

BETWEEN COMANCHEROS AND COMANCHERÍA: A HISTORY OF  
FORT BASCOM, NEW MEXICO

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In 1863, Fort Bascom was built along the Canadian River in the Eroded Plains of Territorial New Mexico. Its unique location placed it between the Comanches of Texas and the Comancheros of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains. This post was situated within Comanchería during the height of the United States Army's war against the Southern Plains Indians, yet it has garnered little attention. This study broadens the scholarly understanding of how the United States Army gained control of the Southwest by examining the role Fort Bascom played in this mission. This includes an exploration of the Canadian River Valley environment, an examination of the economic relationship that existed between the Southern Plains Indians and the mountain people of New Mexico, and an account of the daily life of soldiers posted to Fort Bascom. This dissertation thus provides an environmental and cultural history of the Canadian River Valley in New Mexico, a social history of the men stationed at Fort Bascom, and proof that the post played a key role in the Army's efforts to gain control of the Southern Plains Indians. This study argues that Fort Bascom should be recognized as Texas' northern-most frontier fort. Its men were closer to the Comanche homeland than any Texas post of the period. Its records clearly show that the Army used Fort Bascom as a key forward base of operations against Comanches and Kiowas. An examination of Bascom's post returns, daily patrols, and major expeditions allows its history to provide a useful perspective on the nineteenth-century American Southwest.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I have many people to thank in regards to completing this dissertation. I will start with the excellent staff of the Donnelly Library at New Mexico Highlands University, where I spent many hours scouring over fifty volumes of the James W. Arrott Collection. The staff and archivists at the New Mexico State Research Center in Santa Fe were also very helpful. I also have to thank Warren Stricker of the Panhandle Plains Historical Museum in Canyon, Texas, and Bill Broughton, of the Fort Union National Monument Archives for their help in tracking down pertinent information.

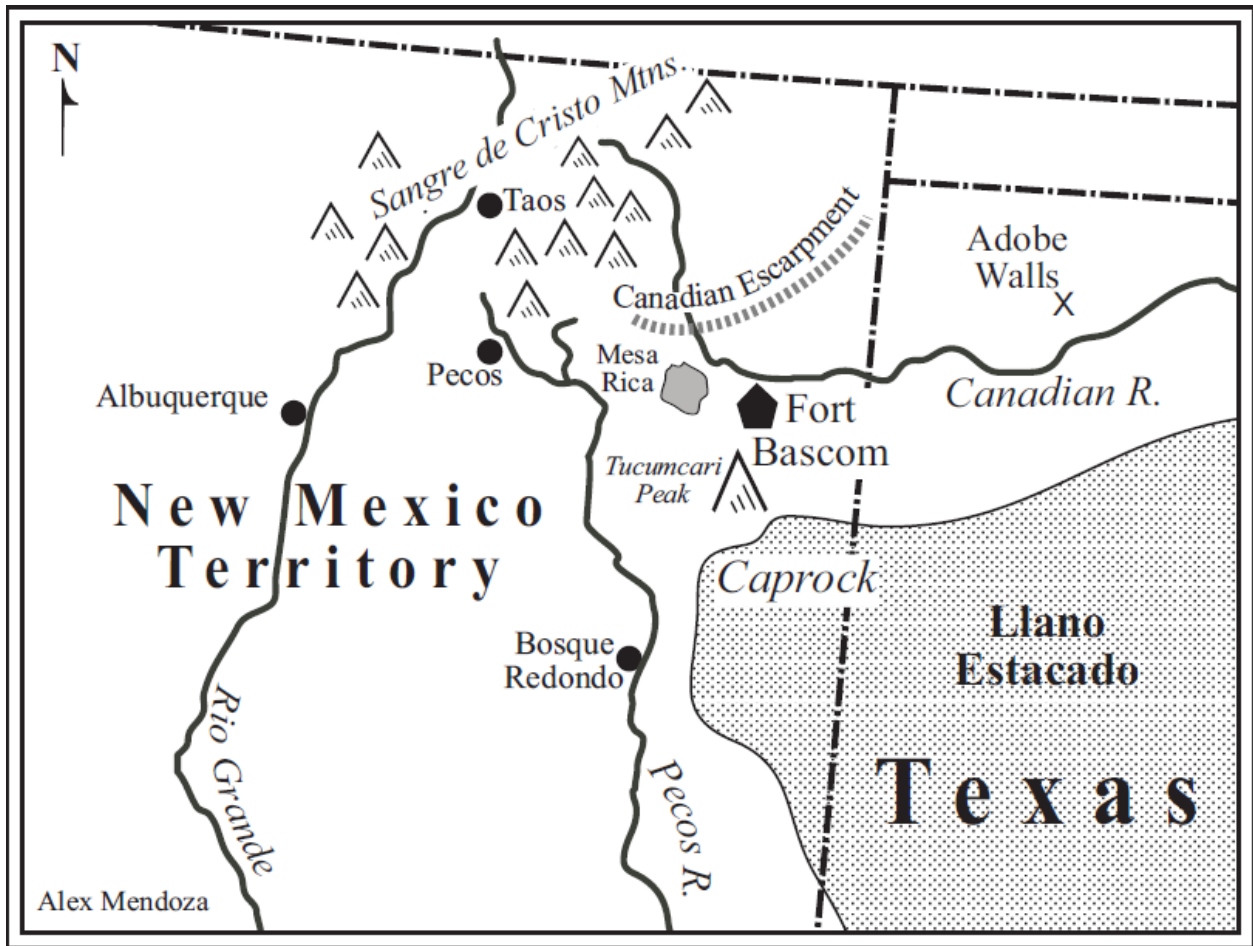
My major professor, Rick McCaslin, offered continual encouragement and firm guidance when I began to feel like I had taken a wrong turn in the Llano Estacado. I want to thank everyone on my committee for their time and expert advice. Durwood Ball was an early inspiration, letting me know that research into this post was of historical value. A portion of this research was turned into a journal article for the *New Mexico Historical Review*. Portions of chapters 2, 6, and 8 first appeared as “Boots on the Ground: A History of Fort Bascom in the Canadian River Valley,” in the *New Mexico Historical Review* 87, no. 3 (Summer 2012): 329-358. Copyright 2012 by the University of New Mexico Board of Regents. All rights reserved.

Finally, I must thank my wife Barbara, a scholar and teacher in her own right. I owe Barbara the most. During this process, while I was focused on deadlines, she took care of everything else. In 2006, she convinced me that I should quit my job and do something that I loved. There is no adequate way that I can properly express in words how instrumental she has been in the completion of this dissertation. So I'll just say to the love of my life: “Thanks, Barb. We did it.”

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	iii
Chapters	
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
2. IN THE SHADOW OF MESA RICA.....	18
3. A NEAT LITTLE POST.....	47
4. ADAPTION, TRANSITION, AND REALLOCATION.....	73
5. THIS BEAN-BELLIED ARMY.....	102
6. HUNDREDS OF DAYS AND HUNDREDS OF MILES.....	133
7. BETWEEN COMANCHEROS AND COMANCHERÍA.....	168
8. TEXAS’S NORTHERN-MOST FRONTIER FORT.....	203
9. CONCLUSION.....	233
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	238

Map 1. On the edge of Comanchería



## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

In 1863, Fort Bascom was built along the Canadian River in the Eroded Plains of New Mexico Territory, about sixty miles west of the Texas border. This fort's construction was prompted by Union fears of a second Confederate invasion from Texas and a desire to check incursions by Southern Plains Indians. It was placed about eleven miles north of present-day Tucumcari, New Mexico, a day's ride from the western edge of Llano Estacado (see map 1). Fort Bascom operated as a permanent post from 1863 to 1870. From late 1870 through most of 1874, it functioned as an outpost of Fort Union, and it was used as a base of operations for patrols in New Mexico and expeditions into Texas. This investigation attempts to broaden the scholarly understanding of how the United States Army helped extend federal power over the Southwest by examining the role Fort Bascom played in this mission.<sup>1</sup>

Fort Bascom stood within Comanchería, during the height of the United States Army's war against the Southern Plains Indians. Comanchería encompassed the eastern face of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains, the Llano Estacado, and much of Central Texas, extending as far south as the southern rim of the Edwards Plateau. Within this region, an area larger than many European countries, various Comanche communities refused to defer to American expansion and violently resisted attempts to relocate them. Despite its location within what could almost be considered a foreign country at war with the United States, Fort Bascom has garnered little scholarly attention. An example of this academic oversight is found within the works of two of

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<sup>1</sup> See Acting Assist. Adj. Gen. Ben C. Cutler, General Orders No. 20, Headquarters, Department of New Mexico (hereafter DNM), 11 August 1863, Letters Sent, Department of New Mexico, Record Group 98 [now 393], National Archives, in James W. Arrott Collection, Donnelly Library, New Mexico Highlands University, Las Vegas [hereafter LS, DNM, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection], Vol. 10, pp. 264-65; Assist. Adj. Gen. William A. Kobbe, Special Orders No. 105, Headquarters, DNM, 20 October 1870, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 24: 91.

the region's best historians. In 1964, Ernest Wallace detailed the efforts of Col. Ranald S. Mackenzie to defeat the Comanches in the Texas Panhandle. Regarding an expedition that occurred in the fall of 1871, Wallace wrote: "Mackenzie and his Fourth Cavalry had penetrated the very heart of the hostile Indian country, even venturing into the abysmal Llano Estacado in an area hitherto unexplored by the United States military." Ten years later, esteemed scholar Frederick J. Rathjen wrote of an 1872 Mackenzie expedition: "One wonders, in fact, whether the colonel realized the historic significance or personal distinction of having led the first United States military force across the Staked Plains!" [exclamation is Rathjen's.] Seven years before Mackenzie's first journey into the Texas Panhandle, Fort Bascom patrols had already penetrated the region, participating in routine scouts and more extensive military expeditions. Such information does not detract from Mackenzie's accomplishments, nor Wallace or Rathjen's contributions. Yet, if the military's first forays into this "unexplored" territory were historically significant, then a study of Fort Bascom and its soldiers is warranted.<sup>2</sup>

Fort Bascom's location within this cultural shatter-zone provides useful perspectives on existing and evolving relationships in this area during an important era in the expansion of the United States. Thus, a thorough history of this post includes examining the mid-nineteenth-century economic ties between Southern Plains Indians and the various mountain people of New Mexico, the environment of the Canadian River Valley, and the experiences of Fort Bascom's soldiers. Spanish explorers, American merchants, and the United States Army Corps of Topographical Engineers left scholars the first written descriptions of this region and the people who lived there. *Nuevo-mexicanos* from the Sangre de Cristo Mountains, Navajos from Bosque

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<sup>2</sup> Ernest Wallace, *Ranald Mackenzie on the Texas Frontier* (Lubbock: West Texas Museum Association, 1964), 56; Frederick W. Rathjen, *The Texas Panhandle Frontier* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1973), 202.

Redondo, Comanches from the Llano Estacado, African-Americans from Kentucky, Anglo-Americans from Illinois, and European transplants all crossed paths here.<sup>3</sup>

Inspired by David J. Weber, in the last twenty years many scholars have returned to the Southwest. Following this scholar's lead, William deBuys, Dan Flores, and Andrés Reséndez have added depth and new perspectives on the region, revealing a world of cultural and economic vitality. Specific works that detail the economic relationships that existed between plains and mountain people include James F. Brooks's *Captives and Cousins: Slavery, Kinship, and Community in the Southwest Borderlands*, Charles L. Kenner's *A History of New Mexico – Plains Indian Relations*, and articles such as Thomas Merlan and Frances Levine's "Comanchero: José Piedad Tafoya, 1834-1913." Additionally, Pekka Hämäläinen and Brian DeLay have recently argued that Native Americans and Hispanos were shapers of Southwestern history, not mere participants. If this is true, then what about Fort Bascom, situated just north of the Llano Estacado? As Weber, Reséndez, and Hämäläinen's works illustrate, circling back to areas once considered not worth the time or already researched has proven to be a fruitful enterprise. This dissertation seeks to add to the emerging scholarship on Southwestern history by circling back to one such place.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>The term "cultural shatter zone" comes from Benjamin Nathans' "ethnic shatter zone" discussed in *Beyond the Pale: The Jewish Encounter with Late Imperial Russia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 380. In a recent environmental history of the Canadian River, Margaret A. Bickers illustrates the Comancheros' close ties to this stream, but does not address the larger implications of this transnational black-market economy. See Margaret A. Bickers, "Three Cultures, Four Hooves, and One River: The Canadian River in Texas and New Mexico, 1848 – 1939" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Kansas State University, 2010). For early descriptions of the Canadian River Valley, see Don Juan de Oñate, *Don Juan de Oñate: Colonizer of New Mexico 1595-1628*, eds. George P. Hammond and Agapito Rey, pt. I, Historical Series V (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1953), 401, 402; and Josiah Gregg, *Commerce of the Prairies*, ed. Max. L. Moorehead (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1954), 349, 363, 379.

<sup>4</sup> Charles L. Kenner initiated renewed scholarly interest in the region in 1969. See Kenner, *A History of New Mexico – Plains Indian Relations* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1969), 97, 155. David J. Weber followed Kenner, creating a historiography all his own. For the purposes of this study, one should begin with *The Mexican Frontier, 1821-1846, The American Southwest Under Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico

After the Civil War, the cultural gulf between American soldiers and Southern Plains Indians widened. Many of the volunteers who manned the frontier forts at the beginning of the conflict were locals, or at least lived somewhere within the region, and were familiar with the topography and people who inhabited it. The First New Mexico Volunteer Infantry and Cavalry mustered out in 1866, leaving the mission of gaining control of the Southwest to the regulars from Kentucky, Maryland, or Europe. Soldiers' familiarity with both the people and the landscape of the region was paramount to success, yet the newcomers often had a difficult time distinguishing Navajos from Puebloans, Comanches from Utes, and honest Hispano ranchers from deceptive Comancheros. The Comancheros, both Puebloans and local *Nuevo-mexicano* mountain people, traded with the Comanches, sometimes legally and sometimes illegally. This study will reveal the "fluid borderland world" into which Anglo American, Irish-born, and African American soldiers were inserted, and how they ultimately met the challenges presented by both the Canadian River Valley of eastern New Mexico and the Southern Plains Indians.<sup>5</sup>

While the subjugation of the Comanches may appear to have been inevitable, the future was not so certain along the edge of the Llano Estacado in the 1860s. American dominance,

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Press, 1982). Also see William deBuys, *Land of Enchantment and Exploitation: The Life and Hard Times of a New Mexico Mountain Range* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995); Dan Flores, *Horizontal Yellow: Nature and History in the Near Southwest* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1999); James F. Brooks, *Captives and Cousins: Slavery, Kinship, and Community in the Southwest Borderlands* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press for the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, 2002), 271, 317;; Thomas Mertan and Frances Levine, "Comanchero: José Piedad Tafoya, 1834-1913," *New Mexico Historical Review* 81 (Winter 2006), 43; Pekka Hämäläinen, *The Comanche Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008); and Brian DeLay, *War of a Thousand Deserts: Indian Raids and the U. S. – Mexican War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008). The relationships between kinship, violence, and a Southwestern indigenous economy is expanded upon in Gary Clayton Anderson, *The Indians of the Southwest, 1580 – 1830: Ethnogenesis and Reinvention* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999), and F. Todd Smith, *From Dominance to Disappearance: The Indians of Texas and the Near Southwest, 1786-1859* (Norman: University of Nebraska Press, 2005). On Fort Bascom's place within *Comanchería*, see map in Hämäläinen, *Comanche Empire*, 316.

