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Article Summary: A few innovative post chaplains organized libraries and schools, sources of instruction and distraction for soldiers whose daily lives were often monotonous. Negro regiments in particular suffered from isolation on frontier posts and benefitted from access to books and newspapers.

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Photographs / Images: aerial view of Fort Wallace, Kansas, 1879 (prepared in 1955 for the Fort Wallace Historical Association); Fort Robinson adobe schoolhouse used as band quarters, 1908; Chaplain Henry V Plummer; Fort Laramie, Wyoming, about 1863 (from a painting by C Moellman); Chaplain Allen Allensworth

A Touch of Civilization: Culture and Education in the Frontier Army

By Miller J. Stewart

POST LIBRARIES

The early decades of the 19th century were dramatic ones. In this era of expansion and rampant nationalism, the young republic acquired hundreds of thousands of square miles of land—westward from the Appalachians in the East to the Missouri River, southward from the Great Lakes in the North to the Gulf of Mexico in the South.

Beyond the unpredictable Missouri River, the Army's waterway corridor to the northern Midlands, was the wide expanse of plains, interrupted only by the Rocky Mountains stretching from Canada to the Rio Grande River. The Southwest with its deserts, craggy buttes, and barren mountains eventually fell to the young republic. The Far West, that strip from the snow-covered Sierra Nevadas to the Pacific, rounded out the territorial aspirations of the young nation. Manifest Destiny had been achieved.

Into the vast plains, the heartland of the Sioux, Cheyenne, Comanche, Apache, and other Indian tribes—a land of great distances, sudden climatic changes, loneliness, and few settlements—came the Army, whose mission was to explore and map the land, improve travel routes, and create new ones, aid the immigrants, and most important, protect the settlers from the Indians.¹

Whence came these soldiers in blue? Many were from Ireland, Italy, Germany, England, and Scandinavia. They were the educated and the illiterate, farmers and bookkeeper-clerks, professional men and unskilled laborers, and even New York Bowery toughs. They all volunteered for a frontier serv-

ice which meant abominable food and quarters, grinding monotony, arduous fatigue duties, interrupted infrequently by campaigns and skirmishes against Indians, and long separations from friends and relatives and the comforts of civilization. Enlistment, too, meant low pay, slow promotions, small chance of adventure, and for the enlisted man often harsh and brutal discipline.²

The Army's authorization of post regimental and company libraries soon brought a touch of civilization to these soldiers serving under such adverse conditions.

Books for the Wants of the Enlisted Men—Post libraries originated in the mind of General Winfield Scott, an officer concerned with the morals, discipline, and education of the enlisted man. This general, whose career spanned nearly six decades, believed that all enlisted men of the Army should have an opportunity to rise above ignorance and illiteracy and to improve themselves while in the service so that they might become more useful citizens when they returned to civilian life. To that end he wrote into the *General Regulations of the Army, 1821*, that post funds were to be provided for the purchase of books for a library.³ And it wasn't long before many of the military posts took advantage of this provision and soon stocked their libraries with books and other reading materials provided by funds derived from a tax on the post sutlers.⁴

That these collections were miscellaneous in character is true; they ranged from ponderous tomes to light fiction supplemented by a wide variety of newspapers, unbound periodicals, and many religious tracts. The religious tracts came from any number of Bible, Sunday School, and tract societies, which flourished widely in the early 19th century. Reports indicate that religious tracts and books constituted the bulk of some military post libraries.⁵ Donations from religious societies had been the chief source of supply before post funds were created.⁶

The post libraries functioned quite smoothly with little interference from the War Department until 1857, when for some reason Secretary of War Jefferson Davis ordered post library funding discontinued. The program was restored in 1861, but this had little immediate effect, coming as it did on the eve of the Civil War when practically all post libraries ceased to function.⁷

During four years of civil strife, furnishing reading material to the soldiers in camp and field was effectively carried on by the United States Christian Commission sponsored by various YMCA chapters and other religious groups. The commission's first appeal to the people at home was for religious and denominational newspapers. Persons were urged to send only "good reading material . . . no trash."⁸ Books and reading materials of a religious nature so dominated the commission's monthly lists that it prompted one Massachusetts soldier to remark: "The men were presented with a plate of soup and a Testament."⁹ While some of the books and tracts were light reading, a perusal of one of the lists published by the commission shows occasional, more scholarly reading for war-weary soldiers. For example: Bucher, *Lectures to Young Men*; Hooker, *Natural Philosophy*; Hooker, *Chemistry*; Goodrich, *Glance at Philosophy*; Histories of England, France, Rome, and Greece; Hooker, *Physiology*. A few fiction titles such as Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, Milton's *Paradise Lost*, and Scott's *Lady of the Lake* made the list.¹⁰

Upon the cessation of hostilities in 1865 the commission began winding down its activities and closed its doors on January 1, 1866. The records kept by this praiseworthy organization over the war years reveal a prodigious undertaking. In addition to the light and heavy reading material furnished, over 28 million Bibles, New Testaments, religious tracts, and religious-oriented weekly and monthly newspapers were distributed to the Tommy Yanks.¹¹ The proliferation of religious material prompted one keen observer of life in camp and field to remark: "Christian folks must have labored under the delusion that the Army was composed of badmen."¹²

The Civil War ended; the Grand Review of the Union Army paraded proudly along Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington, DC. The veterans of the Confederate Army, though defeated, had gone home with honor and glory; their career officers would soon join their former opponents to garrison the vast lands west of the Mississippi River. There they together carried out the Army's mission, but not unmindful of their ties to eastern society.

