



Frontier Forts and Settlement

Since Spain ruled Texas, the Indians had served as a major issue in settlement. Fighting between the two was significant and the trouble was transferred to the Texians (white settlers) when Mexico took over, then to the Republic of Texas and eventually the state.

Determined to establish peace, the US Army needed a permanent physical presence. In June 1851, General William Belknap founded Fort Belknap located in Young County (near present day Graham). It protected settlers from Kiowa and Comanche Indians throughout the 1850's.

The next fort was about 50 miles away. Ft. Phantom Hill was established in November 1851. Its location, from the beginning, was a major problem. The resources, most importantly water which had to be hauled from 4 miles away, were not as plentiful as once thought. They did have mostly peaceful relations with the Indians. In April 1854 the fort closed and the soldiers burned the buildings, so that no one would have to man the fort again.

October 1852, Ft. Chadbourne was established about 60 miles southwest of Ft. Phantom Hill and did have to deal with hostile Indians. Ft. Mason was built in the summer of 1851 about 90 miles southeast of Ft. Chadbourne. They also protected settlers from the Comanches, Lipan Apaches and Kiowa. Ft. McKavett was built in 1852 about 35 miles west Ft. Mason was and abandoned in 1859.

The US soldier's service in Texas was divided between building forts, protecting settlers, expeditions in pursuit of Indians, fighting Indians, surveying roads, escorting the mail, stringing telegraph lines and enforcing the law. They lived as soldiers do today, with a defined chain of command. Each soldier's rank indicated where he fit in the scheme of things.

The forts were abandoned by US troops at the beginning of the civil war leaving settlers to fend for themselves due to the lack of resources from the state. The state did form the Frontier Regiment in an attempt to protect frontier settlements. Indian attacks increased.

Resourceful Texans joined together to provide a defense from the Indians. As a result of the Elm Creek raid in 1864, citizens began to join together for protection and form citizen forts. The forts also provided the settlers with a sense of community which they lacked in their otherwise normally isolated lives. Most though were abandoned prior to the end of the Civil War.

The presence of the US military had been a factor bringing settlers to the region and after the Civil War, the same citizens demanded that the protection be provided. By 1866, US military presence resumed.

The military returned to Ft. Mason in 1866 and rebuilt it while curbing the violence and lawlessness of the region. Fort Griffin was built in 1867 in Shackelford County. Early in 1868 Ft. Richardson was built. In 1868 troopers and contractors began construction of Ft. Concho in present day San Angelo. The War Department reactivated Ft. McKavett in 1868.

Buffalo Soldiers (African American) were introduced to the area and proved to be very strong, capable soldiers. They along with white soldiers helped survey roads, escort the mail, string telegraph lines and enforce the law. Soldiers black and white, helped to build West Texas.