<sup>5</sup>Quote from Pekka Hämäläinen, "The Emergence of New Texas Indian History," in Walter Buenger and Arnoldo de León eds., *Beyond Texas through Time: Breaking Away from Past Interpretations* (College Station: Texas University Press, 2011), 52. For details on several of the volunteer soldiers who served in New Mexico, see George H. Pettis, *The California Column* (Santa Fe: New Mexican Printing Company, 1908).

claims of racial superiority, acquisition of ancient land grants, and elimination of hunting ranges served a recipe for dissent among a variety of people impacted by the Army in general and Fort Bascom soldiers in particular. Although many Hispanos fought for the Union during the Civil War, others remained loyal to their life-long trading partners, the Comanches. This fact ensured that Fort Bascom's problems involved more than just chasing Indians. Troopers were charged with interrupting a transnational, black-market economy that funneled manufactured goods and weapons south in exchange for Texas cattle and horses, the illegal contraband of the American Southwest during the 1860s. Wealthy *Nuevo-mexicanos* and Anglo ranchers from Kansas were interested in cheap cattle, and hardly concerned with where the Comancheros had acquired them, although they certainly knew. This dissertation illustrates how this shadow economy worked, and what Fort Bascom soldiers did to bring it to a halt.<sup>6</sup>

The evidence supports the argument that Fort Bascom was Texas's northernmost frontier fort. Its men were closer to the Comanche homeland than any Texas post of the period. Its commanders continually sent patrols into the Texas Panhandle to break up the black-market trade that plagued Texas ranchers and settlers in the 1860s and 1870s. Three major expeditions sent large columns from Fort Bascom as a part of missions to eliminate the Comanches and Kiowas who prevailed in the region. These columns, as well as regular scouts from this post, were instrumental in finally gaining control of the region.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Charles L. Kenner, *The Comanchero Frontier: A History of New Mexican-Plains Indians Relations* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994), 206. The importance of cattle during the war and afterward can be found in Glen Sample Ely "Gone From Texas and Trading With the Enemy: New Perspectives on Civil War West Texas," in Ely, *Where The West Begins: Debating Texas Identity* (Lubbock: Texas Tech University, 2011), 45-49.

<sup>7</sup>Those major expeditions can be found in a variety of documents. For Col. Christopher Carson's mission, see Carson to James H. Carleton in *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* 70 vols. in 128 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1888-1901), Series 1, Vol. 41, pt. 1, pp. 940-42. For expeditions from 1868 and 1874, see Joseph P. Peters, *Indian Battles and Skirmishes on the American Frontier, 1790-1890* (Ann Arbor, New York: Argonaut Press, 1966), 14, 15, 44, 45; and Maj. William R.

As stated above, the fort was built in the Eroded Plains of New Mexico, just west of the Llano Estacado. The role of environment in western history is a broad subject with a variety of layers. Both its aridity and the topographical challenges found in the Canadian River Valley have been detailed by several scholars. Their works, along with contemporary reports, are used to create the context needed to understand the challenges that Fort Bascom soldiers faced.

Any understanding of the western environment begins with a nod toward Walter Prescott Webb. Many revisionists abandoned Webb due to his negative characterizations of Indians and Hispanics. Webb also admired the themes found in Frederick Jackson Turner's "Frontier Thesis," which has been denigrated as an outdated and discarded approach to western history which has obscured the contributions of many people. Yet scholars such as Donald Worster, Michael Malone, and Flores consider Webb to be one of the founding fathers of environmental history. In *The Great Plains*, Webb wrote that "the essential truth is that the West cannot be understood as a mere extension of things Eastern." Lack of water and arid climates restricted the use of landscapes in ways that did not occur east of the Mississippi River. Such scarcity shaped culture and influenced how people, including soldiers posted in the Canadian River Valley, lived. In a land without maps, the Comanches and Kiowas were never lost, yet military patrols often were, with disastrous results. As William deBuys has noted, "In an unforgiving environment, small errors yield large consequences."<sup>8</sup> A part of Fort Bascom's story includes explaining how such men adapted to this borderland region.

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Price to Headquarters, Santa Fe, 20 August 1874, Telegrams Sent and Received, DNM, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 29: 141. Information on routine scouts and patrols that originated out of Bascom can be found in Letters Sent (Arrott Collection) and *War of Rebellion* records.

<sup>8</sup>Walter Prescott Webb, *The Great Plains* (Waltham, MA: Ginn and Company, 1931), 507; to see the arc of Webb's influence, see James Malin, "Ecology and History," *Scientific Monthly* 70 (May 1950); Donald Worster, "New West True West," *The Western Historical Quarterly* 18 (April 1987), 146; Michael Malone, *Historians and*

To survive on the arid frontier, officers and troopers had to do more than adjust their frame of reference. East of the Mississippi River, crops and forage were readily available for harvest or purchase. West of the river, vegetation and hay were sparse, supply lines were often hundreds of miles long, and merchants were few and far between. Thus logistics would play as great a role in subduing the Southern Plains Indians as combating them. This work illustrates these difficulties from Fort Bascom's perspective.

In 1982, Darlis A. Miller focused on the volunteers who followed General James H. Carleton east to help defend New Mexico during the Civil War. In *The California Column in New Mexico*, Miller illustrates the impact these soldiers had in region, in the process detailing how difficult it was to supply frontier posts located in an arid war zone. In 1989, Miller followed this study with *Soldiers and Settlers*, answering Francis Paul Prucha's call for someone within the scholarly community to do a more in-depth investigation on the positive impacts of frontier military institutions.<sup>9</sup> Although published a couple of years before Patricia Limerick's synthesis of the West, Miller's answer to Prucha was generally ignored by her peers. Miller's work argued that pre-railroad territorial partnerships between the federal government and private enterprise injected capital into the hands of both entrepreneurs and local communities steeped in chronic poverty.<sup>10</sup> The federal government could not dictate where crops would be grown or who would

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*the American West* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), 2; and DeBuys, *Land of Enchantment and Exploitation*, ix.

<sup>9</sup>Darlis A. Miller, *The California Column in New Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1982); Miller, *Soldiers and Settlers: Military Supply in the Southwest, 1861-1885* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1989); Francis Paul Prucha, "Commentary," in *The American Military on the Frontier: Proceedings of the Seventh Military History Symposium* (Washington: Office of Air Force History, Headquarters USAF, 1978), 177.

<sup>10</sup>New Western Historians like Patricia Limerick gained traction in the mid to late 1980s in anticipation of the 100-year anniversary of Frederick Jackson Turner's "Frontier Thesis." They used this opportunity to dissect and eliminate Jackson's theories and highlight their own. Limerick and her colleagues used world system theories that illustrated the importance of colonialism in the founding of the West. This view held that power structures running

grow them. Officials did use their powers to promote certain contractors over others, just as they had elsewhere, but due to issues related to scarcity, the Hispano farmer could not be ignored in New Mexico.

In his 1997 geographic history, *El Llano Estacado*, John Miller Morris described the flat, treeless prairie that stretched from Midland, Texas, to the Canadian River, a range with which both the Comanches and Fort Bascom soldiers were very familiar. Using an interdisciplinary approach, Miller reviewed the first military expeditions sent to chart the territories acquired as a result of the United States' victory over Mexico. After assessing the official reports of the United States Corps of Topographical Engineers and other travelers' findings, Morris concluded that perceptions of a place were just as important as reality, a notion soldiers would have to overcome in their efforts to subdue the Comanches and their allies. Many privates and officers stationed at Fort Bascom considered the Canadian River Valley inhospitable and cruel, with little relevance in the grand scheme of their lives, and this disdain shaped their actions in the region.<sup>11</sup>

In *Horizontal Yellow*, Dan Flores contends a deeper understanding of geography helps to explain why people acted the way they do much better than theories grounded in the social sciences. Like Webb, Flores argues that landscape shaped man, not the other way around. Flores contends that Native American and *Nuevo-mexicano* notions of landscape and spirituality were

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back to the East Coast and across the Atlantic extracted the West's resources, leaving little for the region. They also argued morality had little to do with history, as events were shaped more by profit motives than altruism. For two excellent examples of the New Western History, see Patricia Limerick, *Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1987), and Hal Rothman, *On Rims and Ridges: The Los Alamos Area since 1882* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992).

<sup>11</sup>John Miller Morris, *El Llano Estacado: Exploration and Imagination on the High Plains of Texas and New Mexico, 1536-1860* (Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 1997), 3. For examples of the frustrations ordinary privates expressed about their scouts on the Canadian River see Eddie Mathews, "Letters From Home and Journal of His Military Years," transcribed by Ora Mathews Bublitz, typescript, n.d., Fort Union National Monument Archives, Fort Union National Monument, Watrous, New Mexico. Private Mathews served with the Eighth Cavalry while stationed at Fort Union, Fort Bascom, and on extended scouts while using Fort Bascom and locations along the river as summer base camps.

linked and passed down from one generation to the next. Understanding the environment of the Canadian River is the key to gaining the proper perspective needed to understand the challenges Fort Bascom soldiers faced, yet it is just as crucial to place this fort within its proper military context, one that clearly illustrates its role within the federal government's overarching mission.<sup>12</sup>

Two long works on Fort Bascom have been published. Public historian F. Stanley and scholar James A. Foster created histories of this post in the early 1960s, yet both are very dated. Father Stanley Louis Crocchiola, a historian as well as a Franciscan priest who practiced his faith in New Mexico for fifty years, used the pseudonym F. Stanley. His history of Fort Bascom was based on anecdotal first generation recollections as well as archival sources, yet he did not footnote his material. Foster's work was footnoted and more detailed but narrow in focus. The triumphalist themes Stanley and Foster both incorporated into their histories have long needed an update to place the history of this post within the emerging historiographies that have recreated Southwestern history in the last twenty years.<sup>13</sup>

While some scholars have begun to understand the historical significance of the Canadian River, few have acknowledged Fort Bascom's relevance to this history. One of the few to note its role at all was J. Evetts Haley, who focused on the United States Army's efforts to eliminate the Comanchero trade. Thirty years later, Chris Emmett and Leo E. Oliva in their examination of Fort Union did reference Bascom occasionally, as did Robert C. Carriker's works on frontier

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<sup>12</sup>Dan Flores, *Horizontal Yellow: Nature and History in the Near Southwest* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1999), iv.

<sup>13</sup>F. Stanley, *Fort Bascom: Comanche – Kiowa Barrier* (Pampa, TX: Pampa Print Shop, 1961); James Monroe Foster, "History of Fort Bascom, New Mexico" (Master's thesis, Eastern New Mexico University, 1955). While more scholarly in nature, Foster's work incorporates the triumphalist theme of most 1950s and 1960s historians.

garrisons, but only Charles L. Kenner's study of the Comancheros devoted more than a few pages to Fort Bascom's military role in the history of this region. Forty years have passed since its first publication.<sup>14</sup>

In *Kit Carson and the Indians*, Tom Dunlay argues that the word *conquest*, despite its obvious meaning, does not adequately express the ambiguous nature of what happened in the American Southwest. While never sugar coating the atrocious behavior of some frontier soldiers, Dunlay gives an alternative view to the revisionist studies that characterize all military personnel as racists, detailing how some of their efforts saved lives. The best single work that explains the military campaigns and battles that occurred on the Southern Plains remains William H. Leckie's *The Military Conquest of the Southern Plains*. Leckie juxtaposes the efforts of Indian agents and officers charged with enacting Grant's Peace Policy against the evolution of frontier soldiers who were transformed into borderland warriors. While Leckie seldom mentions Fort Bascom, this work creates the proper military context from which to re-assess its contributions.<sup>15</sup>

Scholar Thomas T. Smith's history of Fort Inge illustrates how economics drove western expansion and details the gritty realities soldiers faced on the western frontier. But for different

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<sup>14</sup>J. Evetts Haley, "The Comanchero Trade," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 38 (Jan., 1935), 157-176. On Fort Union, see Chris Emmet, *Fort Union and the Winning of the Southwest* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1965); and Leo E. Oliva, *Fort Union and the Frontier Army in the Southwest* (Santa Fe: National Park Service, 1993). Oliva's examination is the more useful of the two. Additionally, see Joseph P. Sánchez, et al., *Fort Union National Monument: Ethnographic Overview and Assessment* (Santa Fe: National Park Service, 2006); Robert C. Carricker, *Fort Supply Indian Territory: Frontier Outpost on the Plains*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1970); Kenner, *A History of New Mexico – Plains Indian Relations*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1969).