Soon there were libraries established again. Metropolitan dailies kept frontier regulars in touch with eastern society and news from around the world. Some of the more common

weekly and daily newspapers found on the post library tables:

Kansas City Times,
New York Tribune,
St. Louis Globe-Democrat,
New York Graphic,
Baltimore Sun,
Detroit Free-Press,

Louisville Courier-Journal,
New York Herald,
San Francisco Examiner,
St. Louis Republican,
Salt Lake Tribune, and
*Chicago Inter-Ocean.*¹³

Fort Atkinson, Nebraska, subscribed to two newspapers not found at other posts, *The Watchman* and the *West Point Sentinel*.¹⁴

If the newspapers represented a broad spectrum of the country, the periodicals symbolized the world. Over 27 periodicals were counted; this did not include many agricultural publications that were so much in evidence at the Army posts where farm-garden programs were in operation. Periodicals common to most garrisons were: *Harper's Weekly*, *Harper's Monthly*, Frank Leslie's *Illustrated Newspapers*, *Frank Leslie's Monthly*, *North American Review*, *Cosmopolitan*, *Judge*, *Century*, and of course the semi-official *Army-Navy Register* or *Army-Navy Journal*.¹⁵

The literate soldiers of the garrison at Fort Mackenzie, Michigan, enjoyed the *Southern Literary Messenger*, while the non-drinkers found solace by perusing the *Journal of American Temperance*. Fort Ridgely, Minnesota, provided its German soldiers with their own language periodical, the *Illustrated Zeitung*, and their French comrades could browse through the pages of the *Chevron l'Illustration*. The pink pages of the *Police Gazette* offered titillating reading to soldiers of the 3rd US Cavalry at one western post.¹⁶

Visitors to some of the larger western military posts could very likely find journals from the British Isles on the reading tables. For example: *Blackwood's Magazine* (Edinburgh). The *Edinburgh Review* and the *Edinburgh Magazine* were very much in evidence as well as copies of *The New London Monthly* and *London Punch*.¹⁷

To list the great number of fiction and non-fiction titles of books on the post, regimental, company, and hospital library shelves would be redundant. Works by the great authors were there too: Sir Walter Scott, John Milton, William Shakespeare, James Fenimore Cooper, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Washington Irving, Edgar Allen Poe, Daniel Defoe, John

Greenleaf Whittier, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Henry W. Longfellow. In addition volumes of travel, biography, history, science, mathematics, philosophy, geography, and military science lined the shelves.¹⁸

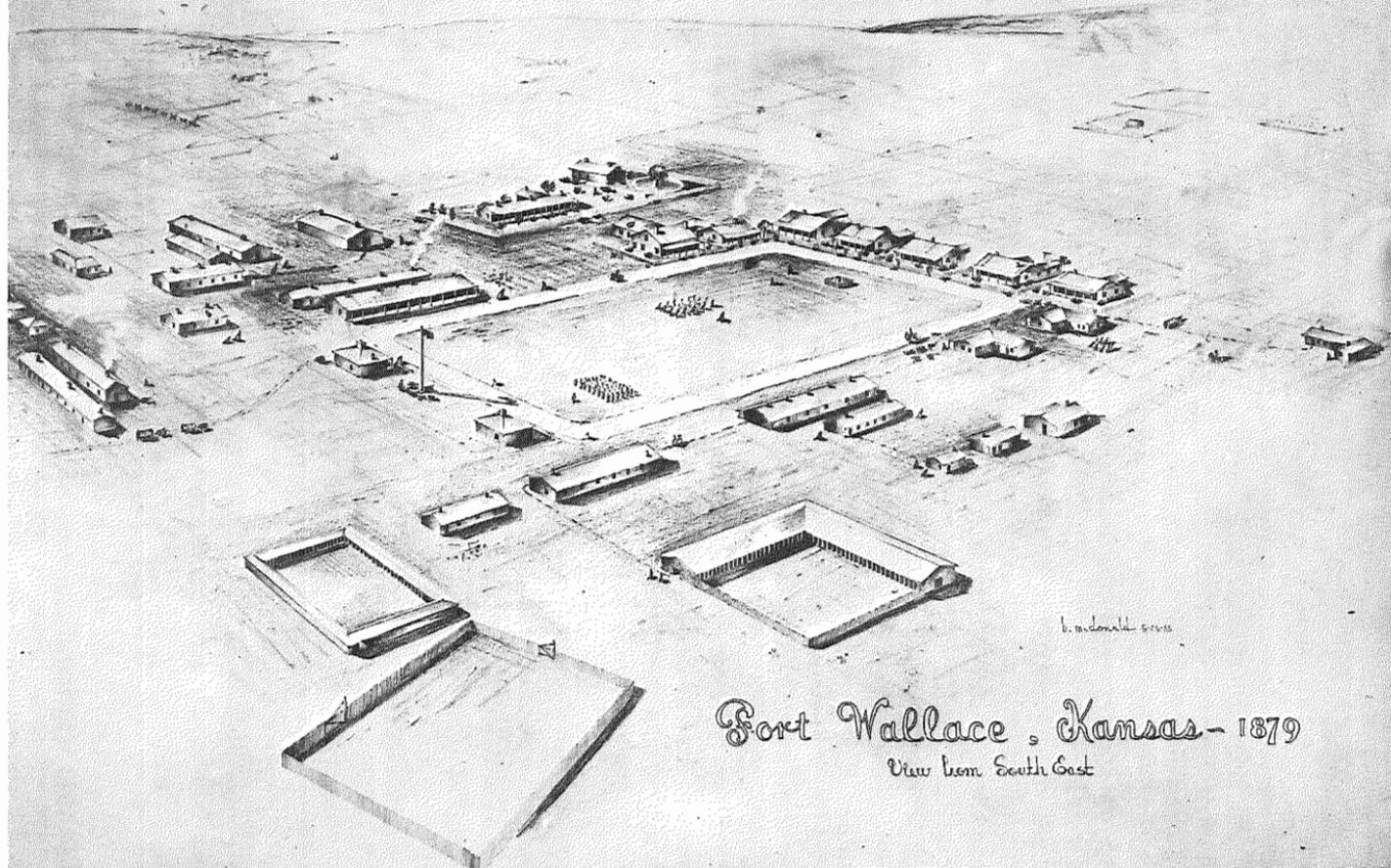
Frontier regulars in garrison usually had a modest stock of reading material at hand, though not always diverse. Scarcity of reading material could occur at any time. Elizabeth Bacon Custer writing from Fort Riley, Kansas, remarked that reading material for the 7th Cavalry, her husband's command, was so scarce that he often permitted the men of the regiment to use his personal library, a collection entirely of non-fiction. Here, too, newspapers and magazines were once at a premium, and soldiers eagerly read pages word for word—not excluding the advertisements. Even the fashion pages of *Harper's Bazaar* "were not scorned in that dearth of reading by the men."¹⁹

