

Fort McKavett State Historic Site, overlooking the spring-fed waters of the San Antonio River in Texas' scenic Hill Country. Before Europeans arrived, this area had been home to various Native American groups. Spanish missionaries arrived in the 1750s and the U.S. Army in 1852. Today, Fort McKavett is one of the largest and most intact examples of a Texas Indian Wars military post.

SETTING POST

The setting for a frontier post that was built, in part, to help guard the upper San Antonio River. The limestone hilltop offers panoramic views in all directions and the dependable source of drinking water. Limestone on site and cut native stone were used for some of the fort's construction. Abundant game supplemented the diet. Isolated forts were not self-sufficient and supplies including tobacco, salt, and pack forage were hauled by wagon.



SOLDIERS AND SETTLERS

The fort's garrison of 350 to 500 men usually consisted of half an infantry regiment, a regimental headquarters, and two or more cavalry companies. It served as a supply base for western expansion and a location for testing new weapons.

The daily life of the soldiers began with the bugle call of "Reveille" and often included breakfast of bacon, coffee, and beans. A typical day followed a routine of guard duty, area patrols, and maintenance. Though the fort was established as a military post, its relations with Native Americans and settlers were complex. More often, soldiers engaged in activities including hauling water, maintaining the buildings, loading and unloading wagons, tending the post's livestock, and other daily tasks.

Although combat was a small part of the frontier soldier's life, Fort McKavett troops participated in several major Indian campaigns including Mackenzie's and Shafter's raids into Mexico, and at the Battle of Palo Duro Canyon during the Red River War in 1874.

Portions of all four African American Army regiments, known as the Buffalo Soldiers, were stationed at Fort McKavett at some point during the Indian Wars.



Because of their bravery, tenacity, and appearance, Native Americans applied the honorable term "Buffalo Soldiers" to the troopers. The first Medal of Honor awarded to an African American soldier after the Civil War was earned by Sgt. Emanuel Stance of the Ninth Cavalry while stationed at Fort McKavett for freeing a captive child, preventing an assault on a wagon train, and capturing 15 horses.

Women played an important supporting role in frontier life. Officers often brought their families with them and the Army allowed one laundress to be hired for every 19 soldiers. Although their numbers were small, their influence was immeasurable. They promoted cultural activities such as dances and plays, and often the presence of just one lady on a post could lessen discipline problems.

As with many frontier forts, a town sprung up nearby to support the fort. In return, the fort offered protection for the town. After the final withdrawal of the military in 1883, nearby settlers occupied the Fort McKavett buildings.