A History Of Fort Shaw, Montana, From 1867 To 1892

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A HISTORY OF FORT SHAW,
MONTANA,
FROM 1867 TO 1892.

by

ANNE M. DIEKHANS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
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BY

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BY

[Signature]

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PREFACE

Fort Shaw existed as a military post between the years of 1867 and 1892. The purpose of this thesis is to present the history of the post in its military aspects during that period. Other aspects are included but the emphasis is on the function of Fort Shaw as district headquarters of the United States Army in Montana Territory.

I would like to thank all those who assisted me in any way in the writing of this thesis. I especially want to thank Miss Virginia Walton of the Montana Historical Society and the Rev. John McCarthy of the Carroll faculty for their aid and advice in the writing of this thesis. For technical advice I am indebted to Sister Mary Ambrosia of the English department at Carroll College. I also wish to thank the Rev. James R. White, Mr. Thomas A. Clinch, and Mr. Richard Duffy who assisted with advice and pictures. Thank you is also in order to Mrs. Shirley Coggeshall of Helena who typed the manuscript.

A.M.D.
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CHAPTER I

GENERAL BACKGROUND

The reasons behind the establishment of Port Shaw in Montana Territory in the decade of the 1860's reach back beyond the boundaries of both the date and place of its establishment. Events far from its site had an influence on the post's origin and development, as they did on the whole territory. To be sure, the most basic purpose for the establishment of Port Shaw was the same as that for most western army posts, namely, the protection of the settlers. The frontier was fast becoming a place where even the lawless, Indian and white alike, would be brought into submission to society's ideals. With a growing white population and the increasing Indian resentment an eventual clash was inevitable. In Blackfoot country the situation soon became critical.

"Many factors contributed to the unrest that prevailed in the Blackfoot country during the 1860's. Certainly a major underlying cause was the Civil War."¹ The effects of the Civil War on the frontier were felt in several ways. During the war Federal authorities had a tendency to temporize with the unruly tribes and this policy had bred in the recalcitrant

Indians a feeling of contempt for the U. S. Army, an attitude also generally shared by the white residents of the area. It was often said by them that ten cowboys were worth a company of soldiers. Then, too, the Indians went so often unpunished for their frequent wrongs against white settlers and their property that, when they were not punished for such actions, they reasoned it was because the whites were afraid of them.¹ This conclusion of theirs did not result in a more peaceful frontier.

All problems connected with the frontier, as well as those of pacifying and civilizing the Indian tribes, were, of course, secondary to those of the war. During the Civil War the most able government representatives were absorbed into the war effort. The field representatives left in the frontier area were for the most part weak, inept and unexperienced in dealing with the Indians and related affairs. For one period of eighteen months there was no Indian agent at all.²

To complicate this period of national crisis and weakness in Indian administration there were several other factors. The gold discovery at Bannack brought a horde of

² Ewers, Blackfeet, p. 236.
prospectors into territory that had been designated Indian by treaty. Indian resentment was not mitigated any in 1863 when neither agent nor annuities were sent to them. Low water hindered the passage of boats up the Missouri but to the Blackfeet it just seemed to be still another broken treaty. The Sioux, traditional enemy of the Blackfeet, were on the warpath and the Indian agent, Major Reed, was at his home in Epworth, Iowa, over a thousand miles from his field station and not in a position to be effective.\(^1\)

A good portion of the trouble lay not with the Indians but with the white invaders of the Indian hunting grounds. Many trespassed on treaty-designated Indian territory and violated terms of treaties that the U. S. Government had made with the Blackfeet. A good share of the whites entering the territory were from the dregs of white society. These people were not ideally suited to getting along with their fellow whites, let alone avoiding violence with the Indians. They were as much a problem to the frontier lawman as they were to the Indians.

Whiskey-runners demoralized the Indians. When the Indians stole horses (to them not a crime but an admirable feat and honorable sport) the whites retaliated by murder. Sometimes

\(^1\) Ewers, *Blackfeet*, p. 236.
Indians were even killed on the streets of the frontier settlements as well as on the plains by Indian-hating whites. The Indians retaliated by killing whites caught away from the settlements.¹

The problem of the defense of the frontier fell to General William Tecumseh Sherman. The problem was complicated by the fact that Sherman had to fight Indians while the country was technically at peace. Taxes were being reduced and consequently the army and appropriations were being cut, while the settlers and miners were demanding absolute protection. Railroads had to be built and defended. There were vast distances over which transportation had to be provided. Cavalry was made terribly expensive by the need to transport grain, of which a large amount was lost to rats and mice. The continual westward rush of population, often in violation of treaties, into Indian country, year by year pushed the frontier and its posts before it. These factors made Sherman's problems complex and enormous. He attempted to keep the white men and Indians from clashing but it was impossible to do so.²

Among factors that further impaired the army's effectiveness was the fact that authority in the territory regarding

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¹ Ewers, Blackfeet, p. 236.
Indian affairs was divided between the Army and Interior de-
partments. Meanwhile conditions within the U. S. Army it-
self at this crucial time were very unsatisfactory. The offi-
cers had received their military training in the campaigns of
the Civil War, which had almost nothing in common with the
Indian warfare of the frontier, so they were unfamiliar with
Indian fighting. The soldiers were unfamiliar with frontier life, and desertions were frequent and often successful. At
many posts discipline was lax, which deteriorated the morale
of the soldiers and officers still further.

The regular army of the Indian campaigns following the
Civil War can be compared to the French Foreign Legion be-
cause of the great variety within its ranks. Those ranks in-
cluded immigrants, Union veterans, ex-Confederates, "galvanized
Yankees," soldiers of fortune, and negroes, who were known to
the Indians as the "buffalo soldiers" because of the wool on
their heads. Motives of the recruits were as varied as their
background. There were those who signed up because they liked
army life, there were those who were out of jobs as victims of
the depression of the 70's, and there were those known as "snow
birds" who were winter enlistments for shelter and rations and

1 Paul F. Sharp, Whoop-Up Country; The Canadian-American West,
1865-1885, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1955,
p. 127.
who deserted in the warmer weather in the spring.\footnote{Vestal, \textit{This is the West}, p. 67.}

Central Montana was not the established home of any of the Indian tribes of the West; because of this it became an important route for many bands on hunting or raiding expeditions. It also was a retreat avenue for them when conditions became uncomfortable on their home grounds. It was not long until military leaders discovered that the area had a high strategic value in control measure.\footnote{Merrill G. Burlingame and K. Ross Toole, \textit{A History of Montana}, Vol. II, New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Co. Inc., 1957, p. 148.} One of the posts that were established in the area was Fort Shaw. It became the key base from which the army controlled the whole area as far north as the Canadian border. Strategically located on the Old North Trail where Piegans, Bloods and Blackfeet traditionally crossed the Sun and Missouri Rivers on raids into the Gallatin Valley, it became the "western bastion on the plains."\footnote{Sharp, \textit{Whoop-Up Country}, p. 127.} It was in a good location as the Sun River was a favorite thoroughfare of the Indians. They called it "the Great Medicine Road to the Buffalo."\footnote{Burlingame and Toole, \textit{loc. cit.}} General Sherman regarded Fort Shaw as the most important post in the Montana Territory, for from it the army could watch the Crees.
Assiniboins, and the River Crows as well as the Blackfoot Confederacy.¹

This was a particularly crucial era on the Great Plains. Thousands of Civil War veterans of both sides returned home only to find themselves dissatisfied with a life of hard and monotonous labor. It did not compensate for their desire for the thrill of danger and longing for adventure. Ex-Confederates found conditions in the reconstructed South unbearable. At this time the opportunities of the developing West beckoned. There was talk of the railroad construction across the plains, of gold and silver to be dug out of Montana hills, of free land for the settlers, of the profit in the hunting of furs and buffalo robes and of big money to be had in supplying the steamboats of the Missouri with wood. The most turbulent and adventurous were drawn like a magnet to the West, and the U. S. Government was almost as powerless to control them as the Indian chiefs were to control their young men.

