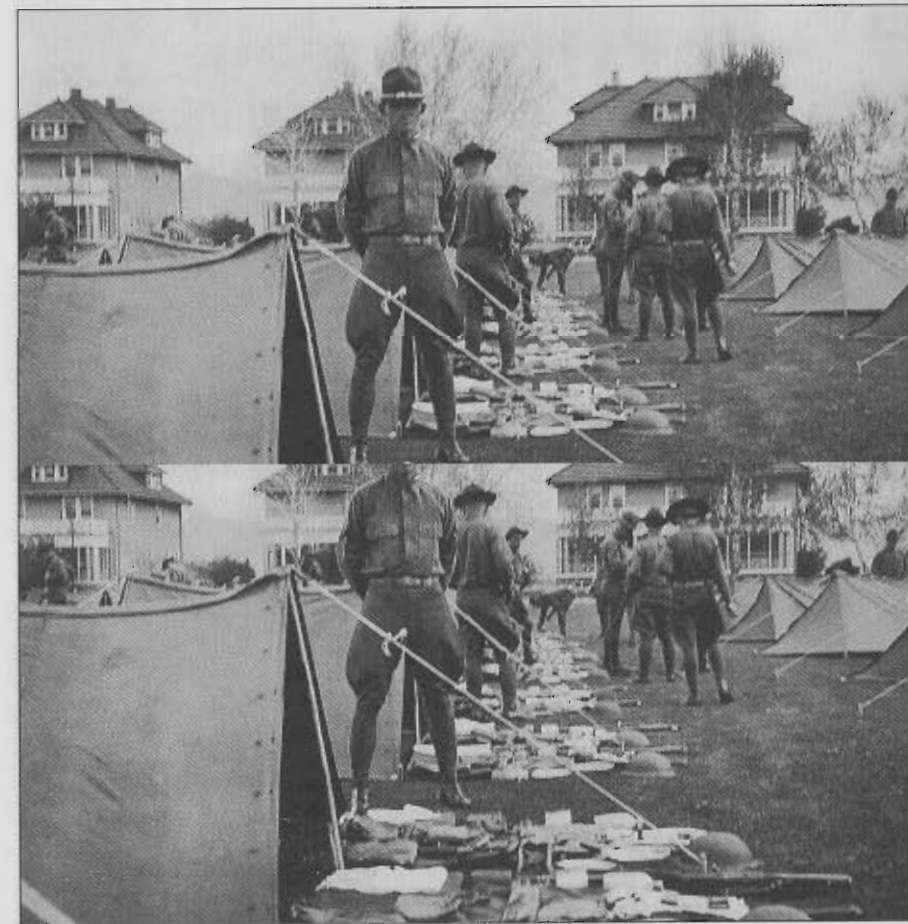
Norm Blashill Collection HM@FM



Recreation Hall WPA Project 1938

Walter H. Saxton Collection HM@FM

The Army and its active installations acquired a new mission in the 1930's when they organized, administered and housed the Civilian Conservation Corps. Fort Missoula became a regional headquarters for a number of CCC camps in the area. In addition to maintaining its own crews, it served as supply center for camps throughout Montana and parts of the Northwest. This activity ended with the declaration of war in 1941.



Full field inspection 1939

Walter H. Saxton Collection HM@FM



Immigration Service Headquarters 1941-44 Marion McLaughlin (Mrs. Leonard)
Kuka Collection HM@FM



1941-44 Internment Camp Capt. Carlo Fava Collection HM@FM



Thanksgiving 1941 Capt. Carlo Fava Collection HM@FM



Italian internee soccer team Peter Fortune Memorial Collection HM@FM

In that year, control of Fort Missoula went to the Immigration and Naturalization Service. The agency established an internment camp for civilian Italian seamen and a few Germans. Whenever ships of the Axis nations entered or were stranded in American seaports, the crews were placed in protective custody. Located in an area remote from vital war industries and international borders and boasting modern construction, Fort Missoula was determined to be an excellent choice for such a camp.

