

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

Monday, April 4, 1966

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We were up early, and at 8:00 said goodbye to the basin in the Chisos Mountains, took a last look at the tree I had planted in front of what was going to be a picture window for the new recreation hall. I wondered if I would ever get back again. I asked one of the Rangers who came mostly to visit the Park. It is the least visited one of all the 32 National Parks because it is the farthestest on the rim of the world. He said retired people in trailers, Boy Scouts and youth groups and lots of foreign students who seem the most appreciative and the most amazed of all.

We drove for 2 hours to Fort Davis. On the way I got some pictures of the ocotillo cactus standing 15 or so feet tall, its spines spraying out rather gracefully like a fountain and at this season covered with tiny pink² red blooms. The local folks tell me a little rain and out come the blooms and then some leaves and then if it ever rains again some more blooms.

The main event of the day was to dedicate Fort Davis as a National Historic site.

Our entourage arrived there about 10:30 to one of the most colorful scenes of all my traveling. It's an old army fort established in 1854 when Jefferson Davis was Secretary of War and named after him. It's in Peasant ^{Ch} ² ^{Tap} Box Canyon in the scenic Davis Mountains' mile-high country. And its mission was to guard the wagon trains and stage coaches and immigrants, and especially the mail along the San Antonio-El Paso road from the hostile Comanches and Apache Indians and the ^{Kiowa} ~~Koas~~.

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The nearest ^{other} Fort was Fort Bliss -- 200 miles away.

The sight that greeted our eyes was about 5,000 West Texans. Men, women and children. And believe me that's a lot of folks to ^agather in that land. And ~~the~~ gayly dressed high school bands from Marfa and Alpine and Marathon and Pecos.

Everybody mingled around in the parade grounds around which some two dozen or so buildings of the old Fort still stood. There were low, red-stoned ^{brick} buildings, long cool porches with white columns running along the fronts, ^{giving} ~~giving~~ ^{to the} ~~to the~~ certain dignity and charm into this country.

Right behind them very dramatically there was a steep escarpment of the Davis Mountains.

I wondered if it was there ^{the} ~~the~~ quality I sensed in this crowd -- more open, eager, friendly -- or is that ~~just~~ just a quality I like to ascribe to West Texans? At any rate, they weren't ^{used to} ~~associated~~ with so-called celebrities ~~over the fence~~ like this. And a sort of contagious excitement seemed to spread from them to me to everybody in the group.

Nellie was there to meet me. She had come a long way, bringing with her Ben Barnes, Speaker of the House. I appreciated the show of friendship and solidarity. The papers are always trying to promote a feud between John and us. And I appreciated her working at John's job, because Texas -- everything about Texas -- is his job.

And there were two descendants of the warriors who had fought there to meet me: James O'Cheer, grandson of a ^{Kiowa} ~~Kiowa~~ warrior and Lawrence Tomer, Jr.

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great grandson of Heart Eater, a fierce Comanche -- in full feathered head dress and looking very amiable and at home. If they spoke of yesterdays rather romanticized fighting ^{There were} they would be reminders of today's. Two infantrymen who had been wounded in action in Viet-Nam -- Private Joe Ryoris of Corpus Christi and Private James Crawford of Omaha, Nebraska. We had our pictures made together and then I quite simply said "Thank you" to them for my husband and me and "good luck".

First, Superintendent Smith took us through the new museum which has been built very much in the architecture of the old Fort. He showed us ^a diarama, old uniforms, weapons, maps of the cattle trails, and a brief history of the old Fort from '54, when it was established, to '91 when the flag came down for the last time, and the Indian raids passed into history. It had had an interesting time, that Fort. Its acting depot Commander had once been a young Colonel ~~named~~ Robert E. Lee and it had been his duty to make use of the camels that Jefferson Davis had secured through a Congressional appropriation of \$30,000 in 1855 to conduct experiments with them as pack ~~xxxx~~ animals in the western Army installations.

On ~~one~~ one reconnaissance to Fort Davis the soldiers went five days covering 120 miles without finding a drop of water. The camels carried water for the troops but didn't drink a drop themselves.

Among the travelers that Fort Davis had protected had been gold seekers going along the ^Butterfield Trail to California.

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Last, Superintendent Smith said about one-fourth of the buildings had been restored or preserved at a cost of some \$250,000. And last year, 107,000 persons visited the Fort to see how the frontier Army used to live.