<sup>15</sup>Thomas W. Dunlay, *Kit Carson and the Indians* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 332-337. For a recent example of revisionist interpretations, see Anderson, *Conquest of Texas*. Other important works include William H. Leckie, *The Military Conquest of the Southern Plains* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1963), 113, 114; and Robert M. Utley, *Frontier Justice: The First Century of the Texas Rangers* (New York: Berkely Books, 2002). Utley notes both the failings and murders of Anglo perpetrators in Texas, but creates a more three dimensional narrative of events that help explain fluid realities of the frontier. For an excellent contemporary analysis of the Union's outposts in New Mexico, see Jerry D. Thompson, ed., *New Mexico Territory During the Civil War: Wallen and Evans Inspection Reports, 1862-1863* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2008). Particularly helpful is Thompson's introduction, the best overview of the territory's frontier military posts.

reasons, like Limerick, Smith counters the idea put forth by the Turnerians that pioneers were preordained to settle the territories for the good of mankind. *Frontier Crossroads*, Robert Wooster's work on Fort Davis, is one of the latest studies to place fort histories within the new southwestern historiography. Such works look at the social history of the people both inside and outside the fort, as well as the economic issues that swirl around such installations. Soldiers went west because their mission took them there. Citizens followed because frontier forts often opened up opportunities for the hardy souls that had the nerve to go there. Like Smith's and Wooster's work, this study will show that gaining control of the Southwest was never as inevitable as some nineteenth-century historians considered it to be.<sup>16</sup>

One of the key arguments in this dissertation is that new Indian histories have highlighted the importance of the Canadian River Valley, which was a lifeline for Comanches, Comancheros and Kiowas. No post was closer to this base of resistance than Fort Bascom. Thus what the soldiers did there was important. In *War of a Thousand Deserts*, Brian DeLay argues that the Native Americans associated with this region played a key role in bankrupting the Mexican nation during the first part of the nineteenth century. As a consequence, Mexicans were ill-prepared to meet the American army in 1848. In *The Comanche Empire*, Hämäläinen broadens

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<sup>16</sup>Thomas T. Smith, *Fort Inge: Sharps, Spurs, and Sabers on the Texas Frontier, 1849-1869* (Austin: Eakin Press, 1993); Robert Wooster, *Frontier Crossroads* (College Station: Texas A&M Press, 2006); Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," in *Frontier and Section: Selected Essays of Frederick Jackson Turner* (Englewood Cliff, N. J.: Prentiss-Hall, 1961): 37-62. Other useful works on frontier installations and the challenges their soldiers faced include Thomas T. Smith, *The Old Army in Texas: A Research Guide to the U. S. Army in Nineteenth Century Texas* (Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 2000); Thomas W. Dunlay, *Wolves for Blue Soldiers: Indian Scouts and Auxiliaries with the U. S. Army, 1860-1890* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1982); Durwood Ball, "Fort Craig, New Mexico, and the Southwestern Indian Wars, 1854 – 1884," *New Mexico Historical Review* 73 (April, 1998): 153-173; Ball, "Ranald Mackenzie: War on the Plains Indians," in Richard W. Etulain and Glenda Riley, eds., *Chiefs and Generals: Nine Men Who Shaped The American West* (Golden, Co.: Fulcrum Publishing, 2004); Lee Myers, "Military Establishments in Southwestern New Mexico: Stepping Stones to Settlement," *New Mexico Historical Review* 43 (Jan., 1968): 5-48; Robert W. Frazer, *Forts of the West* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1965); Robert G. Carter, *On the Border with Mackenzie, or Winning West Texas from the Comanches* (New York: Amereon Ltd., 1935); and Alan J. Holmes, *Fort Selden, 1865-1891: The Birth, Life, and Death of a Frontier Fort in New Mexico* (Santa Fe: Sunstone Press, 2010).

DeLay's thesis, contending that these Indians were the colonials extracting resources from the countries on their periphery, and altering economies and cultures for over a century. F. Todd Smith's works have also played an important role in building this historiography. Thus New Indian History, New West Texas History, and a revitalized Southwestern History together have created a platform from which to understand the daunting task Fort Bascom soldiers faced as they sought to dismantle the raid-and-trade economy that sustained the Southern Plains Indians, who refused to submit to military control in the 1860s and 1870s.<sup>17</sup>

The second chapter of this work focuses on the land that troops were charged with patrolling and the people who already lived in the region when the post was built. Deep history of the geology and the valley's cultural context helps create a better sense of place from which the scholar can truly appreciate the challenges American soldiers faced. This chapter also illustrates how the Canadian River tied the mountain and plains cultures together, and detail the first observations of both the Spanish and Anglo Americans that visited this valley.<sup>18</sup>

Chapter 3 explains the events that led to Fort Bascom's construction. It includes early background on federal efforts to gain control of New Mexico and northwest Texas. It also details the general paranoia that existed throughout the Department of New Mexico after Brig. Gen. Henry Hopkins Sibley and the first Confederate invasion of New Mexico was repulsed at Glorieta Pass in 1862. Primary sources clearly indicate that the fear of another invasion prompted federal officials to send Fort Union soldiers to the Canadian River to create a

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<sup>17</sup>DeLay, *War of a Thousand Deserts*, 281; Hämäläinen, *Comanche Empire*, 345; F. Todd Smith, *The Wichita Indians: Traders of Texas and the Southern Plains, 1540 – 1845* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2000); and Smith, *From Dominance to Disappearance*. The challenges faced by the Fort Bascom garrison and other borderland soldiers are thoroughly detailed in Hämäläinen, *Comanche Empire*, 317; and Ball, "Fort Craig, New Mexico, and the Southwestern Indian Wars," 154-60.

<sup>18</sup>This chapter also includes early primary source descriptions of the Canadian River Valley, such as Oñate, *Colonizer of New Mexico*, 401, 402; and Gregg, *Commerce of the Prairies*, 349, 363, 379.

temporary base, Camp Easton, which turned into Fort Bascom. This chapter details military correspondence, explain Bascom's design and construction, and illustrate just how dangerous this valley was in the months prior to construction.

Chapter 4 portrays the soldiers of Fort Bascom, regulars and volunteers, and in the process investigate the unique relationship that existed between the two organizations. Along with the First New Mexico Volunteer Cavalry, Capt. Peter W. L. Plympton and Company F of the Seventh United States Infantry were the first soldiers to inhabit this post. Plympton and Company F soon left, leaving operations to the volunteers. While both Hispanos and Anglos made up the volunteer officer corps, most Fort Bascom privates were *Nuevo-mexicanos*. In August of 1866, volunteers were mustered out and replaced by regular army troops. Lt. Col. Silas Hunter relieved the volunteers of their duties, taking over Fort Bascom with five companies of the Fifty-Seventh Infantry, a regiment of United States Colored Troops. Later companies of the Third and Eighth cavalries operated out of this post, as did the One Hundred and Twenty-Fifth United States Colored Infantry. Chapter 4 notes the post's early leaders, such as Capt. Edward H. Bergmann, and identifies the regiments and companies that served there.<sup>19</sup>

Chapter 5 studies life at the post, both social and economic. Some of the officers brought their wives to Fort Bascom. A few privates were also allowed this privilege, yet their spouses were often employed as laundresses. Some of the documents reveal the great concern regarding these women's true occupation, while others note the struggle between headquarters and the post to define what constituted a legal union in a land of few priests. A town of sorts, Liberty, sprang

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<sup>19</sup>U.S. Returns From Military Posts, Fort Bascom, U.S. Army, RG 94, NA, M617A, Roll 81, August 1863 (hereafter cited as Fort Bascom Returns, U.S. Army, [month-yr]). For the 3<sup>rd</sup> United States Cavalry and the 125<sup>th</sup> United States Colored Infantry, see Fort Bascom Returns, U.S. Army, , February 1867; and for the 8<sup>th</sup> United States Cavalry see Fort Bascom Returns, U.S. Army, August 1870.

up close to Fort Bascom. Its name derived from the soldiers' phrase for time off. Liberty sported the mandatory saloons, yet was also where merchants did business with the federal government. Communications regarding hay, beef, and freight contracts at Fort Bascom are used to illustrate the business side of gaining control of the western territories. Without ample forage, horses could not perform day-long patrols in adverse conditions. The same could be said for the cavalymen and infantrymen stationed at the post. Without adequate produce, hungry soldiers often became sick soldiers. Negotiating for hay and beef contracts, keeping the post's library up to date, as well as pining for ice, are all components of this fort's history. Such a study gives Fort Bascom a more three dimensional look. It also highlights both the limitations put on the area by the environment, and the logistical problems found on the American frontier.

With a focus on the volunteers, Chapter 6 explores the patrols and expeditions Fort Bascom soldiers participated in from its inception until they were mustered out and replaced by regular army troops in 1866. One such patrol led Bergmann, then a major, to the Upper Cimarron Springs in Kansas. The most significant event during this period, Colonel Carson's 1864 Canadian River expedition, is also detailed. Such events illustrate both the range and impact Fort Bascom soldiers had on the region, and begin to reveal the role soldiers stationed in New Mexico played in gaining control of Southern Plains Indians that lived in Texas.

Chapter 7 describes the shift that occurred in 1866 as a result of the Regular Army taking over the post. General William T. Sherman believed installing soldiers that did not have histories with the region's Indians would reduce hostilities, yet such transfers also highlighted the difficulties of all newcomers adjusting to different environments. Additionally, soldiers from the United States Colored Infantry and troopers from the Third Cavalry experienced a cultural learning curve in the Canadian River Valley, one that required them to quickly distinguish

Navajos from Comanches, and Comancheros from Hispano ranchers. The role of the Comanchero trade is expanded upon in this chapter. The lure of profits from this borderland economy and how it enticed some of the post soldiers to get involved is also explored. This chapter also illustrates how major expeditions and regular patrols that originated out of Fort Bascom from 1866 until 1869 were integral to the Army's defeat of the Southern Plains Indians. One such conflict that is investigated in depth as a part of this study is the second major expedition into Texas led by Maj. Andrew J. Evans in the fall of 1868 as a part of Sheridan's Winter Campaign. Neither Comanches, Kiowas, or Cheyenne signed the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, and they did not acknowledge the United States' claim to their homeland. Troops from Fort Bascom became involved in the bloody conflicts that resulted from this defiance of federal authority.

Such involvement is further detailed in Chapter 8, as is the strong link that exists between Northwest Texas and Fort Bascom during this period. While Fort Richardson, near Jacksboro, is recognized as Texas' northernmost fort, Fort Bascom was much closer to the Comanches' homeland. During and after the Civil War, many northwest Texas counties lost millions of dollars in livestock and settlers were forced to abandon their ranches. The history regarding Fort Bascom's role in stopping these depredations is practically nonexistent, yet the documents reveal that this post was always involved in efforts to stop to this trade. Ranchers and farmers in Palo Pinto, Montague, Wise, and other north and northwest Texas counties were impacted by the successes and failures of this fort. Thus Fort Bascom can be utilized as a case study on how frontier soldiers and their officers came to gain the experience needed to defeat the Comanches, the Kiowas, and their borderland partners, the Comancheros. In addition to recounting numerous patrols and scouts in the last four years of its existence, this chapter details the third major

expedition into Texas that originated from this post, solidifying the argument that Fort Bascom could be considered Texas's northernmost frontier post.

Establishing the importance of Fort Bascom first requires an acknowledgement that this post was not built on a whim. Its construction during the Civil War demanded a significant allocation of finite resources be directed to the Canadian River Valley. Manpower was shifted to this post and integrated into the Department of New Mexico's defense of the Union frontier. Either as a full or part-time post, it remained operational until the United States Army gained control of the Southern Plains Indians. Inserted within a harsh environment amongst many cultures that did not want them there, Fort Bascom soldiers evolved into what one trooper called "horse marines," an apt title for the borderland warriors who ultimately helped end the traditional way of life of the Comanches and Kiowas that roamed the Llano Estacado. This history illustrates the impact Fort Bascom had on the region and the role it played in the conquest of the Southern Plains.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> The reference to "horse marines" is found in "Camp on the Canadian River, N.M.," *Freeport (Ill.) Journal*, 16 October 1872.

## CHAPTER 2

### IN THE SHADOW OF MESA RICA

Americans have always followed the rivers. Whether it was the Kennebec or the Connecticut, the Mohawk or the Mississippi, similar survival and migration patterns played out along the rivers that vein the North American continent. Where there was water, there was life: fish, fowl, edible plants, a variety of mammals, and after a time, humans. Over the centuries, people used rivers as pathways and resource zones. The Canadian River Valley of northeastern New Mexico is such a place. From its source in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains to the plains of Texas and Oklahoma, various cultures have lived, hunted, and traded along this stream for at least one thousand years. Archaic cultures utilized the Canadian River Valley as a home long before the arrival of Puebloans, Plains Indians, Spaniards, or Nuevo-mexicanos. Well-worn foot paths once shadowed this river from its headwaters near Raton Pass to its tributaries in the Oklahoma Panhandle, and cart trails were later added.<sup>1</sup> In 1863, in the midst of a variety of people who claimed this river valley as their homeland, the Union Army built Fort Bascom. The surrounding environment played no role in the decision to build this outpost, yet impacted military operations. Thus, a thorough examination of the geology, topography, flora, fauna, and cultures that existed along this river prior to Bascom's construction is essential to understanding the challenges that its soldiers faced in the 1860s and 1870s.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Frank E. Wozniak, *Across the Caprock: A Cultural Resource Survey on the Llano Estacado and in the Canadian River Valley of East Central New Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1985), 29.

<sup>2</sup> Deep history involves a study of a region's geologic history, an overview of its flora and fauna, and how humans have interacted within the same environment over the centuries. Environmental historians such as Dan Flores term this type of history, "bioregionalism." See Dan Flores, "Argument for Bioregional Review," *Environmental History Review* 18 (Winter 1994), 2.

Frederick Jackson Turner argued that the modern United States emerged from expansionist efforts to tame the frontier, yet the conversion of the American West into a fount of manageable resources did not work along this portion of the Canadian River. Forests did not have to be leveled to make way for the plow. Despite being able to skip this step in Turner's "process," the region's soils seldom yielded bountiful crops. Additionally, prior civilizations had already claimed this corner of Turner's "wilderness" as their domestic and spiritual homes, and some of these prior settlers proved very resilient. This chapter, an investigation of the Canadian River Valley, discusses both environmental and cultural aspects of the region's history. This includes an adjusted perspective on Comancheros, the Hispano trading partners Southern Plains Indians used to thwart the federal government's attempts to shuttle them off to reservations.<sup>3</sup>

It is true that any region's ecology impacts the people who live there, yet specific environments create particular concerns, such as a continual awareness of where water sources and wood are located. In New Mexico, such environments make up the greatest part of the landscape. Both Native Americans, living in a world without horses, and United States cavalymen faced the same environmental realities within this river basin.

