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## Camp Supply

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# LANDMARKS

## CAMP SUPPLY

— Paul Blosser

Indians ravaged white settlements in the years following the Civil War. Warriors, angry at the white man's westward expansion, burned wagon trains, stole cattle and horses and killed over 800 men, women and children between 1862 and 1868.

Settlers and government officials alike cried for increased federal protection. Major General Phillip H. Sheridan, military commander of the Department of the Missouri, was allowed only 2,600 cavalry and infantry men to patrol the area of Kansas, New Mexico, Missouri, Arkansas and Indian Territory, now Oklahoma.

Sheridan developed a plan to gain control of the plains of Indian Territory — a plan which called for a prolonged winter campaign against the Indians. The soldiers and supplies would be located at a temporary camp in Indian Territory.

7 Little did Sheridan know that the establishment of Camp Supply as the temporary supply base would last over a quarter of a century and play a significant role in bringing civilization to the plains of Oklahoma Territory.

Sheridan assigned Brigadier General Alfred Sully to select a site and establish the supply camp. Sully sought the advice of Major Joel H. Elliott, Captain John H. Page and Indian scout John Smith. The four agreed on a location at the junction of Wolf and Beaver Creeks, 113 miles southeast of Fort Dodge, Kansas and about 100 miles northwest of Fort Cobb, Indian Territory. They had camped near there less than a month before on an expedition into Indian Territory.

The location was near the Cheyenne and Arapahoe Reservations. It was close to the Indian winter campgrounds.

Fresh water flowed in both streams. Wild game was abundant. Squirrels lived in the cottonwood trees lining the creeks' banks. Buffalo grazed on the prairie grass plains. Rabbits, deer and turkey watered at the creeks.

Sully led the column of 400 wagons and 1,100 men south from Fort Dodge. They encountered wind and snow on their six day journey. The column passed through Devil's Gap, four mile north of their final destination, arriving at the creek junction on the evening of November 18, 1868. Official field orders named the spot Camp Supply.

Construction of the temporary camp began the next morning. In the canyons northeast of the camp, infantrymen and cavalrymen chopped down large cedar trees. Horse teams pulled the trimmed logs to the campsite. Soldiers' hands notched the logs and assembled them

into the ten-foot tall stockade walls.

Industrious soldiers erected blockhouses at the northwest and southeast corners of the fortress.

On the creek banks, axes sent cottonwood chips flying. The smaller trees were felled and trimmed. Soldiers dug pits outside the stockade walls for their sleeping quarters. The earthen walls of the pits, four and one-half feet deep, were held in place by the cottonwood logs. These bunkers extended above the ground three feet. Soldiers roofed the bunkers with more logs, stuffing the cracks between the logs with straw and earth to keep out the winter wind and snow.

Severe weather set in several days later, halting construction. General Sheridan arrived in the midst of the blowing snow and sleet. He had fought the same storm on his trail from Fort Dodge, for five days.

Sheridan ordered Colonel George Armstrong Custer to prepare his Seventh Cavalry to move out at daybreak. He was to locate and attack any Indians he might find in the vicinity.

A ceiling of gray clouds hung over the plains on the morning of November 23, 1868. Seven hundred cavalrymen stood ready beside their horses. Stamping hooves swirled the fresh snow into the chilly air. The bugler sounded mount and Custer and his men swung into their saddles.

The column marched south as the band played the regimental song, "Gerry Owen." Ben Clark, a young Indian scout, led the expedition across the snow-covered plains to Custer's greatest victory, the Battle of the Washita.

Custer's cavalry surprised Black Kettle's sleeping Cheyenne village at dawn on November 27. The Indians were encamped against the winter storms near the Washita River.

The 11 troops of cavalry surrounded the unwary camp, awaiting the signal to attack — the opening strains of "Gerry Owen."

In the melee that followed, Custer's troops were forced to dismount and fight the Indians hand to hand. The warriors fought fiercely to defend themselves and their wives and children. Black Kettle and 103 of his braves were killed in the bloody battle, along with some women and children.

The cavalry captured 123 squaws and children. They rounded up and shot 875 Indian ponies. Hostile Indians, who had escaped during the battle, surrounded the soldiers throughout the day, but Custer managed to retreat after dark.

PHOTO BY PAUL BLOSSER



St. John's Episcopal Church, located at the corner of Tenth Street and Texas Avenue in Woodward, was originally used as the Fort Supply Chapel. Military Chaplain Henry Swift performed the first Episcopal services in Woodward. The church is the oldest in the Cherokee Outlet.

The lead element of Custer's attack force, commanded by Major Elliott, was left behind during the retreat. The military casualties included not only Elliott and the 15 men with him, but also three others. Captain Louis M. Hamilton, the grandson of Alexander Hamilton, was one of the three men that was killed in the attack.