Then it was time to go up on the bunting draped platform with the Udalls and our Congressman Richard White who was with us every step of the way. And George Hartzog and Nellie and Ben Barnes and John Ben Shepherd. And all of the local people, the sponsors, who are responsible for having brought Fort Davis back to life -- the Fort Davis Historical Society and Representatives of the Chambers of Commerce of Alpine and Marathon and Marfa and Odessa and Pecos -- everybody who is ^{trying} ~~has~~ to build West Texas and has a hand in this restoration.

Dick White spoke and Stu Udall and George Hartzog and Superintendent Smith.

But to me the most thrilling thing was not what anybody said but some of the sights:

A man in the uniform of a ^{Cavalryman} ~~cavalier~~ of 1875 posed quietly on his horse like a ghost out of the past ^{on the Parade} ~~and of the~~ gray grounds of the Fort.

And then an American flag with 37 stars marking the number of the States in the Union when the post was deactivated was run up the flagpole as ^{the band played} "The Star Spangled Banner" in a very strange cadence as it was played in those days.

When it was my time to speak, I said that the real significance of this dedication is in what it says, ^{about} the character of the American people.

"Although Gemini 8 has taken us one step closer to the moon, we still have time

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to walk into our past. We still have time to preserve our heritage for the guidance of future generations. While we continued to explore new frontiers in outer space, we must exert more effort into making the world in which we live a better and more attractive place to work, to play, and to raise our families. //

Then I tried to thank all the West Texans for what they had done in bringing old Fort Davis back to life.

And Stu and ^{Nellie} ~~Millie~~ and I marched off the platform and placed the bronze plaque on the stone pedestal at the foot of the flagpole and declared Fort Davis a National Historic Site. And then the ceremony was over.

I shook hands and waved and smiled and sometimes even hugged. And one old lady came up to me and pressed into my hands a yellowed newspaper -- it was only later that I saw that its date was the summer of 1941 -- Lyndon's first race for the Senate. And she said, "You can see how much we love you all. I've saved this all these years."

There were two of M. D. Bryant's grandchildren there.

Everywhere I went there ^{was} somebody who had known Lyndon -- ~~Sam~~ ^{Sam} Marcos -- in NYA when he was Senator.

Finally we waved goodbye for the last time to the Odessa Chuck Wagon gang who was staying on to prepare the barbeque for the West Texans.

The paper ~~said~~ said, "It's been a great day for West Texas."

At any rate it was a great day for me.

We left the Presidio airport a little after 1:00 -- had a bit of lunch on board and were at Austin about 2:15.

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Correct*
I took Stu Udall -- Lee had gone on to a meeting of Indians in Santa Fe -- and George Hartzog and we departed for the Ranch where we were met by Mr. Krueger and Mr. Woodbin and Mr. Kiley who had come at the request of Stu to have a look at the proposed Park area~~x~~ across from the main Ranch house.

A. W. met us. We looked at the plans the State of Texas had suggested. We drove all around the ~~circumference~~ ^{circumference} of the Park a couple of times. There may never be any Park. There is local resistance, fed by wild rumors that it would mean the removal of the Lutheran Church and the cemetery. And a rapacious rise in the prices asked for the land. The gist of their feeling was that if there ever was a Park it must have some waterfront first. Second, that the road should probably be removed from right in front of our house into the park instead off of the main highway -- mostly walking paths.

They like the idea of using the open fields for a carpet of wildflowers. And A. W. explained to them Lyndon's idea of using at least part of it for native wildlife -- especially the whitetail deer.

Then A. W. left and I took Stu and Mr. Hartzog and Mr. Krueger, Mr. Woodbin and Mr. Kiley in the King Air over to the West Ranch and we drove around for about an hour and a half as evening waned, watching the deer in great multitudes, jump the stone fences, graze untroubled in the pastures in herds of 50 or more. It was a fascinating sight, and they ~~x~~ rewarded me by being as thrilled as I am always thrilled. They hadn't known Texas would be like this. Many of them had been to Africa and compared ~~x~~ it to the great game preserves.

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Then we drove home past the Sharnhorst, around the ^{Stage} ~~State~~ Coach road and into the valley and on back to the main Ranch house -- except for Stu who had had to leave at the West Ranch to take a plane directly into ~~X~~ Austin where he was to address a conservation group.