

Big Changes at Fort Carson

Me coming to military backwater Fort Carson after two wars, high combat honors and considerable achievements, publishing widely read articles, professional and popular, redefining future wars for the Secretary of Defense, proving TET was a Communist failure, and winning virtually all of my combat battles?

And to a virtually unknown outfit called the 5th Mech Division - to work for a less-than-rising-star general, just because he wanted me to help him command?

But little did I (or he) know that big changes were in the wind for Fort Carson, Army realignment of combat units, the selection of Fort Carson for a great National Military Policy experiment - elimination of the Draft, and the impact of the 60's culture. All of which would greatly influence what I went through the challenging next 4 years.

I said later, I served in three wars - Korea,

Vietnam, and Fort Carson.

But that glorious Colorado morning in July, 1968 driving westward over a rise on US 24 highway from the Eastern Plains, with our entire family in our car towing the little Morris Minor with dog Sam visibly sitting up in its front seat, the morning sun at our backs illuminating bright shining Pikes Peak ahead, and hearing out the open car window, for the first time in decades the field song of a Meadow Lark - I knew I was home in my Colorado. I was thrilled for my family who had never really known my wonderful state.

In swift order I was processed in, having arrived before my 1 August 1968 orders deadline and happily learned that, indeed General Gleszer had ordered that his battalion and higher commanders live in quarters on post. For he had decided that I should command a Mechanized Infantry Battalion for at least enough time to learn the core unit of the Division, and so was slated to 'command' -

again.

So we soon were able to move into Quarters - as I recall 10B - on Ticknor Drive right on the post. A modern building but small for a 5 member family.



Here is one of the few pictures I have of General Gleszer, at some civic award involving school kids event in 1969. Rebecca

is on the left and I am at the extreme right
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And so swiftly that I don't even remember the details, I was ordered to take command of the 2d Battalion, 11th Mechanized Infantry Regiment of the 5th Mech Division.

Fort Carson's Military Future

Now is a good time to explain what had been happening to the US Army.

It was becoming clear that Vietnam was a lost American cause after 8 years of costly war, political change, and rising anti-war sentiment in the American public. So we would sooner or later withdraw our main military forces. At the same time the Cold War with the Soviet Union, which still posed a large ground threat to Europe, would require American readiness to deter conventional war or go to the aid of NATO there in the event of hostilities.

So where should the traditional military

divisions in Vietnam be relocated?

Well several things happened in a short span of time.

First of all, Secretary McNamara was determined to close down military bases that were cost-ineffective. Fort Carson, which had been only a foot infantry Division Post since 1942, only expanded during the Korean War, then cut back afterward, was on the chopping block. For there WERE no more plain Infantry Divisions. Only Airborne, Air Mobile, Tank, or Mechanized Infantry were needed.

But he sent out senior generals to survey all the Army Posts, such as Fort Riley, Hood, Polk, Carson to see whether they had a role in the future ready-army.

Then an Army Major General Heintges visited Fort Carson. He saw a pro-military City of Colorado Springs - even during the anti-military sentiment of the Vietnam War - he saw large tracts of Federal and marginal ranch land

outside Carson's boundaries - which had long been sufficient for training boots-on-the-ground Infantry Divisions. He saw the coming Federal Reservoir south on the Arkansas River. And he knew that the longer range Army weapons and increasing reliance on air support, would need ground and air space. And he saw little of the 'encroachment' and political constroversies against both .civilian air fields and military bases caused by civilian growth in eastern states where most Army units were stationed.

He sent back a glowing report that called backwater Fort Carson, if it were to remain and even expand, an Army post of the Future, rather than of the past.

His report was decisive. McNamara decided to retain what was once called 'Camp' Carson and turn it into a permanent, and modern-construction, 'Fort' Carson. Still in early 1968, before I got there, more senior Army officers, such as Lt General Palmer, flew out to evaluate it for themselves. And the Department of the

Army started pouring construction money into Fort Carson to modernize it from its 30 year old wooden frame construction era. Which delighted the Colorado Springs Chamber of Commerce.

And politicians of El Paso County and Pueblo County 'promised' they would support physical 'expansion' of Carson to permit the much more training-space-using Mech Division to train properly.

So the Army they activated the 5th Mechanized 'Red Diamond' Infantry Division, at Carson, having already determined that the famed 4th Infantry Division still in Vietnam, which landed on Utah Beach on D-Day WWII, and whose history went back to WWI, would replace the 5th Mechanized Infantry Division, at Fort Carson, as troops were drawn down in Vietnam. At some near date the Colors of the 4th 'Ivy Leaf' Division would be transferred to Fort Carson, and the 5th Mech would be deactivated and its men and equipment, and

units would become the 4th Mech.

Later everyone in the 5th Mech, including me who, was by that time in 1969 the Division G-3 - Plans and Training Officer - would take off the red diamond 5th Division patch, and put on the 4th Division Ivy Leaf patch.