About 1200 Italians and an unknown number of Germans were incarcerated here until December 1943. Well-treated and well-fed, they helped to erect fences, pre-fabricated dormitories and other structures as needed. Except for this type of labor, most were confined without physical employment for about 16 months. Eventually some of these men went to work outside the compound. Some were employed in the harvest of the sugar beet crops and others in the forest products industry. Liberation of southern Italy in late 1943 resulted



Scrap drive, WWII, Fort Missoula

Peter Fortune Memorial Collection HM@FM

in the release of most of the internees the following year. Some chose to remain permanently in the Missoula area.

Immediately following the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, panic and racism ran rampant along the West Coast. Thousands of Japanese-American citizens were deprived of their rights. One thousand men were sent to the alien detention camp at Fort Missoula. Upon their arrival, the rather lax control enjoyed by the Italian seamen was tightened. The number of Border Patrol Officers was increased from 25 to 50 and additional civilian guards were hired. For cultural reasons, the two groups of prisoners chose not to mix. Eventually, they were placed in separate compounds.

As the fear subsided, the Japanese-Americans were also allowed to work outside the camp. They helped harvest sugar beets and truck



Italian mess hall, 1942

Peter Fortune Memorial Collection HM@FM

garden produce. They were released and allowed to return to their homes early in 1944.

With the expansion of the armed forces of the United States from approximately 250,000 military personnel to a total of over ten million, the military prison system was overwhelmed by an unprecedented number of prisoners. In order to increase the prison capacity, each of the nine service commands into which the U.S. was divided established a medium security Branch Disciplinary Barracks. The Ninth Service Command, headquartered at Fort Douglas, Salt Lake City, Utah, established its branch at Fort Missoula on June 23, 1944. The facility housed court-martialed army personnel whose sentences ranged from two years to almost 30 years. Some 2000 prisoners would pass through this facility. The maximum number held at one time was 1,750. The staff and guard personnel formed the 1969th Service Command Unit. This unit consisted of 560 officers, 576 en-



Japanese internee golfing at Fort Missoula

Peter Fortune Memorial Collection HM@FM

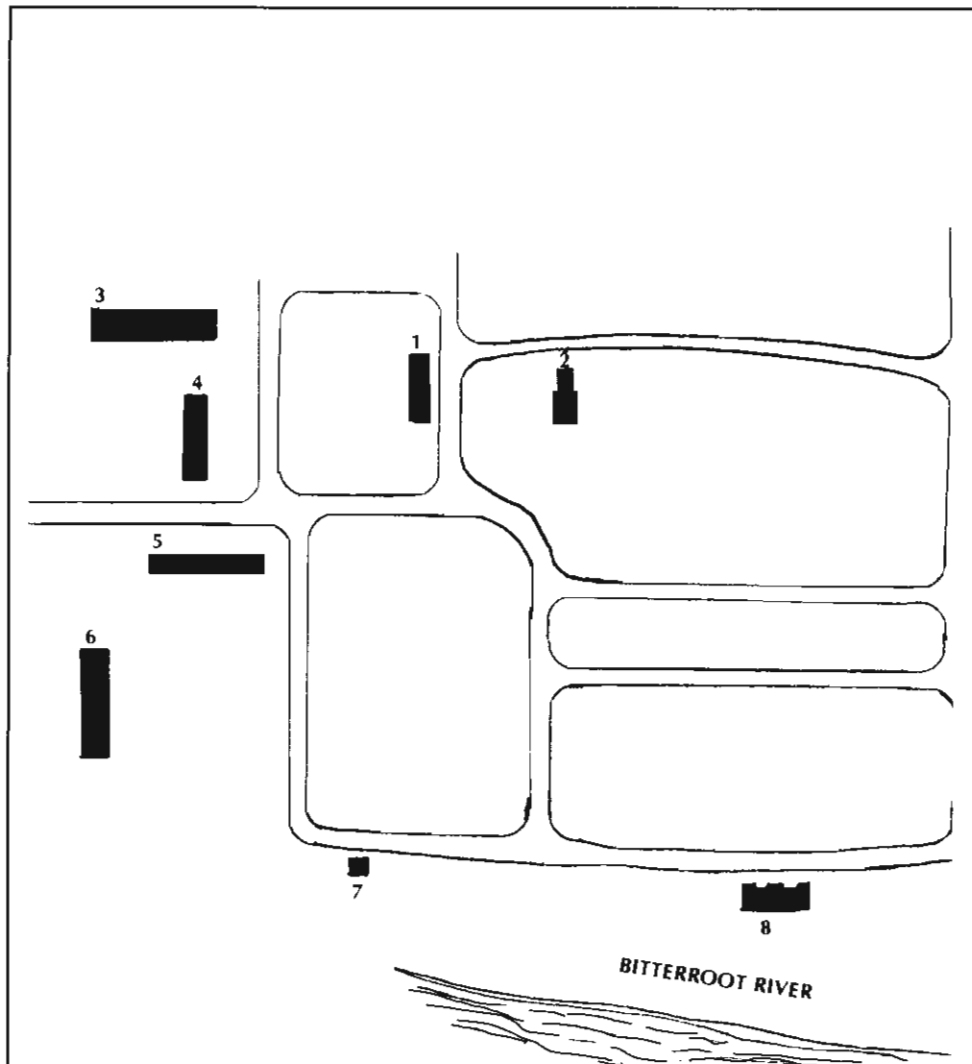
listed personnel and 171 civilian personnel. This was the fort's largest garrison.

