

FRANCIS E. WARREN AIR FORCE BASE
(1867 – 2022)



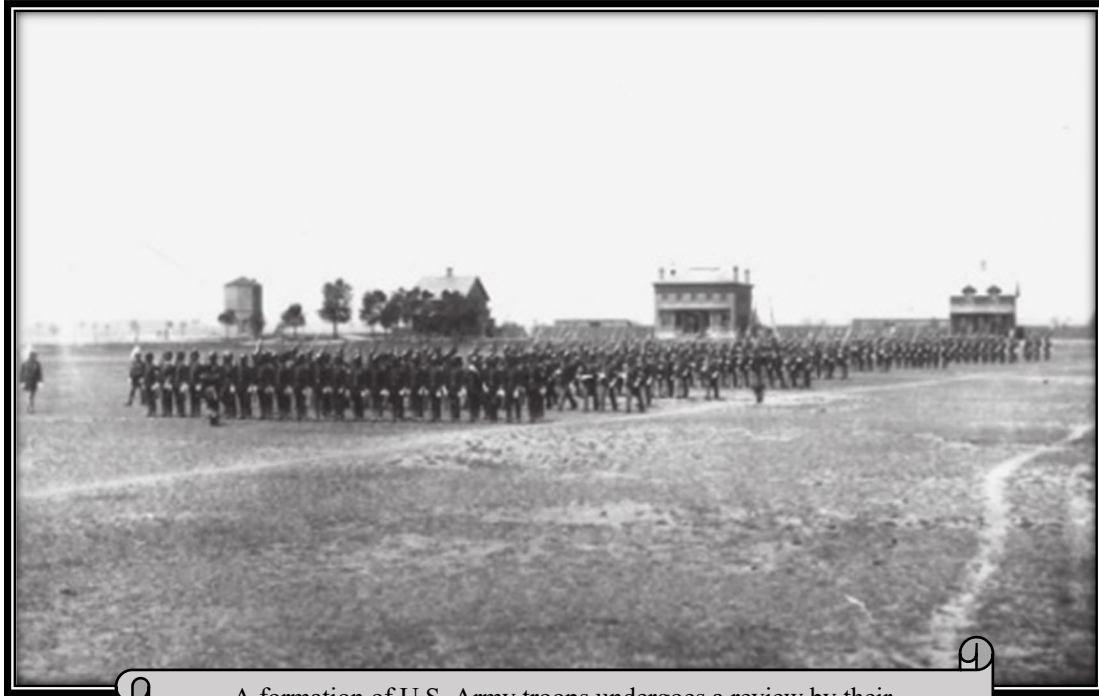
Historic Fort D.A. Russell



90th Missile Wing History Office

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In 1884, just as many frontier forts were being dismantled, Fort D.A. Russell was declared a permanent military installation and a robust building program was started to replace the old wooden buildings on base with brick ones—many of which are still standing and remain in use today.



A formation of U.S. Army troops undergoes a review by their commanding officer at the original Fort D.A. Russell parade field (later named the Marne Parade Field). Note, in the background, from left to right, the base water tower and Quarters No. 1, the post's first built commander's headquarters. Circa 1888.

At the turn of the twentieth century Fort D.A. Russell came under the attentive and enthusiastic patronage of Wyoming's first governor, Francis Emroy Warren (b. 1844 - d.1929) a Civil War veteran and winner of the Medal of Honor. Governor (and later U.S. Senator) Warren's long career as a Wyoming statesman was marked by a concentrated effort to sustain and expand Fort D.A. Russell. Likely because of his efforts, in 1902, the fort was again deemed a necessary permanent military installation by a board of general officers. It was that same year that Troop E of the Tenth cavalry, recently returned from fighting in the Philippines, became the first unit of an African American regiment to be assigned to the fort. The 'buffalo soldiers' from Troop E, as well as numerous natives from the Shoshoni and Arapaho tribes regularly participated in Cheyenne's annual Frontier Days. Around that same time, then Captain John J. Pershing (later General of the Armies) married Senator Warren's daughter, Helen Frances Warren-Pershing, and was assigned quarters at Fort D.A. Russell—although he rarely ever stayed there.



A view of Fort D.A. Russell's front gate at the turn of the century. In 1888, the post commander requested a gate be added to the fort as a speed deterrent.

When the United States entered the Great War (1914-1918) on 6 April 1917, the army ballooned in size and Fort D.A. Russell became, at least initially, a major training installation for cavalry units for the war effort. At the end of the war the fort was designated as a post-war demobilization point for the surrounding region and by mid-March 1,000 soldiers a week were moving through the fort. In May of 1918, the USA's Far West Flying Circus arrived and put on an airshow to promote the sale of Liberty War Bonds.