The Indian community with its loose government seldom recognized the right of any chief to deal in its name or to make treaties binding upon it. While the elders of the tribe might follow a wise chief, the young men were seldom, if ever, under control. Indian social organization forced youths to make their names and reputations on the warpath.²

² Quaife, Army Life, p. xx.
The result of a meeting of these two groups would inevitably be a fierce struggle, and the meeting would be inevitable. Indian food, clothing and shelter depended upon the buffalo which the white civilization destroyed. Indian leaders began to think that their only hope for survival was to definitely and finally drive all whites from their lands, killing them wherever and whenever they had the chance. Regarding this policy one historian has stated, "The struggle they initiated lasted for a full decade, and the horsemen of the plains tribes are fully entitled to rank with the great fighters of the world."¹

This was one of the immediate causes for the establishment of Fort Shaw. The "Blackfoot War" as this particular segment of Indian restlessness was known, was not really an out-and-out war. When this "Blackfoot War" is compared with the all-out effort of the Piegans against their Indian enemies of earlier days, the situation with the whites becomes a more sporadic and disorganized affair. The Indians did not once between the years 1865 and 1870 attempt any general operations against the white invaders. They limited their activity to guerrilla warfare, which consisted in frequent small-scale attacks by a few warriors over a very wide theater of

¹ Quaife, Army Life, p. xxi.
war. "These actions resembled traditional Blackfoot horse raiding operations rather than their large-scale revenge raids of earlier times."\(^1\)

The situation during this "war" was aggravated by the territorial officials, who were unfitted for it. Some of them used their offices to their own interests rather than those of the public welfare and went to considerable time, trouble and expense to establish reputations as Indian fighters.

Acting Governor Thomas F. Meagher aggravated Indian problems during his brief administration by playing upon public fears to rehabilitate his waning political fortunes. Others, ambitious for economic gain, supported his drastic measures to line their pockets at federal expense.\(^2\)

Augustus Chapman, Flathead agent who went through Blackfoot country in 1867, said that the Blackfoot War scare was

The biggest humbug of the age, got up to advance his (Meagher's) political interest, and to enable a lot of bummers who surround and hang on to him to make a big raid on the United States treasury.\(^3\)

Despite such observations and reports, repeated requests from the settlers and miners for protection against Indian raids brought a portion of the U. S. Army to the area as soon as the soldiers could be spared for frontier

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1 Ewers, *Blackfeet*, pp. 243-44.
3 Ewers, *op. cit.*, p. 244.
duty after the Civil War. In the spring of 1866 a battalion of the Thirteenth Infantry came up the Missouri and established Camp Cooke at the mouth of the Judith about one hundred twenty miles below Fort Benton. The Blackfeet raids continued despite the presence of the soldiers. Horse stealing continued on a wholesale basis, and many murders were committed. The principal victims of these depredations were the citizens of Chouteau, Lewis and Clark, and Meagher counties. "Herders were killed near Fort Benton and horses were run off almost within sight of Helena and Diamond City. In six months more than a thousand head of horses were stolen." As a result of all this activity, on June 30, 1867, a military post was established on the south bank of the Sun River about twenty miles above its mouth, when Major William Clinton brought four companies of the Thirteenth Infantry up from Camp Cooke. The new post was named Camp Reynolds. Later, department orders dated July 4, 1867 changed its name to Fort Shaw. The new name took effect on August 1, 1867.

2 Ibid., p. 299.
4 Ibid. Colonel Robert G. Shaw of the Massachusetts 54th Volunteer Regiment of Negro Soldiers was killed in action at Fort Wagner on July 18, 1863, during a battle of the Civil War.
5 Hamilton, op. cit., p. 299.
Reasons for establishing the post there were, to protect and keep open the route between Fort Benton and the gold fields around Helena and secondarily to use the post to set up some type of Indian controls. The latter was not a very successful venture at first. The Indians were well-mounted and could keep well out of the reach of the infantry stationed at Fort Shaw. "During the summers of 1868 and 1869 conditions did not improve."¹ The Wells, Fargo Company had a particularly bad time of it. The Piegan's fired on the coaches, raided the stations and drove off the stock quite frequently. Finally a company of mounted cavalry was ordered from Fort Shaw to patrol the road between Kennedy's ranch and Tingley's.²

The post was established to be a keystone fort in the emerging military department of Montana and was to serve as regimental headquarters. It was the largest and most pleasantly situated of the early military posts. Although it was always an infantry post, it maintained a large number of horses for various aspects of its work, which included less combat duty than the peaceful efforts of guarding the western passes, of escort duty and of explorational activity.³ U.S.

¹ Hamilton, Wilderness to Statehood, p. 185.
Army surgeon F. L. Tawn described the site of Fort Shaw in a report to his superiors thus:

Fort Shaw, Montana Territory, is located on Sun River, about 20 miles above its mouth, in latitude 47° 30' north, longitude 111° 4' west. The elevation above the sea level is probably not less than 5,000 feet. The valley of Sun River is about 50 miles in length, with a variable width of two to five miles, and its general direction is nearly due east and west.¹

A minute description of the buildings may be found in the appendix to this thesis. The post was built around a four hundred foot square. Clay from nearby, reinforced by straw supplied the adobe bricks that were used in the walls. The bricks were protected on the exterior by wooden siding and on the interior by lath and plaster.² The construction contract was held by J. B. Hubbell and was not finished under the original plans until 1868.³

During the first summer, the infantrymen were lodged in tents. Before winter set in, half of each set of company quarters, a part of the hospital, a frame storehouse and three sets of officers quarters were completed. Building was suspended during the winter to be resumed the following spring. The principal buildings on the post were completed between

¹ Tawn, Surgeon General's Report, p. 409.
² Great Falls Tribune, September 9, 1951, "Montana Parade," p. 3.
³ F. George Heldt, "Fort Shaw," Montana Illustrated, p. 32.
1868 and 1869. Buildings on the post included quarters for four hundred men and band, officers' quarters, six double sets with wings, and quarters for commanding officer, a hospital 83 x 33 feet, with wings; guardhouse and prison 68 x 31 feet each; inadequate storage capacity, temporary building for grain storage and stables, workshops, sawmill, bakery and laundress' quarters. Information found in Tawn's report reveals that the plans for the post were designed by General Reeve in 1867 and that the adobe brick was used exclusively in the construction of the walls of the buildings. The dimensions of the brick used were six inches by twelve inches, with a thickness of four inches. The report states that the outside walls of the buildings were all eighteen inches thick and that the inside walls, also of adobe, were a foot thick. The adobe brick between wooden walls provided good insulation in the Montana climatic extremes, and the materials were available in plentiful and cheap supply.

1 Tribune, "Montana Parade," p. 3.
2 Burlingame & Toole, History of Montana, p. 148.
CHAPTER II

MILITARY ACTIVITIES

1. Baker Massacre

The establishment of army posts and garrisoning of soldiers in their country did not deter the Indians and their raiding operations continued. In April of 1867 a very prominent settler, John Bozeman was murdered. White sentiment against the Indians became even greater when, in the following winter, several more murders were committed in the area. Fort Shaw, as the key post in the Montana department, was vitally concerned with these developments. The commanding officers of Fort Shaw during the period of the "Blackfoot War" were somewhat responsible for developing as well as executing army policy in the area. One of the most controversial incidents of the period is the "Baker Massacre." It was not an isolated event but rather it was the culmination of several incidents between the Blackfeet and the settlers, neither of which were entirely innocent of blame.

In 1869 a brother of Mountain Chief, head chief of the Piegans, and a young boy on an errand for Major Culbertson in Fort Benton were shot down in the streets of the town in broad daylight in revenge for the Indian killing of two white...