During the life of the prison (July, 1944-October, 1946), 110 prisoners escaped and all were eventually re-captured. One prisoner was shot to death trying to escape. By late 1946, all prisoners had been sent to other installations or had been released. By May, 1947, all of the staff personnel were gone. Only two solitary confinement cell-blocks and some concrete foundations still exist today.



Italian internees doing grounds work at Fort Missoula

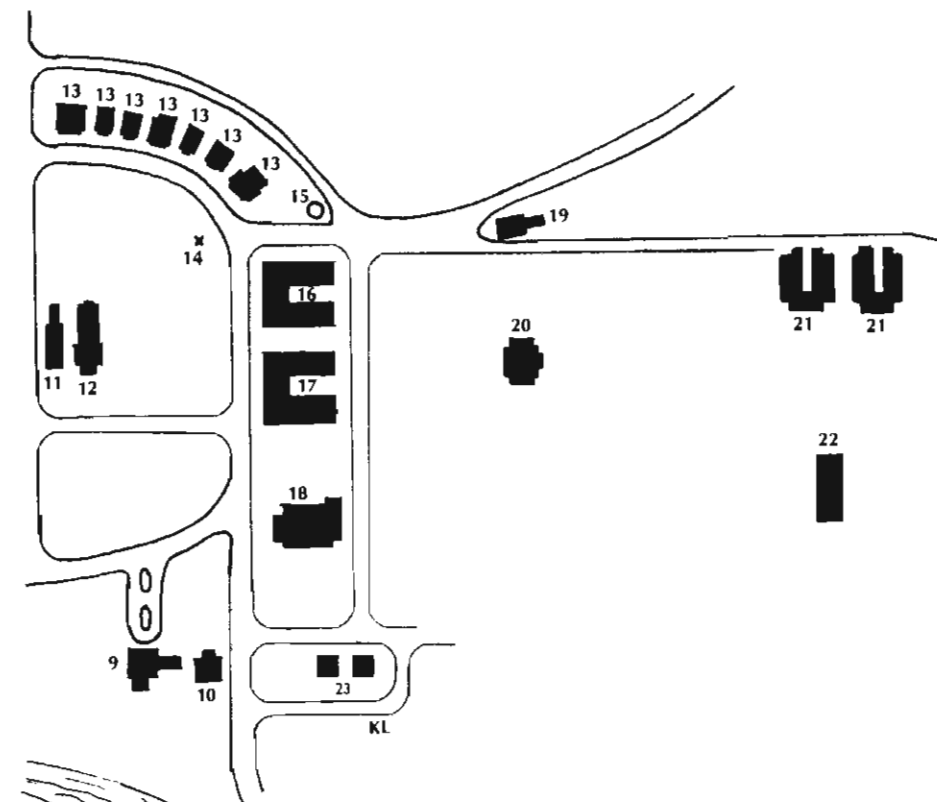
Peter Fortune Memorial Collection HM@FM



- 1. Historical Museum (*Fort. Mason's Wheel*)
- 2. NCO Quarters (original)
- 3. Warehouse
- 4. Rocky Mountain Museum of Military History
- 5. Montana National Guard
- 6. Montana National Guard
- 7. Powder Magazine (original)
- 8. Child Development Center