When the Rocky Mountains pushed out of the ocean millions of years ago, they shed a sea of alluvial soils eastward for hundreds of miles. This relocation of old ocean beds led to the creation of upland grassland prairies. Centuries later, water flowing out of the Rockies cut wide valleys and deep canyons through these high plateaus, creating the Eroded Plains. The new valleys separated the elevated plains into two distinct geographic formations, the Las Vegas Plateau and the Llano Estacado. The Canadian River Valley runs between these formations. The

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<sup>3</sup> Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," in Richard W. Etulain, ed., *Does the Frontier Experience Make American Exceptional?* (New York: Bedford St. Martin's Press, 1999), 27-28.

southern rim of the Las Vegas Plateau, called the Canadian Escarpment, rises from 1,500 to 2,000 feet above the river-bed. Shortly after joining the Conchas River, the Canadian turns east, eventually cutting through the walls of the Caprock Escarpment, which rises up to meet the plains of the Texas Panhandle. About a millennium ago, both plateaus were covered in blue and hairy grama grasses, as was the river basin that divided them. Centuries later, buffalo grass replaced large swaths of the gramas, its namesake spreading its seeds south each spring.<sup>4</sup>

Although the Canadian River Valley's latitude is about the same as Central Tennessee's, it is locked into an ecological zone more similar to northern Mexico's.<sup>5</sup> Moving west toward the mountains from the Texas Panhandle, this Lower Sonoran life zone cuts through the Upper Sonoran grasslands of the upland plateaus before turning northwest and beginning an ascent into the pine-forested and snow-covered peaks of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains. These upper elevations are within what is called a Transitional Zone. The entirety of the Canadian drainage system includes 11,237 square miles, 34 percent of which contain mountains, 41 percent consisting of plateaus, and a remaining 24 percent left to lower level canyons and mesalands that cut through the Southern Plains.<sup>6</sup>

The environmental focus of this study, for the most part, is concerned with about eighty miles of the river, all within the Lower Sonoran Zone, an area near present-day Tucumcari, New Mexico. Yet for proper context, the entirety of this stream must be understood. The Canadian exits the Sangre de Cristo Mountains 7,834 feet above sea-level, a fast-running river at this point.

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<sup>4</sup> Henry Gassett, *List of Elevations: Principally in that Portion of the United States West of the Mississippi River* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1877), 99; Jack T. Hughes and Patrick S. Wiley, eds., *Archeology at Mackenzie Reservoir* (Austin: Texas Historical Commission, 1978), 10-13.

<sup>5</sup> Gassett, *List of Elevations*, 99.

<sup>6</sup> Lauren C. Hammack, *Archaeology of the Ute Dam and Reservoir of Northeastern New Mexico* (Papers in Anthropology, Number 14: Museum of New Mexico Press, 1965), 4.

For approximately one hundred miles it runs south, paralleling the Sangre de Cristos before reaching the edge of the Canadian Escarpment. From this juncture, the river quickly descends approximately 2,000 feet to the valley floor, where it meanders forty miles or so before blending into the Conchas. From this juncture it continues south until it passes the old Fort Bascom site, where it bends east. By the time the Texas and Oklahoma panhandles meet, this once full-bodied river has become a sluggish stream, ambling along about 2,505 feet above sea-level. The journey from Raton to the Texas encompasses about 240 miles of the river, carrying bits of the Sangre de Cristos into the Llano Estacado along the way.<sup>7</sup>

Although the Canadian has calmed considerably by the time it turns toward Texas, the land surrounding it, known as the Eroded Plains, retains a visible, geologic vitality. Oranges, reds, browns, and purples paint the numerous sandstone columns, remnants of old volcanic flows, and the inner-linings of the deep arroyos that lace this section of the valley. Little grass and few trees exist far from the stream. While many animals still follow the river, fossil imprints found high in the delaminating walls of the rocky outcrops and mesas that overlook it acknowledge creatures of another time once roamed here, albeit much higher up. Such outliers stand throughout both the Canadian and the nearby Pecos River Valleys. Two of the most prominent, the Tucumcari and Cuervo formations, lay to the south and southwest of the Canadian.<sup>8</sup>

Another important geologic formation in this region, Mesa Rica, looms between these two river valleys. This outlier's crumbling, stair-stepped veneer, over four miles long and a

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<sup>7</sup> Hammack, *Archaeology of the Ute Dam*, 4.

<sup>8</sup> N. H. Darnton, "*Red Beds*" and *Associated Formations in New Mexico: With an Outline of the Geology of the State* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1928), 298.

quarter-mile wide, resembles the ruins of an enormous Aztec pyramid. Just below this mesa's buff-colored cap, which rises five-hundred feet above the two valleys, a layer of hard Dakota sandstone is visible. Directly below the cap is a sheet of gray to greenish Purgatoire shale. This shale has been known to encase Washita fossils, capitosauroid labyrinthodonts, and raiisuchid archosaurs of the Middle Triassic age.<sup>9</sup> With each descending step, Mesa Rica reveals additional, alternating geologic layers. Maroon sandstone sections are interspersed with layers of brown and gray shale that are followed by a sixty-foot deep, white Wingate sandstone. At the bottom of this formation rests two hundred feet of dark red earth. This base is a compilation of red and almost iridescent orange layers of shales and sandstones, called the Dockum group, which are also known as "red beds."<sup>10</sup>

The most striking geographic characteristic found in the Eroded Plains are these "red beds."<sup>11</sup> The rippled and eroded walls of the Dockum group hold up the outliers and escarpments that rise and fall throughout the region where Fort Bascom would be built. The Canadian River carved these stair-stepped mesas millions of years ago. The river's present elevation, anywhere from 30 to 100 feet below the valley floor, is often hidden from the horizon, cutting below grade, exposing gray and greenish sandstone, limestone, and shales of the same group. Layers of

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<sup>9</sup> Spencer P. Lucas and Adrian P. Hunt, "Stratigraphy of the Anton Chico and Santa Rosa Formations, Triassic of East-Central New Mexico," *Journal of Arizona-Nevada Academy of Science* 22 (1987), 27.

<sup>10</sup> The description of the various layers found within Mesa Rica comes from Darnton, "*Red Beds*" and *Associated Formations in New Mexico: With an Outline of the Geology of the State*, 302. An outlier, as described by geologists, is the eroded, pyramid like rocky formations left standing in an ancient river valley, some standing several hundred feet above the valley floor.

<sup>11</sup> Darnton, "*Red Beds*," 297.

medium-sized gravels and rocks, pushed down the valley during Sangre de Cristo spring thaws and rainstorms, rim the river's beds.<sup>12</sup>

Geologically speaking, this region is still young. Mature soils take thousands of years to develop, something that has not occurred among the valley's sharp ridges and broken outliers that continue to crumble and find their way to the valley floor. In such areas, the top soils are generally light in color, low in organic material, and shot through with alkali compounds. Organic materials derived from the breakdown of plant particles and other organisms usually act as a soil's cohesive agent. One of the soils found in this region is called aridisols, which do not contain these cohesive materials. Often found between the Pecos and Canadian Rivers, aridisols are highly water soluble, meaning their capacity to retain moisture and sustain plant life is slim. Aside from specific issues regarding the valley's growing capacity, the arid nature of this environment also eliminates ground moisture through evaporation. Acidic compounds that are left in the earth wick up to the surface as the water evaporates, leaving a white powdery material exposed to the sun. As this study will later illustrate, nineteenth-century government officials realized too late that this white powdery substance was destructive to local vegetation.<sup>13</sup>

When compared to the flora in subhumid or humid regions in North America, Canadian River Valley plant life could be characterized as sparse. Yet despite its alkaline topsoils, an accounting of the growth found there reveals a wide variety of species. The greatest diversity of

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<sup>12</sup> Wozniak, *Across the Caprock*, 143.

<sup>13</sup> Jerry Williams and Paul E. McAllister, eds., *New Mexico in Maps* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1986), 65; Terry E. Hilley, Tom E. McCarty, et al., *Soil Survey of San Miguel County Area, New Mexico* (Washington: United States Department of Agriculture, 1981), 53; Robert MacCameron, "Environmental Change in Colonial New Mexico," in James E. Sherow, *A Sense of the American West: An Anthology of American History* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1998), 51. One such example of the government becoming aware of the difficulties with the soil can be found in A. B. Eaton to Secretary of War, April 10, 1868, in United States Congress, "Unsuitableness of the Bosque Redondo Reservation for Navajo Indians," House Executive Document 248, 40<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> Session [ Serial Set 1341].

vegetation is located near the water's edge. Throughout the northern portion of the valley, underground springs leach out of the arroyos and run down to the main stream. Native Americans and Comancheros were cognizant of these springs and used them to great advantage. Tall cottonwood trees dominate these junctures.<sup>14</sup> Chokecherries, hackberry, and poison ivy thrive near the river, clinging to the banks' steep edges. Junipers and pinions grow in the basin. Since they do not require as much water, these evergreens cling to the top of the mesas and vertical edges of the escarpment. Along with these brush-like trees, the spiny-fingered cholla cactus and the white-flowered yucca dot the slopes, plateaus, and canyon edges with various shades of green.<sup>15</sup>

At first glance, the dominant visual characteristic that follows this stretch of the Canadian River appears to be emptiness, or lack of movement. Yet like the shimmering blue blurs that occasionally dance off the valley floor, such perceptions are merely mirages that evaporate upon closer inspection. For generations, the black blurs that hung in the cottonwoods following the river turned out to be wild turkeys. Beneath the water's surface lurked native trout, and the western box tortoise once moved along the water's shaded edges where the hackberries grew. The red-sided garter, eastern ribbon, Plains' black-headed, and western diamond-back rattlers still glide through the reeds and hide in nearby rocks. Lizards skitter across the gravel beds and through the prairie grasses. The collared, southern prairie, lesser-earless, six-lined race-runner, and Texas horned frog are just a sampling of lizards still found along the Canadian. Bobwhites and yellow-billed cuckoos, mockingbirds, cardinals, and golden throated woodpeckers flit from the hackberries and junipers. The hispid pocket mouse, striped skunk, badger, black-tailed prairie

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<sup>14</sup> On springs, see Hammack, *Archaeology of the Ute Dam*, 6.

<sup>15</sup> Hammack, *Archaeology of the Ute Dam*, 6.

dog, fox squirrel, opossum, desert cottontail, black-tailed jackrabbit, and even porcupines lived there, as well as larger, four-legged creatures such as mountain lions, cougars, coyotes, gray foxes, gray wolves, bobcats, and black bears. Both merchant and military documents often note the presence of antelope herds. Winged creatures included the burrowing and great horned owls, prairie and peregrine falcons, red-tailed hawks, and golden and bald eagles.<sup>16</sup>

Still, any description of the topography or listing of the animals that lived and live in the valley marginalizes and compacts the expansive nature of the region. Thus a study of the dual nature of the relationships that existed between the inanimate and the animate creates the context needed to understand the challenges Fort Bascom soldiers faced in the 1860s and 1870s. Josiah Gregg, the American merchant who kept a diary of his travels through the area in 1832, wrote that this part of the Canadian River Valley “constituted a kind of chaotic space where nature seemed to have indulged in her wildest caprices. Such was the confusion of ground-swells and eccentric cavities, that it was altogether impossible to determine whereabouts the channel of the Canadian wound its way among them.” Newcomers like Gregg, unfamiliar with the valley’s resources, were amazed at the “sublimity of its desolation.”<sup>17</sup> Such notions of desolation were foreign to natives who had been using its resources for generations. Native Americans and Nuevo-mexicanos would not have characterized the Canadian River Valley as desolate.

The cultural history is buried deep in the broken topography of the Canadian River Valley. It can be found along remnants of the foot paths and cart trails that once gouged the lip of the Caprock. It is present along the riverbeds of the Eroded Plains, where smooth-bored holes

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<sup>16</sup> Jack T. Hughes and Patrick S. Wiley, eds., *Archeology at Mackenzie Reservoir* (Austin: Texas Historical Commission, 1978), 10-13. Also see Hammack, *Archaeology of the Ute Dam*, 6. On antelopes, see Josiah Gregg, *Commerce of the Prairies*, ed. Max L. Moorehead (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1954), 363, 379.

<sup>17</sup> Gregg, *Commerce of the Prairies*, 2.

found in the limestone benches indicate where Apaches long ago mounted their lodge poles. Historians, anthropologists, and environmental scholars have written about distinct sections of this region, such as the Sangre de Cristo Mountains and Palo Duro Canyon, yet little work has been done on the Canadian River Valley of northeastern New Mexico. Just like the multicolored layers of stair-stepped mesas that identify different ages of the earth, centuries of human culture are pancaked on top of one another in this valley.<sup>18</sup>

These cultures were long ago separated by the same waters that cut through the upland prairies. The archaic Apishipa Focus people of the northwestern Las Vegas Plateau used their elevated vantage to study the Canadian Valley for game and other humans. About the same time, another group of hunter-gatherers, the Antelope Creek Focus, emerged on the western edge of the Caprock, living on the lip of Llano Estacado. It is conceivable that the Antelope Creek Focus peered west across the Caprock at the same time the Apishipa looked east from the Canadian Escarpment, both searching for game or visitors.<sup>19</sup>

Environments are not constrained by human imposed borders, yet the ultimate owners of such environments often have perceptions of place that come with straight-lined, surveyor-plotted boundaries. Many Hispanos and Southern Plains Indians refused to accept Anglo ideas

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<sup>18</sup> One of the first historians to write about the challenges found in the arid West was Walter Prescott Webb. See Walter Prescott Webb, *The Great Plains* (New York: Grossett & Dunlap, 1931), 507. Three works that best describe these environments and the people that made them their home are William DeBuys, *Enchantment and Exploitation: The Life and Hard Times of a New Mexico Mountain Range* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1985); Dan Flores, *Horizontal Yellow: Nature and History in the Near Southwest* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1999); and John Miller Morris, *El Llano Estacado: Explorations and Imagination in the High Plains of Texas and New Mexico, 1536 – 1860* (Austin: Texas State Historical Society, 1997).

<sup>19</sup> Hammack, *Archaeology of the Ute Dam*, 4; Dan Flores, *Caprock Canyons: Journeys Into the Heart of the Southern Plains* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), 2. Both Hammack and Flores hypothesize that these early people migrated west from the Mississippian woodland cultures. Most of the archeological evidence concerning their existence is near present-day Amarillo. Alex D. Krieger believes some of the people that moved to the Caprock area in the fifteenth century could have been displaced Puebloans. See Alex D. Krieger, "The Eastward Extension of Puebloan Datings towards the Cultures of the Mississippi Valley," *American Antiquity* 12 (Jan., 1947), 143. On the grama grasses, Hughes and Wiley, eds., *Archeology at Mackenzie Reservoir*, 10.

concerning laws and borders that inconceivably (to them), cut across rivers and mountain ranges and prevented them from carrying on a livelihood that began with their great-grandfathers.