Money to purchase a set of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* was appropriated in 1871 by the Council of Administration at Fort Wallace, Kansas.²⁰ This appropriation, however, was disapproved by the commanding officer "because the post library was not used by the enlisted men, and until some place could be had for their use, such purchase could not be made."²¹

However, 1st Lieutenant W. A. Kobbe in a letter dated November 4, 1871, protested. He requested that such a room be set aside for the enlisted men and requested funds to purchase library furniture and files. The request was granted judging from an 1878 map, which locates the Fort Wallace library in room 1 of building number 35. New books purchased included a nine-volume edition of the works of William Thackeray, an unabridged dictionary, and a *History of the Defense of Sebastopol*.²²

The Fort Laramie, Wyoming, library held 300 or more "worn out" books, Lieutenant John Bourke, General George Crook's aide-de-camp, wrote. He "read everything he could get his hands on in the company libraries" but sorrowfully concluded that "living in the frontier an army officer's chances of [finding] literary treasures are so slight that he must cheerfully embrace whatever opportunities come within his reach without waiting for a selection."²³

In direct contrast to these unhappy circumstances, Mrs. Ellen McG. Biddle, writing in her *Reminiscences of a Soldier's*



Fort Wallace, Kansas, 1879. Prepared in 1955 for the Fort Wallace Historical Association, then headed by Edward M. Beougher, Grinnell, Kansas. Fort Wallace, established in 1867 and abandoned in 1882, maintained a post school and library. Research by Mrs. Ruth Jackson of Sharon Springs, Kansas, member of the staff of the Ft. Wallace Association, indicates that both were supported by profits from the post bakery.

Wife from Fort Robinson, Nebraska, in the early 1890s commented that "books, magazines, and papers were in profusion."²⁴

And Caroline Frey Winne, wife of Lieutenant Colonel Charles Winne, post surgeon at Sidney Barracks, Nebraska, in 1876, writing to her brother said, "We have read *Rise of the Dutch Republic* and *History of the United Netherlands* this summer with an occasional novel thrown in." Mrs. Winne said that they read *Scribners* every month and the *Tribune* every day. She ended a letter by saying, "Time passes by pleasantly and profitably."²⁵

So, it seems that however late the delivery, however sparse the supply, reading matter of one kind or another reached soldiers who were interested in current events, or who fancied the intriguing plot of a popular novel, or became captivated by the hair-breadth exploits of some real-life adventurer.

Keep in mind, though, that many, perhaps most, of the soldiers at western posts were not attracted to the printed word. There were the unschooled illiterate Americans, the immigrants from European countries who could not read English, and the non-readers who sought earthy diversions off the post. The unsavory establishments which flourished near military posts is evidence enough of the latter.

Soldiers who garrisoned frontier posts in the 19th century frequently found themselves isolated from all but the smallest civilian settlements, their only contact "with civilization" being through newspapers at the post libraries. For troopers of the four Negro regiments mustered into the military establishment shortly after the Civil War, this isolation was more acute than for the white soldiers. Few black people lived in the small settlements adjacent to the posts and the Army's failure to regularly provide subscriptions to the few newspapers published by Negroes magnified the problem. Newspapers published by whites rarely contained personal items about black people.²⁶

With the posting of the 9th US Colored Cavalry to Fort Robinson, Nebraska, in the 1880s and 1890s and the 10th US Colored Cavalry in the early 1900s officials at the post resolved to bring the troopers news by and for their people.

During the 9th Cavalry's tour of duty at Fort Robinson in 1886, the library listed five papers, including one black

publication, the *New York Freeman*, better known by its later name the *Age*. Seven years later, 1893, no Negro papers were on library shelves.²⁷ But the troopers were not entirely without news of their people, thanks to the efforts of Chaplain Henry Vinton Plummer.

Chaplain Plummer was born a slave, labored as a field hand during his youth, enlisted in the Union Navy during the Civil War, where he learned to read and write. Following the war, Plummer worked and studied in Washington, DC to become a "soldier of the cross." Through his efforts and those of influential friends he was commissioned in the Chaplains Corps in 1884 and assigned to the 9th Cavalry Regiment, the first Negro clergyman to be appointed chaplain in the Regular Army.²⁸

In 1892 Chaplain Plummer, by then a successful, capable, but controversial figure at Fort Robinson, was putting up with a certain amount of ostracism from white officers, due in part to his concern for his race.²⁹ Chaplain Plummer soon became embroiled in politically controversial subjects which were reflected in his editorship of the *Fort Robinson Weekly Bulletin* and his managership of the *Omaha Progress*. Both of these publications carried news of interest to the Negro troops. The *Progress* even published letters about racial injustice. This was alarming, considering the state of race relations at the time—so frightening, in fact, to officers of the post that Chaplain Plummer was labeled a "disturbing element."³⁰

Whether or not the Plummer incident was entirely responsible for the disappearance of Negro literature from the library, it was not until 1902 that the Negro regiments at Fort Robinson once again could read news of their people. The racial climate had changed for the better. The 9th Cavalry by then had departed for other stations, and the 10th Cavalry was posted to Fort Robinson. Troopers of the regiment were authorized to subscribe to the *Colored American Magazine* and the *New York Age* by getting in touch with First Sergeant Robert M. Johnson of Company K. Other Negro newspapers available to troops at Fort Robinson were the *Richmond (Virginia) Planet*, *Cleveland Gazette*, and *Indianapolis Freeman*.³¹

