

Work Progress Administration (WPA) Additions and Upgrades, 1934-39

In 1934 wide-ranging construction projects began at Fort Huachuca under the auspices of the Work Progress Administration (WPA). Supervising the work was Major S. J. Raymond, Q. M. Corps, the post quartermaster. In the fall of 1936, he wrote a summary of the accomplishments of the WPA program.

Before beginning a description of the character and extent of the work done at Fort Huachuca, it is necessary to add a word of explanation in regard to the handling of funds placed at the disposal of the post officials.

When money is allotted to a military post for expenditure, the amount is divided into two portions, one sum being set aside for accounting and distribution by the Post Quartermaster, and the other falling under the supervision of the constructing quartermaster. The first portion consists of all requirements for betterment and additions to existing structures, and the second is used for the creation of new units demanded by economic and military conditions of recent development.

Work falling under the supervision of the Quartermaster included rehabilitation and alteration of buildings, plant, and utilities; construction and installations required in existing barracks, in the theater, in the quartermaster warehouse, and in the quartermaster offices; placing of lightning arrestors on specific buildings; a fire look-out and cistern on Huachuca Peak; plumbing renovation and repairs; alterations and additions and replacements to existing electric lights, wiring and fixtures; and general repairs to buildings, plant and utilities.

The constructing quartermaster was given the responsibility for improvements to the emergency landing field; the construction of four miles of paved road from the post to Garden Canyon (White City); stone garages for garrison personnel; steel post and barbed wire fence about reservation; lavatory buildings at Training Camp area; concrete bases for tents at Training Camp area; and a septic tank and sewer line to serve the Training Camp area.

The post was advised of the availability of funds July 8, 1934. Work was started within 10 days, with eight men secured through the Bisbee Employment Office, and from that nucleus employment increased to a maximum of 358 men in April, 1936.

About September 1, 1935, about 60 men were placed on the payrolls of the constructing quartermaster. Increase of that number to 257 men in May, 1936, brought employment to a grand total of 615.

All work being done is the result of cumulative demands over a long period of time, covering necessary work tabulated and estimated by the various trade foremen at the post, but for which improvement funds always seemed to be lacking from the War Department in its usual distribution of appropriations.

As is generally known, the main part of the post structures were built some 50 years ago when construction materials were hard to get. Most of the officers' quarters, the civilian quarters, offices, guard house and many other buildings were constructed of adobe with insufficient foundations. While stone was plentiful, both lime and cement were difficult to bring in.

Therefore, the quartermaster was enabled to begin at once on work of this character--rebuilding foundations, adding necessary rooms, rebuilding chimneys and fireplaces, replastering, installing electric wires and new plumbing fixtures, and building floors and stairways. Old shingle roofs were removed, rafters strengthened and the buildings covered with a good quality of asbestos shingle, making not only a much neater appearance and a more lasting structure, but at the same time decreasing the fire hazards.

This last feature has been a problem at this post in recent years as the demand for domestic water supply has constantly increased with no assistance from nature in the furnishing of additional water. A fire at the post in the dry season would prove a real calamity.

The problem of water supply seems to be finally solved in that a well drilled at the emergency landing field appears to have developed an enormous quantity of water that may easily be made available to the post requirements; this will be determined in the near future.

Two features of the quartermaster's improvements were decidedly opportune; both local schools, one white and one colored. As a result of haphazard growth, the schools had been unsatisfactory; they are now much more satisfactory to the children, teachers and parents.

In the department of the constructing quartermaster, materials were assembled for road paving as quickly as possible, and men were put to work delivering stone, oil and sand along the subgrades. For 75 percent of the distance the old road was improved to make it quickly available. The other 25 percent was changed to eliminate poor drainage, to make better curves, or to eliminate curves entirely.

Use of as many workers as possible and simultaneously to use what machinery was available efficiently, to give the post a good, durable, paved highway, was the aim. The basis of the structure was an excellent quality of limestone, mixed with asphalt and enough sand to make a good quality binder. The result appears to be a highway that will stand the hard wear of local automobiles, delivery trucks and trucks of the military establishments.

At the landing field, a new provost station house has been made to replace a ramshackle wooden structure. In it is built a cell to accommodate any obstreperous citizen or soldier who might evade regulations. The new building is located at a different point than that occupied by the old guard house, because of reestablishment of the reservation boundary line.

