

HISTORICAL SUMMARY OF FORT BAYARD

Fort Bayard, New Mexico dates back to 1863 when a troop of cavalry operating in southern New Mexico, camped near several springs among the foothills some 150 miles from the city of El Paso, Texas. Under the order of General Bell of the Department of Missouri at Santa Fe, a post was ordered established near the important gold and silver mining communities of Pino Altos and Silver City. A post cemetery was established away from the encampment for the burial of civilians and soldiers. This post cemetery later became known as Fort Bayard National Cemetery. The 25th Infantry (Buffalo Soldiers) under the command of Lieutenant Derr selected the site of the 1863 encampment because it commanded the war trails of the Apaches from their lands, near the present Faywood Hot Springs, to the numerous mining operations in the area. At the particular time in 1863, the roving Apache bands headed by Magas Colorados, Victorio and later Geronimo were held in check by transient troops. The Army Department of Missouri ordered the establishment of a fort in the Southwestern part of New Mexico to maintain law and order in the area. This fort was named in honor of Brigadier General George D. Bayard who had been killed at the Battle of Fredricksburg, Virginia. From 1855 this fort was the center of operations against the Warm Springs Apache, whose Chief was Victorio and the renegade Apache Geronimo. The 300 year campaign of Spaniard, Apache, Pueblo, Navajo, Mexican and American forces came to an end. It was not until August 21, 1866, the end of the Civil War, that federal troops were assigned to Fort Bayard. In 1886 Second Lieutenant John J. Pershing, 6th Cavalry, was assigned to Fort Bayard directly upon his graduation from West Point. He later became the famous General "Blackjack" Pershing.

During the period of the occupancy by the War Department, 1866 to 1920, interments were made of service men, families of these men, civilian employees of the War Department, and some known persons, presumably settlers, killed in Indian Massacres. After the fort became a U. S. Army Hospital in 1899, service men and patients of the hospital, including both Army and Navy service, has been interred.

The first burial at the Post cemetery with positive identification was Sgt. David H. Boyd, Company M, 3rd U. S. Cavalry, October 10th 1866. It was preceded by one other, who is recorded as an "Unknown".

One of the most important civilians buried at Fort Bayard is Walter Foote Sellers, author of the poem, "The Kneeling Nun". He was the stepson of Brigadier General Walter I. Duggan, retired. On his headstone is engraved "Ah, Me, the World Seems Lonelier Today." In the civilian section of the cemetery near the fence at the east side is also buried John William Richmond Kennedy, who died at St. Joseph's sanitarium, Silver City, New Mexico on March 14th 1914. He was the eldest son of the Honorable William Rann Kennedy, Knt. P.C. of England.

Fort Bayard was an active army post until 1900 when it was converted to an army hospital. It served in the capacity until 1920 when the United States Public Health Services took it over for the treatment of tuberculosis. On May 1st 1922, the hospital was taken over by the Veterans Administration, at first, also, for the treatment of tuberculosis and in the late 1950's it became a general medical-surgical hospital.