In general the operating rules and the duties of the librarians were pretty much the same at all posts. Administrative councils drew up the rules and selected the

librarians. Excerpts from regulations at Fort Mackenzie, Michigan, in 1845 were:

1. The post librarian shall catalogue all books belonging to the post in a book kept by him.
2. All books taken out shall be charged to that person . . . in a book provided for such purposes.
3. Books charged out for one week may be renewed.
4. All books unnecessarily damaged by borrower must be paid for by a fee set by the Council of Administration.
5. On arrival of the mail, newspapers shall be immediately taken to the reading room. No papers to be taken out of the library for twenty-four hours.
6. The enlisted men had access to the library 1 to 5 p.m. daily.³²

The librarian at Fort Atkinson, Nebraska, in the 1820s was not only required to catalogue the books, but had to enter the cost of each book in his ledger and inscribe on each fly leaf "Regimental Library 6th Infantry." "Small" books could be checked out for one week, "large" books for two weeks. Books could be checked out on Saturdays only unless the librarian was a good fellow and consented to accommodate an officer at other times. No renewals were possible at Fort Atkinson. Rank had its privilege, and if two officers wanted the same book at the same time, the ranking officer's request would be granted. The post surgeon ranked with a captain and the surgeon's mate ranked with a first lieutenant. A book damaged by a borrower had to be replaced, but if it was part of a set, the hapless soldier was required to replace the whole set. All books had to be returned on the last day of the month. Newspapers, those much-sought-after publications, could not be checked out. A small fine of 2½ cents per day was charged for overdue books.³³ This contrasted sharply with the 12½ cents per day a soldier at Fort Snelling, Minnesota, was required to pay for his oversight.³⁴

Who drew the post librarian assignments? The post treasurer was quite often given the job. But chaplains, on the assumption that such duty was consonant with their religious and school work, were prime candidates for the assignment. Occasionally the post surgeon or adjutant fell heir to library duty.

Until separate buildings or separate rooms were designated for libraries, the libraries set up in odd places such as the adjutant's office, first sergeant's room, school rooms, and sutler's storerooms. At Fort Concho, Texas, the hallway between

Chaplain Norman Badger's quarters and rooms occupied by a couple named Morrison became the post library.³⁵

Some libraries were well furnished, brightly illuminated, quite spacious, and comfortable. Fort Atkinson, Nebraska, was one. Here the post council generously appropriated \$3 to purchase cloth for reading room tables and recommended that the floor be "double laid," and a new ceiling be added.³⁶ Fort Buford, Dakota Territory, housed its library in a 15x22 foot space divided into three rooms. Fort Harker, Kansas, provided a 10-foot square room, well lighted and cheerful, and the soldiers at Fort Brown, Texas, where all things were done on a large scale, were proud of their library situated in a large 50x112-foot rectangular building, spacious and pleasant, surrounded by a nine-foot veranda.³⁷

Fort Robinson, Nebraska, soldiers also boasted ample facilities. William E. Annin, correspondent for the *Omaha Bee*, writing of his visit to Fort Robinson in 1883, described the library and reading room facilities. He reported the post library containing 700 volumes occupied one-half of the downstairs of the administration building. Annin commented that Companies M and H of the 5th Cavalry maintained "a carefully selected library and well-stocked reading room."³⁸

Regiments and companies—smaller military units—and occasionally an individual officer established a library to fill a void at some post where a library did not exist. Incidentally, regimental libraries may have predated post libraries. A resolution by the Continental Congress (June 20, 1777) which established a Corps of Invalids required that the officers contribute one day's pay toward the purchase of books for a regimental library. The books purchased, however, were too technical and not suited to the enlisted men.³⁹

At some posts regimental and company libraries augmented post libraries. The library at Fort Boise, Idaho, boasted that 1,000 of its volumes had been loaned to it by a company stationed there in the 1870s. At Fort McPherson, Nebraska, in 1875 two companies of the 5th US Infantry maintained a library of some 388 volumes.⁴⁰ At one time the garrison at Fort D. A. Russell, Wyoming, was kept in touch with civilization through the efforts of the 9th US Infantry and several of the Cavalry companies stationed there.⁴¹

Post hospitals, too, usually obtained reading matter for pa-

tients, with surgeons loaning books from their personal libraries. It was not unusual for frontier Army officers to carry their personal libraries from post to post. One of the most fascinating of these officers prior to the Civil War was General Ethan Allen Hitchcock, graduate of West Point, instructor and commandant of cadets, whose ambition was to master diverse branches of knowledge. Hitchcock wrote often upon public events and matters of professional interest. He wrote and published eight volumes of material on metaphysics.⁴²

Hitchcock's library, said to number over 750 volumes not including pamphlets and magazines, was carried everywhere he went, amid all conceivable inconveniences.⁴³ His books were not for show—he read them. One entry in his diary recorded his jubilation at receiving \$200 worth of books, including a few on alchemy and metaphysics. While others might be playing cards, drinking, or otherwise socializing, Hitchcock sat in his tent by the light of a flickering candle reading some ponderous tome on metaphysics or alchemy. On occasion, should the noise from fellow officers prove too much, Allen would retreat to a secluded spot to read in peace “out of range of profanity, ribaldry, and blustering braggadocio.”⁴⁴

Was the Army's library program a success? Indeed it was. Books became tattered, torn, well-thumbed through constant use. Immigrant soldiers at Fort Stevenson, North Dakota, were known to have used the library to learn English, an accomplishment which set them on the promotion road. They read even the advertisements and fashion pages. The circulation of books increased from 835 in 1882 to over 32,000 in 1883. There have been only minor setbacks since. Today the Department of the Army funds 40 percent of post library budgets.⁴⁵

FOUR ARMY CHAPLAIN-EDUCATORS

Once it was considered sufficient for a soldier to be able to handle his musket and learn the fundamentals of ground combat. This view changed when the War Department recognized that a soldier needed formal education to perform other military duties in an intelligent manner and to be a better citizen on return to civilian life.