Fort Francis E. Warren

During the Interwar Period the fort remained garrisoned by various active units but also took on the role of facilitating several USA training schools. Senator Warren died in 1929 and as result of his lasting legacy on the development of the base, on 1 January 1930, the installation was renamed Fort Francis E. Warren.

With the outbreak of the Second World War (1939-1945) and the United States' subsequent involvement in the conflict on 7 December 1941, Fort F.E. Warren's size expanded exponentially with the addition of the Quartermaster Replacement Training Center and the eventual establishment of a prisoner of war camp. These events resulted in a massive expansion of post facilities, particularly south of Crow Creek, where numerous temporary quarters and training facilities were erected.



A pair of unidentified U.S. Army cavalrymen stand ready with their steeds fully equipped for field exercises. Circa 1920s.



An aerial view of the base with a formation of troops in the foreground (front left) and the expansive quartermaster training facilities in the background.

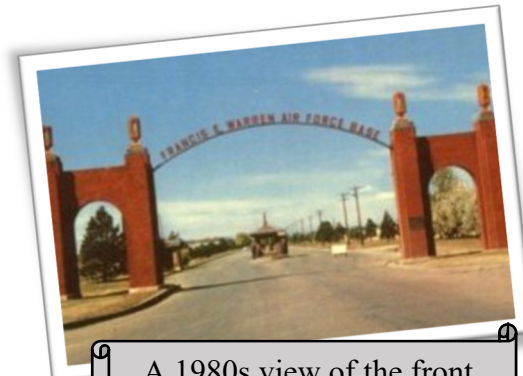
Francis E. Warren Air Force Base

In the draw down that came after the war ended, the fort's future seemed uncertain, however the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers started an aviation engineering school there in 1946, and then in 1947, the (recently independent) United States Air Force (USAF) took charge of the post and stood up the 463d Air Force Base Unit. In 1948 the 463d was reorganized as the 3450th Technical Training Wing. The following year, on 7 October 1949, the fort's name was officially changed to Francis E. Warren Air Force Base (AFB). The base maintained a robust technical training mission well into the later part of the next decade.

During the 1950s, Cold War (1947-1991) tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union continued to escalate and contributed directly to the development of the nation's first Intercontinental Ballistic Missile (ICBM). As the USAF contemplated the deployment of an ICBM force, F.E. Warren AFB became one of several bases, which were deemed to be ideally strategically situated to take on the ICBM mission. Consequently, on 1 February 1958, the base was turned over to Strategic Air Command (SAC), which concurrently stood up the 4320th Strategic Wing (Missile)—the following year it was replaced by the 706th Strategic Missile Wing (SMW). The 760 SMW received its first Atlas D, ICBM in October 1959, and over the course of the next year acquired a total of 24 Model D and E Atlas missiles. F.E. Warren subsequently became the nation's first operational ICBM base and as a result of its new mission set, the base received numerous upgrades and renovations. On 1 July 1961, the 760 SMW was redesignated as the 389th Strategic Missile Wing.

With the onset of the Cuban Missile Crisis (16-28 October 1962) the 389 SMW placed all its Atlas missiles in launch configuration and maintained a ready posture until 27 November 1962—when the crisis finally abated. At about that same time, missile silo construction in the area had already commenced in order to prepare for the coming deployment of 200 (vastly superior, solid fuel) LGM-30 Minuteman IB ICBMs. The command of the new missile system was entrusted to the 90th Strategic Missile Wing which was activated at F.E. Warren on 1 July 1963.

In 1965, the last of the Atlas ICBMs were taken off alert status and the 389 SMW was deactivated. That same year, on 15 June, the 90 SMW became the first fully operational Minuteman I wing in the USAF. In 1973, the wing transitioned to the LGM-30G Minuteman III and in 1986 also added the LGM-118 Peacekeeper to its arsenal—although this system was later removed in 2005. In 2020, the 90th Missile Wing received word that it would be acquiring an all new Ground Based Strategic Deterrent ICBM called the LGM-35A Sentinel.



A 1980s view of the front gate of F.E. Warren AFB.



A view of the missile display and installation sign at F.E. Warren AFB, located immediately south of the front gate. From left to right are the Peacekeeper, Minuteman III and Minuteman I.

Today the 90 MW remains the host unit for F.E. Warren AFB, the oldest continuously active military installation in the USAF. On 1 October 1969, the base was added to the National Register of Historic Places and on 15 May 1975 it was designated as a National Historic Landmark.

Sources: (U) Adams, Gerald M. *The Post Near Cheyenne: A History of Fort D.A. Russell, 1867-1930*. Boulder, CO: Pruett Publishing, 1997; (U) Taylor, Paula Bauman. *F.E. Warren Air Force Base*. United States: Arcadia Pub., 2012; (U) 90th Missile Wing History Office, “History of the 90th Missile Wing,” F.E. Warren AFB, WY, 2020.