The Battle of the Washita left the Indians bitter, but their resistance had been broken. In the succeeding months, the once-proud Indians yielded to the white man's wishes, withdrawing to their respective reservations.

The Kiowas joined the Comanches in reservation at Fort Cobb in late December. The Kiowa-Apaches, Comanches, and Kiowas moved to their Medicine Lodge Reservation near Camp Wichita in January.

Little Raven's Arapahoes surrendered the same month at Fort Sill, Indian Territory.

Weak and disarmed, the Indians did not want to be confined on the reservations. Railroad crews laid a path of oak ties across the plains, steel spikes ringing with sledgehammer blows. The rails of the Iron Horse snaked westward, cutting through Indian lands.

White cattlemen sneaked herds across the Kansas and Texas borders. Their cattle grew fat on the green prairie grass at no cost to the rancher. Hunters decimated the buffalo herds, depleting the Indians major source of food, fuel and shelter.

The noble Red Man waited in lines to draw meager rations from the stores at Camp Supply. In the winter of 1878 over 700 Northern and Southern Cheyennes were reduced to killing and eating their horses and dogs to survive.

The humbled Indians responded to these deprivations

with sporadic assaults against white settlements.

Camp Supply was officially renamed Fort Supply in December 1878, marking the beginning of an end to Indian matters. By the fall of 1879, the military post had served ten years, protecting the white man from angry Indians, Indians from equally vengeful white men, and warring Indian tribes from each other.

The following years did not decrease the activity at Fort Supply. Scouting parties escorted cattle herds and wagon trains over established trails, protecting them against Indian attacks.

Patrols settled disputes between cattlemen and Indians. Soldiers expelled would-be settlers from Indian land.

Fort Supply played an important role in the opening of the Cherokee Outlet to white settlement on September 16, 1893. The opening of the area to settlement brought about the closing of the fort.

Colonel Dangerfield Parker commanded the soldiers responsible to police the 9,000 square miles of land and evict 'sooners.' Parker made it clear to his men that they were to protect government property and mails, preserve the peace and guard the settlers against criminal acts.

Troopers, riding bareback, patrolled the more than 400 miles of border around the outlet. Detachments guarded the land offices against early registrations and kept the peace in the burgeoning crowds.

Settlements sprouted and grew on the plain of Indian Territory. The town of Woodward grew from the land office 15 miles southeast of Fort Supply. Another small

Toch-e-me-ah, the Indian bride of scout Ben Clark, was among the 123 captives at the Battle of the Washita. She is also buried at the cemetery.

PHOTO BY PAUL BLOSSER



PHOTO BY PAUL BLOSSER



The Teamster's Cabin is one of the few remnants of the historic Northwest Oklahoma fort.

town took root west of the fort, taking the name of Supply.

Civilization had arrived on the plains. Fort Supply had outlived its usefulness. Railroads assured the rapid mobility of infantry and cavalry troops from Fort Riley and Fort Reno.

Time stopped for Fort Supply on February 26, 1895. On that day, Lieutenant F. E. Lacey turned custody of the post over to the Department of the Interior.

Since then, time and civilization have been unkind to the remains of the historic fort. The stockade walls, which once cast early morning shadows over the post chapel, have fallen and are rotting into the sandy creek banks.

The small chapel was sold in 1894 as the post was closed. The chapel, the oldest in the Cherokee Outlet, was moved to Woodward by a rancher named Roselle. He drove the team of six oxen which pulled the frame structure across the plains on cedar logs. In Woodward, the church was moved a second time several years later to its present location.

St. John's Episcopal Church, as it is now called, is located at the corner of Tenth Street and Texas Avenue. Its doors are open to the public 24 hours a day. Regular church services are provided to the northwest Oklahoma

community as well.

The site of the old fort is occupied by the Western State Hospital. Many of the fort's original buildings have been replaced over the years, leaving only a few reminders of Oklahoma history.

West of the hospital grounds is the former military cemetery. The bodies of the 56 soldiers buried there were transferred to Fort Leavenworth, Kansas when the post began closing in 1894.

One of the remaining headstones marks the grave of Toch-e-me-ah, the Indian wife of scout Ben Clark. She had been captured at the Battle of the Washita.

James Quinlan, a teamster at the fort, is also buried there. Before his death, Quinlan ran a Mexican Monte Bank, a popular gambling game, at the teamster's cabin on Fort Supply.

The cabin still stands on a hospital backroad. It has been bought by the Oklahoma Historical Society for preservation.

Near the center of the hospital grounds is the "powder-monkey's" house. The powder monkey, Sergeant William Scully, fired the cannon salute each morning and evening.

The final cannon salute at Fort Supply heralded new settlements on the plains of Oklahoma Territory and signalled an end to Indian hostilities. ■

PHOTO BY PAUL BLOSSER



This is the 'Powder-Monkey's' House where Sergeant William Scully lived. Scully had the daily duty of firing the morning and evening cannon salutes.