Army recruits have always cut across social, economic, and educational lines. The unschooled drew the simple, though often more hazardous, duties. With the enlistment of non-English-speaking emigrants from Europe during the early decades of the 19th century—and long afterward—it became mandatory that some schooling in the fundamentals of the English language at the very least be provided for them.

Thus, the War Department became the first agency of the Federal Government to recognize the existence of an educational problem within its sphere of influence and to bring it to the attention of Congress.

On four occasions considered in this article, Congress enacted legislation with reference to military post schools. The first was the Act of March 2, 1821, published as *The General Regulations for the Army, 1821*. It provided post schools for the soldiers' children, established post libraries, and authorized expenditure of post funds for upkeep.¹

These regulations written by General Winfield Scott incorporated ideas collected from a study of military systems in France and England where he had visited following the War of 1812.² General Scott had arrived in England when the British regimental schools were at their best, and it is obvious the general was influenced by their operation, although no direct evidence testifies to that assumption.³

Thus, credit for first establishing Army post schools belongs to General Scott, who during his distinguished career from 1808 to 1861 was active in promoting education as well as concerning himself with moral values.

The second occasion on which Congress concerned itself with military post schools produced the Act of July 5, 1838, which provided for chaplains in the Army and stipulated that they "also perform the duties of schoolmasters with pay not exceeding forty dollars per month, plus four rations per day, with quarters and fuel furnished."⁴

Soon afterward Congress took a third step in authorizing the establishment of night schools for musicians "and such uneducated soldiers as may be desirous of improvement."⁵

A letter, dated September 2, 1878, from the commander of Fort Wallace, Kansas, indicates the general condition of education then existing at the post:⁶

Chaplain [George A.] England has taken a lively interest in the education of the soldiers at the post, and also in the education of the children. At a larger post his services could no doubt be a great benefit in the matter of education of the enlisted men. At this post, which has up to a late period been one company post, his services have been all that could be expected.

On account of the small number of men heretofore at the post, we found it impossible to make a post fund for the purchase of books. . . .

The post school for soldiers was discontinued on account of hot weather and fatigue duty, and will be reopened in the latter part of Sept. if we have a sufficient number of men to justify it.

There is at the post a private school for officers' children, and this school also opens its doors to the children of the soldiers, all of whom attend at reduced rates. This school is superintended by Chaplain England. James Van Voast, Lieut. Col. 16th Infantry, Commanding.

A map of Fort Wallace dated June 30, 1878, and signed by George H. Palmer, 1st Lieut., 16th Infantry, designates one building as library, school house, and courtrooms.⁷ The records do not indicate whether this school room was used by soldiers at the post or by children—or both.

Funds for the post school were appropriated from profits from the post bakery. Orders for these appropriations were issued by the Council of Administration, which met at irregular intervals. At each council meeting the post treasurer submitted the bakery receipts and expenditures and reported the balance on hand. This money was appropriated by the council for salaries for the chief baker and his assistant, the post school, post library, and other purposes.

Following the Civil War, Congress passed legislation which changed the whole course of the Army education program. By the Act of July 28, 1866, Congress provided for the addition of Negro infantry and cavalry regiments to the Army. As the enlisted men of these newly created regiments were for the most part lacking in the very rudiments of an education, Congress wisely authorized one chaplain for each regiment of Negro troops "whose sole duty shall include the instruction of the enlisted men in the common English branches of education."⁸ That such instruction was necessary is quite evident when one reads that only one man was found in the entire 9th

US Colored Cavalry who could read or write sufficiently to act as sergeant major (the military clerk). It was not uncommon for a Negro first sergeant to ask his captain for assistance in calling the roll. Every report and every roster had to be prepared by an officer,⁹ usually white. This situation also occurred in the other colored regiments.

The vast majority of Negro enlisted men had had no opportunity to attend school and complete even elementary school education. It is to their great individual credit that they soon rose to positions of responsibility and honor in their regiments through the efforts of such dedicated Army Negro chaplains as George G. Mullins, Henry V. Plummer, and Allen Allensworth.

The Schoolmasters—Over the entrance of the training school on the campus of the Colorado State Teachers' College at Greeley, from which this writer was graduated many years ago, are inscribed the words: "He who teaches a child, labors with God in His workshop." These words exemplified the work of Chaplains Mullins, Plummer, Allensworth and other less publicized colleagues, who labored diligently to keep the lamp of learning burning for uneducated enlisted men and the children on frontier posts of the West.

Chaplain George S. Mullins, a Disciples of Christ minister, began his Army career on January 20, 1875, with the 25th US Colored Infantry at Fort Davis, Texas.¹⁰ Although entertaining grave doubts about the ability of the Negro troops at their ages to absorb formal education and dismayed by the dilapidated condition of the schools and the lack of equipment, Chaplain Mullins stayed on with the regiment. Through his efforts he brought its troops gradually up to a satisfactory level of achievement.

Because Fort Davis had been without a post chaplain for three years prior to Chaplain Mullins' assignment, he had to completely reestablish the post schools. It wasn't long before he had an enrollment of 80 eager enlisted men determined to acquire an education. Over one-half of these were beginners in the "three Rs."

To care for so many pupils, he held three class sessions daily except Saturdays and Sundays. The classes were in addition to his religious duties and placed an enormous workload on him.