1 Ewers, Blackfeet, p. 244.
cattle herders near Benton a few days earlier.¹

Perhaps a proper policy under these circumstances would have been to arrest the guilty individuals, but army officers were unable to execute this program, for "no civil court in Montana would convict a white guilty of an offense against an Indian." Because of these circumstances, army officers reported, the Indians were driven to violence in avenging their dead.²

The Indians did not wait for white man's justice, the record of which showed that the guilty whites would probably be acquitted. General Sully, Superintendent of Indian Affairs, reported,

I think I can arrest the murderers but I doubt very much if I can convict them in court. Nothing can be done to insure peace and order till there is a military force here strong enough to clear out the roughs and whiskey-sellers in the country.³

In retaliation for the Benton incident the Indians employed the hit-and-run tactics familiar to Blackfoot horse raiders. Small Piegan war parties attacked freighters on the Fort Benton-Helena road and raided the outlying ranches, running off horses and killing the settlers. On the night of August 17, 1869, some twenty-five young Piegan warriors visited Malcolm Clarke on his ranch near the mouth of the Prickly

¹ Ewers, Blackfeet, p. 246.
³ Ewers, loc. cit.
Pear Canyon, within twenty-five miles of Helena. Despite the fact that he had known and dealt with the Blackfeet for more than a quarter of a century and despite the fact that he was married to a Piegan woman, he was shot and killed by these Indians.\(^1\) The news of this type of death to such a prominent man in the territory, roused its white citizens to urge prompt and effective military and civil action against the Indians.

By the 18th of August, Sully reported to Washington, that he thought that the Blackfeet would have to be considered to be in a state of war\(^2\) but Major Culbertson disagreed. He thought that the trouble was due to a portion of the young warriors whom the chiefs could not control and whom, he said, "nothing but the strong arm of the government" could control.\(^3\) The commander of Fort Shaw, General Philip deTrobiand, thought that the issue of war was being put too strongly, and he warned his superiors against the rabid hysteria and steam-rolling tactics of some of the whites. He said,

> The public danger is apt to be magnified by parties whose interests lie in the promotion of military schemes that will cause the disbursement of money or will furnish employment for the otherwise idle.\(^4\)

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1 Ewers, *Blackfeet*, pp. 246-47
Disturbed and confused by the mounting agitation in Montana and by the conflicting reports from the commanders in the region, Lieutenant General Philip H. Sheridan sent General James A. Hardie to investigate the situation. Hardie reported that there had been isolated reprisals by hot-blooded youths whom the chiefs could not control but that there was no general uprising.

The depredations did not stop, but continued into the fall. When U. S. Marshal William F. Wheeler listed fifty-six whites who had been murdered and testified that more than a thousand head of horses had been stolen by the Blackfeet before a grand jury in October of 1869, the situation appeared to be very bad. Wheeler also was able to name five of the Piegan warriors who were recognized by Malcolm Clarke's children at the time of the murder. He asked for their indictment for the willful murder of Malcolm Clarke. The grand jury indicted them and issued to General Sully warrants for their arrest.1

When he was informed of conditions in Montana, General Philip H. Sheridan, the Civil War hero and a champion of aggressive action against hostile Indians, then in charge of the Military Division of the Missouri, expressed regret that

1 Ewers, Blackfeet, p. 247.
the expiration of enlistments left too few troops in Montana "to do much against these Indian marauders." Ranks soon filled again, however, and Sheridan proposed the plan he used against hostile southern Indians: "Let me find out exactly where these Indians are going to spend the winter and about the time of a good heavy snow I will send out a party and try and strike them." General of the army William T. Sherman approved Sheridan's plan in Washington on November 4. 1

Despite pressure from Sheridan and Montana citizens, General Philip deTrobiand, in command at Fort Shaw, disagreed. He knew that the hostile Indians were near the Canadian border and that as soon as troops started after them they would cross it to safety. On November 26th, he reported,

I do not see so far an opportunity for striking a successful blow. The only Indians within reach are friendly, and nothing could be worse, I think, than to chastise them for offenses of which they are not guilty. I speak not only with a view to justice and humanity, but for the best interests of the Territory.2

But General Alfred Sully disagreed with the Fort Shaw commander, and from his office as Superintendent of Indian Affairs in Helena, "he urged a firm military policy against the tribes. Perhaps the constant public clamor in the capital city and

1 Ewers, Blackfeet, p. 247.
2 Ibid., p. 248.
the promptings of scheming friends influenced his judgment.\textsuperscript{1}

Sully and Wheeler called a conference of Blackfoot chiefs at the agency on the Teton River. There on January 1, 1870, they delivered an ultimatum to the assembled chiefs. The provisions were that the chiefs must keep their young men under control and raids against the white settlers must cease; that stolen horses and livestock must be returned; and that the murderers of Malcolm Clarke must be surrendered in two weeks. They declared that unless these demands were met, the government would consider that a state of war existed with the Blackfeet.\textsuperscript{2}

Blunt warnings to the Indians had failed and more raiding parties than ever roamed northcentral Montana. To harassed army officers the argument for a punitive expedition became increasingly attractive. General deTrobriland at Fort Shaw changed his mind and now thought that a surprise attack upon an unsuspecting band would not only be a punishment for past crimes but would be a deterrent to further aggressions. His letter to General James Hardie which he wrote January 13, 1870 reflects his opinions concerning the events of November and December 1869:

\begin{quote}
These three attacks on White men or their properties without any sort of provocation whatever, and occurring almost simultaneously and immediately upon the arrival of
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{1} Sharp, \textit{Whoop-Up Country}, p. 146.
\textsuperscript{2} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 147.
the Indians on the Maria river, show in what disposition they have returned, and how prompt they are to resume their murderous and plundering incursions,—unfortunately unchecked during the past summer for want of means of repression.

It is my firm belief that they are greatly encouraged by their past impunity and that to prevent the recurrence and increase of those depredatory raids upon the residents of the Territory, it has become necessary to inflict a punishment on the guilty parties.—Mostly Piegans. This not only to chastise the culprits, but also as a warning to prevent others, unconcerned so far in the past aggressions, to become accomplices and participants in new ones which seem to be contemplated by the young red warriors, judging by their open boasts, as I am informed from various sources.

This, General, does not imply that my views are changed respecting the general disposition of the Blackfeet Nation, including the three tribes, Blackfeet proper, Bloods, and Piegans. It is still my opinion that no state of war actually exists in the Territory, and that the majority of the Indians, especially among the Bloods, are peacefully disposed. But among them all, and principally among the Piegans, there is a certain number of ill-disposed and positively hostile young men who must be punished as they cannot be controlled by the friendly chiefs and are even openly sustained and protected by other chiefs, the most conspicuous of whom are Mountain Chief and his sons with their followers. These we must strike and strike hard so as to make an example.

As far as the striking goes (provided the action of General Sully does not scare them away) I can do it with the forces now at my command, as explained in my dispatch to General Hancock of December 21st, with this modification that I will operate from the trading post down towards Benton's instead of from Benton's up towards the trading post. In that way I would cut the line of the Maria River
where the Indians are scattered, so as to leave out the Bloods, who are encamped up the river above, and peaceably disposed, limiting the punishment to the Piegan, who are all below that point. And even among them I would be careful that the two friendly bands of Heavy Runner and Big Lake be left unmolested, so as to single out Mountain Chief and his followers, who were two days ago still at the place known as Big Bend.

This, successfully accomplished, would not, according to all probabilities short of a certainty, bring any general war. The Blackfeet are all far away on the British possessions and would not be touched. The Bloods would be left out, and, as they all expect it, the hostile Piegan would be punished alone, while friendly ones would be spared. The moral and material result would therefore be, I am confident of it, what we may desire, and peace and security would be restored in the Territory, at least for a time...

