Break With The Past

Venerable Fort Huachuca Enters Electronic Age

By W. G. KNEELAND

Arizona's historic old Fort Huachuca takes on a new role tomorrow. It becomes the nation's first electronic proving ground.

The vast, mile-high military land had its inception as a cavalry outpost to help hunt down the ferocious bloodthirsty Apache raiders, and bring peace and order to a troubled land.

Yet, in a sense, its new role is not too different from its earlier one.

Instead of mounted scouts and fast-moving troopers who were the "eyes and ears" of the old army, Huachuca's mountain fastnesses now will guard experiments in, and development of, the new army's eyes and ears. These are the intricate, almost-human electronic devices that can trace the flight of supersonic aircraft, warn of their approach; aim, and fire aerial defensive weapons, and do all manner of things with less human error.

INSTEAD OF providing security for a small and almost unpeopled portion of the nation, it will help provide security for the whole free world.

It was on March 3, 1877, that Capt. Samuel Marmaduke Whitside, commanding two troops of cavalry and a company of Indian (Shalipai) scouts, pitched camp on the northern slopes of towering Huachuca Mountains, about a dozen miles north of the Mexican border in what now is Cochise County.

That was the year that prospector Hugh Jones located—and later abandoned—his Copper Queen mine some 20 miles southeast of Captain Whitside's detachments.

That was the year that, as a curb to lawlessness, Arizona carved its territorial prison out of solid rock at Yuma.

It was the year that Ed Schieffelin went to "hunt for his tombstone" and made the rich silver strike that boomed a town "too tough to die"—today's Tombstone.

AND IT WAS the year that reports of gunfights, murders, ambushing of mail riders and stagecoach drivers, and Indian massacres in the territory reached such alarming proportions that President Hayes conferred with his secretary of war on means of reestablishing law and order out of the chaos that prevailed.

Later, in 1882 when Huachuca was officially designated as a fort—the territory's governor, F. A. Tritle, was to give his personal bond for guns and ammunition from the army to arm a militia force.

But when Captain Whitside and his detachments — composed of Troops B and M, Sixth U.S. Cavalry, and Company D of Indian Scouts—pitched the first camp here far from where old Camp Crittenden had been abandoned nine years earlier, it was to cope with an Apache uprising. The Apaches had spread terror through southeastern portions of the territory.

Tactically, the site was ideal.

TO THE WEST was the town of Nogales and the fertile, farmed valley of the north-flowing Santa Cruz River; to the east were a string of farms and settlements along the San Pedro River Valley; to the north was Tucson, then—but not for long—the territorial capital; and from the high slopes where the camp was located could be seen the rugged Whetstone and Santa Rita Mountains; the Dragoons where old Chief Cochise had built his stronghold; and the pass in Mule Mountains through which Geronimo would lead his raiding warriors.

And, most important of all, there was water. Some say that the very name, Huachuca, is Indian for "mountain with water."

It was from that setting, for three years, that Captain Whitside and men of his detachment hunted the Apaches and sought to bring peace; and from which his patrols often trailed the raiding warriors for hundreds of miles — one such chase alone amounted to 703 miles, according to army records.

IT WAS TO Captain Whitside that Lt. Leonard Wood, a former contract surgeon commissioned to the line, reported for his first assignment to duty. Later, as Colonel Wood, he commanded the Rough Riders at San Juan, in the war with Spain, and in World War I became a major general, a department commander, and for the Republican presidential nomination.

Incidentally, Colonel Wood's second in command at San Juan during the war with Spain was Lt. Col. Theodore Roosevelt—later president—who had helped organize the famed Rough Riders at Prescott, and who had helped train them for battle.

But in Captain Whitside's time, the general-to-be was a patrol leader who took his training from Civil War and Indian campaign veterans like his commander and the officers of the old Sixth Cavalry.

The founder of Fort Huachuca, however, did not stay there long enough to see it officially designated as a fort.

AFTER SIXTEEN years of Apache hunting, the family captain sought and obtained leave of absence to visit abroad—and it was one month Feb. 17, 1882, a year after his departure, that the war department designated the one-time outpost as Fort Huachuca.

For years after Geronimo's surrender, some 70 miles east of the site, Fort Huachuca was used principally as a training center for officers and men.

Then, after Pancho Villa, the Mexican insurrecto, raided Columbus, N.M., it became an important military center for cavalry and infantry alike, and its mountains echoed to the boom of mountain cannon designed to be carried by mules.

When World War I came, it again expanded, and in World War II it became a divisional training camp.

Twice since that war, however, the old fort was about to be abandoned—and twice arrangements were made to cede it to the state.

BUT ON EACH occasion new emergencies brought changes in plans.

The first was Korea.

The second is what President Eisenhower calls "an age of peril" with the free world facing the threat of Communist capture.

Tomorrow, upon reactivation as the U.S. Army Electronic Proving Ground, Brig. Gen. Emil Leonard will assume command and the old outpost will become a new one—an ultra scientific one.

Much of its operations will be secret.

Electronic warfare is defined by U.S. Sen. Barry Goldwater (R-Ariz), himself an air force colonel, as "a rapidly developing field of military operations."

"Generally speaking," the senator says, "electronic warfare involves the gathering of military intelligence for the purpose of formulating tactical procedures in terms of the enemy situation without revealing to the enemy the possession—or the means of possession—of this information."

REJUVENATED Fort Huachuca will include an aviation center, a division of tactical photography, experimentation with battlefield television, and related fields.

[illegible] there will overlap," says Senator Goldwater. "For example, aircraft are used in connection with communications, photography, the laying of equipment, and the organization of battlefield operations."

No extensive construction or rebuilding is contemplated, and procurement requirements will probably be moderate and comprise mostly perishable foodstuffs such as milk, butter, fruits, and the like.

Electronic and aviation equipment of the kind needed is "top secret" and obtainable only from special contractors.

THIS NEW role was undreamed of in Captain Whitside's time. The telegraph was only 33 years old, the first telephone exchange was yet to be built, and those who dreamed of heavier-than-air flying machines were certainly quicker—if not wholly mad.

But times have changed.

Captain Whitside's son, Col. W. W. Whitside of the cavalry, now retired, lives at Front Royal, Va., and his grandson, Capt. W. W. Whitside Jr., U.S.N., retired, is a Phoenixian.

Phoenix's Captain Whitside remembers tales of his grandfather's service.

"Why," he says, "it used to take three days and three nights to travel from Holbrook to Fort Apache."

THAT'S ABOUT 73 airline miles, a few deep breaths at today's rate of plane travel.

Captain Whitside, the grandson, was born on a cavalry post, and attended West Point Military Academy.

Fort Founder Murals in supreme court wing of state capitol depict Capt. Samuel Marmaduke Whitside, center, without hat, selecting the site for his cavalry outpost in the Huachuca Mountains. His post tomorrow becomes nation's first separate electronic proving ground. Looking at mural are Mrs. G. G. Trujillo, 415 S. 20th St., and her daughter, Maxine Marie, 5.—(Republic Photo, Ralph Camping)

DESCENDANT — Grandson of Fort Huachuca's founder is Capt. W. W. Whitside, USN retired, shown aboard USS Essex, famed aircraft carrier, during World War II. Captain Whitside now is a Phoenix resident.