But the enthusiasm, competition, and great pride exhibited by the Negro troopers enrolled in his classes tended to lighten his burden, he acknowledged. One satisfying result of the classes he noted, was a noticeable drop in disciplinary problems, which diminished in direct proportion to the amount of learning acquired by the soldiers.¹¹

The curriculum at Fort Davis, as at most posts, consisted of reading, writing, arithmetic, history, English, spelling, and elementary science. The flexibility of the curriculum provided for individual needs. Usually on Fridays, Chaplain Mullins gave special lectures to the enlisted men on some topic of civil, military, and moral law.¹²

For three years, Chaplain Mullins singlehandedly conducted the educational program for the 25th Infantry before he was assigned a sergeant assistant. During three years of study over 160 enlisted men who previously could neither read nor write were brought to an educational level sufficient for assignment as company clerks.¹³

While the educational structure at Fort Davis burgeoned, chaplains at other western posts were not always successful. Chaplains endured dilapidated facilities, shortages, poor equipment, no uniform texts, and worst of all, luke warm support, even hostility, from staff and line officers. They managed with varying degrees of success to carry out the educational program of the War Department.

That Chaplain Mullins' work did not go unnoticed by higher authority is evidenced by a letter of commendation from the commanding general of the Department of Texas E. O. C. Ord, who in a letter to the editors of the *Army-Navy Journal* (August 29, 1876) said: "The Chaplain manifests a commendable spirit in seeking the opportunity of extending to every man of the regiment . . . the benefits of his teaching. His course and work at Fort Davis, the headquarters of his regiment, has been marked by results in an admirable character. The Chaplain deserves all and more than he asked [Mullins had requested temporary assignment to Fort Bliss]. . . for the faithful and admirable manner in which he has performed all the duties pertaining to his office."¹⁴ What military man wouldn't like to have such a commendation in his 201 file?

In 1881 news reached Chaplain Mullins that he had been selected to succeed Colonel Alexander McDowell McCook as

officer in charge of education in the entire Army.¹⁵ During his tenure at the War Department, Chaplain Mullins was able to bring about well-stocked libraries, a greater standardization of textbooks and curriculum, and a closer inspection of post schools. When Congress turned down his plea for a corps of trained professional teachers, he directed his energies toward providing better-qualified teachers from the enlisted ranks. His goal of compulsory education for enlisted men was not to come about, however, until after he had retired.¹⁶

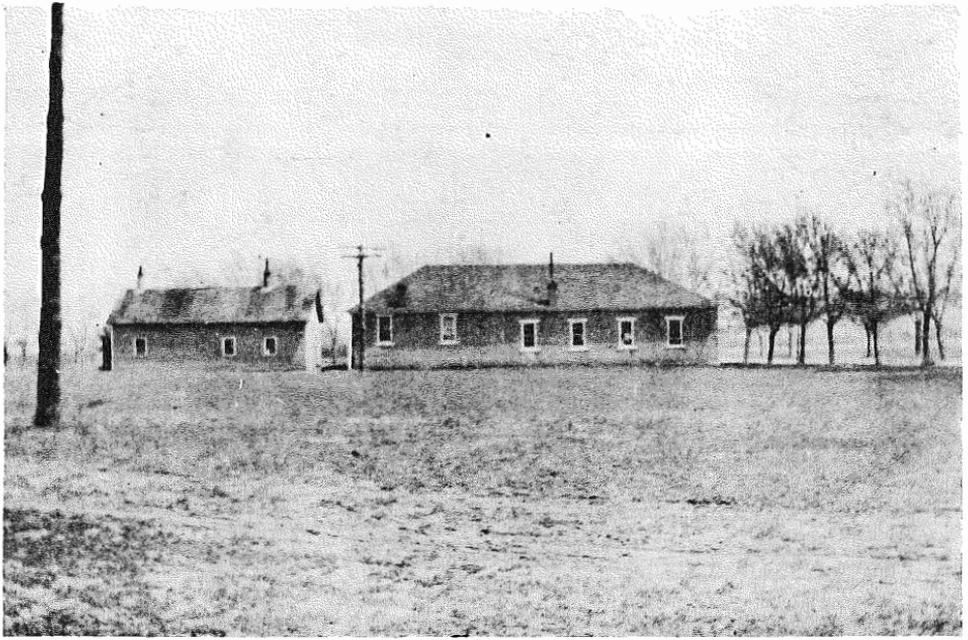
Chaplain Mullins returned to his regiment, the 25th Colored Infantry in 1891 in poor health. Illness forced his retirement from the Army.

The first Negro commissioned in the Chaplains' Corps of the regular Army was the capable, controversial, Henry V. Plummer. Born a slave on June 30, 1844, in Prince Georges County, Maryland, he worked as a field hand throughout his boyhood days. Upon the outbreak of the Civil War, Plummer enlisted in the Union Navy, as did another future Negro Army chaplain, Allen Allensworth. Henry Plummer learned to read and write. After an honorable discharge at war's end, this ambitious ex-Navy man worked in the Washington, DC Post Office until he had saved enough money to attend Wayland Seminary in Washington. After graduation in 1879, Plummer served as minister in Baptist churches in Washington and near-by Maryland.¹⁷

Hearing of the resignation of 9th Cavalry Chaplain Charles C. Pierce, Plummer applied for the position. With letters of reference from influential clergymen, and upon the recommendation of the great Negro leader, Frederick Douglass, Plummer was appointed chaplain of the 9th, then stationed at Fort Riley, Kansas, on July 1, 1884.¹⁸

Arriving at this first duty station, the newly appointed chaplain found that in addition to his religious services, he was assigned duty as post superintendent of schools. Commenting upon this assignment, the editor of the *Junction City Union* (July 12, 1884) wrote that Plummer had been graduated from the seminary "with honors and well merits the office that has been given him."¹⁹

Chaplain Plummer was also assigned duty as post bakery officer. An incident occurred at the bakery which led eventually to his dismissal from the Army. Although he held this position



Fort Robinson adobe schoolhouse used as band quarters, 1908.



*Chaplain Henry V. Plummer.
Courtesy of Moorland-Spingarn
Research Center.*

for two or three years, little is known about his bakery work. Once, though, Plummer reprimanded a baker, Private Robert Benjamin, who because of drunkenness did not have bread ready for distribution one morning. The chaplain forgot the incident—the private did not.²⁰

Plummer's main energies and thoughts were directed to the post school. Learning was the key, Plummer told the enlisted men, that would unlock the door to opportunities in the military and civilian worlds. He taught them how to fill out military forms, take roll, make up guard and duty rosters, and keep account books.