By the time the Spanish entered New Mexico, generations of Jicarillas and Puebloans knew where the water bubbled out of the rocks in the Canadian Valley, the main path fur bearing animals took to the stream, and the location of valuable herbs and edible plants. During this period, the Faraones Apaches claimed much of the area between the Pecos and the Rio Grande. These natives greeted an expeditionary force put together by Don Juan de Oñate in 1598. By this time, these Apaches had forced Puebloans who had ventured east back toward the Sangre de Cristos and the Rio Grande, where they lived in multilevel, fortified dwellings. Regardless of the raiding practices of some of the more nomadic tribes, all native groups found ways to avoid their enemies and make annual pilgrimages into the river basins and onto the High Plains in search of game. Apaches often hunted along the river and camped under its cottonwoods. Antelope, elk, and deer were plentiful, yet there was another animal most Native Americans hunted when the grama grasses grew lush. In early summer, bison herds flowed into the valleys and onto the plains. Hunters who lived at the feet of the Sangre de Cristos followed them east.<sup>20</sup>

It was some of these Indians that Oñate's men encountered on their expedition. On 20 September 1598, *sargento mayor* Vicente de Zaldívar led sixty Spanish soldiers away from the Pecos Pueblo to get a firsthand look at the bison herds.<sup>21</sup> Zaldívar was on a larger mission to

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<sup>20</sup> John L. Kessell, *Spain in the Southwest: A Narrative History of Colonial New Mexico, Arizona, Texas, and California* (Norman: University of Oklahoma, 2002), 40; Kenner, *Comanchero Frontier*, 13.

<sup>21</sup> Don Juan de Oñate, *Don Juan de Oñate: Colonizer of New Mexico 1595-1628*, eds. George P. Hammond and Agapito Rey, Part I, Historical Series V (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1953), 398. Oñate established Spain's first permanent settlements in New Mexico. During the Pueblo Revolt in 1680 the Spanish were forced out of this province, returning twelve years later. A broad look at the region and these events can be found in John L. Kessell, *Kiva, Cross, and Crown: The Pecos Indians and New Mexico, 1540-1840* (Washington: National Park Service, 1979).

explore the area east of the Rio Grande pueblos. He had heard of the strange beasts that inhabited the plains and wanted to investigate. After spending a few nights at the Pecos Pueblo, Zaldívar and his men camped along the Gallinas River near present Las Vegas. Later transcribing what his sargento mayor reported, Oñate wrote that the Gallinas was “abounding of fish.” He reported that many were caught with one hook. Moving in a southwesterly direction, Zaldívar saw his first bison north of present-day Tucumcari, about sixteen miles east of where Fort Bascom would be built. The first bison these Spaniards saw included about 300 “cows.” Soon after, they came upon a herd of 4,000 moving through the Canadian River Valley. The conquistadores built a corral of cottonwood branches and tried to herd them into a makeshift trap, yet the animals refused to cooperate. After many attempts to capture them, Zaldívar gave up. He noted that bison were “brave beyond praise, and so cunning that if one runs after them, they run, and if one stops or moves slowly, they stop and roll, just like mules, and after this rest they renew their fight.”<sup>22</sup>

On this same trip Zaldívar noted that the Canadian “flows from the direction of the Picuríes” (a Puebloan people who lived and still live in the mountains south of Taos, northwest of Zaldívar’s location). While following the river, the expedition came upon the Faraones. Their teepees were draped with bright red and white bison skins that “were round like pavilions, with flags and openings, made as neatly as those in Italy.” He described these Indians as vaqueros who had just come back from the Plains. They packed meats, skins, fat, and tallow to trade with Puebloan peoples for pottery, maize, cotton products, and salt, evidence that barter between the different cultures was a long-standing tradition. Of the Llano Estacado, Oñate wrote: “We never

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<sup>22</sup> Hammond noted that Zaldívar saw these bison north of Tucumcari and about six leagues from the Canadian River. Fort Bascom was eleven miles north of Tucumcari and a league is approximately 2.6 miles. Juan de Oñate, *Colonizer of New Mexico*, 398, 399, 401, 402.

came to the end of these plains; nor do they have sierras, trees or shrubs.” When writing of the river basin, he said: “At the front of these mesas, in some places where they form valleys, there are numerous junipers, countless springs flowing out of the very mesas, and a half a league from them, there are large groves of cottonwoods.” He concluded this description of the region by adding: “There are numerous Indians in those lands.”<sup>23</sup>

Noted archeologist Alex D. Krieger believed Puebloans had been traveling from their Rio Grande villages to the Llano Estacado to trade with Plains peoples since at least the fifteenth century. Some of these Puebloans may have begun to farm along the Caprock.<sup>24</sup> It is certain that by the time Zaldívar made his way into the region, the flow of traffic up and down the Canadian and Pecos River Valleys had been going on for hundreds of years. Over parts of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the mountain agriculturalists and the Plains bison hunters were linked through trade. This barter economy thrived up and down the Canadian River, a main thoroughfare for both eastern and western bound caravans looking to convert corn into bison robes, and meat into wool fabrics.

In 1680, the Spanish were forced out of New Mexico, leaving behind many horses in their wake. When the Comanches pushed down from the Arkansas River in the first decades of the eighteenth century, they collected many of these animals and were soon breeding their own herds. As a result, the Comanches were at the forefront of the indigenous transportation revolution, in the process creating their own distinct vehicles of war. Utilizing the horse, all Southern Plains Indians became capable of shortening both time and distance, resulting in closer

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<sup>23</sup> Oñate, *Colonizer of New Mexico*, 400.

<sup>24</sup> Krieger, “Eastward Extension of Puebloan Datings,” 143.

links between mountain and plains cultures, as well as transforming more dangerous adversaries.<sup>25</sup>

After the Pueblo Revolt of 1680, the Spanish did not return to New Mexico for twelve years. By then, the Comanches had replaced the Apaches as the dominant force in the region. From 1706 to 1779, Spanish settlers participated in an economy fueled by revenge wars, livestock raids, kidnapping of women and children, and slave labor. Such exchanges included the Navajo, who lived to the north and west of New Mexico, and Comanches and Apaches who claimed lands to the south and east. On the Spanish frontier, all living things could be converted into commodities.<sup>26</sup>

The Jicarilla Apaches resided near the headwaters of the Canadian just beyond Raton Pass, yet their homeland was not confined to the eastern face of this New Mexico mountain range. Jicarillas were taught from childhood that when their ancestors emerged from underground, the “Supreme God” asked them where they wanted to live. They chose the land between the Rio Grande and the Arkansas, Canadian, and Pecos rivers. Within this range, Jicarillas were both horticulturalists and hunters. *Sargento mayor* Juan de Ulibarrí noted their presence in 1706 when he passed by their community near the headwaters of the Canadian. He noted that they were growing pumpkins, corn and frijoles, yet like other Sangre de Cristo Mountain people, they also followed the Canadian onto the plains each summer to hunt bison.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Dan Flores, “Bison Ecology and Bison Diplomacy: The Southern Plains from 1800 to 1850,” *Journal of American History* 78 (Sept., 1991): 465-85.

<sup>26</sup> James F. Brooks, *Captives and Cousins: Slavery, Kinship, and Community in the Southwest Borderlands* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 117, 161; Pekka Hämäläinen, *Comanche Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 330.

<sup>27</sup> Kenner, *The Comanchero Frontier*, 25. This work was originally published in 1969 as *A History of New Mexican-Plains Indian Relations*.

The Jicarillas' only boundaries on such excursions were those they set for themselves. What many Europeans considered desolate wilderness, Native Americans, as well as early Hispano settlers, found to be life-sustaining and holy.<sup>28</sup>

Nuevo Mexico remained a zone of strife until Governor Juan Bautista de Anza's army killed Comanche war chief Cuerno Verde in 1779. From this victory, a peace was finally brokered on 21 April 1787. The treaty, a drawn-out affair that took several rounds of negotiations at Pecos Pueblo and Mexico City, officially formalized the already ongoing plains-mountain trade. This led to a relatively nonviolent period in Hispanic-Plains Indians relations that lasted into the Mexican period. The Spanish government issued licenses to Pueblo Indians and Hispanos that granted them the legal right to barter with the Comanches and other Southern Plains Indians. Spanish authorities encouraged these relationships, hoping they would halt outright theft. They also counted on eastern trekking traders to bring back intelligence concerning any future raids. Such traders could also be used to alert officials of unwanted encroachment by Anglo explorers.<sup>29</sup>

After Mexico gained its independence from Spain in 1821, the new government opened its borders to United States merchants.<sup>30</sup> Although many of the first Americans to cross into New

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<sup>28</sup> Veronica A. Tiller, *The Jicarilla Apache Tribe: A History*, rev. ed. (Albuquerque: Bow Arrow Publishing), 2, 3.

<sup>29</sup> James F. Brooks, *Captives and Cousins: Slavery, Kinship, and Community in the Southwest Borderlands* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 117, 161; Thomas W. Kavanagh, *The Comanches: A History, 1706 – 1875* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), 92, 121; Kenner, *The Comanchero Frontier*, 7. See also David J. Weber, *The Taos Trappers: The Fur Trade in the Far Southwest, 1540 – 1846* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971), 28, 29; and Hämäläinen, *Comanche Empire*, 250-253.

<sup>30</sup> For a good examination of the impact of American markets on New Mexico, see Andrés Reséndez, *Changing National Identities at the Frontier: Texas and New Mexico, 1800-1850* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 96. Guns flowed along a transatlantic pipeline that included British firearms entering through Canada to the Skiri Pawnee who traded them to Comanches for horses. After acquiring French weapons in Louisiana, Caddo and Wichita tradesmen did the same thing, bartering them for Comanche horses, usually stolen from Mexico and

Mexico left journals of their exploits, few, if any, were as talented in this endeavor as the previously mentioned diarist, Josiah Gregg.<sup>31</sup> Although his characterizations of Nuevo-mexicanos were unflattering, his descriptions of the countryside are some of the first American observations of the Canadian River Valley. Gregg wanted to be a doctor, yet as a result of suffering from chronic dyspepsia and consumption, he never completed these studies. In 1831, after trying his hand at teaching, he decided to head west for his health, keeping the accounts for a wagon train full of goods that journeyed to Santa Fe. His health improved. Over the next nine years he ventured west from Missouri four times to sell merchandise to Mexicans, in-particularly, Nuevo-mexicanos. In 1839, while heading west, and on the return trip east in 1840, his journey led him along old Indian and contemporary Comanchero trade routes that tied the Rio Grande to the Llano Estacado. These same paths later evolved into the Fort Smith route that led back to Arkansas, where a portion of the old Route 66 and current Interstate 40 runs from Amarillo to Albuquerque. On the westward trek, Gregg followed the Canadian River as far as the Tucumcari Peaks. Yet here, not far from where Fort Bascom was constructed, the river turned north. On this trip, Gregg abandoned the stream and continued in a westward direction toward Albuquerque.<sup>32</sup>

This merchant's additional descriptions of the flora and fauna surrounding the eventual location of Fort Bascom are worth noting. Of the grama grasses that drew the bison and other game into the valley he wrote, "Our stock will eat but little corn; for the first appearance of spring grass set the animals crazy – they will leave all other food to seek after the few shooting

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Texas. See Brian DeLay, *War of a Thousand Deserts: Indian Raids and the U. S.-Mexican War* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008), 104, 105.

<sup>31</sup> Gregg, *Commerce of the Prairies*, passim.

<sup>32</sup> Gregg, *Commerce of the Prairies*, xxi.

sprouts.”<sup>33</sup> He believed the exposed soils lacked something in their composition, which led to the common erosion of the *cejas* or brows along the Caprock. “The clayey foundation is exceedingly firm . . . [yet] while dry, it seems the most soluble of earths, and melts almost as rapidly as snow under actions of water.” His animals were unable to drink from some of the streams he crossed due to their brackishness. On a separate journey that took him eight miles beyond the river’s junction with the Conchas, he wrote of steep walls along the Canadian Escarpment, noting that they rose 2,000 feet above the river. He commented on the difficulty of travel through this area, which he called “the narrows,” yet at the same time mentioned the presence of cart-paths crisscrossing the valley.<sup>34</sup> He found plums, grapes, choke-berries “and several kinds of onions” among the river’s creeks and marshes. He wrote of the presence of sunflowers, dog-tooth, and violets on the valley floor. He observed herds of deer and found black bears foraging on various red, black, and white berries, as well as on abundant acorns. He was particularly fascinated with the prong-horned antelope that roamed the prairies and the “curious” prairie dogs that stood atop their burrows and chattered at him when he passed.<sup>35</sup>

Gregg encountered “large parties of New Mexicans,” some on horses and mules, others pushing the wooden-wheeled *carretas* east to where they hunted game and searched out the Comanche to trade hard breads and produce for robes and other bison products.<sup>36</sup> He also came into contact with Native Americans. In the early part of his 1839 journey, near where the Little River joined the Canadian, a small group of Comanche and Kiowa warriors and their families

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<sup>33</sup> This is just south of Tucumcari outliers. See Josiah Gregg, *Diary and Letters of Josiah Gregg*, ed. Maurice Garland Fulton (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1941), 46.

<sup>34</sup> Gregg, *Commerce of the Prairies*, 260, 349.

<sup>35</sup> Gregg, *Commerce of the Prairies*, 363, 379.

<sup>36</sup> Gregg, *Commerce of the Prairies*, 67.

joined Gregg's caravan to barter a few mules. About to embark to the west in a direction he had never traveled, Gregg asked Chief Tábba-quena if he might describe the area he was about to enter. After giving the chief "paper and pencil . . . he promptly executed . . . to our astonishment, quite a map-like appearance, with far more accurate delineation of all the principle rivers of the plains . . . than is to be found in many of the engraved maps of those regions."<sup>37</sup>

Gregg learned a fact in 1839 that would mystify Americans for the next forty years. Comanches and Kiowas did not need marks on paper to tell them where they were. Like other Native Americans, their homeland's topography was imprinted in their mind. Regardless of distance or the seemingly monotonous nature of the landscape, each brook held special meaning. Cliffs and mesas were more than rocks and dirt, more than the remnants of another world. Whether Jicarilla, Comanche, or Puebloan, the land appeared to be saying something different to Chief Tábba-quena than it did to Gregg and all the Americans who followed him.

