

A bittersweet day at Vancouver Barracks

Army officially transfers responsibility for East and South sections to National Park Service



Photo by [Steven Lane](#)

About 250 spectators turned out for the ceremony that formally turned over the East and South Vancouver Barracks to the National Park Service on Monday. Fort Vancouver until Monday was the longest continuously operating Army installation west of the Mississippi.

By [Jacques Von Lunen](#)

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Rangers from the National Park Service get ready to receive the nation's flag from their Army counterparts.

As a 21-gun salute echoed across the historic grounds, a flag detail of U.S. Army soldiers lowered the Stars and Stripes flown at the Artillery Barracks at the Fort Vancouver National Site.

The detail took the flag to Brig. Gen. Alton Berry, commander of the 88th Regional Support Command, who ceremoniously handed it over to Christine Lehnertz, director of the National Park Service's Pacific West region.

An era had come to an end.

The East and South Vancouver Barracks now officially are part of the National Park system. The U.S. Army vacated its longest continuously operating installation west of the Mississippi in Monday's ceremony.

(The West Barracks, including the historic Red

Cross building, is owned by the city of Vancouver but maintained and operated by the nonprofit organization Fort Vancouver National Trust).

"It's a bittersweet day," Brig. Gen. Kurt Hardin told the crowd of about 250. "We honor the Vancouver Barracks and inactivate them. But they now are in the good hands of the park service."

Fort Vancouver is one of 397 national park sites.

Rep. Jaime Herrera Beutler, R-Camas, told the assembled park service officials that her office "stands ready to support the park service as it takes ownership of this sacred place."

Vancouver Councilor Larry Smith, a retired career soldier whose last assignment was at his now-hometown barracks, invited all military branches to still conduct ceremonial events on the Fort Vancouver parade grounds in the future. He spoke of the historic fort as the anchor around which the city of Vancouver grew and said he was "saddened and excited to see this day come."

"I can't think of a more appropriate owner than the National Park Service," he said. "The story of the Army at Fort Vancouver will live on."

Lehnertz, the regional parks director, accepted the transfer of ownership of the barracks with the assurance that her agency would honor the facilities' history. The parks service and the Army have collaborated for a very long time, she said.

Ulysses S. Grant, who was stationed at Fort Vancouver during his military career, later established the nation's -- and the world's -- first national park in Yellowstone in 1872, when he was president.

Tracy Fortmann, the superintendent of Fort Vancouver National Historic Site, said that the site already hosts about 20,000 students from all over the Pacific Northwest each year. That role would be expanded now, she said.

The park service plans to create a public service campus at the barracks. The facilities will be used to teach visitors -- particularly school groups -- about military history and the fur traders who first established the post.

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