After a three-year tour of duty at Fort Riley, Kansas, Plummer was transferred to Fort McKinney, Wyoming, where he again supervised educational and religious programs. Here he urged that the soldier-teachers be given rank and compensation in keeping with the position, and that the War Department establish a bureau of Education and Literature to select textbooks and equipment. He advocated increased appropriations and suggested a form of compulsory evening courses for enlisted men who needed them.²¹ Congress eventually authorized classes for barely literate soldiers in March, 1889. The act was rescinded two years later when legislation forbade the enlistment of men unable to read, write, or speak in English at the age level of 13.²²

Chaplain Plummer was transferred to Fort Robinson in the Pine Ridge of northwestern Nebraska in 1892.

Marching to the beat of a different drummer than the majority of his non-political colleagues, Plummer became embroiled in controversy. Fellow officers considered him to be a "disturbing element." Plummer edited the *Fort Robinson Weekly Bulletin* and served as resident manager of the Fort Robinson department of the *Omaha Progress*, a Negro paper published in Omaha. Both publications carried news of interest to Negro troops, and the *Progress* even published letters about racial injustice. Though he performed his educational and religious duties satisfactorily, suspicion of him grew among the white officers of the post and their scorn was directed at the crusading chaplain.²³

The act that forced his dismissal from the service, however, came from an entirely different direction—an official complaint signed by Robert Benjamin, the culprit in the Fort Riley

bakery incident some years back. He charged Chaplain Plummer with violation of the 61st Article of War—"conduct unbecoming an officer and gentleman." In the specifications Benjamin, now a saddler sergeant, alleged that Plummer drank intoxicants with and furnished liquor to enlisted men and "behaved in a most disgraceful manner"—all this, at Sergeant David R. Dillon's promotion party.²⁴

The pre-trial investigation brought out the fact that his accuser was extremely drunk most of the evening in question. Testimony showed that Sergeant Benjamin had written himself an anonymous letter, signing it "We Thirteen," in an attempt to have the court believe that he and perhaps other witnesses had been threatened if they testified against the chaplain.²⁵ Investigation also revealed that Sergeant Benjamin had nursed a grudge against Plummer for the Fort Riley bakery incident and that he was "out to get the chaplain." Nevertheless, the charges stood. Efforts by clergymen, congressmen, and high-ranking officers, all vouching to Plummer's good character, great works, and good influence among the soldiers, were fruitless. On November 10, 1894, he was dismissed from the service.²⁶

Following his dismissal Plummer and his family moved to Kansas, where he served as pastor at Kansas City and Wichita until his death on February 10, 1905.

Chaplain Allen Allensworth's career was productive and satisfying. He, too, came up from a slavery background. Born of slave parents in Kentucky (1843), he early began acquiring formal knowledge. His owner became alarmed at his progress and sent him "down river" to work on a tobacco farm. In 1861 Allensworth was put on the auction block at a slave market and sold to a race-horse owner for \$1,000. A year later, through the efforts of friends, Allensworth was able to obtain his freedom.²⁷

During the Civil War Allensworth served briefly as a nurse in the 44th Illinois Hospital Corps²⁸ before his acceptance in the Union Navy (1863). He was assigned to the gunboat *Queen City*, then being fitted out at Cincinnati. The captain of the ship, looking for bright assistants, selected Allensworth to be wardroom steward, a notable advancement. Ever punctilious in his duties, he was soon promoted to petty officer first class.²⁹

At war's end Allensworth returned to Louisville, Kentucky, joined the First Baptist Church, and through its influence became a pupil at the recently organized Normal School of Freedom, established by the American Mission Society in 1867. His studies completed, Allensworth was ordained teaching minister to churches in southwest Kentucky.³⁰ Shortly afterward he enrolled in a combined education-religion course at Roger Williams University in Nashville. On completing his studies, Allensworth turned toward the military as a career.³¹

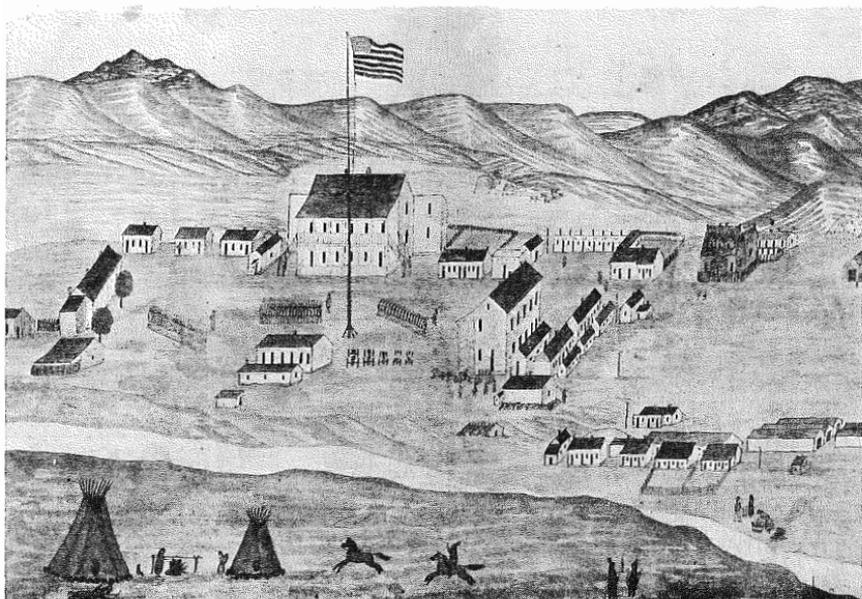
After months of letter writing, obtaining scores of testimonials, and gaining recommendations from prominent persons, including senators, Allensworth was appointed chaplain to the 24th US Colored Infantry stationed at Fort Supply, Indian Territory, on April 1, 1886.³²

The first Negro officer at this post, largely garrisoned by white southern cavalry, Allensworth was concerned as to the kind of reception he would receive. The new chaplain was aware of the temper of the times and had prepared himself for the occasion. On arrival his apprehensions were allayed by the gracious reception he received from the post commander, Colonel Zenas R. Bliss, and other officers.