By the 1840s, Hispano and Puebloan farmers and ranchers, loaded with goods, left their villages in August and September of each year and traveled with their pack-mules, carts, and wagons toward the Llano Estacado. At the same time, the Comanches moved north with stolen horses and cattle, and bison hides. Kotsoteka and Yamparika bands met the Comancheros at pre-designated locations to barter. In the decades to come, regional demographics shifted. The Kwahadi became the primary group of Comanches who met these traders on the Texas Panhandle, but Kiowas and Apaches also took part. The Hispano participants in this exchange lived in villages that began near the New Mexico-Colorado border and ran down the eastern range of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains, a path also followed by the Canadian. Puebloans also

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<sup>37</sup> Chief Tábba-quena was an important Comanche chief affiliated with the Tenewas. Gregg, *Commerce of the Prairies*, 233.

participated, with the Santo Domingo traders being particularly active. The zone of trade encompassed much of Comanchería, including the highland prairies of the Llano Estacado and the Edwards Plateau of Central Texas. Within the Wichita, Davis, and Sangre de Cristo Mountain Ranges, Comancheros carried on a substantial trade with their namesake. For three-quarters of the nineteenth century, these New Mexico middlemen operated in the center of a trading nexus that at different times included Canadian fur trappers, Arapaho merchants, Anglo American cattlemen, Hispano farmers, and Tiwa Indians from Taos.<sup>38</sup>

Beginning with Juan de Oñate's expedition of 1598, as Gregg's journals verified, this exchange was well established by the 1830s. Nuevo-mexicano and Puebloan travelers, early on called *viageros*, drove their pack mules and carretas onto the Llano, finding the Comanche on the western edges of the Texas Panhandle. Even the governor of the Tesuque Pueblo participated in this trade, and was called, like the others, a Comanchero.<sup>39</sup> These traders followed the Canadian and the Pecos Rivers out of the mountains, hauling their goods across the prairie sea to *Las Tecovas* and *Cañon de Regate*.<sup>40</sup>

Annexation of half of the Mexican nation in 1848 prompted many within the United States to commence the business of connecting their new territories to the rest of the nation.

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<sup>38</sup> Hämäläinen, *Comanche Empire*, 56, 79, 180-181, 273, 315-320; Kavanagh, *Comanches*, 70; DeLay, *War of a Thousand Deserts*, 58, 59; Morris, *El Llano Estacado*, 185, 187, 190; Kenner, *Comanchero Frontier*, 36; Weber, *The Mexican Frontier*, 98.

<sup>39</sup> Kavanagh, *Comanches: A History*, 179, 368. Puebloans and Nuevo-mexicanos who lived in the region that surrounded the southern Rockies made annual journeys to the Llano Estacado to trade manufactured goods, home-made products and agricultural produce to the Comanches for mules and horses, and cattle, most of which had been stolen in Mexico and Texas. For an in-depth, yet dated analysis of this trade, see J. Evetts Haley, "The Comanchero Trade," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 38 (Jan., 1935) 157-176. For one of the most recent interpretations, see DeLay, *War of a Thousand Deserts*, 91, 100, 110-11.

<sup>40</sup> Juan de Oñate, *Colonizer of New Mexico*, 400. Kavanagh, *Comanches: A History*, 179. The Canadian was usually followed southeast to *La Tecovas*, which as stated above, is northeast of Amarillo. Most comancheros following the Pecos River traveled to *Cañon de Regate*, located near Lubbock. Kavanagh states both of these locations were established camps where the Comancheros met up with the Comanches to trade.

Congress approved several surveys be conducted by the United States Corps of Topographical Engineers. They were charged with determining and mapping the best route through the west for a transcontinental railroad. In 1853, Lt. Amiel W. Whipple led a team of surveyors, scientists, and engineers along the same Canadian River route Gregg had taken fourteen years earlier.<sup>41</sup>

With an engineer's eye for detail, Whipple recorded more than data pertinent to building a railroad. Just north of Amarillo, close to where the Antelope Focus people once lived, the lieutenant met a group of Indians from the Santo Domingo Pueblo. Draped in Mexican blankets and wearing Indian headdresses and beads, they were on their way to trade with the Southern Plains tribes. These Puebloans rode mules and packed hard breads and flour to trade with the "k'ai-ó-wás." Whipple had stumbled onto one of the permanent rendezvous sites where the Comanchero trade took place.<sup>42</sup>

From the Caprock to the Tucumcari outliers, Whipple wrote about a variety of subjects not related to railroad topography. He found wild grapes, "as large as hazel nuts," growing by a brook and counted hundreds of antelopes grazing on the prairies. On both 18 and 21 September, his party met several groups of Mexican traders heading east: "We had no idea of the extent of this Indian trade, or the impunity with which defenseless traders could mingle with these savages and treacherous tribes upon their own soil."<sup>43</sup>

As the expedition passed eleven miles south of the future site of Fort Bascom, botanist Dr. John Milton Bigelow climbed Tucumcari Peak. He deduced much of this outlier to be from

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<sup>41</sup> Morris, *El Llano Estacado*, 280.

<sup>42</sup> A.W. Whipple, *A Pathfinder in the Southwest: The Itinerary of Lieutenant A.W. Whipple during His Explorations for A Railway Route from Fort Smith to Los Angeles in the Years 1853 & 1854*, ed. Grant Foreman (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1941), 86. This site was called *La Tecovas*, found in Kavanagh, *Comanches*, 179.

<sup>43</sup> Whipple, *Pathfinder in the Southwest*, 89, 93, 94.

the Jurassic period and expounded on the beauty of the valley that wound north toward the Sangre de Cristos. Along the way the expedition observed “lizards, horned frogs, and snakes in quite numerous and interesting new varieties daily.” Whipple wrote that this valley “offers every faculty for a large settlement.” He observed that the same Gallinas where Zaldivar’s Spaniards had caught so many fish had “pure running water, but with neither wood or grass upon its banks.”<sup>44</sup>

While recent historiography concerning the Comanches’ economic influence has compared them to other colonial powers, such a story seems a only half told tale. If the wealth that these Indians accumulated over a fifty-year period during the nineteenth century actually drove Southwestern economics and inculcated surrounding cultures, as Hämäläinen has argued, would not the barter Comancheros accumulated to trade for this wealth be just as valuable? And if this were so, what would that say about the men who provided this barter? Detailing these trade goods, where they came from, who participated, and what impact the exchange had in New Mexico and Texas, which will be further investigated in subsequent chapters, sheds new light on the Comancheros’ relevance to the history of the Southwest. Such a discussion should begin with a brief comparison to their more famous Anglo counterparts. Scholars have never doubted the historical significance of Rocky Mountain fur traders and trappers. If, upon inspection, it can be deduced that the Comancheros were in part, similar to their Anglo counterparts, perhaps scholars will begin to look at them from a different perspective.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Whipple, *Pathfinder in the Southwest*, 93, 94, 99.

<sup>45</sup> Hämäläinen, *Comanche Empire*, 1-10. Kenner, *Comanchero Frontier*, 15-19. Still of use is J. Evetts Haley, “The Comanchero Trade,” *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 38 (Jan., 1935): 157-176. The new historiography on Comanches includes Delay, *War of a Thousand Deserts*; Brooks, *Captives and Cousins*; Dan Flores, “The Southern Plains from Bison Ecology and Bison 1800 to 1850,” *Journal of American History* 78 (Sept., 1991): 465-85; Dan Flores, *Horizontal Yellow: Nature and History in the Near Southwest* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1999), iv.

Most descriptions of the Hispano traders who facilitated these transactions focus upon characterizations of them as a backward people who hauled their goods across the plains like so many itinerate gypsies. The first Anglo travelers to come into contact with New Mexican traders recorded their impressions in journals and reports, which were often published on the East Coast. Historians still use images first conjured up by men like Gregg. His descriptions did not evoke romantic images that led to dime-store novels. Yet in the 1870s, Col. Ranald Mackenzie found José Piedad Tafoya, a noted Hispano trader, to be “reliable . . . brave, intelligent and sagacious.”<sup>46</sup>

Many Anglo mountain men became popular American folk heroes, but much of what happened behind the mountains did not make the newspapers back home. Media adulation came in part from the notion that such men had freely chosen such a dangerous and different lifestyle. As in all frontier zones of interaction, different forms of violence were as much a part of the landscape as the snow-covered peaks and green river valleys that cut from north to south across the continent. Anglo mountain men were traders as well as trappers. George Ruxton noted that “mountaineers . . . [capture] women, whom they carry off, and not unfrequently . . . sell to other tribes, or each other.” Some were known to practice ritual cannibalism and many took their enemy’s scalps. Besides slaves and furs, traders were also interested in horses. Several mountain men encouraged the Utes to raid into California. The herds these Indians confiscated, numbering into the thousands, were led back to the Rocky Mountains, where “expectant capitalists,” as one historian called them, awaited their arrival at rendezvous. Stolen horses were bartered for

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<sup>46</sup> Gregg, *Commerce of the Prairies*, 67; Morris, *Llano Estacado*, 186-188. For more on American perceptions of Hispanos, see David J. Weber, “‘Scarce More Than Apes:’ Historical Roots of Anglo-American Stereotypes of Mexicans” in *New Spain’s Far Northern Frontier: Essays on Spain in the American West, 1540 – 1821*, ed. David J. Weber (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1988), 299. Quote from Thomas Merten and Frances Levine, “Comanchero: José Piedad Tafoya, 1834-1913,” *New Mexico Historical Review* 81 (Winter 2006), 40.

whiskey, weapons, and gun powder. Although Ruxton's fact-based, fictional account of such experiences was distributed throughout the country, it was East Coast "blood and thunder" paperbacks that gained traction with the public. With little to no focus on slave trading or horse stealing, most historians' characterizations of mountain men likened them to Knights of the Round Table or Robin Hood and his Merry Men. Although Wilbur R. Jacobs did describe them as "wasteful varmints," for the most part, their reputations remained untarnished. William R. Swagerty has noted that "other than politicians, [no one] has received as much attention as this cadre of often overly romanticized . . . mythological and real personalities."<sup>47</sup>

In many respects, Comancheros carried on a similar livelihood, but no George Ruxton cared to romanticize their actions in print. Race is woven into why this is so, yet not always in traditionally understood ways. Distance from media outlets, language, foreign borders, and the inability to travel freely across Comanchería also helps to explain why so little has been written about the Comancheros, especially anything positive. On the surface, their world embraced many of the same characteristics associated with Kit Carson, Ceran St. Vrain, and other mountain men. Both lived in the Indian's world. Both traded there, married native women, became a part of the local community, warred with and against neighboring tribes, and in many cases, recoiled at returning to their previous lives. Early historians and pulp writers never had a problem using their imaginations to fill in the gaps left by men like Carson. If mentioned at all, such traders'

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<sup>47</sup> George Frederick Ruxton, *Life in the Far West*, ed. Leroy F. Hafen, 6<sup>th</sup> edition (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1981), 87, 88, 99; Douglas Monroy, *Thrown Among Strangers: The Making of Mexican Culture in Frontier California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 131. Wilbur R. Jacobs' quote in William R. Swagerty, "Marriage and Settlement Patterns of Rocky Mountain Trappers and Traders," *Western Historical Quarterly* 11 (April, 1980), 159. An example of a "Blood and Thunder" is Charles Averill, *The Prince of the Gold Hunters* (Boston: G. H. Williams, 1849).

illegal activities accentuated their cunning and adventuresome spirit, while similar reports of Hispano actions seldom portrayed them as anything other than thieves.<sup>48</sup>

Defining the significance of the Comancheros within southwestern history involves acknowledging the multi-dimensional aspects of their story. They were the product of a social exchange system that originated out of the New Spain's slave-trading heritage. As cultural intermediaries, they used this heritage to their advantage. Like Carson, they traveled easily between the Euroamerican and Native Worlds. The ability to converse with a variety of nationalities allowed them to become significant economic players in the region, as well as facilitators of a transnational black market phenomenon. The Comancheros would ultimately link Mexican nationals, Texas Comanches, Nuevo-mexicano businessmen, and Kansas ranchers into one trade network.<sup>49</sup>

By the close of the Spanish period, racial and cultural interchange between plains and mountain people was generations old. This exchange created an ethnic borderland free of predetermined loyalties based on treaties or geographic boundaries. At least one thousand Indians and several hundred Spanish women and children had been "cross-cultured" through generations of slave raiding, trading, and kidnapping. These raids helped fuel the Comanche economy and fulfilled Nuevo-mexicanos' insatiable desire for servants, which ultimately pushed many of the Mexican citizens who first ventured away from the Rio Grande to start new

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<sup>48</sup> Brig. Gen. Christopher C. Auger to Col. James B. Fry, 28 September 1872, in Charles C. Rister, ed., "Early Accounting of Indian Depredations," *West Texas Historical Association Year Book* 2 (1926): 54-60; Swagerty, "Marriage Settlement and Patterns of Rocky Mountain Trappers and Traders," 164-67; Mertan and Levine, "Comanchero: José Piedad Tafoya, 1834-1913," 43; Charles L. Kenner, "The Great New Mexico Cattle Raid, 1872," *New Mexico Historical Review* 37 (Oct., 1962), 245.

