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Review of *Fort Randall on the Missouri, 1856-1892* By Jerome A. Greene & *Fort Concho: A History and a Guide* By James T. Matthews

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Fort Randall on the Missouri, 1856-1892. By Jerome A. Greene. Pierre: South Dakota State Historical Society Press, 2005. x + 264 pp. Maps, illustrations, appendixes, notes, bibliography, index. \$28.95 cloth, \$17.95 paper.

Fort Concho: A History and a Guide. By James T. Matthews. Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 2005. 73 pp. Photographs, notes, index. \$9.95 paper.

National Park Service historian Jerome A. Greene, a leading figure in western military historiography, here offers a comprehensive study of Fort Randall, which served as a bastion of U.S. Army presence in the Great Plains for thirty-eight years. Built in 1856, Fort Randall's garrison was expected to keep peace among Native Plains nations, prevent Indian-white conflicts, and monitor the burgeoning traffic on overland trails and the Missouri River. Located just above the Nebraska-South Dakota border, Fort Randall lay within two hundred miles of the Ponca, Santee, Yankton, Rosebud, and Pine Ridge reservations. Despite its proximity to these sometimes troubled reservations, the post's garrison saw relatively little combat. Native nations most important to its story are the Poncas and their linguistic relatives the Yanktons.

Fort Randall's founding resulted from the killing of Lieutenant John L. Grattan and twenty-nine soldiers at Fort Laramie in August 1854. Colonel William S. Harney launched a punitive expedition against the Sioux a year later, and when the

campaign ended Harney wintered at Fort Pierre, but found it deficient in many respects. By the summer of 1856, a new post was located on the Missouri about thirty miles north of the Niobrara. When the Civil War began, fears of guerilla attack arose, but no assault materialized. By 1862 many soldiers wished they were in the east, where the gargantuan battles offered better chances for glory and advancement. When the Santee Sioux outbreak in Minnesota took place in 1862, soldiers at Fort Randall anticipated conflict, but again little occurred to disrupt what Greene notes was "a life of comfort, if not of total ease, at the post."

Still, Fort Randall hosted several important expeditions that ventured into the Plains, including those of Gouverneur K. Warren (1857), the Yellowstone Expedition (1873), and Lieutenant Colonel George A. Custer's Black Hills Expedition (1874). As well, the notable leader Sitting Bull and 172 of his people were incarcerated at Fort Randall in 1881-83. Greene describes the daily life at the post well, focusing attention on various social activities, and on soldier-sutler relationships, changes in administration, equipment and uniform, and the post's architectural history. Given the limited sources for social history of such posts, Jerome Greene is to be commended for teasing out a good deal of illuminating information on a post that, while important to regional military operations, saw almost no serious action.

Less ambitious, but quite interesting, is James T. Matthews's *Fort Concho*. Part guidebook to the site and part history of the post, this brief volume offers much engaging material. Established in 1867 in west-central Texas, the fort was meant to subdue regional Natives and advance non-Native occupation of the Southern Plains. Among the major events at Fort Concho was the staging of Colonel Randall McKenzie's Comanche raids in 1872-74, culminating with his attack on the tribe and slaughter of their horses at Palo Duro Canyon. Fort Concho housed several companies of black Americans, the famed "Buffalo Soldiers." Colonel Benjamin Grierson's all-black 10th Cavalry arrived at Fort Concho in 1875 and campaigned against Victorio and the Warm Springs Apaches in 1879-80.

As the local economy developed, the civilian settlement of San Angelo grew up across the Concho River from the post. Considerable friction occurred between bigoted townsfolk and the black soldiers at the post, and murders became relatively common. Matthews provides a handful of vignettes

that tellingly illustrate social and institutional conflicts. By 1882 the frontier had passed Fort Concho, and the black soldiers moved west to Fort Davis. A few years later, in 1889, the old post was decommissioned and abandoned. By the mid-twentieth century plans were afoot to restore the post and interpret its story. In 1961 Fort Concho became a National Historic Landmark. Today it features a robust “living history” program and is administered by the City of San Angelo.

Both books, with workmanlike prose and excellent photograph selections, make informative and worthwhile reading, and both reflect the good work and support of state-based historical societies whose mission includes the publication of historical works of regional interest.

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