

HISTORY OF FORT TOWNSEND

Fort Townsend was established in 1856 and served as a United States Army Post until 1894 when it was destroyed by fire. It was located three miles from the city of Port Townsend at the eastern end of the Straits of Juan de Fuca.

It was established at a time when there were numerous Indian difficulties on Puget Sound, and when Port Townsend was Port of Entry for the whole Puget Sound region. After the establishment of the post there were no great disturbances among the Indians for the garrison to quell, but it took part in several minor events connected with Indian affairs.

There were several periods in its history when it was unoccupied and after the Civil War many of the commanders of the Department of the Columbia recommended that it be abandoned, but for twenty years it was destined to be the only fort on Puget Sound.

The first mention of troops on Puget Sound in government documents is found in the report of the Adjutant General dated November 28, 1849, which says that the two companies of the First Artillery which sailed from New York for Oregon in November, 1848, arrived at the mouth of the Columbia River May 13, 1849. One company was stationed near Nisqually on Puget Sound.

The troops that were sent to Puget Sound occupied the buildings of the Hudson's Bay Company trading post at Steilacoom on August 23, 1849, and from that time the post which was retained till 1870 was known as Fort Steilacoom. The site of the post is now occupied by the Washington Hospital for the Insane.

A memorial was sent to Congress by the Oregon Legislature February 19, 1852, asking, "that troops be sent to Oregon to protect the territory, especially the Puget Sound region," "because of the rapid expansion of the territory."¹ This was the first of many requests that were sent east asking that military protection be given Puget Sound. Most of the requests were sent by the generals who were in command of the Division of the Pacific or the Department of the Columbia.

An example of this is found in the request of General Harney

¹ 32 Cong. 1st Sess. H. M. Doc. 14.

who was commander of the Division of the Pacific when he asked that troops be made available for stations on Puget Sound to protect the citizens of that region from the Indians. He made this request in 1854.²

General Harney's request must have had some effect for on August 26, 1856, Fort Bellingham was established, and on October 26 Fort Townsend was established. The garrison of Fort Townsend consisted of 82 officers and men, including a company of the Fourth Infantry and a detachment of Artillery commanded by Captain G. O. Haller.³

In the next two years \$17,535 was spent on construction work at Fort Townsend. In 1857, \$4,281 was spent and in 1858, \$13,554 was spent.⁴

Congress passed a resolution December 23, 1858, asking J. B. Floyd, Secretary of War, for detailed plans for the defense of Puget Sound. He replied January 21, 1859, that there were none and that none could be made until a survey of the region had been made. He asked for an appropriation of \$10,000 for the purpose of making the survey. The matter was tabled by Congress.⁵

As a result of the boundary dispute with England over the San Juan Islands the troops from Fort Townsend and Fort Bellingham were ordered to San Juan Island July 9, 1859. Other troops soon occupied the two posts.⁶

All regular troops were withdrawn from Fort Townsend in 1861, and volunteers garrisoned the post, when it was garrisoned, for the next few years.⁷

In his annual report of 1866, General Halleck, who was in command of the Department of the Columbia, recommended that Fort Townsend, which was unoccupied, be abandoned and the buildings be disposed of.⁸

The following year General Babcock who had succeeded General Halleck in command of the Department of the Columbia suggested that the buildings of Fort Townsend be torn down and moved to another location of more strategic value.⁹

The post was occupied for a short time by Company F of the Twenty-third Infantry commanded by First Lieutenant J. T.

2 Rep. Secy. War 1854 (Rep. Com. Div. of Pac.)

3 Rep. Secy. War 1856 (Div. of Pac.)

4 Rep. Secy. War 1859 (Q. M. Gen.)

5 35 Cong. 2nd Sess. H. E. Doc. 65.

6 Rep. Secy. War 1859 (Div. of Pac.)

7 Rep. Secy. War 1866 (Dept. of Col.)

8 Rep. Secy. War 1866 (Dept. of Col.)

9 Rep. Secy. War 1867 (Dept. of Col.)

Haskell. The company was soon transferred to Camp San Juan, and the post remained unoccupied for another period of years.¹⁰

General Thomas in his annual report for 1869 recommended that the land and buildings of the post be disposed of because they were not in proper place for defense purposes.¹¹ The next year General E. R. S. Canby took the opposite view of the situation. He recommended that the post be retained although there was no immediate need for troops there. He gave as his reasons for desiring the post retained that it was near the frontier, on a very good harbor, and troops stationed there would be in easy reach of the whole Puget Sound region. He said that the buildings in their present condition were worthless due to the state of decay.¹²

The post was soon to be the only one on Puget Sound as Fort Bellingham had been disposed of, and Fort Steilacoom was sold in 1870. As soon as the boundary dispute was settled there would no longer be any use for Camp San Juan. A detachment of troops were sent to Fort Townsend with the idea in view of preparing it for the garrison stationed at Camp San Juan.¹³

In 1874 Company C of the Twenty-first Infantry commanded by Captain George H. Burton which had been stationed at Camp San Juan was transferred to Fort Townsend where it remained till 1876.¹⁴ That year Captain E. A. Bancroft took command.¹⁵

General O. O. Howard, in his report of 1876, says of Fort Townsend, "The buildings have been repaired and the grounds cleared of the brushwood that covered part of them at my last visit. I think Captain George H. Burton who is in charge has reason to be gratified at the order and beauty of his post."¹⁶

Indian wars took all the available troops to the field in 1877 and the post was garrisoned by detachments of the Twenty-first Infantry and the Fourth Artillery consisting of four commissioned officers and eleven enlisted men commanded by First Lieutenant E. W. Stone.¹⁷