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- 8. Child Development Center
- 9. Western Montana Mental Health Center
- 10. Former Nurses' Quarters
- 11. Former "New Post" Headquarters Building
- 12. Former Library, Post Exchange, Gymnasium

Fort Missoula Today



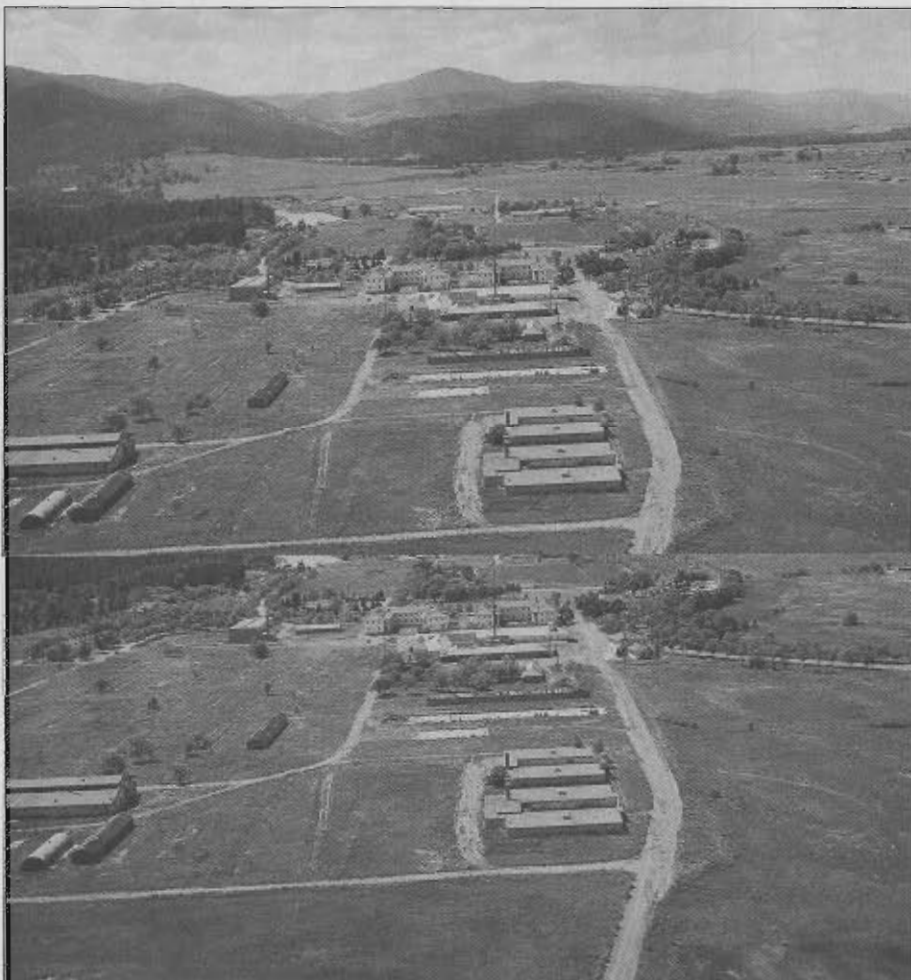
- 13. Former Officers' Quarters
- 14. Flagpole
- 15. Nez Perce War Monument
- 16. U.S. Army Reserve
- 17. U.S. Forest Service
- 18. Army Reserve Shop
- 19. Former Guard House/Fire Station
- 20. Former Prison Bakery

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- 20. Former Prison Bakery
- 21. Former Cell Blocks
- 22. Former Stable/Prison Workshop
- 23. Former Non-Commissioned Officers' Quarters



