

## The Old Fort during the American Civil War

In 1857 the Mormon Missionaries had abandoned their settlement, and it was not until 1860 when William Knapp returned to open a trading post in the abandoned ruins. However, it would not be until 1865 that any real attention was provided to the location - and the US Army would actually occupy it.

Myth has it that the Old Mormon Fort was known as "Fort Baker" during the American Civil War. Due to this notation on maps, it helped to prevent Captain Sherrod Hunter's Texans from advancing out of the Yuma, AZ area during General Sibley's invasion of the New Mexico Territory in the fall of 1861 and spring of 1862. In this case there is fact to back the myth.

The post was referred to as "Fort Baker" in honor of the Commander of the 1st California Volunteer Infantry (*Later reformed as the 71st Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry*), and Brigadier General in charge of the California Brigade (*Later reformed as the Philadelphia Brigade*). Senator Edward Dickinson Baker was killed during the battle of Ball's Bluff on October 21, 1861 where he was shot in the head, and has the distinction of being the only US Senator to have died in that conflict. In addition to representing the state of Oregon on the US Senate, he had also been a Colonel in the US Army during the Mexican-American War.

There is no mention of "Fort Baker" until a letter from Brigadier General James Carleton, of the California Column, written December 21, 1861 to the Department of the Pacific. The General mentions his plan to send an advance party of seven companies from Fort Yuma, AZ to reoccupy Fort Mojave, AZ and reestablish the ferry there. Carleton then intended to send on from there, three cavalry companies and one of infantry to the Mormon Fort at Las Vegas, and establish a post called "Fort Baker".

This was in preparation for an advance to Salt Lake City, UT the following year following up on some of the pre-war mobilizations by Generals who were now ironically Confederates. The move to reoccupy Fort Mojave, AZ never took place because the California Column at Fort Yuma, AZ was sent into Arizona where its advanced party encountered Captain Hunter's Confederates at Stanwix Station, AZ on March 29, 1862. They would eventually engage in a withdrawing action at the battle of Picacho Pass, AZ in April 15, 1862 near the present day Picacho Peak State Park. However Fort Mojave was later reoccupied in 1863 by Union troops from California monitoring the area after flushing the Confederate Army out of New Mexico, back down into Texas.

In 1864 a road survey party led by Captain Price of Company M, 2nd California Cavalry traveled through Las Vegas on the route from Fort Douglas to Fort Mojave, stopping for water there on June 10. While the unit stopped there

temporarily, it was not until after the war was over that Price would be involved with the outpost at O.D. Gass's Rancho.

While no US Army troops were stationed at "Fort Baker" during the American Civil War, the US Army did establish an outpost there between 1867 and 1869 at the request of O.D. Gass and his constituents.

The name of "Fort Baker" also refers to a part of the San Francisco Bay area defenses in California that are presently used by the US Coast Guard and to film Starfleet Headquarters for the Star Trek movies. Across the world volunteer "Living Historians" reenact as the 71st Pennsylvania, and the other units of the Philadelphia Brigade, in recreated battles of the American Civil War. The Old Mormon Fort in Las Vegas was also used in the video game "Fallout: New Vegas" as a base for "The Followers of the Apocalypse".

Additional details and information on Fort Baker (NV) can be found in the book ["The Army of the Pacific: Its operations in California, Texas, Arizona, New Mexico, Utah, Nevada, Oregon, Washington, Plains Region, Mexico, etc. 1860-1866"](#) by Aurora Hunt. Printed by Stackpole Books, 2004. Page 202-203. Comments on this page may be addressed to Jason Coffey.