In conclusion, convinced that it is better to strike at once than to preserve indefinitely a passive attitude, and judging the present opportunity the best we can reasonably hope for, I have the honor to inform you that I am ready for action, and after mature consideration in no fear of the consequences.¹

When General Sheridan received General deTrobriand's agreement to a punitive war, he went ahead with plans for a winter campaign against hostile bands of the Piegan. But then Sully changed his mind and began to urge a policy of moderation toward the Indians. In a letter dated January 13th to General Hardie he wrote of his opinion, "For the

present, no blood should be shed, if it is possible to avoid it."¹ Sully's last minute change of heart was ignored and on January 15th Sheridan telegraphed general orders saying,

If the lives and property of the citizens of Montana can best be protected by striking Mountain Chief's band, I want them struck. Tell Baker to strike them hard.²

January 14th had been the expiration of the Indians' time limit for surrendering the murderers of Malcolm Clarke. The murderers had not been brought in, so now the army began to make definite plans for an attack. "Sheridan referred to Major Eugene M. Baker of the Second Cavalry at Fort Ellis" named by him to be in charge of the Indian Expedition if there should be need of one.³ Following the unsuccessful council of January 1st at the Teton Agency, Baker was asked to bring his troops to Fort Shaw. It was one of a very few major operations to be carried on in a Montana winter. The most favorable time to make war against the Indians was mid-winter, when they could be surprised in camp, not suspecting soldiers to be in the field.

On January 6, 1870, Major Baker left Fort Ellis with four troops of cavalry. It was ten degrees below zero and

³ Ibid.
grew colder with temperatures ranging between twenty and thirty degrees below zero, throughout the time of the march. The expedition arrived at Fort Shaw on January 14th, the expiration date of the ultimatum delivered to the Indians.

General de Trobriand's marching orders to Baker instructed him "to chastise that portion of the Indian tribe of Piegans, which, under Mountain Chief or his sons, committed the greater part of the murders and depredations of last summer and last month in this district." The orders "stated clearly that the friendly band of Heavy Runner should not be molested."

General Sully advised caution and perhaps leniency, but gave Baker wide discretionary powers and sent him from Fort Shaw on the nineteenth in the below-zero weather that had prevailed since the expedition left Fort Ellis.

While at Fort Shaw, Baker added a company of infantry to guard the supply train and another company of mounted infantry to his force. Strict secrecy was maintained regarding the expedition to insure against whiskey-runners at Fort Benton warning the Indians. Baker knew that the Indians were encamped somewhere on the Marias River, and, on the twenty-second, his scouts located the camp. The Indians did not suspect

1 Hamilton, Wilderness to Statehood, p. 186.
2 Burlingame, Montana Frontier, p. 225.
3 Ewers, Blackfeet, p. 249.
4 Burlingame, loc. cit.
that any troops would be in the field because of the intense cold.¹

During the night the troops advanced to within a mile of the Indian camp and, at daybreak on the twenty-third, they stormed into the camp, catching the Indians by complete surprise. One hundred seventy-three Indians, including about fifty women and children, were killed. All not killed were allowed to escape, but three hundred horses were captured and taken to Fort Shaw, where many were reclaimed by their original white owners. Baker's casualties included one man killed and one wounded in a fall from his horse.² The troops returned to Fort Shaw on January 30.³

The number of women and children casualties was greatly exaggerated in the eastern press and Baker was criticized for unnecessary cruelty. General Sheridan was instructed to investigate the charges. Baker made a full explanation to Sheridan, which was reported to General Sherman, the Commander of the Army. General W. S. Hancock, in command of the Department of the Dakota, defended Major Baker against the charge of

¹ Hamilton, Wilderness to Statehood, p. 186.
² Ewers, Blackfeet, p. 251.
³ Hamilton, loc. cit. Major Baker and his detachment arrived back at Fort Ellis on February 6th. In one month he had marched six hundred miles in severe winter weather, including one day which recorded a -40° temperature.
inhuman warfare, in his report regarding the episode. He re­ported that too dim daylight was responsible and that he did not believe any women and children had been killed outside the lodges. Hancock was satisfied that not more than forty women and children had been killed, and he had his information on the authority of Father Imoda, who knew all of this band of Piegans.¹

Other sources and some of the rumors circulated then claim that the camp attacked was that of the friendly chief, Heavy Runner, who was among the first casualties as he tried to prove his loyalty to the attacking troops. These sources maintain that not only was it a friendly camp but that the Indians there were the old men, women and children, therefore noncombatants, and that the camp was suffering from a severe smallpox epidemic. Others claim that Baker, no teetotaler, was drunk during the attack and consequently destroyed the camp while aware that it was one of friendly Indians.² These varied opinions and reports caused a great stir among those who heard them.

On March 28th, Sherman telegraphed Sheridan to assure Baker that no amount of public clamor had shaken his confidence

¹ Hamilton, Wilderness to Statehood, p. 187.
² Sharp, Whoop-Up Country, p. 149.
in him, but added that if any responsible persons would claim
the reports so widely circulated that he would give them the
benefit of an official hearing. "This closed the affair as
far as the army was concerned."

General Hancock believed that the effects of this fight
were highly beneficial to the settlements in Montana, and he
predicted that it would be a long time before the Blackfeet
would cause trouble again. The Baker episode on the Marias
broke the spirit of the Blackfoot nation. They were con­
vinced that the U. S. Government had the power and could ex­
terminate them if they continued to plunder and murder.

This controversial event has not yet been completely
resolved, and there are many conflicting reports and opinions
concerning it. The major ones can be summarized as follows:

Surprisingly, the Piegans spoke of the attack as "the
fortune of war." They blamed Joe Kipp, the half-breed guide
of Baker’s expedition, and they never forgave him for it.

Eastern critics proclaimed it a disgrace to American arms
and public opinion set off an investigation. The army stood
with Baker and his superiors. The majority of the Westerners
applauded it and, years later, pointed to the fact that after

1 Hamilton, Wilderness to Statehood, p. 187.
2 Ibid.
3 Sharp, Whoop-Up Country, p. 150.
the incident, the Blackfeet never again posed a serious threat.¹ One prominent historian of the period gives his opinion that "The impartial historian will most likely come to the conclusion that the attack of Major Baker on Chief Bear Head's camp was a dreadful mistake and amounted to a massacre."²

2. Sioux Campaign

The decade of the 1870's became the most active for the army in Montana Territory as military operations against the Indians continued. Troops from Fort Shaw took part in every campaign. General John Gibbon, commander of the District of Montana, was based at Fort Shaw³ and led several of the expeditions.

Trouble with the Sioux began when both sides broke the provisions of a treaty made in 1868.⁴ The treaty established the Sioux Territory which was not to be violated by the whites, but the U. S. Government failed to prevent gold-seeking whites from breaking the provision when they invaded the Black Hills and other forbidden areas in their search for gold. The

¹ Sharp, Whoop-Up Country, p. 150.
² Hamilton, Wilderness to Statehood, p. 189.
⁴ Hamilton, op. cit., p. 413.
Indians also broke their obligation of not interfering with the railroad construction. By terms of the charter made with the Northern Pacific Railroad, the U. S. Government bound itself to provide all necessary protection against hostile Indians to the parties engaged in the survey of the route and the construction of the road. Consequently when the company wanted to extend its surveys into hostile Sioux territory in 1872 an escort from Fort Shaw and Fort Ellis was provided. The Sioux harassed the surveying party and their escort until the survey had been completed as far as Pompey's Pillar, where the chief of the survey decided to advance no farther and the military escort were recalled to their posts.