Rec Hall destroyed by fire, 1946

John Lanier Collection HM@FM



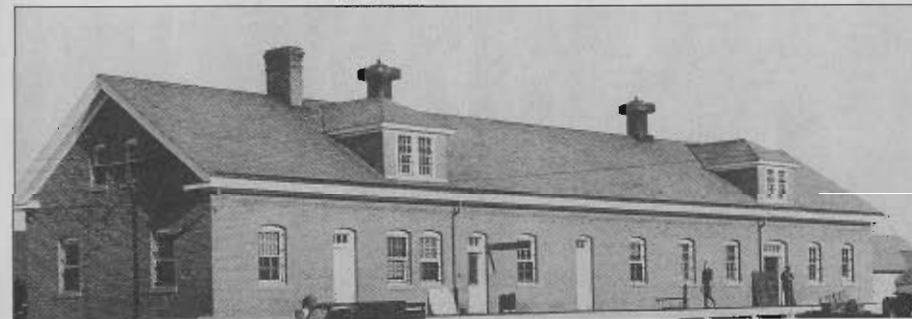
Fort Missoula ca. 1947

Robert Sonders Collection HM@FM

Postscript

Since 1947, no regular military units have been assigned to Fort Missoula. Officers' Row is now administered by the Northern Rockies Heritage Center who leases the houses to various groups including non-profits and colleges. The Army Reserve uses a former barracks (Bldg. 26), and the former recreation hall (Bldg. T-150) is a repair shop. The Montana Army National Guard has repair shops, a motor pool and storage facilities. The Forest Service uses a former barracks (Bldg. 24), the former guardhouse/fire station (Bldg. 46), the former bakery (Bldg. 152), a warehouse (Bldg. T-312), and extensive motor pool/parking areas. The University of Montana uses the former solitary confinement cell blocks (Bldgs. 156 and 157) for storage, and also utilizes the former stable/prison workshop (Bldg. 142). The former post hospital and nurse's quarters are now part of the Western Montana Mental Health Center. The Rocky Mountain Museum of Military History is housed in the former Civilian Conservation Corps headquarters building (Bldg. T-316) and in Bldg. T-310. The Historical Museum at Fort Missoula is housed in the former Quartermaster's Storehouse and also encompasses a 32 acre campus. Most of the former fort land has been parceled to various Missoula County and City Departments, the University of Montana, and to other public agencies and private businesses.

It is doubtful that Fort Missoula will ever again resound permanently to bugle calls or military commands, but the flag still flies over the servicemen and women who sleep in her cemetery, and her history is still fresh in the minds of those who care.

