

Abandonment of Fort Duchesne and Story of Its Founding

OUT in the mountains of eastern Utah, the happenings of the past fifteen years have not much disturbed the rest of the world, because the country was near in miles, but very, very distant in point of accessibility. For that reason little is known about the Indian peoples who have lived there, and the chiefs who made their headquarters along the rivers running into the Grand. And also little is known about the efforts of white men and trappers to live with them, or to conquer them.

However, in Fort Duchesne, located on the Utah river, just above the forks of the Duchesne, and many miles away from any outpost of white men's settlements, the government made its frontier stand to control one of the last of the warring tribes. Fort Duchesne will be abandoned within the next year, and the Indian chiefs, for which it was built to keep in submission, are now either gone to their happy hunting grounds, or, instead of being young bloods, full of fight, and vigor, are aged grandfathers, telling tales of early exploits to more peaceful and agriculturally inclined descendants.

FOUNDING OF THE FORT.

Fort Duchesne is not much to look at, in point of elaborateness of finish, yet it is probably the most expensive fort ever erected in America, in proportion to what has been secured. Every building has run up away beyond what would be expected, as all material for its construction has had to be freighted in from Price, Utah, after paying high mountain freight rates to the railroad. It was founded originally by Major A. R. Chaffee, now commander-in-chief of the United States army, and is a literal descendant of Fort Thornberg, near Ouray, which in turn was made necessary by the transfer of the White River Utes into the Utah country.

Proceeding this transfer was one of the most bloody massacres in the last days of Indian warfare, and a slope of troops under Major Thornberg that forced some of the hardest work performed in the west by the army. Thornberg fell early in the fight, and when the troops followed the insurgent Utes over the Colorado line into Utah, their first camp was at Fort Thornberg, which he had established and abandoned at an earlier date. This was in the early eighties, and when Major Chaffee took command with four companies of soldiers, he moved the fort up the river to its present site, and named it Fort Duchesne. The reason for the transfer was that forage conditions were better.

Fort Duchesne has had but little history, as with one exception it has not been called upon to furnish troops for massacres or death in battle. A forced march over the Colorado line however occurred in 1889, and saved a large number of Colorado volunteers from massacre in an Indian ambush.

CAVALRY ALWAYS THERE.

Chaffee had cavalry with him, and in all subsequent transfers of troops, cavalry has always been apportioned to Fort Duchesne. It now has two troops of the Fifth, and two companies of the Twenty-ninth infantry. The march into Colorado was in charge of a cavalry officer, Lieut. George R. Burnett, who was so used up by his long ride in the saddle, that he had to be retired on account of permanent disability, resulting from it. A few riot calls, when some drunken Indian has gone on a crusade, have filled up the recent years of the fort's activity.

ABANDONMENT NEXT YEAR.

It was planned to abandon the fort this year, and but for the work of Utah congressional delegates, it would now be a thing of the past. A general fear that the absence of troops would lead to friction between whites and Indians in the new Utah settlements has led to the request that the fort remain for another year at least. The belief now is that the autumn of 1906 will see it abandoned, and the buildings, which have cost so much, sold at public auction to the highest bidder.

One feature about the fort is that the land on which it is built does not belong to the government, but to the Indians. On being sold the money derived therefrom will go into the hands of the Indians, who shared in the general appropriations for the maintenance of the Utah reserve.

The abandonment of Fort Duchesne marks an interesting period in the combat between white men and Indian for the possession of the west. Old Utah pioneers can tell who "Tabby" was in his youthful days, when he led Southern Ute Indians on campaigns of pillage extending clear through Utah, and over to the California trail, and made forced marches necessary on the part of early Utah militia.

RILEY IN "SHOW ME" STATE.

During the lecture tour that James Whitcomb Riley made through the state of Missouri he found himself one day compelled to put up at a particularly uninviting hostelry in a town not far from Jefferson City, says Harper's Weekly.

Mr. Riley says that when, after a hard night on a shuck mattress, he came down to the villainous smelling "dining room" he was in anything but a cheerful frame of mind. He seated himself at a table opposite a rough looking fellow who was busily engaged

and Sever counties.

SEVEN TRIBES IN IT.

In the movement seven distinct tribes of Ute Indians figured. Most important in Colorado were the White River Indians, under Chief Nevada, who were moved into Utah in 1881 after the Thornberg and Meeker massacres. Along the Utah border the Uncompagres, under Chief Ouray, figured prominently, and the Southern Utes, under Chief Ignacio, were also a powerful tribe. Directly west of the White River settlements the Utah Utes held this country now embraced in the reservation. These seven tribes comprised the Ute nation, which held the country west of the Rockies clear over to the Sierra Nevada. Their traditional enemies were the Cheyennes and Arapahoes of the plains, with whom they continued in incessant warfare, which called for the exchange of cattle and

scalps at every meeting. Altogether their strength was about 15,000 souls, and in civilization and "tameness" they were most backward of the tribes, for they had come in contact with the Indian agents and troops of the government. The Sioux, Cheyennes and Arapahoes had engaged the attention of the army from 1869 until 1880, when it came to be the turn of the Utes.