By the autumn of 1875 it was apparent that hostility between the settlers and the Sioux had come to the point of a final showdown that must end. To accomplish this it would be necessary either to put the Sioux and their allies, the Northern Cheyennes, on reservations and to keep them there by armed force, or else the government would have to compel the whites, in accordance with the treaties, to stay off the Sioux hunting grounds and to cease prospecting for gold on their reservations. It became obvious that the Sioux were preparing for

2 Hamilton, Wilderness to Statehood, p. 416.
war and stocking up on arms and ammunition. They kept up an unceasing warfare against all white prospecting trespassers in the Black Hills. To end the situation, the government tried to buy the area, but the Sioux would not part with it. The Secretary of the Interior decided that his department could not handle the situation, and he turned it over to the Secretary of War. The army began to make preparations for a campaign to round up and compel the hostiles to report at the agencies. General Alfred H. Terry, Commander of the Department of the Dakota, began to assemble an army to campaign against the hostile Sioux. He ordered General Gibbon at Fort Shaw to collect his scattered soldiers and join him at the mouth of the Powder River. On March 17, 1876, a battalion in charge of Gibbon left Fort Shaw. The Battalion consisted of five companies of the Seventh Infantry and a mounted detachment, totalling twelve officers and one hundred ninety-five men. A train of ten government wagons hauled the camp equipment, ammunition, ten day's rations, and the personal effects of the officers and men. Gibbon rode in a buggy leaving Captain Charles C. Rawn in immediate command of the expedition. Lieutenant James H. Bradley was placed in charge of the mounted soldiers and was responsible

1 Hamilton, Wilderness to Statehood, p. 423.
2 Ibid., p. 424.
for the scouting. The expedition also included a gatling gun for long-range defense.¹

The expedition arrived at Fort Ellis on March 28th and rested there while supplies were replenished. Another company of the Seventh Infantry joined them, adding to the artillery a twelve-pound cannon and a second gatling gun.²

The campaign was a three-pronged attack on the region south of the Yellowstone River, between the Big Horn and the Powder, General George Crook moving up from the south, General Terry coming in from the east and General Gibbon advancing from the west. Gibbon, in command of the "Montana Column," had six companies of the Seventh Infantry and four companies of the Second Cavalry, which amounted to about four hundred thirty officers and men. Also in his command were a group of Crow Indian scouts, civilian scouts, guides and teamsters.³

The forces of Gibbon and Terry combined and, commanded by Terry, crossed the Yellowstone River and moved toward the Little Big Horn River, over the rough country east of the Big Horn River.⁴ Terry, Gibbon and Custer held a conference on

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¹ Hamilton, Wilderness to Statehood, pp. 426-27.
² Ibid., p. 427.
⁴ Ibid., p. 387.
the steamer "Far West" and decided to send Custer with the Seventh Cavalry up the Rosebud River on the trail of the Indians. Custer received his written orders dated June 22, 1876, regarding this mission from General Gibbon.¹

The disastrous Battle of the Little Big Horn took place on Sunday, June 25th. It was not until early morning of Tuesday on the 27th that Gibbon and Terry reached the scene of the battle. Lieutenant Bradley, scouting ahead for them on the 26th, was probably the first white man not actually in the battle to be told of its result.² After burying the dead and transporting the wounded from the bluffs to the "Far West" at the mouth of the Little Big Horn, the force split up. General Gibbon took command of his Montana soldiers and the remnant of the Seventh Cavalry, thus ending temporarily the participation of the "Montana Column" in the Sioux Campaign of 1876. The army was relentless in tracing down the victorious Sioux. It eventually drove them to the reservations or into Canada, where they became an international problem for many years.

3. The Big Hole

Military affairs regarding the Indians were dominated in 1877 by the famous retreat of Chief Joseph and the Nez Perce

¹ Hamilton, Wilderness to Statehood, p. 431.
² McFarling, Exploring the Northern Plains, p. 487.
from Idaho through Montana towards their intended destination of Canada. The Nez Perce War started in Idaho with the Indians' refusal to leave their home in the Wallowa Valley in order to be moved to a reservation. In May of 1877 several councils were held. Chief Joseph had decided to obey the governmental orders, but some of the younger men disagreed and instigated action against the white settlers of their area. Their actions involved the Nez Perce in war with the government and Chief Joseph committed himself to the leadership of his people in their cause.

Untried in battle, he proved his leadership and ability as a tactician against the army troops at White Bird Canyon. His merit as a wily and formidable foe was shown against the Salmon River Expedition and at the Clearwater River. He began his claim to the title of "the Red Napoleon of the West" with these victories against the army in Idaho later to be repeated in Montana. His ability in battle strategy, whether defensive or offensive, and his resourcefulness in retreat enabled him to choose the time, the place and the conditions of battle when he chose to fight. By these means

2 Ibid., p. 8.
3 Ibid., p. 40.
he was able to defeat all efforts of the army to stop him in Idaho.

The Idaho engagements made things too uncomfortable for the Nez Perce there. Yet, since surrender seemed out of the question, Joseph planned a course towards Canada through Montana. General O. O. Howard was unable to stop him in Idaho and did not suspect the course the Nez Perce were taking until they had embarked on it, too late for him to stop them. The route of the Nez Perce into Montana was the Lolo Trail. When General Howard discovered the intention and route of Joseph he telegraphed General Gibbon in the Montana District, who immediately began collecting a force from the area. Captain C. C. Rawn, in command at Fort Missoula, went to the Lolo Pass with a detachment and set up a barricade in the hope of stopping the Nez Perce there. But the Indians bypassed the fortifications by going over seemingly impossible terrain into the Bitter Root Valley.¹

By hard marching, Gibbon was able to reach Fort Missoula from Fort Shaw on August 3, 1877. He had one hundred forty-six men, seventeen officers and thirty-four citizen volunteers in command when he left and started down the valley.²

¹ Brady, Northwestern Fights, p. 22.
² Ibid., p. 23.
Gibbon's approach was unsuspected by Chief Joseph, who was merely intent upon keeping out of Howard's reach. The Indians were encamped well ahead of Howard in a meadow on the south side of the Big Hole.

By August 8th Lieutenant Bradley and his scouting party discovered the encamped Indians. In the early morning of the ninth Gibbon and his force attacked the camp, catching the Nez Perce by complete surprise.

The initial attack by the troops was such a success that within twenty minutes of its beginning the camp was in Gibbon's possession. However, contrary to usual Indian fights, the Nez Perce rallied, and their sharp shooting from the cover of the undergrowth and trees began to take its toll of Gibbon's men exposed in the meadow. Gibbon and his men managed to gain a wooded knoll and to hold the position. Meanwhile, under cover of their own fire, the Indians broke camp and sent the women, children and horses southward.

The battle continued throughout the day with the troopers beleaguered on the hill in the hot sun without food or water. The Indians set fire to the grass in an attempt to drive them from their position, but a change of wind prevented the plan

from success. The howitzer with twenty-five hundred rounds of ammunition and the expedition's supplies were lost early in the day, the former having been fired but twice before its capture.¹

After dark, Gibbon sent a citizen volunteer, Billy Edwards, through the Indian lines to Deer Lodge about sixty miles away to telegraph for help and to get teams and physicians for the wounded.² The soldiers spent the night deepening their trenches in preparation for another attack, but at dawn they found that the Indians, being aware of Howard's advance, had withdrawn. That same morning, Howard's courier arrived, informing Gibbon that Howard was on his way with assistance.³

Howard arrived on the 12th and relieved the wounded Gibbon, who returned with the wounded to Missoula, while Howard with the capable remnant from the battle continued his pursuit of the Nez Perce.⁴

Casualties of the battle were severe on both sides. Gibbon reported that three officers had been killed and four, including himself, had been wounded. Twenty-seven soldiers had been killed and another thirty wounded, while six of the citizen volunteers

¹ Brady, *Northwestern Fighters*, p. 185.
² Buck, *Big Horn*, p. 126.
³ Brady, *op. cit.*, p. 188.
had been killed and four more wounded. This amounted to over forty per cent of the men engaged in the battle.¹ The Indians left eighty-nine dead unburied on the site of the battle, and Chief Joseph later admitted that he sustained a loss of two hundred and eight killed or mortally wounded.²

