

**CALIFORNIA MILITARY DEPARTMENT HISTORY PROGRAM
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Native Americans at Fort Tejon

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Native Americans at Fort Tejon

Pre-contact to August 1854.



The Native Americans who lived in the area surrounding Fort Tejon prior to the establishment of the military garrison are generally referred to as the *Emigdiano*. They were an inland group of the Chumash people who lived along the Santa Barbara channel coastline. Unlike their coastal relatives, however, the Emigdiano avoided contact with European explorers and settlers, and were never brought into one of the missions or even incorporated into the Sebastian Indian Reservation.

The area that Fort Tejon was to occupy was inhabited by the Interior Chumash and often referred to as Emigdiano Chumash. Although the area is on the eastern extreme of their territory and the boundaries are difficult to establish due to very limited ethnographic data. Other groups in the area were the Southern Valley Yokuts, Kitanemuk and Tataviam and possibly even the Serrano peoples.

Just prior to the establishment of Fort Tejon two local rancherias or villages existed near the future site of Fort Tejon. They were Lapau and Sasau. Lapau was a large settlement at the mouth of Canada de las Uvas near the Grapevine exit off

Interstate 5. The second was Sasau on the north shore of Castac Lake, now part of Tejon Ranch development plans.

Unconfirmed accounts report that a massacre occurred on the shores of Castac Lake prior to the Army arriving at Fort Tejon. Travelers or Ranchers in the area are said to have attacked the rancheria, killing many and driving the survivors of of Sasau into Castac Lake. Their bodies were mummified by the mineral salts in the water and were said to have surfaced at intervals for a long time thereafter.

August 1854 to 1861

Once Fort Tejon was established, the Emigdiano often worked as independent contractors for the army, providing guides for bear hunts and delivering fresh fruits from their fields for sale on Officer's Row. Although Native Americans were gathered to the Sebastian Reservation, the local Indians in the immediate vicinity of Fort Tejon were not incorporated into the Reservation.

See attached Stammerjohan monograph on the military movements to the Reservation.



1863 to 1864

Owens Valley Indian War

By 1863, the Owens Valley area began to witness growing tensions between whites and Indians. The anger of the Indians directed toward the whites had reached the boiling point. The Owens Valley Indians had droves of cattle overrun their small farms, the Kawaiisu chief in Walker Basin (whose name was Old Jesus) disliked the white settlers, feeling they had taken their land, forcing them into the hills, away from the productive land. In retaliation, the Tehachapi Indians had been stealing cattle in the Kern River Valley and had killed a miner. Finally, they called for a war council with the Owens Valley Indians near present day Kernville.

On April 12, 1863, Captain Moses A. McLaughlin, 2nd Cavalry, California Volunteers rode from Camp Babbitt near Visalia, with a detachment of twenty-four men to Kernville, to teach the Indians a lesson. Early in the morning of April 19, they surrounded the Indian's camp, separated out 35 Indian men either shot or ran them through with sabers.

Officially McLaughlin reported: "This extreme punishment, though I regret it, was necessary, and I feel certain that a few such examples will soon crush the Indians and finish the war in this and adjacent valleys. It is now a well-established fact that no treaty can be entered into with these Indians. They care nothing for pledges given, and have imagined that they could live better by war than peace. They will soon learn that they have been mistaken, as with the forces here they will soon either be killed off, or pushed so far in the surrounding deserts that they will perish by famine."

Shortly after the massacre, beginning July 10, 1863, Captain McLaughlin, Commander of Camp Independence, forced over 1,000 Indians from Fort Independence to Sebastian Reserve southwest of Tehachapi. Along the way, through the Kern River Valley and Walker Pass, many escape. When they were counted in Walker Basin it was determined some 250 missing.

Ranchers in Tehachapi area were alarmed at the growth in numbers at the reservation, and drove livestock through it to create havoc and distress among the residents. However, testimony, during an 1865 congressional inquiry of the "Condition of the Indian Tribes," holds Alexander Godey, Indian Agent at the Sebastian Reservation, responsible for herding cattle through the camp. According to Robert Daley's testimony:

“...[I] went to the Tejon about the 20th of July, with seven hundred and fifty Owen's River or Monache Indians, who had been brought from Owen's river. After remaining at Tejon a few days [I] picked out camps for the Indians on the reserve. The Indians were forbidden by Alexander Godey (who was agent for Mr. Beale) to cut brush with which to make their houses. [I] waited upon Godey and forbid his disturbing or interfering with the Indians, as he was left in command with orders to keep the Indians upon the reservation. The next day Godey drove his stock of cattle in among the Indians and herded them in their camps; [I] then forced Godey to remove his stock off the reservation.”

The 2nd Cavalry, Cal. Vol. reactivated Fort Tejon with approximately 300 Paiute Indians camping near the Post. When the Paiutes were forcibly marched from the Owens Valley by the 2nd Cav., they numbered 1000, a third of them being sent to Fort Tejon. The Indians were kept in a camp down Grapevine Canyon from the Fort called the "Pot Holes." After the arrival of the 2nd Infantry, the garrison provided the Paiutes with a meager ration to keep them in place and to keep them from starving [which the Volunteers were not supposed to do; Capt. Schmidt satisfied headquarters by deeming the rations for "Prisoners of War".]

The government Indian Bureau agents refused to assume responsibility for their care. Edward F. Beale did not want to rent or sell the land to the United States to create (or continue) a Reservation, since he had plans for developing the ranch. Beale demanded immediate removal of the Owens Valley Indians from the Rancho El Tejon, but allowed occupancy by the Tejon Indians. Therefore, the Owens Valley Indians were moved to a site close to Fort Tejon.

Most of this information is available on the Internet. Especially helpful is the information at www.militarymuseum.org a site that is sponsored by the State of California Adjutant Generals Office. See sections on Camp Independence and Owens Valley War.

