History of Camp Ripley

Euro-Americans and Native American Peoples

Ancestors of Native American peoples, including the Dakota, Cheyenne and Iowa, first inhabited present-day Camp Ripley 1,000 – 2,000 years ago. During the 1700s, French, British and American fur traders moved into the region. Located at the confluence of the Mississippi and Crow Wing rivers, the area became a hub of Euro-American and Native American activity. By the mid-1750s, the Ojibwe, also known as the Anishinaabe, migrated into the region from Lake Superior. Warfare broke out between the Dakota and Ojibwe nations around 1787. Eventually, the intertribal hostility was seen as a threat to the fur trade and a detriment to interests of the newly formed United States government.

Establishing Camp Ripley

In January 1877, the destroyed three buildings at Fort Ripley and the War Department decided to permanently close the fort rather than rebuild it. By 1930, the ruins of the powder magazine, built of stone, were all that remained.

In 1927, Minnesota's adjutant general, Elmer A. Walsh, convinced the state legislature to allow the Minnesota National Guard to obtain a new outpost six miles north of Little Falls. By October 1937, the War Department granted approval for construction of the training camp and Maj. Philip C. Bettenburg was assigned to design the construction and design of the project. The new training camp was opened to troops in June 1931. By the late 1930s, Camp Ripley totaled about 15,000 acres, making it the most suitable for hosting some of the largest joint training maneuvers in the country.

In the 1950s and 1960s, Camp Ripley expanded by approximately 40,000 acres through two separate land acquisitions. Present-day Camp Ripley is a 35,000-acre regional training installation that supports military and civilian training requirements. The Minnesota National Guard is dedicated to environmental stewardship of the land through numerous initiatives at Camp Ripley, one of the most noteworthy being a partnership with Minnesota Power to construct the 10-megawatt solar power plant you see before you today.

Fort Ripley

To keep the peace between the Dakota and Ojibwe and to protect the increasing number of settlers in the region, the U.S. government dispatched Gen. M. Brooke in 1848 to locate a site for a military outpost. A fort was established on land parcels ceded by the Dakota to Lt. Zebulon Pike in 1805. The new outpost was named in 1849 and named Fort Ripley in honor of Brig. Gen. Eleazer W. Ripley, an American soldier and politician who fought in the War of 1812.