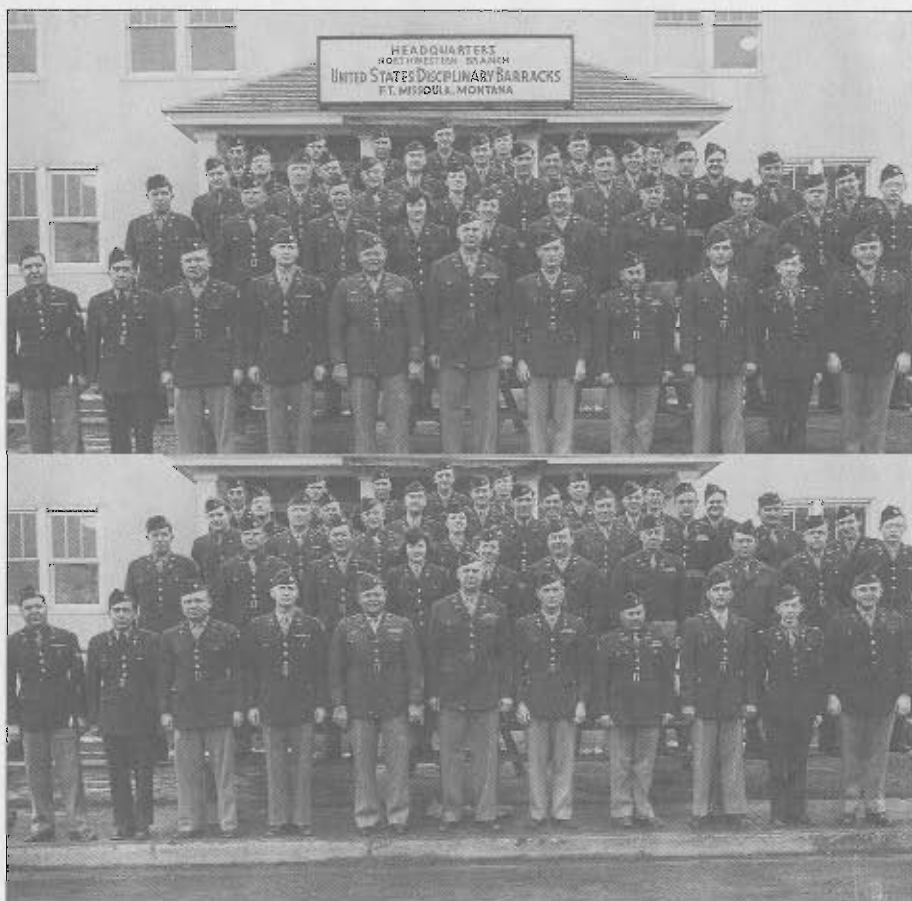


Quartermaster's Storehouse ca. 1941-44

Marion McLaughlin (Mrs. Leonard) Kuka Collection HM@FM

Points of Interest at Fort Missoula

1. Post Cemetery: graves of soldiers and dependents, and civilians stationed at Fort Missoula. Also re-internments from abandoned Fort Ellis near Bozeman, Montana (2nd Cavalry soldiers and civilians), veterans and retired soldiers from the Indian Wars to the Vietnam War. Two Medal of Honor winners: both 2nd Cavalry re-internments from Fort Ellis, are buried here. They are Michael Himmelsback (name is misspelled on his stone) and Harry Garland.
2. Nez Perce War Memorial: located next to the Army Reserve Center, Bldg. 26.
3. Sgt. Ernest Veuve Army Reserve Center: named for a Medal of Honor winner and former Fort Missoula soldier. He is buried in the Missoula Public Cemetery.
4. 1877/1878 vintage original Powder Magazine and NCO Quarters: contact the Historical Museum staff for information.
5. Historical Museum at Fort Missoula: originally constructed ca. 1911 as a quartermaster's storehouse.



Officers and Non-Commissioned Officers 1946

Shirley Lintz Collection HM@FM

Post Cemetery Guide

The Post Cemetery is located a short distance north of the buildings of Fort Missoula. It is a small cemetery and was the burial site of several notable figures from our history. To locate the following graves enter the main gate.

First row on your left are the two Medal of Honor winner's graves: #3 is Harry Garland, Nez Perce War, Camas Prairie, Idaho, 1877; #5 is Michael Himmelsbach, Little Blue River, Nebraska, 1870.

Fifth row on the left 1st grave: Aati Tyrvaainen – an accused WW I draft dodger, he was arrested in 1924 and was never tried or convicted because he starved himself to death in the post hospital. He is here because his body was never claimed.

Eighth row on the right: at the far end is the grave of Wm. Gerlick, Co. H, 3rd Infantry who was the first enlisted man to die at Fort Missoula. His was the first burial in this cemetery (1878).

Twelfth row on left: Grave 4 'Fremont child' – grandchild of Civil War General John C. Fremont (1813-1890) who was an army officer, explorer and politician. This child's father was Lieutenant Francis Fremont (1855-1931), acting commander of Fort Missoula in March 1898. Grave 5 – 1st Lieutenant Edward A. Belger who was the first officer to die at Fort Missoula in October, 1879.

Following is a short list of people, some famous, some infamous, some well-known locally, some unknown. All have had some association with Fort Missoula.

Booth, Charles A. (1850–1928) A veteran of long service in Montana during the Indian Wars and the frontier years: Fort Benton, Montana Territory 1872–1875; Fort Shaw, Montana Territory 1875–1876, 1876–1878; Montana Column, Sioux Indian War of 1876, and the Little Big Horn Campaign; Commander of Fort Missoula

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Burt, Andrew S. (1839-1915) A veteran of extended service in Montana during the Indian Wars and the frontier years: Fort C.F. Smith, Montana Territory, 1866-1868; Commanding Officer

(Colonel), 25th Infantry Regiment 1892-1898; Commander of Fort Missoula, 1892-1898; survivor of Sioux Indian War and the Little Big Horn Campaign, 1876.

Coues, Elliot, Professor (1842-1899) Army surgeon (Civil War), naturalist, famed for ornithological studies and for services on government surveys; noted editor of a four volume history of the Lewis and Clark Expedition; visited Fort Missoula, date unknown.

Lawson, Gaines. Congressional Medal of Honor winner, Civil War, 1861. Captain, 25th Infantry; Acting Commanding Officer, Fort Missoula, July 16-25, 1891 and April-July 1892.