THE UTE TROUBLES.

The trouble in Ute affairs began among the Indians themselves, when Nevada died, and his son Autelope, Douglas, Johnson, Colorado, Jack, Schwitz, and Bennett, quarreled as to who should be first in the Ute nation, by becoming head of the White River. The government agents however appointed an outsider, Ouray, of the Uncompagres, and gave him a salary of \$1,000 a year to date from 1869. A decade later this same Colorado, son of

Nevada, left his photograph in the hand of the dead body of Maj. Thornberg to let the soldier's friends know by whom he had come to his death. In 1875 a conspiracy against Ouray by the young chiefs of White River, reached definite form, when Ouray was charged with holding out government supplies from the White River.

The result was not the overthrow of Ouray, but an outbreak in which white men were the chief victims. A White River Indian named Chief Jack patched up affairs with the Cheyennes, and Arapahoes, and joined them in a pillaging expedition into Wyoming. Ouray lived on the Uncompagres river near the present town of that name, and near his home was the agency, in charge of the venerable N. C. Meeker, who with 12 others was massacred, after attempting for several years to teach the Indians how to farm and live in houses.

Meeker had trouble with the Indians, not all of them it is true, but especially with one named Johnson, who wanted the land Meeker was breaking up for farming as a pasture for his ponies. The Indian figured long possession gave him the land, and Meeker figured the good he would do the Indians, justified him in starting the farm. Johnson attacked Meeker personally one day, driving him out of his house and beating him in a fist fight.

Meeker sent for troops to help him. Capt. Payne started with a troop of colored cavalry from Fort Garland, and Maj. Thornberg left Fort Steele for the reservation, with 160 cavalrymen. When the news that the troops were coming reached Ouray, Meeker was not notified by the Indians, but he learned it in the excited, hostile actions of the Utes, who surrounded his house and killed both him, and twelve of his subordinates, the women and girls of

the agency being carried off captive by the chiefs to be later despoiled in their tents. The buildings were robbed and burned, and the oncoming troops were ambushed at a defile on Milk creek. Here one of the most trying sieges of the Indian wars occurred.

KILLING OF THORNBURG.

The Indians, skilful in war, swept down between Thornberg and his baggage train which lumbered along in his rear. In trying to force his way back, he was killed, while 12 of his men fell with him, and nearly half of the remaining men were wounded. Capt. Payne of the Fifth cavalry, upon whom the command devolved, reaching the baggage train with over 40 wounded, including the surgeon.

The trenches that were hastily built were made of dead bodies and the carcasses of horses. The Utes fired the brush, and it burned down to the bottom of the stockade, where they extinguished it with blankets. A scout named Rankin slipped the news to Fort Rawling, 160 miles distant. Then the famous forced march of Col. Merritt, with a force of 500 men began, and on the sixth day, the siege was relieved. Only a few of the men were still alive, and the colored troop of Capt. Dodge, which had come up on the third day, had only added its members to the list of killed. The only officer fit for duty when relief arrived was Lieut. S. A. Cherry of the Fifth cavalry, who reported what had happened to the relief force.

Thornberg was a much loved man, and since that memorable event, his name has been held in reverence by army men and women. Merritt, after burying him, and taking the photograph of Col. Thornberg out of his hand, pressed on to the agency, and buried the dead agent and his companions. They found that the women and children were still prisoners in the Indian camp, and through Ouray negotiations were entered into by which they were secured.

THE UTAH RESERVATION.

