

Bugle Calls

The post commander held a wide range of authority in the conduct of the garrison. The daily schedule of bugle calls was one of his tools in regulating the activities of the soldiers. Although the schedule would vary from season to season, the routine generally did not. The result was a regimented lifestyle that centered around the bugle call as a measure of time.

This schedule of calls is extracted from schedules used at Fort Davis during the 1870s and 1880s. They are presented to help visitors envision Fort Davis as an active military post. Differences between the historic army time schedule and this time schedule are noted in the description of the bugle calls.

8:15 — Assembly of Trumpeters	- The first signal for the soldiers to awake from their blissful slumber, this call historically sounded between 4:45 a.m. and 6:00 a.m., depending on the season.
8:20 — Reveille	- Upon the last note of this call, the flag was raised, the morning gun was fired, and all men were out of their bunks and getting dressed for morning roll call.
8:25 — Assembly	- The men stood in formation outside their barracks for morning roll call.
8:30 — Stable Call	- Soldiers in the cavalry put on their white canvas stable clothing and reported to the stables to feed and groom their mounts. This was historically done right after morning roll call, about 6:15 a.m.
8:45 — Water Call	- Cavalry troopers watered their horses.
9:00 — Mess Call	- Breakfast usually consisted of bread and bacon, mush and molasses, or pancakes, and plenty of hot, black coffee. This signal ordinarily sounded between 6:30 a.m. and 7:00 a.m.
9:30 — Fatigue Call	- Those soldiers assigned to a morning work party reported to their assignments for fresh air and physical exercise. Typical work details included building repair and construction, cleanup of the post grounds, gardening, cutting firewood, and hauling water.
9:40 — Sick Call	- Soldiers who were ill reported to the hospital dispensary for examination by the surgeon. Those who were truly sick were given a dose of “quinine and pills” and excused from work for the day. Army surgeons were always watchful for malingerers—those who faked sickness to escape work.
10:00 — Assembly of Trumpeters and Dress Guard Mounting	- This was the first call for “Guard Mount,” or the changing of the 24-hour guard detail.
10:05 — Assembly of Guard Details	- Men assigned to guard duty assembled in front of their respective barracks.
10:10 — Adjutant’s Call	- The guard details marched to the guard house where the Guard Mount ceremony took place. This historically took place around 8:00 a.m.
10:30 — Drill Call	- Soldiers who were assigned to morning drill assembled.
10:35 — Assembly	- Soldiers practiced battle formations and marching. New recruits learned more basic skills.
11:00 — Recall	- Morning work parties ceased at the sound of this call.
11:30 — Recall	- Morning drill ceased.
11:45 — First Sergeants’ Call	- Company first sergeants reported to post headquarters with their “Morning Reports,” which gave the number of their men sick, on guard duty, on drill or fatigue, or on special assignment.
12:00 — Mess Call	- Dinner was the main meal of the day—typically consisting of stew, or roast beef and potatoes, or corned beef and vegetables, plus coffee and bread.
1:00 — Fatigue Call	- Those soldiers assigned to afternoon work details had the opportunity to work off their dinner.
1:30 — School Call	- School commenced at the Post Chapel after dinner for children.
1:50 — Boots and Saddles	-This signal alerted cavalrymen to put on their riding boots and saddle their horses.
1:55 — Drill Call	-Soldiers who were assigned to afternoon mounted drill assembled.
2:00 — Assembly	- Cavalrymen practiced battle formations and exercised their horses. New recruits were taught the basics of horsemanship.
3:00 — Recall	- Afternoon drill ceased.
3:10 — Stable Call	- Cavalrymen repeated the morning care of their horses.
3:15 — Recall	- Afternoon work parties ceased at the sound of this call.
3:30 — Water Call	-Horses received their afternoon watering.
3:55 — Assembly of Trumpeters	- As the preparatory call for Retreat Parade, “Assembly” usually sounded twenty minutes before sunset.
4:00 — Assembly	- The entire garrison turned out for the Retreat Parade ceremony. The actual lowering of the flag and playing of Retreat were at sunset.
4:25 — Assembly of Trumpeters	- This was the preparatory call for “Tattoo.”
4:30 — Tattoo	- Historically played at about 9:00 p.m., “Tattoo” was the signal for enlisted men to prepare for bed and to secure the post.
4:35 — Assembly	- This was the last roll call of the day.
4:45 — Extinguish Lights	- By the last note of “Taps,” all lights were extinguished, all men were bedded down in their bunks, and all loud talking ceased.

FORT DAVIS RETREAT PARADE SOUND PROGRAM



Cavalry Company at Fort Davis, circa 1875

Retreat Parade

Plays daily at

11:00 a.m.
2:00 p.m.
4:00 p.m.

Let us journey back in time to a late summer day in 1875. The low light of the setting sun casts shadows across the parade ground, where officers are inspecting companies of the 10th U.S. Cavalry and the 25th U.S. Infantry in front of the row of barracks. The soldiers are in full dress uniform, their polished brass insignia glistening in the sunlight. Also present is the 25th U.S. Infantry Regimental Band, ready to strike a note upon completion of inspection of the soldiers. The evening Retreat Parade is about to begin.

Retreat Parade was a military ritual that may have appeared out of place on the dusty frontier. Despite the grand appearance, Retreat

was just another part of a soldier’s routine. The ceremony served a dual purpose—it was part of the ever-present discipline of the enlisted man, and it provided an opportunity for roll call and inspection.

For the soldier, it marked the end of yet another day filled with drills and work details like hauling water, chopping wood, and caring for government stock.

Along officers’ row, some of the ladies and children turn out to watch the martial proceedings from their shaded verandas. All is quiet and the signal to commence is given...

Trumpets: “Assembly” and “Adjutant’s Call”

The adjutant posts the guides then instructs company commanders to bring their companies to “parade rest.” He then commands the band to “sound off.” The band plays “Hail Columbia” as it marches the full length of the assembled soldiers and back to its original position.

Trumpets: “Retreat”

The evening gun is fired. Company commanders order their companies to “present arms.”

Trumpets: “To the Colors”

The flag is lowered, followed by the playing of “The Star Spangled Banner.”

The soldiers stand in formation for review. The adjutant then receives reports from the first sergeants of all companies. After they are accounted for, the adjutant reads out the day’s general orders. He announces the death of former President Andrew Johnson and the honors to be paid him by the garrison.

Note: “The Star Spangled Banner,” with a different arrangement, was not adopted as the National Anthem until 1931.

Review the Troops

The commanding officer commands the review to begin. The band, playing “The Young Recruit” followed by “Garryowen,” marches to front and center, then remains in place. The soldiers march twice around the parade ground, first at a cadence of 100 beats per minute and then at double time—165 beats per minute. After the soldiers arrive at their original position and the band finishes playing, the commanding officer instructs the adjutant to dismiss the parade.

Dismiss Parade

The parade is dismissed; the band continues playing until the parade ground is cleared.

The music and commands of the U.S. Army ceased to echo through the mountains when Fort Davis was abandoned in 1891. As you walk about the grounds of Fort Davis National Historic Site, look at the buildings through the eyes of the officers, enlisted men, wives, and children who made its history.

This sound program was recorded in cooperation with the staff of the United States Army Artillery and Missile Training Center, Fort Sill, Oklahoma in 1964. Music was played by the 77th and 97th Army Bands.