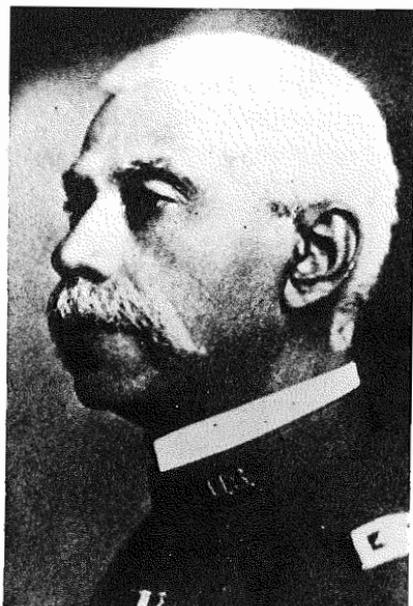
But, to the enlisted men of the 5th US Cavalry, a white outfit, it was a different story. They refused to accord the new chaplain the common military courtesies. Whenever he passed by their barracks, they would retreat inside to avoid saluting him. Allensworth took this in stride, remained calm, and did not put erring soldiers on report for failure to salute. In a few months his sense of justice and fairness had won them over.

Chaplain Allensworth prepared and put into operation a course of study for the enlisted men and children of the garrison. The enlisted men's classes were divided into three sections, one each for privates, corporals, and sergeants, in order that each grade could concentrate on its particular needs. Classes met in the afternoons or evenings, Monday through Friday. In addition to the regular classwork, the enlisted men studied bookkeeping, military correspondence, and military administrative practices.³³ School attendance on the part of the enlisted men was encouraged by the staff and line officers.

Allensworth's educational efforts carried over from the formal classroom to the kitchen. He conducted a cooking school



Fort Laramie, Wyoming, about 1863. From a painting by C. Moellman, a bugler with the 11th Ohio Volunteer Cavalry. Courtesy of University of Wyoming Archives.



Chaplain Allen Allensworth. Courtesy of R. H. Smith Collection, Phoenix, Arizona.

in the kitchen of his quarters. Drawing upon his slave-houseboy background and as an ex-owner of two restaurants, he explained the "chemistry of food" and gave demonstrations on the cooking art.³⁴

His educational efforts and achievements soon reached the ears of higher military authority. Colonel Bliss praised him for his "energy and effectiveness." Department of Arizona Commander General Alexander McDowell McCook, recommended that his course of study be adopted throughout the Army. In fact, military post school superintendents were already requesting copies of the Allensworth course of study.³⁵ Allensworth's "Outline of Course of Study and Rules Governing Post Schools at Fort Bayard, New Mexico" illustrated his educational principles. His use of visual aids, many purchased from personal funds, and the use of environmental surroundings in teaching, proved innovative.³⁶

He recognized that grade pupils have short attention spans and that the teacher must provide "a change of pace." Teachers were to encourage students through judicial praise, not through fear and scolding. (These were classroom-management ideas far ahead of the times.) Children, he said, learned faster by doing than by repeating what they have been told. Keeping children busy was his number one classroom axiom.

A few examples of Chaplain Allensworth's "Rules and Regulations" will illustrate his concept of proper classroom management:

1. Children will be assigned to grades according to intelligence and progress. No favoritism whatever will be shown.
2. Parents must send children to school clean and neat.
3. Corporal punishment is not allowed unless requested by the parents, but the teacher is permitted to inflict slight punishment when deemed necessary, but in no case to the extent of injury to the child's health.
4. Teachers must obey and carry out instructions of superintendents.
5. Teachers must in all cases be kind and firm.³⁷

Manners and words were not neglected. Allensworth admonished his teachers to use classroom incidents to instruct in proper behavior.

Throughout military circles Chaplain Allensworth continued to receive such wide recognition for his contributions to Army post schools that civilian educational circles began to take notice. He was invited to address the National Educa-

tional Association at its 1891 convention in Toronto, Canada. (Because of an indifferent War Department, Allensworth had to pay his own expenses.) Allensworth stressed that Army education provided "the soldier's life with a new and greater dimension and as a means for making soldiers more responsible and useful citizens." The *Toronto Globe* described the Chaplains' address as "fluent and forceful."³⁸

Wherever the 24th Infantry was stationed, Chaplain Allensworth established schools and arranged classes. During his tour with the 24th in the Philippine Islands, he organized a Christian Endeavor Society (youth religious-study group), delivered mail to hospital patients, and encouraged stateside church societies to correspond with soldiers who received no mail. He was especially known for his educational and entertaining lectures at the YMCA.³⁹

Upon returning to the United States, Captain Allensworth was one of four chaplains promoted to major on June 14, 1904.⁴⁰ By this time after nearly 20 years on active duty, Allensworth was approaching retirement. On April 7, 1906, he was placed on the Army's retired list with the rank of lieutenant colonel.⁴¹

Retirement was hardly a rocking chair on some vine-covered porch. He founded a town—Allensworth—in 1908 about 40 miles north of Bakersfield, California. Now on State Highway 43 a few miles west of Delano in Tulare County, the small Negro community is dwindling away. Only a few weather-beaten, white, gray or brown houses show any signs of life. The few inhabitants still living there now work in nearby fields or in the larger populated areas nearby.⁴²

It was to have been a model community for his race. It *was*, briefly, before being threatened by a polluted water supply. He never entirely completed plans for the town. He was struck by a motorcycle in the streets of Los Angeles and died the next day, September 14, 1914.⁴³

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