The losses on both sides cannot be measured in terms of the number of casualties alone. Aside from the hardships caused to their families,³ the deaths of Captain William Logan of Company A of the Seventh Infantry and of First Lieutenant James A. Bradley of Company B of the Seventh Infantry were serious losses to the army, to Fort Shaw and to the Territory. Both were outstanding officers and well known throughout the Territory. Both were well acquainted with tactics of Indian warfare, and Bradley, especially, had been invaluable on several occasions, not the least of which being the last, for his scouting ability. Other disabilities inflicted on the Fort Shaw detachment included the mortal injury of H. S. Bostwick, the civilian, post guide at Fort Shaw, and the severe wounding incurred by Gibbon in his left thigh.⁴

² Ibid., p. 113.
³ Captain and Mrs. Logan had a family of 13 children. The Bradleys had two daughters. Every officer casualty was a married man.
⁴ Shields, "Battle of the Big Hole," p. 86.
The Nez Perce's victory was perhaps more costly to them than was the defeat to Gibbon. For, although Gibbon lost forty per cent of his command, the army could replace the diminished number, while Chief Joseph had no resources on which to rely. His force had never numbered more than three hundred fighting men. Even considering that a sizable portion of his casualties must have been women and children, one can see that any diminution of his force, no matter how small, would be an irreplaceable loss. At the Battle of the Big Hole Chief Joseph lost his capable lieutenant, Looking Glass, one of those who had helped him rally his panic-stricken camp during the attack. Also killed in the attack was the medicine man, Cul-Cul-Se-Ne-Na, whom the Nez Perce had believed to be invincible. These casualties were psychological blows to the tribe. Among the women killed were two of Chief Joseph's wives and a daughter of Looking Glass.

As an indirect result of this battle, Joseph later was defeated in his march toward Canada. One of Gibbon's men who

2 Ibid., p. 183.
4 Brady, *loc. cit.*
5 Ibid. Chief Joseph surrendered to General Nelson A. Miles on October 8, 1877, after a four-day battle with the troops of General Miles and General Howard in the Bear Paw Mountains, less than fifty miles from his goal of refuge. In his retreat he had led his people on a two thousand mile march, fought eleven engagements, winning three of the five
survived the battle said, "Though we were whipped, we broke
the back of the Nez Perce nation."\(^1\) Another historian has
written of the battle:

To Gibbon's command, more than any and all
others who pursued and fought Joseph and his
men, belongs the honor of having broken the
proud spirits of these dusky warriors . . . .\(^2\)

4. Policing Duties

Besides its duties of Indian control and others of a mil-
itary nature, the U. S. Army helped to bring civil law and or-
der to the Montana Territory. Troops from Fort Shaw assisted
the local officials and federal marshals in enforcing the laws.\(^3\)
Most police activity centered around trying to stamp out ille-
gal whiskey and gun trade between the whites and the Indians.
Fort Shaw soldiers joined civilian authorities in suppressing
the extensive whiskey traffic to the northern Indians. General
John Gibbon stationed detachments along the Whoop-Up Trail to
capture the traders, but the infantrymen were not often suc-
cessful when pitted against the well-mounted renegades from
Fort Benton.\(^4\) He was also plagued by the illegal arms trade
between the Indians and white traders. In September, 1876, he

\(^1\) Buck, "Review of the Big Hole," p. 128.
\(^2\) Woodruff, Battle of the Big Hole, pp. 115-16.
\(^3\) Sharp, Whoop-Up Country, p. 126.
\(^4\) Ibid., p. 127.
warned the T. C. Power Company of Fort Benton concerning infor-
mation he had received stating that the Power Company had re-
ceived 138,000 rounds of small arms ammunition and several 
cases of breech loading small arms. He warned the company 
not to trade these items with the then restless Indians.1 The 
whole Department of the Army shared Gibbon's apprehension, and 
they had reason to worry: Sitting Bull was still on the loose.

Many charges regarding whiskey and arms traffic with the 
Indians were leveled against the Fort Benton firms but proof 
was difficult to assemble. The business firms claimed that 
their trade with the Indians conformed to license privileges 
granted to them by the Office of Indian Affairs, which included 
permission to trade in limited quantities of arms with northern 
Indian tribes. Each firm denied that its arms trade violated 
the Congressional Act of 1873, which regulated the sale of guns 
and ammunition to "uncivilized or hostile Indians."2

When troops were not needed for emergency expeditions, a 
summer camp was maintained at Cadotte's Pass by soldiers from 
Fort Shaw. The camp was situated about fifty miles west of 
Fort Shaw on the pass leading into the western valleys. The 
camp served to keep the wandering bands of western Indians 
from crossing the plains without purpose and also to keep the

1 Sharp, Whoop-Up Country, p. 216.
2 Ibid.
plains Indians from moving into the western valleys.¹

One of the major police duties of the Fort Shaw garrison was the guarding of the roads between Fort Benton and other key towns in Montana.²

5. Escort and Patrol Activities

Escort and patrol activities were many and varied for Fort Shaw. An annual report submitted by Colonel C. C. Gilbert to the Assistant Adjutant General from Fort Shaw in September of 1873 described some of the activities of the post. Companies C, D, E, F, G, I, and K of the Seventh Infantry, totaling four hundred thirty-four soldiers, are described in the report.³ Their more important expeditions, as outlined in the report, included the escort of a surveying party into the Yellowstone Valley.

By terms of the charter with the Northern Pacific Railroad, the U. S. Government was bound to provide all necessary protection for the parties engaged in the survey of the route and the construction of the road. Therefore, when in 1872 the company wanted to extend its surveys into hostile Sioux territory,⁴ it called upon the government for the protection it was obliged to

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¹ Burlingame, Montana Frontier, p. 201.
⁴ "Bradley Manuscript." Sioux territory extended from the base of the Rocky Mountains to the Missouri River at Bismark.
provide. Two parties were to take the field. General John Gibbon, Seventh Infantry, stationed at Fort Shaw and command-
ing the district of Montana, was assigned the duty of providing for a suitable force for the protection of the western corps on the upper Yellowstone while it worked down the river, until it met the eastern corps at the mouth of the Powder River. For this purpose, Companies C, E, G, and I of the Seventh Infantry were drawn from Fort Shaw, and Companies F, G, H, and L of the Second Cavalry were taken from Fort Ellis. The whole force, numbering about four hundred men, was placed under the command of Major Eugene M. Baker of the Second Cavalry. The detach-
ments assembled at Shield's River on July 13, 1872, were joined there by Colonel Hayden with his corps of surveyors and began their march down the Yellowstone the next day. The expedition was harassed by horse-raiding parties of Sioux several times. When the survey was completed as far as Pompey's Pillar, the chief of the survey decided to advance no farther and the mil-
itary escort were returned to their posts. The detachment from Fort Shaw returned October 5th with the loss of one soldier killed and one disabled.