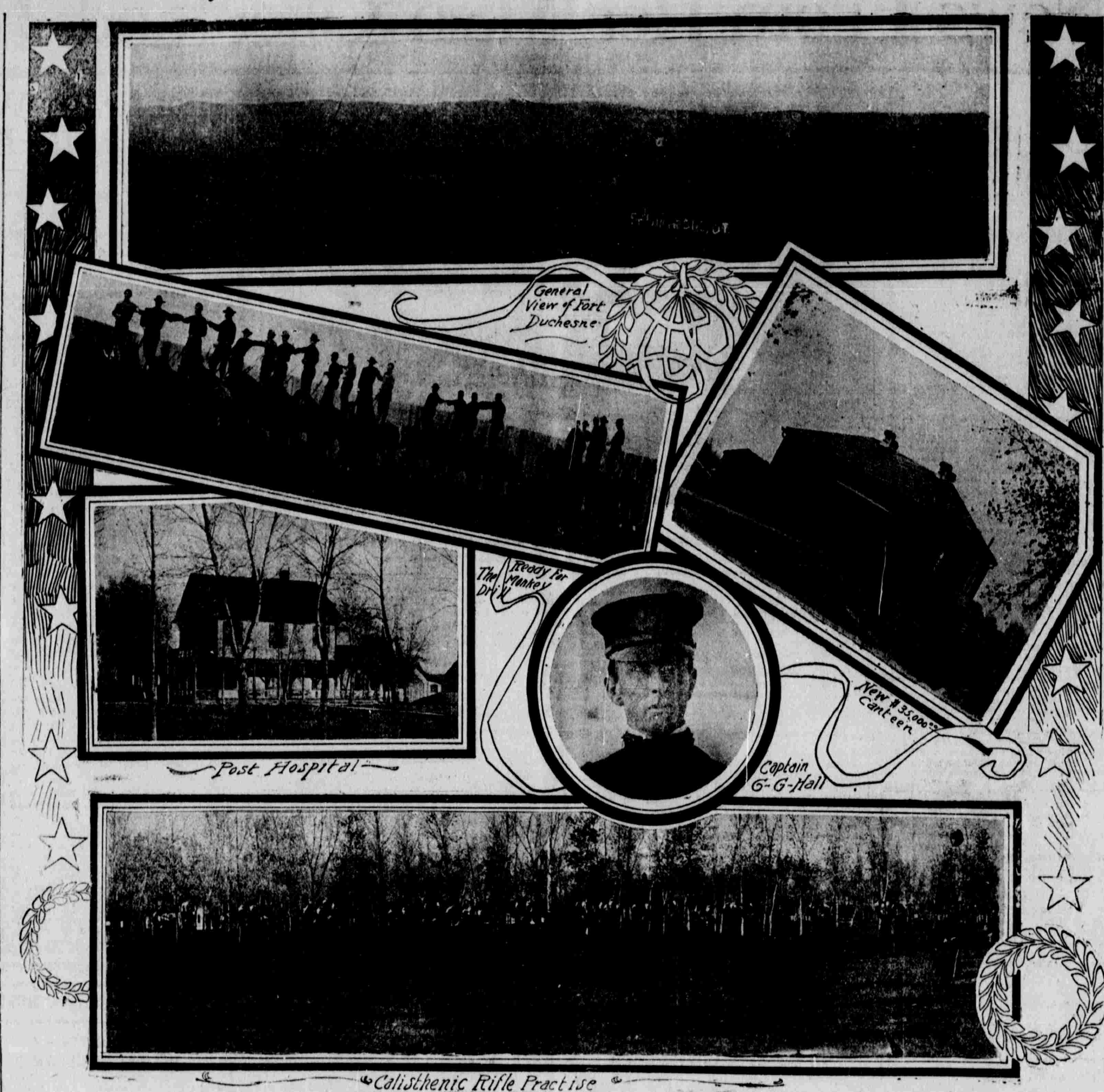
In this conference it was that the Utah reservation, as such, had its first conception. Col. Merritt insisted on two points, and they were that the Indians must move to some reservation outside of Colorado, and that the men engaged in the Meeker massacre must be surrendered. Ten days were consumed in parley, at the end of which time several chiefs gave themselves up and were taken to Washington.

On March 6, 1880, the Utes, representative in Washington entered into an agreement to give up all the criminals, and for the Uncompagres to move over on to the Grand river, near the mouth of the Gunnison, in Utah and Colorado. The White River Utes were to move over into Utah, and were each to be given 160 acres of land for pasture and another 160 acres for farming, with 80 acres for each child. The Uncompagres Indians were to receive an annuity until they should become self-supporting, but the White River chiefs supporting, but the White River chiefs were to have this held out on them until the conspirators in the Meeker massacre were turned over. The move across the line into the Utah country along the Duchesne and Utah rivers, and farther down on the White river, began at once. The Utah reservation had already been laid off by Congress in 1864, and previously by an executive order in 1865, including the headwaters of all the streams flowing into the Duchesne, extending down the Duchesne to the Green river. To this was added the White River agency, and the Uncompagres agency, and the troops came in to found Fort Thornberg in the desert near Ouray. The former station had been here, and had afterwards been moved far up into the Ashley valley near its head. The move this time was up the Utah river, instead of to Ashley valley, and the troops settled down upon the present site of Fort Duchesne.

WAGON ROADS TO PRICE.

Their first task was to open the government wagon road to Price, and a later task of importance was to construct a telephone and telegraph system into the reservation. This wagon road to Price afterwards became a leading reason for the selection of Price as a pasture for his ponies. The Indian figured long possession gave him the land, and Meeker figured the good he would do the Indians, justified him in starting the farm. Johnson attacked Meeker personally one day, driving him out of his house and beating him in a fist fight.

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