

History of Fort Reno, Oklahoma

As told by Jake V.

El Reno, Oklahoma

Fort Reno originated as a temporary camp on July 1874

Its job was to protect the Cheyenne-Arapahoe Agency at Darlington. This happened after an Indian outbreak that led to the Red River War of 1874.

Sited three miles west and two miles north of Preston, Reno in Canadian County, the original military camp was enlarged and officially created as Fort Reno on July 15, 1875.

It took its name from General Jesse L. Reno, who had been killed at South Mountain, Maryland during the Civil War.

Good afternoon. My name is Debra Kaufman. I am the full-time volunteer here at Historic Fort Reno Visitor Center and Museum, and I am also the current president of Historic Fort Reno, Inc., the nonprofit group that is allowed to sit in this building and greet visitors to the Historic Fort Reno site and tell them the story of Historic Fort Reno.

And how do you feel that Fort Reno connects to democracy?

From its beginning to its end, it ties into several aspects of our country's history. The land runs, land development.

But prior to that, it was a state

As people were moving west from the east after the Civil War, manifest destiny, there is the history of the attacks by the Native American tribes, and then a little later on, that reverses when we start doing our land run events, land giveaway events.

The military will need to be here to protect the Native Americans.

So, it's teaching us the history of our country.

What is the history of our country?

What else would you like to share about Fort Reno?

There is a lot of history. Of course, the beginning up until World War II, when, well, actually World War I. So, at a point in time, Fort Reno is closed due to funding, but it's later, very shortly later, reopened and its role in history is redefined.

Instead of being a fort to train men, we now become a fort that will train animals to be used as pack animals in World War I and World War II.

And during World War II, Fort Reno becomes a site for a prisoner-of-war camp.

I'm Linda Taylor, and my dad worked out at Fort Reno, and that's what I'm telling you about.

My dad, Jack Wilkerson

Jack Wilkerson went to work at Fort Reno in the 1948.

He broke mules to be used in the Korean War.

The mules transported artillery, ammunition, food, and medicine under the enemy fire and transported the wounded.

Many of the veterans are here today because of a mule stopped a bullet or a piece of shrapnel that was meant for the GIs.

Fort Reno's purpose as a remount station was to raise horses and mules for all the military.

Reports indicated that Fort Reno was one of the regional headquarters, having approximately 14,000 horses and mules at various times throughout the remount station.

Real cowboys broke and trained the horses. They were trained in the military. My dad was one of those cowboys.

Shortly after World War II, in 1948, the United States Army Quartermaster Remount Depot at Fort Reno was decommissioned.

The animals were still trained and shipped out of the Fort Reno until 1952.

My name is Sandra Mantooth.

I live in Ada, Oklahoma.

I am a retired veteran.

I am a retired Spanish teacher and educator.

What piece of information about Fort Reno do I find most interesting?

Well, I was always impressed in that after the Civil War, the 9th and 10th Cavalry regiments, which were considered African-American - of course, they didn't call them

African-Americans back then. They called them blacks or negroes. Those two groups regiments were sent to Fort Reno to work with the Indians and be there, you know.

And so, the Black History and the Fort history, and of course, the Blacks; the Indians called them Buffalo Soldiers because they reminded them the, curly hair on top of their head, reminded them of buffalos.

But it's amazing what these Buffalo Soldiers did in establishing, you know the Fort, and that, you know, they were assigned and sent everywhere when needed.

And it always amazed me that sometimes they rode on the stagecoaches that came through, of course, this is after Indian territory was established.

They rode on top of the stagecoaches to protect the stages from being robbed and being attacked.

Fort Reno also has many interesting facts.

A couple of these include famous flight enthusiast Amelia Earhart landing her airplane at the Fort Reno airstrip in the 1920s.

Will Rogers also visited the fort to watch polo matches and horse races.

And, of course, the big one that always impressed me since I'm quite a horse enthusiast is that one of the horses raised and trained there became the horse that leads the parade of funerals for when presidents and people of high ranking are buried at Arlington Cemetery.

And one of the horses that was used for many, many years was named Blackjack, and he was born and raised at Fort Reno.

Do you feel that Fort Reno still has a place in influencing democracy?

Yes, I think it's very important that we realize history will always be with us, and it's important to learn history just for the simple fact that you don't want to repeat things.

Hello, my name is Jake Volgamore.

I'm from Canadian County and I had this opportunity to do this project and honestly, I had no idea what I was doing going into it.

But the first thought that came to my mind was local and I was like: you know, I've lived in El Reno for 16 years and I've never been to Fort Reno and I've heard very little about it. So, I ended up going and visiting the place and learning a whole bunch of new things and learning a whole bunch of interesting facts.

And I also learned that, you know, for Reno, it started off as a military training unit and then it ended up turning into a Calvary Center and then into a prisoner of war camp.

And now today it stands as a historical site, so it's gone through many phases.

Fort Reno is a nonprofit organization, and so that basically means that they do everything based off donations.

And a lot of things they do are annual events to help educate other people.

And help try to bring an attention to this place because it's something honestly every year I think it kinda gets more and more forgotten. So that's something I kind of want to be able to get out to my community.

I want to help educate them as well as help try to restore this place that's been here for so many years. I'm just so glad I had this opportunity to do this project and I'm going to continue to build onto it.

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