Other information in Colonel Gilbert's report includes the

2 Hamilton, Wilderness to Statehood, p. 416.
fact that on October 15th of the same year a detachment re-
turned to Fort Shaw from guard duty on the Flathead Pass, and, in November, Company D accompanied Agent A. J. Symmonds to Fort Browning with his delegation of Sioux chieftains who were returning from Washington, D. C. The report also indicated that Company K escorted a train of annuities to Fort Belknap in May of 1873. In August of that year, Company C escorted a train of Indian supplies to Fort Peck, and a small detachment set out on a long journey to explore possible lanes of travel between Fort Shaw and Fort Colville, Washington Territory.¹

Patrols were frequently sent out to repair telegraph lines that were in need of repair because of damage by both man and animal. Teamsters often solved their fuel problem by burning poles; buffalo used poles as scratching posts, sometimes dragging off miles of wire as they stampeded across the plains.²

Fort Shaw first became connected with an extension telegraph line in October of 1869. This achievement enabled the Montana military organization to maintain direct contact with the military organization in the East.³ Colonel Gilbert's report made mention of Fort Shaw's patrol of the telegraph line in August of 1873. The report stated that in that month Company F

repaired the line from Helena to Fort Shaw and Company D worked on it from Fort Shaw to Fort Benton.
CHAPTER III

NON-MILITARY DEVELOPMENT

1. Economic Development

The construction of Fort Shaw, as the construction of other posts in the territory, speeded the economic development of the region. Government spending to construct and maintain a post introduced considerable currency into its frontier region. In 1869, when Fort Shaw supported four companies of infantry, the cost of the post totaled to the sum of $187,013.49 for the two years since its establishment.¹

Civilian employees and equipment authorized for 1869 included an engineer and Sawyer at $125 per month, five plasterers for three months at $130, a blacksmith at $100, seven carpenters, one at $125 and the others at $90 per month; one guide and interpreter at $75 to $100, one chief clerk and general superintendent at $150, one postal clerk at $100, twenty-four extra-duty men, who performed various duties and who were in charge of the one hundred and two horses; seventy mules and eleven organized teams.²

Military posts became centers of economic activity in their vicinities as a matter of course. Fort Shaw was no

² Ibid.
exception. Besides the additional cost of constructional activity, there was the matter of provisions for the post. The army quartermaster purchases of fresh vegetables, butter, eggs, hay, and grain stimulated the initial agricultural enterprise in the Sun River Valley. Heavy purchases of beef to feed the soldiers garrisoned in the area prompted the rapid expansion of the range cattle industry on the benchlands and on the surrounding plains. Army manpower built roads, telegraph lines, bridges, and other public works and established extensive farms around the posts. When released from active service, most of the men remained in the region to continue these activities for private gain. Aside from the encouragement of a ready market is the fact that settlement of a territory was encouraged by the presence of a military post in the vicinity for the protection of the settlers.

The fertile western valleys of Montana were getting too crowded with homesteaders by 1870 for the ranging of cattle on a large scale, but experience on the overland trails proved that cattle would do well on the plains to the east. After the Indian treaties of the 1870's, which cut down on the reservations on these plains, they became available for this use. Some of the pressure for these treaties came from the big range outfits,

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1 Sharp, Whoop-Up Country, p. 128.
2 Ibid.
for they were the worst sufferers in loss of livestock. In 1871 Robert S. Ford and Thomas Dunn brought a thousand head of cattle into the Sun River Valley. In 1873 Conrad Kohrs and John Bielenberg enlarged their herds and trailed them into the same region, there to meet the Texas herds of Dan Floweree.¹ This activity took place within the jurisdiction and protection of Fort Shaw. If the post had not been there to protect both lives and property, that region, as a range center might not have developed until much later.

The cattle herds were slowly pushed eastward and southward from the Sun River. The construction of Camp Baker on the western edge of the Smith River Valley to guard the passages leading into the Prickly Pear resulted in the opening up of a market for some beef and provided additional protection from the Indians. Between these two posts a great cattle region was developed, bringing a new source of capital into the area.²

In the more immediate sphere of economic influence there was the post store. Often post stores were the only stores in their regions and enjoyed civilian as well as military patronage. The first post trader at Fort Shaw was Nat Pope. Cutler and Taylor were the traders in 1871, when J. H. McKnight received the appointment.³ J. H. McKnight was backed by the

¹ Burlingame, Montana Frontier, p. 267.
² Ibid.
³ Heldt, Montana Illustrated, p. 32.
capital of T. C. Power and held the license to operate the store at Fort Shaw until 1888, when he resigned in order to move his business activities to Great Falls.  

McKnight carried a varied stock of goods for both soldiers and civilians, served as banker for a community lacking formal banking institutions, and worked closely with the Fort Benton business firms.

He advertised widely through the press of the region and supplied the area north of the Sun River from his stock. The garrison of the post spent heavily at the store, the list of purchases being endless, not the least of which was whiskey.

McKnight's business was not confined to the army personnel and civilians of the area. He also supplied the Northwest Mounted Police in Canada with various items. From this, one can see that the economic development of the area was something that was not confined to the post itself and that the effects of the post were felt on activities other than military in the course of the economic development of the area around Port Shaw.

2. Social and Cultural Activities

In carrying out its primary mission of military protection, the army also made contributions to the social and cultural development of the territory. The army's contributions grew out

1 Heldt, Montana Illustrated, p. 32.
3 Ibid.
of the need to maintain the morale of both the officers and the soldiers. Measures taken were aimed at curbing the high desertion rates and the excessive drinking of the enlisted men. Positive measures were undertaken to relieve the tedium of life on a lonely outpost of the frontier. The responsibility for and the choice of solutions to problems of morale was in the hands of the individual commander of each post. Some commanders merely added more hours of drill and enlarged their guardhouses, while others sought better solutions to these serious problems. Some commanders encouraged both officers and men to hunt wild game on the surrounding plains. Others built gymnasiums, bowling alleys, and baseball fields for their troops and encouraged literary, musical, theatrical, and temperance organizations.

A wide range of these social and cultural activities was offered to the garrison at Fort Shaw. There, in the early seventies, each company of the Seventh Infantry regiment had its own library of well-worn books. The Fort Shaw Dramatic Association presented frequent plays to enthusiastic soldier audiences as well as to citizens of the surrounding area. An excellent musical band, several active literary societies, and a temperance newspaper edited by W. H. Buck, later editor of the Fort Benton Record, were some of the other activities of the post.¹

The result of this activity was to make life at Fort Shaw much more enjoyable, so that even the wives of the officers, some of them from socially prominent eastern families, could be satisfied with life at the post. This is evidenced by an excerpt from a letter written in October, 1878, by Mrs. Roe, the wife of the adjutant of the post, to a friend. In the letter, Mrs. Roe had this to say:

Everyone is happy in the fall, after the return of the companies from their hard and often dangerous summer campaign, and settles down for the winter. It is then that we feel we can feast and dance, and it is then, too, that garrison life at a frontier post becomes so delightful.¹

The officers and their wives created a society at Fort Shaw patterned on the formality of the eastern one. In this society there was a constant round of dinners, soirees, dances, parties, teas, literary and musical organization, meetings, and card parties. Frequent visits by Northwest Mounted Police officers or British officials from Canada also were welcomed breaks in routine.²

The soldiers took part in the choir and band as well as played on the baseball team. They also attended the performances of the Dramatic Association and were encouraged to do so.

When they did not have the price of admission, a deduction from the next payroll could be arranged. Beside these extra activities, there were the morning drills, inspection, and target practice for the enlisted men.¹

The post not only supplied its own amusement, but also provided the whole of northcentral Montana with entertainment and relaxation. Fort Shaw came to be known as the social center of the whole area. Many visitors came to the post to attend the band rehearsals, and programs were printed for the occasion. Weather did not deter the entertainment-starved settlers. In January of 1879 Mrs. Roe wrote to a friend the following concerning the attendance at a theatrical put on as a benefit for the mission:

It was surprising that so many of the Sun River and ranch people came, for the night was terrible, even for Montana, and the roads must have been impassable in places. Even here in the post there were great drifts of snow, and the path to the theater was cut through banks higher than our heads.²

The Fort Shaw Dramatic Association was one of the most active groups on the post. Its industry is evidenced by the number of theatrical productions it sponsored and the number of performances it gave. Among the traveling "road shows" of the era,

¹ Roe, Letters, p. 222.
² Ibid., p. 90.
that performed in Fort Shaw, are John Maguire who gave a perfor-
mance on February 22, 1867, with the post's dramatic society
in a production of "His Last Legs." Other visiting companies
included one in 1878, that of J. Al Sawtelle, which give five
performances at the post, and in 1880 the Henrietta Irving
Combination appeared at Fort Shaw.¹

Probably the best morale builder of all the activities on
the post was the Third Regimental Band. Famous throughout the
whole army it was in demand at all the civilian social affairs
of the territory. Programs were printed for its semi-weekly
rehearsals, which were well attended by off-duty soldiers,
their wives and civilians. Evidence of the band's popularity
in civilian circles is found in the following clipping con-
cerning a social event in Helena in 1885 at the Harmonia Hall:

...The services of the Third Regimental
Band, of Shaw, were engaged for the occa-
sion and they certainly well sustained their
reputation of being one of the finest bands
in the service.²

The article went on to say that the dance was the most fash-
ionable ever given there and that it "was attended by the
elite of Helena."³ The band played at many similar events.