The next year G. O. Haller, this time Colonel Haller, was again in command of the post. The garrison consisted of one company of the Twenty-first Infantry and one of the Fourth Artillery consisting in all of six officers and 59 men.¹⁸ He was

10 Rep. Secy. War 1868 (Dept. of Col.)

11 Rep. Secy. War 1869 (Dept. of Col.)

12 Rep. Secy. War 1870 (Dept. of Col.)

13 Rep. Secy. War 1872 (Dept. of Col.)

14 Rep. Secy. War 1874-5-6 (Adj. Gen.)

15 Rep. Secy. War 1876 (Adj. Gen.)

16 Rep. Secy. War 1876 (Dept. of Col.)

17 Rep. Secy. War 1877 (Asst. Dept. Adj. of Dept. of Col.)

18 Rep. Secy. War 1878 (Dept. of Col.)

transferred in 1879, and Companies B and E of the Twenty-first Infantry in command of Captain Robert Pollock were stationed at Fort Townsend.¹⁹

1880, a new guardhouse and a new storehouse were built at the post.²⁰ Company E was transferred to Fort Vancouver, which was headquarters for the Department of the Columbia, and it was replaced by Company D. The barracks were reported as being in a very poor state of repair and too small for the number of men stationed there.²¹

Captain Pollock was transferred to Fort Klamath, Oregon, and Lieutenant Colonel Alexander Chambers from headquarters at Vancouver Barracks was placed in command in 1882.²²

From this time until it passed out of existence Fort Townsend was mentioned each year in the annual report of the General in command of the Department of the Columbia as being of no value for the defense of Puget Sound, and it was usually added that it should be abandoned and some new fortifications be built in proper places so that the region would not be without means of defense.

In 1884 the Twenty-first Infantry was transferred to the Department of the Platte and replaced by the Fourteenth Infantry in the Department of the Columbia. After the transfer was effected Lieutenant Colonel Henry Douglass in command of a company of that regiment was stationed at Fort Townsend.²³ The barracks were repaired that year.²⁴

General N. A. Miles called the attention of the Secretary of War to the fact that the Puget Sound region was for all practical purposes defenseless. He recommended that Fort Townsend be abandoned and that some of the military reservations, which had been set aside for the purpose, be fortified. He appointed a board of artillery officers to make a survey of locations on Puget Sound that would be suitable for coast defense fortifications.²⁵

In 1885 the Fourteenth Infantry was concentrated at Vancouver Barracks, and one company of the Second Infantry was stationed at Fort Townsend. Lieutenant L. S. Ames was in command of the post.²⁶

The Fortification Board, sometimes known as the Endicott

19 Rep. Secy. War 1879 (Dept. of Col.)

20 Rep. Secy. War 1880 (Q. M. Gen.)

21 Rep. Secy. War 1880 (Dept. of Col.)

22 Rep. Secy. War 1882 (Adj. Gen.)

23 Rep. Secy. War 1884 (Dept. of Col.)

24 Rep. Secy. War 1884 (Q. M. Gen.)

25 Rep. Secy. War 1884 (Dept. of Col.)

26 Rep. Secy. War 1885 (Adj. Gen.)

Board, met in 1886 and drew up plans for the defense of the coast of the whole United States, but they omitted any plans for the defense of Puget Sound.²⁷

From 1886 till 1892 Captain A. H. Bainbridge, in command of one company of the Fourteenth Infantry, was stationed at Fort Townsend.²⁸ In 1892 he was relieved by Captain John Murphey who remained in command of the post until it was abandoned in 1894.²⁹

General John Gibbon recommended in 1888 that Fort Townsend be abandoned because of its small size and poor location. He also suggested that a new fort of large proportions be constructed at one of the places recommended by the board of artillery officers appointed by General Miles.³⁰

Brigadier General A. V. Kautz in his report of 1891 urged that attention be paid to the lack of proper defense for Puget Sound which was becoming a very important region due to its rapid growth, its large foreign trade, and because it was the terminus of several transcontinental railroads.³¹

General W. P. Carlin, when he took command of the Department of the Columbia, reported that Fort Townsend could be of no service in protecting cities and harbors of Puget Sound. He said that the troops there could be more usefully employed in garrisoning some important point in those waters.³²

"Since 1866 the government has done very little looking to the protection of Puget Sound. As regards protection given to the inhabitants of that section through garrisoned posts, it has been in the nature of police and of benefit only in seasons of Indian hostilities. Fort Townsend still remains and is garrisoned by a single company of infantry. The only advantage to be derived from its retention consists in the fact that it furnishes shelter for troops. It might almost as well not exist."³³

The above is the opinion General Otis expressed of the conditions of defense of Puget Sound when he took command of the Department of the Columbia in 1894. That year the Fortification Board met and selected eleven points on Puget Sound suitable for construction of coast defense fortifications.³⁴

Shortly after General Otis made his report the barracks at

27 Rep. Secy. War 1886 (Fort. Bd.)
 28 Rep. Secy. War 1886-7-8-9-90-91 (Adj. Gen.)
 29 Rep. Secy. War 1892-3-4 (Adj. Gen.)
 30 Rep. Secy. War 1888 (Dept. of Col.)
 31 Rep. Secy. War 1891 (Dept. of Col.)
 32 Rep. Secy. War 1893 (Dept. of Col.)
 33 Rep. Secy. War 1894 (Dept. of Col.)
 34 Rep. Secy. War 1894 (Dept. of Col. and Fort. Bd.)

Fort Townsend were destroyed by fire. The troops abandoned the post and arrived at Vancouver Barracks March 6.³⁵ The reservation consisting of 640 acres was turned over to the Department of the Interior June 28, 1895.³⁶

RAY THEODORE COWELL.

35 Rep. Secy. War 1895 (Dept. of Col.)

36 Rep. Secy War 1895 (Abandoned Res.)