<sup>49</sup> The best discussion of this blending of southwestern cultures remains Brooks, *Captives and Cousins*. On Mexican nationals participating in this trade, see Joseph P. Sánchez, et al., *Fort Union National Monument: Ethnographic Overview and Assessment* (Santa Fe: National Park Service, 2006), 35, 36. The term transnational comes from Hämäläinen, *Comanche Empire*, 317.

communities. Additionally, although many of the captured Hispanic Indians were later bartered for horses, blankets, and weapons, kidnapped females of all ages and small boys were also incorporated into Southern Plains Indian society as equals within their communities.<sup>50</sup>

By the late 1850s, descriptions of Mexicans hauling bread and wool out of the mountains only partially described what the caravans were carrying to the plains. In the first decade after annexation, the demand for stolen horses and cattle had increased exponentially, tied to a reduction in bison and an increase in cattle that was related to Anglo American westward expansion. Comancheros could not remain viable partners without providing barter equal to the rate of livestock flowing towards them from Mexico and Texas. Along with the carts and pack mules, wagons were used to move merchandise toward the Llano Estacado. From a distance, such caravans could have been mistaken for the American merchant trains that rolled back and forth along the Santa Fe Trail, characterized in many books as being piloted by intrepid, capitalistic pioneers.<sup>51</sup>

The reason so many Hispanos were noted to be traveling east in the 1850s was that Comanches no longer visited the old trade fairs of Pecos or Taos. By mid-century, Comanches were powerful enough to demand their trading partners come to the plains. New Mexicans followed the Canadian and Pecos Rivers beyond the mesa lands to the upland prairies that rose above the Caprock and the Edwards Plateau. These trails pivoted off the rivers, breaking east and southeast along tributaries that ran into the Panhandle. *La Pista de Vida Agua* (Trail of Living Water) led to *Cañon del Rescate* and Muchaque in Texas. *Las Escabardas* wound its way to

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<sup>50</sup> James F. Brooks, "Served Well by Plunder: La Gran Ladronería as Producers of History Astride the Rio Grande," *American Quarterly* 52 (March, 2000), 24.

<sup>51</sup> David Dary, *The Santa Fe Trail: Its History, Legends, and Lore* (New York: Penguin Books, 2000), 19, 150-52.

Quitaque. Comancheros also met Comanches near Jayton, Texas, and along the Canadian River north of present-day Amarillo. Some transactions also took place closer to the traders' mountain villages, such as in the shadow of the Tucumcari Peaks, at Bosque Redondo, and near the hamlet of Anton Chico.<sup>52</sup>

The Canadian River Valley served as one of the main conduits of exchange. Hispano and Puebloan traders usually took between three and four weeks to reach their destination. Mesa Rica, located between the Canadian and Pecos River Valleys, was one of the geographic markers such travelers and Native Americans used to determine the distance and time needed to reach the Llano Estacado. Like the fur traders' "rendezvous," Comanchero exchanges with the Southern Plains Indians often took on a festive air, with competitive events such as wrestling, horse races, and gambling. Each year, as many as 700 Hispano traders made their way into the canyons and river valleys that hosted these "fairs," indicating just how strong demand for southwestern livestock had become, especially after annexation. This was due to Anglo pioneers moving into Comanchería. On the hinge of this economic gateway, Comancheros exchanged their goods and returned to the Sangre de Cristos with thousands of stolen horses and cattle.<sup>53</sup>

American soldiers quickly learned that Comanche and Comanchero cultures were intertwined. This was certainly true in 1863 when Fort Bascom was constructed. Thus assessing the significance of Comanchero kinship ties with Southern Plains Indians is important. Assimilation had multiple intentions. Kidnapped women and children of all ethnicities were incorporated into various Native American communities to grow the community and supply

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<sup>52</sup> Morris, *Llano Estacado*, 184-86.

<sup>53</sup> Morris, *Llano Estacado*, 182; New Mexico Office of the State Historian, "Santo Domingo Traders-Comancheros 1880," available at [www.newmexicohistory.org/filedetails\\_docs.php?fileID=2161](http://www.newmexicohistory.org/filedetails_docs.php?fileID=2161) (Accessed 25 October 2010).

labor that could cure hides and tend livestock. Merging victims into the families of both societies produced a cohort of bilingual subjects who could understand and communicate with business partners and provide spies to circulate among a new common enemy, the Euroamerican. Comanches assimilated Mexicans, Anglos, Blacks, and a host of native people into their world. Similarly, for generations Hispanos had been enculturating captured Native Americans into their communities. Such comingling created general confusion for United States soldiers charged with eliminating wayward Mescalero Apaches while observing orders to allow Pueblo traders to pass unharmed. Lt. Col. Edward H. Bergmann, on patrol from Fort Bascom, was astonished by the number of Hispanics who rode with the Comanches on the Llano Estacado. He estimated that “one half of the Comanche warriors, which I have seen, were either Mexican Captives or such Mexicans who go among the Indians voluntarily, preferring this style of life.” As early as 1845, on an expedition up the Canadian River, Francois des Montaignes saw a number of Hispanics riding with Kiowas and was told that “many American individuals [were] thus circumstanced among Camanches.” In 1867 a “Mexican” trader caught trying to guide 800 stolen cattle past Fort Bascom told Capt. George Letterman that he had seen fifteen Anglo children with the Comanches and one “negro.” Many captives chose to remain with their captors when Anglo soldiers or Indian Agents offered to purchase them. Capt. John Du Bois reported to Maj. Cyrus H. de Forrest that the Comanches had “many negroes among them.” Such reports illustrate the fluidity of the borderland societies Fort Bascom troopers found along the Canadian. Soldiers often had a hard time distinguishing friend from foe.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> On not being able to distinguish between Navajo and Comanche, see Col. A. J. Alexander to Charles Hubbell, 4 January 1867, Letters Sent, Department of New Mexico, Record Group 98 [now 393], National Archives, in James W. Arrott Collection, Donnelly Library, New Mexico Highlands University, Las Vegas, vol. 49, p. 97, [hereafter LS, DNM, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection]; Lt. Col. Edward H. Bergmann to Maj. Cyrus H. De Forrest, 11 August 1866, LS, DNM, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 49: 72; Francois des Montaignes, *The Plains*

Fort Bascom was located just to the southeast of Mesa Rica, the geologic bridge that ties the Pecos and Canadian River Valleys together. Four miles long, its size made it the perfect screen to avoid military patrols. As a result, Fort Bascom cavalymen were constantly scouting on Mesa Rica. Their reports often illustrated the frustration these soldiers experienced trying to chase down wayward Navajos or illegal traders. More escaped than were apprehended. Part of the problem was Anglos from back east had a hard time remaining oriented in a land of few trees and horizons that occasionally disappeared into arroyos and canyons unknown to them.<sup>55</sup>

The environment that surrounded Mesa Rica was hard on the soldiers and their animals. Evaporation rates strong enough to eliminate 50 inches of ground moisture prevailed in a region that only averaged twenty inches of rain.<sup>56</sup> American Indians and most Nuevo-mexicanos did not know or care about such statistics. They depended on their senses, not precise instruments of measurement, to acquire the information they needed to survive and even to thrive. Comanches did not know what the land lacked, for it had always provided. Kiowas did not need paper maps to locate water or food. The Canadian River Valley, like much of the Southwest, provided Nuevo-mexicanos, Puebloans, Comanches, and Jicarillas with a vibrant, multi-faceted ecosystem. Its topography was entangled within their folklore and helped shape their culture. For some, it was a holy land, for others, just home. For most Anglo Americans, the land around Fort Bascom was never much more than a dry, rock-strewn, windy hell-hole of sand and lizards that

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(Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1981), 119, 120; Capt. George W. Letterman to Maj. De Forrest, 7 September 1867, LS, DNM, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 49:135; Capt. John Du Bois to Maj. De Forrest, 24 May 1867, LS, DNM, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 49: 116. Map concept from Morris, *Llano Estacado*, 185. As noted above, African-Americans sometimes apparently preferred life on the Plains to that as a slave or a citizen of the United States. Also see Quintard Taylor, *In Search of the Racial Frontier: African-Americans in the American West, 1528 – 1990* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1998), 75.

<sup>55</sup> Bergmann to De Forrest, 12 May 1867, LS, DNM, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 49: 42-43.

<sup>56</sup> Jerry L. Williams, ed., *New Mexico in Maps* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1986), 56.

they never quite got their bearings in. Yet within the history of Fort Bascom is the story of such soldiers ultimately adapting to what they considered a harsh environment. Gregg's "sublimity of desolation" was more desolate than sublime for troops forced to live in the Canadian River Valley. Over the years, the New Mexico volunteers and Army regulars posted to Fort Bascom took their cue from the Comancheros and the Comanches, memorizing where the water holes were.<sup>57</sup>

On the eve of the American Civil War, the United States Army knew the Comanchero trade was at the heart of many of their problems concerning Southern Plains Indians. This trade exploded after the start of the Civil War. Most Regular Army soldiers rode east to fight in Virginia and Pennsylvania. This left Hispano and Anglo American cattle ranchers exposed to raids. The extraction of livestock, especially from Texas, provided the Comanches and Kiowas the barter needed to acquire weapons and other manufactured goods from Nuevo-mexicano entrepreneurs. This exchange helped the Southern Plains Indians re-establish much of their hold on old hunting grounds, if only for a few years, that they had grudgingly abandoned in the decade after annexation. Major military and trade routes, such as the Fort Smith road and the Santa Fe Trail, also saw an uptick in depredations during this period. Thus while many Union posts in New Mexico were abandoned, Fort Bascom, constructed in the shadow of Mesa Rica, became one of Union's most forward frontier bases.<sup>58</sup>

The soldiers posted to this fort and the officers they served soon learned military power would have little to do with gaining control of the region. Troopers had to acquire a better understanding of the Canadian River Valley environment and the people that already lived there

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<sup>57</sup> Gregg, *Commerce of the Prairies*, 2.

<sup>58</sup> Kenner, "Great Comanchero Cattle Raid, 1872," 254.

before true progress could be made. Strategy and tactics would change over the years to better challenge adversaries who did not need maps in a land of little water. First impressions concerning Hispanos who lived in the territory proved to be inaccurate. Mountain traders' ties to Plains cultures were much stronger than American government officials first realized, thus coming to an understanding about these relationships, which originated as far back as the sixteenth century, was crucial to developing the tactics needed to be successful. With the establishment of Fort Bascom, on the job training began in earnest on the doorstep of the Llano Estacado.

## CHAPTER 3

### A NEAT LITTLE POST

During the nineteenth century, the federal government's role in the Anglo American settlement of New Mexico was profound. The installation of military bases into any territory impacted that region's history, yet seldom to the degree that it did in New Mexico Territory. After being defeated by the United States in 1848, Mexico was forced to sign the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. This agreement affected societies from Vera Cruz to Santa Fe. Nuevo-mexicanos who spoke Spanish with a hint of Castilian were soon trying to communicate with strangers from the United States, who embraced different concepts of land ownership, legal jurisprudence, and social justice. Americans spoke a different language, came from a different culture, and often perceived their new countrymen as subhuman. Urban and nomadic Indians also thrived in New Mexico in 1848. Many had warred with each other for centuries. In the middle of the nineteenth century, there were approximately 60,000 Nuevo-mexicanos and Pueblos living in New Mexico Territory. Since the sixteenth century, the Native Americans had been enmeshed in complicated alliances, rivalries, and economic relationships with their Nuevo-mexicano neighbors. Anglo-American soldiers found these relationships difficult to decipher. Such confusion was reciprocal. Aside from their own government charging the United States Army with protecting Anglo pioneers and the new government's officials, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo obligated these same troopers to stop Native Americans from raiding below the border. The Southern Plains Indians, who long considered the villages of Northern Mexico a resource domain, were confused by this twist in international diplomacy, which saw the United States, recently at war with Mexico, suddenly become their demanding protectors.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Pekka Hämäläinen, *The Comanche Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 292; Brian

A strong military presence was required in new territories because federal officials intended the first settlers and soldiers who traveled west to lay the groundwork for future entrepreneurs and other waves of immigrants. Many of the indigenous peoples who already lived in New Mexico were displeased with such plans. The United States westward expansion meant land loss for many earlier settlers in New Mexico, and it was these people, even if sometimes certain segments were miniscule, who fought encroachment in a variety of ways. Thus, for almost fifty years, the United States was forced to maintain military bases up and down the length of the new territory as a part of their overall plan to create the stability and security successful expansion required.<sup>2</sup>

The acquisition of half the Mexican nation initiated a two-fold mission for the American conquerors. First, United States soldiers occupied the new territories at strategic locations to ensure locals would not disrupt government officials as they began to implement American policy. The second mission was more complicated because it included controlling the Southern Plains Indians. Both tasks proved harder than originally estimated. Although Mexico had given up its northern territories as a result of the war, pronouncements of a “bloodless” New Mexican conquest did not ring true for many of the first American civilians charged with taking command there. Within a year of annexation, enraged Puebloans, Apaches, and Nuevo-mexicanos removed Charles Bent, the new territorial governor, from his Taos home, scalped and murdered him. Bent’s disregard for early warning signs of local resentment concerning the conquest cost him

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DeLay, *War of a Thousand Deserts: Indian Raids and the U.S. – Mexican War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), xiii.

<sup>2</sup> See Ball, “Fort Craig, New Mexico, and the Southwestern Indian Wars, 1854 – 1884,” 153 – 173; William H. Leckie, *The Military Conquest of the Southern Plains* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1963); Robert J. Rosenbaum, *Mexicano Resistance in the Southwest; The Sacred Right to Self Preservation* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981. Reprint; Southern Methodist University Press, 1998).

and other civilians their lives. The revolt spread from Taos into the surrounding mountain communities. Troops stationed in Santa Fe and Las Vegas quickly put down the revolt, but not before American soldiers experienced their share of casualties. Without contemplating the promise to Mexico to reign in aggressive Southern Plains Indians, this Taos Rebellion highlighted the need for a strong military presence in New Mexico.<sup>3</sup>

The second mission, along with stopping raids into Northern Mexico, included putting an end to traditional wars that raged between Hispanos and Apaches, Comanches, and Navajos. This circle of violence had been raging for over a century. A part of stopping these wars of vengeance included policing a regional economy partially fueled by the slave trade, in which all societies in the region participated. The soldiers were also charged with creating a corridor for Anglo pioneers and merchant trains utilizing the Santa Fe Trail. Both missions, which were functions of conquest, empire, and expansion, required a substantial, longterm commitment by the United States military.<sup>4</sup>

Such an effort required the construction of a series of military posts across the western frontier. Shortly after the uprising in 1847, Camp Burgwin was established on the outskirts of Taos. By 1851, the federal government had grown weary of dealing with the social problems that came with maintaining a garrison within the city of Las Vegas and began to look for a location

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<sup>3</sup> Lt. T. C. McKarney to Col. Sterling Price, 25 January 1847, "List of Killed and Wounded at Pueblo de Taos on 4 February 1847," in United States Congress, "Message from the President of the United States, Part I of IV," House Ex. Doc. No. 8, 30<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 1848 [Serial Set 515], 532-33; James A. Crutchfield, *Tragedy at Taos: The Revolt of 1847* (Plano, Tx.: The Republic of Texas Press, 1995), 123, 126; Andrés Reséndez, *Changing National Identities on the Frontier: Texas and New Mexico, 1800 – 1850* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 254 – 55.