¹ Burlingame & Toole, History of Montana, p. 303.
² Unidentified clipping from Lieutenant Roe's scrapbook now
in the possession of William Bertsche of Great Falls, Mon-
tana.
³ Ibid.
However, despite these activities, the band organization did not suffer in military functions as the following quotation from an unidentified clipping found in Lieutenant Roe's scrapbook will show:

The band of the Third Infantry, as shown by the returns of the Department of Dakota in rifle firing, has for the target year 1885 distanced, not only all other bands in the department, but outside of their own regiment all troops and companies of regiments serving in the department as well, excepting only three companies of the Eleventh Infantry . . . For men who have kept up their musical reputation as well, they seem to have fairly earned congratulations.¹

Another newspaper clipping stated that the Third Infantry stood first on the list of all the regiments of the army in rifle firing and that the Fort Shaw band stood ahead of six of the ten companies of the regiment in that practice.²

The band was under professional direction, one of its directors being Signor D. Apollo Zanichilli of New York and a "well-known composer" who held a diploma from the Imperial Conservatory of Music of Milan, Italy.³

While there were no missions established on the post at Fort Shaw, traveling clergymen stopped regularly to minister

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1 Unidentified clipping from Lieutenant Roe's scrapbook now in the possession of William Bertsche of Great Falls, Montana.
2 Roe scrapbook.
3 Ibid.
to the spiritual needs of the garrison. Priests came from St. Peter's Mission for the Catholics, and a clergyman came from Helena for the Episcopalians. A number of religious organizations and choirs also existed on the post.
1. Abandonment

By 1890 the frontier in Montana had become a thing of the past. Military establishments were no longer needed. The last chapter in the story of Fort Shaw as a military post was recorded on the front page of the River Press of Fort Benton. There a short article reported the army's final abandoning of the post in 1891. The last troopers stationed there left for Fort Buford, North Dakota, under the command of Lieutenant Farnsworth on September 12, 1891, thus ending Fort Shaw's twenty-four years of existence as a military post.

In that relatively short period, Fort Shaw had had an immeasurable influence upon both the locality and the territory. It provided a developmental stimulus for the locality and was influential upon the territory in its capacity as regimental headquarters for the army. Its commanding officers were military tacticians, it is true, and necessarily so, but they were also men of peaceful pursuits. For example, Generals deTrobiand and Gibbon, two of the most militarily accomplished, also contributed greatly to the

improvement of the vicinity as well as to the physical comfort and cultural development of the post.

It was men such as these frontier commanders and the men they commanded who helped to bring Montana from territorial status to statehood because, without their work of creating a peaceful environment, settlement of the region would not have come about. They were a portion of that army of which Lord Wolsey, Commander-in-chief of the British Army, spoke when he declared in the 1880's that man for man the U. S. Army was "the best in the world." One eminent historian of the West has summed up the army thusly:

That army had been whipped into shape by nearly forty years of fighting Plains Indians. They had to be good, for they were matched with and out-numbered by foes who could outshoot, outride, and outfight all but the best, and who inflicted far heavier casualties (including civilian) than they suffered in wars which, for numbers engaged, were bloodier even than the Civil War, the bloodiest in our history.²

After the army abandoned it, petitions for making the Fort Shaw Military Reservation available for homesteading began pouring into Washington. Some of it was released for that purpose. On April 30, 1892, the army relinquished Fort Shaw and turned it over to the Department of the Interior.³

1 Vestal, West, p. 71.
2 Ibid.
With that action Fort Shaw ceased to be a military responsibility. The Department of the Interior planned to use the buildings and land for an industrial school for Indians. In February of 1893 the Secretary of the Interior approved a selected tract of 4,999.5 acres for that purpose. However, it is not the purpose of this thesis to relate the history of Fort Shaw after its relinquishment by the army as a military post.

2. Epilogue

After the period of the Indian school, the fort fell into disrepair and several of the buildings were razed by fire. The site of the fort now belongs to the Fort Shaw school district, and the school occupies the land whereon once stood the post. Only a couple of the original buildings now remain. One of them is occupied by the Sun River Valley American Legion post. On September 26, 1951, that group planned to launch a campaign to restore a small portion of the old post. As of yet, however, there has not been much progress on the project. A stone monument with a plaque telling a brief history of the post stands on what once was the parade ground.

1 Greer, "A Brief History of Indian Education at the Fort Shaw Industrial School," p. 5.
2 Great Falls Tribune, September 9, 1951, p. 3.
Shown on the next page is a map illustrating the positions of the principal posts of the Military District of Montana. Also located on the map are the sites of the major military engagements in which troops from Fort Shaw took a part. (Map drawn by author and printed by Montana Historical Society.)
Below is a list of Commanding Officers of Fort Shaw
with the date of appointment to Command.¹

Major Clinton
Colonel Reeves (1867)
Colonel Andrews (1868)
General P. R. deTrobiand (1869)
General John Gibbon (1870)
Colonel Brooks (1878)
Colonel J. J. VanHorn (1888)

¹ From Fort Shaw Envelope at Montana Historical Library, Helena.
On the following page is a scale plan of Fort Shaw showing the post and its facilities. The facilities included company quarters consisting of four barracks each one hundred two feet front and built alike. The commissary of subsistence and quartermaster storehouses were ninety feet front. The band quarters and guardhouse was of sixty-eight feet front. Also of sixty-eight feet front was the district and post headquarters. The post hospital was eighty-two feet front.

A cemetery was located about a half mile west of the post.

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1 Surgeon's Report, p. 414.
2 Ibid., p. 415.
3 Ibid., p. 416.
NOTES.

Plan of Fort Shaw, Montana Territory.

A. Mess Quarters
B. Q.M. & C. Storehouses
C. Band quarters & Guardhouse
D. Q.M. & CofS. Storehouse
E. Offices, District & HQ
F. Post Hospital
H. Officers Quarters
I. Chapel, Library & Court Martial Room
K. Ordnance Room, School & Billiard Room

1. Bakery
M. Magazine
N. Water Tanks
O. Corral, temporary, of Stabs
m. Sinks & Outhouses
p. temporary sinks.
The parade ground of Fort Shaw is pictured in this photograph taken between the years of 1890 to 1901. The troops ready for review are a Battalion of the 25th United States Infantry. The officers are identified as follows: the mounted officer (1) is Chaplain Simpson, (2) is Captain Bentzoni, (3) is Second Lieutenant William F. Martain and the dismounted officer (4) is Lieutenant Charles S. Farnsworth.

Some of the barracks are in the background. (Courtesy, Montana Historical Society.)
This photograph of the interior of the enlisted men's barracks at Fort Shaw was taken sometime between the years 1888 and 1901.

The bunks on the right have the bedding folded back to the head of the bunks. On the left side of the picture the bedding is folded down. A fire extinguisher, a stack of arms and spittons are in the center. The barracks were heated by wood burning stoves and they were lighted by kerosene lamps. (Courtesy, Montana Historical Society.)
This picture and the one on the page following were taken at Fort Shaw in 1889. They show two views of the officers' quarters as they appeared at that time.

(Courtesy, National Archives.)


Great Falls Tribune. September 9, 1951.


The *River Press*, September 16, 1891.


