FORT LEAVENWORTH NATIONAL CEMETERY

Fort Leavenworth, 1867. Library of Congress.

Civil War Fort Leavenworth

Fort Leavenworth was established in Kansas Territory in 1827 by Col. Henry Leavenworth. It is one of the oldest continuously operating military posts west of the Mississippi River. With the start of the Civil War, it became the main supply depot for the region. Wagon trains, some more than 200 carts long, delivered vital supplies to forts including Scott, Gibson, and Smith—the latter more than 330 miles south in Arkansas. The fort was also a recruiting and training center for soldiers.

Despite entering the Union as the thirty-fourth state in January 1861, Kansas was home to a strong pro-Confederate faction. Fort Leavenworth soon became a refuge for pro-Union supporters—white, black, and American Indian—seeking protection. In July 1862, Gen. James Lane organized early companies of the 1st Kansas Colored Infantry here. Confederate Gen. Sterling Price failed to capture Fort Leavenworth in 1864, when Union troops led by Gen. Samuel Curtis defeated his army at the Battle of Westport, near Kansas City.

National Cemetery

Soon after Fort Leavenworth was established, the U.S. Army created two cemeteries—one for officers, one for enlisted men. In 1858, remains from both were moved to new ground that, in 1862, was designated Fort Leavenworth National Cemetery. By 1874, a stone wall enclosed the 9-acre cemetery that contained two gun monuments. At the time, some 1,377 dead were buried here, including 398 known Union soldiers and sailors, 752 unknown Union soldiers, and 227 known citizens, women, and children. The superintendent and his family lived in a stone Second-Empire-style lodge until 1905, when it was replaced with a new building.

The graves of two noted soldiers are marked by private headstones. Colonel Leavenworth, who died in 1834 in Indian Territory (Oklahoma), was originally buried in New York. His remains were moved here in 1902 and marked with a granite shaft (Section 2, Grave 3215). Col. Edward Hatch enlisted in the volunteer army during the Civil War and later served in the Regular Army (Section A-OFF, Grave 2204). Men of the all-black 9th U.S. Cavalry who served under Hatch during the Indian Wars funded his granite pedestal-style marker.

Colonel Leavenworth's grave marker, 1933, before the eagle was added to the top in 1956. National Archives and Records Administration.

Thomas W. Custer

One Civil War Medal of Honor recipient is buried here. Second Lt. Thomas W. Custer, 6th Michigan Cavalry, was the first man twice awarded the nation's highest military decoration.

Custer captured enemy flags on two separate occasions during the last days of the war in April 1865. The second time, at the Battle of Sailor's Creek, Virginia, he was severely wounded and his horse shot from under him. The younger brother of Gen. George Armstrong Custer, Thomas died at the Battle of Little Big Horn on June 25, 1876. Initially buried on that battlefield, Custer's remains were reinterred here in 1877 (Section A, Grave 1488).

Thomas W. Custer (center) with his brother, George Armstrong, and sister-in-law, Libby Custer, 1865. Library of Congress.

Civil War Army Medal of Honor. Gettysburg National Military Park.

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