Pinchot, Gifford (1865-1946) Conservationist, Chief of Division of Forestry, Department of Agriculture, 1892-1910; Governor of Pennsylvania, 1923-1927, 1931-1935; visited Fort Missoula, date unknown.

Rawn, Charles Cotesworth (1837-1887) First Commanding Officer of Fort Missoula as a Captain, 7th Infantry, June 25, 1877-November 14, 1877; Civil War veteran.

Rumrich, Guenther Gustav, alias Theodor Koerner, Sergeant, U.S. Army; drug addict, alcoholic, army deserter (twice), embezzler of mess funds (Fort Missoula); became a spy for the Germans (May 1936-February 1938), captured, tried, convicted and sentenced to two years in prison. Disappeared from the record after his release.

Sherman, William Tecumseh (1820-1891) Civil War hero, leader of "The March to the Sea" (1864). Commanding General of the Army (1869-1883). He visited the site of Fort Missoula in the fall of 1877, ordered the post size increased up to a four-company post.

Twain, Mark, pseudonym of Samuel Clemens (1835-1910) American author and humorist; visited the garrison at Fort Missoula in August, 1895. Mr. Clemens was on a tour that included speaking in Missoula. He spent the day at the fort at the invitation of Col. A.S. Burt.

Veuve, Ernest (1843-1916) Congressional Medal of Honor Winner (Texas, 1874). He was a sergeant on duty with the quartermaster's office at Fort Missoula (November 1877-January 1880). He resigned from the army, married a local woman, and went into business in Missoula as a wood merchant. He is buried in the Missoula Public Cemetery.

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Fort Missoula Garrisons

(figures are approximate)

		Officers and Men
25 June 1877 - Aug. 1877	Co. A & I, 7th Inf.	55
Aug. 1877 - 14 Nov. 1877	Co. A, D, G, I, 7th Inf.	120
14 Nov. 1877 - 26 May 1888	Co. B, D, H, I, 3rd Inf.	130
26 May 1888 - Apr. 1898	Co. G, H, I, K, F, 25th Inf.	220
May 1898 - Aug. 1901	Caretaker Detachments	6-16
Aug. 1901 - May 1902	Co. C, 8th Inf.	80
May 1902 - Aug. 1902	Co. L, 24th Inf.	70
Aug. 1902 - 22 Dec. 1905	Co. I, K, L, M, 24th Inf.	200
23 Dec. 1905 - 18 Nov. 1906	Co. E, F, G, H, 7th Inf.	202
18 Nov. 1906 - 28 Dec. 1909	Co. I, K, L, M, 6th Inf.	223
28 Dec. 1909 - 20 Mar. 1910	Co. K, 2nd Inf.	31
20 Mar. 1910 - 15 Feb. 1913	Co. I, K, L, M, 14th Inf.	240
15 Feb. 1913 - 25 Feb. 1913	Co. A, B, C, D, 18th Inf.	220
25 Feb. 1913 - 12 Oct. 1914	Caretaker Detachments	15
Oct. 1914 - 10 Apr. 1915	Co. I, K, L, M, 14th Inf.	225
10 Apr. 1915 - 11 Sept. 1921	Caretaker Detachments and Mechanics School ✓	5-100
11 Sept. 1921 - May 1941	1st Battalion, 4th Inf.	260
1941 - May 1944	Civilian and Border Patrol Guards	62
1944 - Apr. 1947	Army Serv. Command Unit 1969	535
11 Sept. 1921 - May 1941	1st Battalion, 4th Inf.	260
1941 - May 1944	Civilian and Border Patrol Guards	62
1944 - Apr. 1947	Army Serv. Command Unit 1969	535

Caretaker detachments included men from Hospital Corps, 13th Cavalry Regiment, 4th Cavalry, 25th Infantry, 2nd Infantry, 7th Infantry

Acknowledgments

My thanks to the former and the present staff at the Historical Museum at Fort Missoula for their patience and encouragement for the original edition and the revised editions of this book.

My thanks to all the past and present staff members at the Mansfield Library, University of Montana, for their assistance with the original and revised editions.

My thanks to the Friends of the Historical Museum at Fort Missoula for their continued backing of this project.

Special thanks to my wife Karla for her continuing support.

Any mistakes or misinterpretations of the facts are solely my responsibility.

Wallace J. Long