

HISTORY OF FT. EGBERT, Eagle, Alaska

H78-39

August, 1973

Interviewer Mike Dalton borrowed from the Eagle Museum (located in the old court house where Judge James Wickersham conducted court) a publication written many years ago. It is available for viewing in the museum.

"History of Ft. Egbert: Military Historical sketch of Ft. Egbert Alaska written in connection with the post graduate course, Garrison School for Officers, Department of the Columbia 1 Nov. 1908 to March 31, 1909 by First Lt. Harry Graham, 22nd Infantry" Dated: Engineers School, July 26, 1909, file 95/462. A War Department stamp dated Aug. 7, 1909.

The author covers early negotiations for purchase of Alaska. Goes into the Sitka area.

Hudson Bay Co. established fur trading station at Eagle (Ft. Egbert in 1847. Known as Belle Island. Three or four white men ran the post but it was closed because it was not profitable. In 1868 a few white men representing Alaska Trading Co. established a trading post there. Named it Fort Grant. Mr. Arlington established a missionary there later and left in 1888. In 1894 gold discovered on American Creek.

This post was established as a result of a telegram from the president and assigning Capt. P.H. Ray and Lt. W. P. Richardson (telegram Aug. 4, 1897) both of the 8th Infantry, to go to Alaska and establish facilities to aid in civil order and communications. In September 1897 Capt. Ray located the present site of Ft. Egbert.

Congress: On reports of widespread starvation in Alaska, Congress on Dec. 18, 1897 appropriated \$200,000 for relief of destitute and the Secretary of War authorized three military expeditions to Alaska to determine what help was needed and where. Expedition was assigned to Skagway and Dyea and along the Dalton Trail to Dawson and to Belle Isle.

The post was named after the Late Harry C. Egbert, Col. with the 22nd Infantry and Brig. General U.S. Volumes. Killed at Malinta, Phillipines March 26, 1899.

Description of post: parade ground, barns, officers quarters, enlisted quarters, mess hall, hospital, wireless station, bakery, blacksmith shop, etc. etc.

Ft. Egbert is 575 miles from Ft. Gibbon (Tanana), 102 miles from Dawson, 695 miles from Skagway and 417 miles from Ft. Liscombe (Valdez).

Telegraphic lines built by Capt. Farnsworth of the 7th Infantry (and all available men) to connect about 12 miles with Canadian line. On May 15, 1901 the first message between Egbert and Dawson was sent. Lt. Craigie of the 7th Infantry and men cleared and cut poles for the line 80 miles southwest to

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to the head of Mosquito Creek. Lt. Mitchell in August 1901 relieved Lt. Craigie and made the connection with Lt. Burnells' Signal Corps line at Tanana Crossing...Aug. 24, 1902. A distance of 165 miles from Ft. Egbert.

Since completion of the Egbert-Valdez line the following stations are maintained by Egbert: North Fork, Ketchum Stock, Tanana Crossing, Summit, Central, Goodpaster, and Circle...a distance of about 400 miles. Central and Goodpaster abandoned in 1906 and Summit in 1907. In 1907 a wireless station was opened in Circle to communicate with wireless station in Fairbanks. But 1.5 kw generator at Circle was not powerful enough and in 1908 a 3 KW was installed making wireless communication possible beginning Sept. 12, 1898 (between Egbert, Circle and Fairbanks).

Troops assigned beginning June 19, 1899 are listed.

Commanding officers (beginning with first one, Capt. W.P. Richardson) are named.