The reservation fence was rebuilt and realigned on monuments and directions of the 1884 survey. In many sections there was practically no enclosure whatever; now there are steel posts every 20 feet with five strands of barbed wire clipped to the posts.

Previously the garrison has had to shelter its personally owned automobiles in shacks, most of the unsightly and in many cases difficult of accessibility. Consequently, most cars remained parked in the post streets. The new garages are neatly built, inexpensive, and properly located in regard to service roads.

Near the site of the local CCC [Civilian Conservation Corps] camp, it was decided to increase accommodations so that a summer training school could be established for all local military accessory schools.

Following War Department plans, a series of tent floors of reinforced concrete were laid, and to these were added three lavatories.

A sewer line was run out a distance of about a quarter mile and at that point a suitable septic tank was built. This work is now all completed and facilities await the arrival of students who will receive training here, from Arizona, New Mexico and Texas.

It appears that laborers have been very fairly treated. A camp was established for these incoming civilians, and at this camp each employee was provided with a cot and blankets, and mess equipment. The food provided was regular Army ration and consequently substantial and at a very reasonable expense. The men have offered no resistance to local regulations, and have expressed a desire to be kept at work as long as funds permit.

As a result of these expenditures, the post has been greatly improved, a fact greatly appreciated by the garrison, and the work has--been--sufficiently varied to give all WPA workmen a good chance to make a fair return for the wages received.

David Bonesteel Stone served as an officer with the 2nd Battalion, 25th Infantry, at Fort Huachuca from 1935 to 1937. He revisited the post during the 1977 centennial festivities and recalled this about his Fort Huachuca experience:

After driving south [from Tucson] for several hours, turned off narrow, but at least gravelled road, onto a new country road just south of St. David. After very bumpy drive over this for quite a time, I came to and obscure track leading off to the south toward some mountains. A small pegged board shaped into an arrow arrangement was lettered "Ft. Huachuca" in very-faded paint. I looked up into the mountain foothills this seemed to lead to and could just make out a huddle of buildings, nothing, but nothing else in all that vastness of desert and sky. My thoughts at this rather tenuous time of my life--first time really "out on my own" was--"my Lord! Here they've ordered me to a place that has been abandoned long ago!! Either the War Department doesn't know what's going on--or they have

played a very dirty trick on me--an unsuspecting innocent little 2nd Lieutenant.

Works Progress Administration construction continued at Huachuca through the 1930s, adding by 1939 the "Million Dollar Barracks," Motor Housing, new wells, a new reservoir, and a warrant officers' quarters. Major J. L. Brooks, Q. M. C., was the Construction Quartermaster in 1938 and he reported progress on all of these projects. He described the Christmas break granted to his WPA work crews.

In order to permit the workmen on these various jobs an opportunity to visit their homes for the Christmas holidays, it was arranged that a double crew of workmen would be placed in operation in order that the entire list would have an opportunity to finish their pay periods and to be paid off before they left for their various homes located in the southern half of the state of Arizona. It is a matter of note to state that, of over five hundred men employed, there were only twenty-five unable to leave for the simple reason that they had no homes. This particular feature was useful to the Post in that it provided a very handy group of workmen to discharge the carloads of pipe and other heavy materials arriving in the last ten days of this month. Their use in this manner prevented the accumulation of demurrage charges usually placed by the railroad company on cars remaining unloaded after a forty-eight hour period. In order to provide a pleasant ending to the final period of work before the holidays commenced, the cooks at the camp where the men are being housed and fed, provided a dinner in which the food served was more elaborate than the usual type of meal served both in regard to quantity and to the character and variety of the items. In fact, it was quite an elaborate dinner and one which pleased the workmen very much. There were five hundred eighty-five men served at this meal, the group being divided into two sections in order to fit the accommodations existing at this camp. This extra dividend to the men in the form of an unusual dinner was appreciated, remarks being made to the officer in charge of the mess indicating their pleasure at having been so served. It is a remarkable fact that, with the concentration of this large number of men, no serious disturbance of any sort developed in the camp, and although it was crowded, it was not overcrowded, and in general gave to the men the satisfaction required both in regard to the food and the housing accommodations. The men left the Post on the 23rd of December and were scheduled to return for duty on January 3rd, a vacation of approximately ten days without any loss in pay.