<sup>4</sup> James F. Brooks, *Captives and Cousins: Slavery, Kinship, and Community in the Southwest Borderlands* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 161; Curtis Marez, "Signifying Spain, Becoming Comanche, Making Mexicans: Indian Captivity and the History of Chicana/o Popular Performance," *American Quarterly* 53 (June, 2001), 268, 269.

that would distance soldiers from urban vices while still suiting the department's strategic requirements. They selected a site twenty-eight miles north of town and constructed one of the frontier army's most important nineteenth century posts. Fort Union was built on the eastern face of the Sangre de Cristo Range, where the Mountain and Cimarron branches of the Santa Fe Trail merged. It was positioned at this location to give maximum protection to settlers and freighters. It would also serve as the main supply depot for future western garrisons. In 1854 Fort Craig was established about forty-five miles south of Socorro along the Rio Grande, and Fort Stanton was constructed on the banks of the Rio Bonito, about ten miles west of Lincoln, New Mexico. The Fort Craig soldiers were charged with gaining control of the Gila and Mimbres Apaches, while Fort Stanton's troops sought to put an end to Mescalero raids in southwestern New Mexico.<sup>5</sup>

Throughout the 1850s the federal government continued to establish posts at key locations, generally along New Mexico's main rivers and trade routes. Yet while the military and territorial officials tried to put in place policies that would create stronger links between New Mexico and eastern markets, Texas sought recognition of its longstanding claim that at least half of this new territory was already within its boundaries. Such claims began with the Texians' victory at San Jacinto. Ten years later, after the United States – Mexican War, the Texas legislature created two new counties within New Mexico Territory and sent administrators north to set up a local government. When Nuevo-mexicanos and the federal government refused to recognize this scheme, Texas governor Peter H. Bell issued a call to raise an army to put down the “rebellion,” but cooler heads prevailed. Due to a long history of such actions, including failed

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<sup>5</sup> Sánchez, et al., *Fort Union National Monument: Ethnographic Overview and Assessment*, 4. Durwood Ball details the New Mexico defense system in Ball, *Army Regulars in the Western Frontier, 1848 – 1861* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001), 30-36.

filibusters, most New Mexico Hispanos, like many Southern Plains Indians, considered the Texans to be a greater enemy than either the Apaches or the United States Army.<sup>6</sup>

In addition to the special hate many Nuevo-mexicanos and Native Americans felt for Texans, as noted above, strong animosity also simmered toward other cultures. Because of this, the frontier army had its hands full trying to gain control of the territory and keep the merchant lanes open and safe at the same time. Events outside New Mexico often affected soldiers' ability to carry out their mission. Government policy or military actions north of the Arkansas or south of the Canadian River often affected the lives of New Mexico Indians, which sometimes led to conflict with soldiers stationed in the territory. Incidents involving Arapahos or Cheyennes along the Cimarron River were quickly communicated across the southern prairies to Kiowas, Comanches, and Apaches. The Indians of the Southern Plains were not a homogenous group, but they occasionally did come together in common cause, such as to fight perceived injustices by exacting revenge on the first Anglos they encountered. Military or political actions far from the Canadian River sometimes elicited a chain reaction of unintended consequences in the Texas Panhandle and into New Mexico.<sup>7</sup>

As an example, during the 1850s, many Texans were relentless in their quest to eliminate Native Americans from their state. Despite Maj. Robert S. Neighbors' earnest effort to establish a reservation system for Texas's Indians, by the late 1850s Comanches and Kiowas who did not want to live in the region that became known as Indian Territory had few places where they could live as they always had. The one exception was the Llano Estacado. Thus these Southern

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<sup>6</sup> Donald S. Frazier, *Blood and Treasure: Confederate Empire in the Southwest* (College Station: Texas A&M Press, 1995), 5-11; Mark Stegmaier, *Texas, New Mexico, and the Compromise of 1850: Boundary Dispute and Sectional Crisis* (Kent, OH.: Kent State University Press, 1996), 27.

<sup>7</sup> Ball, "Fort Craig, New Mexico, and the Southwest Indian Wars, 1854 – 1884," 154 – 57.

Plains Indians found refuge along the Red and Canadian Rivers, centrally located between their old mountain trading partners in New Mexico and the Anglo settlements of northern and northwest Texas. As the Comanches and Kiowas began to depend more and more on the Comanchero trade to remain independent, a lot of pressure was placed on the military in New Mexico to stop this exchange. The argument went that if the Comanches did not have a willing trading partner in New Mexico, depredations would cease in Texas. In 1859, one Indian agent wrote of the Comanches' circumstances: "A smothered passion for revenge agitates these Indians." Even as military posts began to be abandoned in New Mexico and Texas at the start of the Civil War, a cumulative anger over broken treaties and land encroachment continued to fester among the Comanches and Kiowas. Southern Plains Indians once again found themselves in the middle of a confusing array of alliances, but sought to make the best of it, especially against the distracted and weakened Texans.<sup>8</sup>

In 1860, once Abraham Lincoln was sworn into office, the Lone Star State again turned its attention toward New Mexico. Shortly after Texas seceded, Ben McCulloch led a contingent of Texan volunteers into San Antonio and quickly pressured the commander of its federal facilities, Gen. David E. Twiggs, to surrender all government property. Twiggs' capitulation gave the Texans reason to believe a similar success could soon be replicated in New Mexico.<sup>9</sup>

Letters from Mesilla Valley settlers and transplanted Texans in the northern part of the territory encouraged the newly minted Confederates to move north. Robert P. Kelly of the *Mesilla Times* and James Magoffin, the merchant who had guided Col. Stephen L. Kearney into Santa Fe in 1846, intimated there would be little resistance to an occupation, implying most New

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<sup>8</sup> Leckie, *The Military Conquest of the Southern Plains*, 15, 18.

<sup>9</sup> Ball, *Army Regulars in the Western Frontier*, 191-92; Frazier, *Blood and Treasure*, 13.

Mexicans sympathized with the South. As the war drum beat louder, adventurers, entrepreneurs, and leading Texas figures began to put together a plan that envisioned a new southern nation that would expand into New Mexico and points west, with the notion of some day incorporating San Francisco Bay and Northern Mexico's rich mine fields into their newly minted empire.<sup>10</sup>

Soon after the conflict began, two key Southern officers initiated the Confederate army's northern invasion of New Mexico. After resigning from the United States Army in May, Henry Hopkins Sibley left Taos and made his way south to San Antonio to confer with the Texans before going to Richmond. There, Sibley received a commission from Confederate President Jefferson Davis, becoming a brigadier general. President Davis charged Sibley with securing New Mexico as he saw fit. While the new brigadier general was still in Richmond, Col. Earl Van Dorn, temporarily in charge of Confederate operations in Texas, ordered the troops in San Antonio toward present-day El Paso, the Mesilla Valley, and what became Confederate Arizona. The man picked to lead this mission was adventurer, legislator, and Indian agent John R. Baylor. Baylor commanded six companies of the Second Texas Mounted Rifles. Upon his arrival in El Paso County, he and his men were escorted to the recently evacuated Fort Bliss, where they planted the Confederate flag. Just like Magoffin had promised, there was little opposition.<sup>11</sup>

In the meantime, Col. Edward R. S. Canby, in charge of Union forces in New Mexico, knew what the Texans had in mind and was busy preparing for the anticipated assault. Most regular army companies had been transferred to the eastern theatre, or its men had left for the Confederacy. Canby consolidated his remaining soldiers at Forts Craig, Fillmore, and Union,

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<sup>10</sup> Frazier, *Blood and Treasure*, 35-36.

<sup>11</sup> Frazier, *Blood and Treasure*, 47-50; Jerry D. Thompson, *Henry Hopkins Sibley: Confederate General in the West* (Natchitoches: Northwestern State University Press, 1987), 216.

abandoning posts he could no longer adequately defend. In the summer of 1861 Canby, as the Department of New Mexico's commander, called up local militia and volunteer units to bolster his decimated ranks. These volunteers, mostly Hispanos, began to muster in late July and were subsequently sent to these three forts. These men – along with later arriving volunteers from Colorado, many of whom would serve at Fort Bascom – were all that stood between the Confederacy and the conquest of New Mexico.<sup>12</sup>

On 21 October 1861, Brigadier General Sibley led 3,200 Confederates up the Rio Grande, intent on moving quickly through New Mexico, capturing the North's main supply depot at Fort Union, and then pushing into Colorado and seizing its gold fields. Sibley had convinced President Davis that this was an achievable goal, and once accomplished, his army would be well positioned to march west and gain the Pacific Coast or go north to Denver. Although fraught with delays and logistical issues, Sibley's army did make great gains, yet faced their greatest challenges after a hard winter descended in New Mexico.<sup>13</sup>

In late February 1862, Sibley's army fought Union troops to a stalemate at the Battle of Valverde, and he managed to keep moving north and captured the capital, Santa Fe. Yet when the Confederate Army of New Mexico moved east toward Fort Union, it was repulsed in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains by regular army and the volunteers units from Colorado and New Mexico. These soldiers managed to fight the Confederates to a standstill at Glorieta Pass, but more importantly, in the process destroyed the bulk of the Texans' supplies, which eventually

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<sup>12</sup> Jerry D. Thompson, ed., *New Mexico Territory during the Civil War*, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2008), 34; Frazier, *Blood and Treasure*; 50, 144; Muster Rolls, Archives Box 10822, Folder 09, pg. 05, New Mexico State Records Center, Santa Fe.

<sup>13</sup> Frazier, *Blood and Treasure*, 117 – 119.

forced the invaders back to Texas. Despite the Confederates' defeat, New Mexicans doubted they had seen the last of the Texans.<sup>14</sup>

For the next two years, Union officers and territorial officials worried that another attack was imminent. The Canadian River began to appear in reports as another possible invasion route. Territorial Delegate John S. Watts had always argued the strategic necessity of protecting this river from the Confederates. As Sibley's army approached Santa Fe, Watts wrote to Union Maj. Gen. Henry W. Halleck, commander of the Department of the Missouri, stating that if he would only "look at the map," it was clear that after the Confederates sacked the capital, they would have a clear path to Missouri by following the Canadian River east. Although such a possibility was extinguished at Glorieta Pass, control of this river remained an object of military concern.<sup>15</sup>

Not long after turning the Confederates back at Glorieta Pass, Brig. Gen. James H. Carleton replaced Canby as overall commander of New Mexico. Carleton had recently arrived after marching twenty companies of California volunteers to the territory. The new 48-year-old commander of the Department was a twenty-year veteran of the army, having spent five years stationed in New Mexico prior to the war. The California Column remained in New Mexico for the duration of the war, and its men served at several frontier posts, including Fort Bascom. As Canby took his leave, he informed Carleton that if the Confederates invaded New Mexico a second time, he doubted it would be up the Rio Grande, "but if our troops in the Southwest

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<sup>14</sup> John McLellan Taylor, *Bloody Valverde: A Civil War Battle on the Rio Grande* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995), 80 -83; Don Alberts, *The Battle of Glorieta: Union Victory in the West* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1998), 134-135; Marc Simmons, *The Little Lion of the Southwest: A Life of Manuel Antonio Chaves* (Chicago: Swallow Press, 1973), 184; Thompson, ed., *New Mexico Territory During the Civil War*, 155-58, 224-30; Darlis A. Miller, *Soldiers and Settlers: Military Supply in the Southwest, 1861 - 1885* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1989), 224.

<sup>15</sup> John S. Watts to Henry W. Halleck, 23 March 1862, *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, 70 in 128 vols. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1888-1901), Ser. 1, Vol. 15, pp. 650, 651 [hereafter *OR*].

should meet with any serious reverses it may be by the Canadian.” Thus from Carleton’s first days as department commander, he was warned of the possibility that the Canadian River might become the next Confederate entry point.<sup>16</sup>

Over the next few months, Carleton dispatched to his field officers a series of orders and warnings that illustrated his concern. He ordered his acting inspector general, Maj. Henry Wallen Davies, to investigate all possible invasion routes and report his findings. While Davies believed it likely that any second attempt would also come up the Rio Grande, he could not completely rule out an advance up the Pecos or Canadian rivers. Thus he recommended to Carleton that he place some “well mounted and rationed mountain men” somewhere close to the Llano Estacado.<sup>17</sup>

On 26 October 1862, Carleton directed Capt. William H. Backus and Company C of the Second Colorado Volunteer Infantry to move from Anton Chico, along the Pecos River, to a location near “the confluence of Utah Creek and the Canadian River [northeast of Tucumcari Peak].” This forward camp would act as an advance picket against a possible Confederate invasion from the Texas Panhandle. It was called Camp Easton. Soldiers dug cavities into the hillsides and used available logs, rocks, and branches to create living quarters that would serve them for the next several months. Besides watching for Confederates, Backus’s troops would also be used as escorts for the mail and military supply trains. General Carleton encouraged Backus to befriend the region’s Comanches and utilize them, if possible, as scouts. Yet it was Company C, not the Comanches, upon whom the department commander depended for critical

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<sup>16</sup> Henry P. Walker and James Teal, eds., “Soldier in the California Column: The Diary of John W. Teal,” *Arizona and the West* 13 (Spring 1971), 34, 34; Edward R. S. Canby to James H. Carleton, 11 August 1862, *OR*, Ser. 1, Vol. 9, pp. 574-75.

<sup>17</sup> Thompson, ed., *New Mexico Territory during the Civil War*, 9, 25.

information. Carleton ordered Backus and his men to “watch the road and the country toward Fort Smith and toward Texas, [and] to give timely notice of the advance of any force of rebels. . . . For this purpose you will keep scouts well down upon the Fort Smith road, and over toward the Llano Estacado.” Carleton was specific in his instructions. He ordered Backus to shoot any rebel scouts his men spotted. He also instructed them to stampede the enemy’s livestock and burn the prairie grass in front of any approaching force. He further ordered Backus’s troops to shoot any male Mescalero Apaches or Navajos they came into contact with, and to arrest any Anglos or Mexicans not carrying proper passes.<sup>18</sup>

A month later Carleton informed the post commander of Fort Union, Capt. Peter W. L. Plympton, that he had ordered the Colorado volunteers (including Backus’s Company C) to remain in New Mexico specifically because he was anticipating a second invasion. Carleton explained to Captain Plympton that Col. Joseph R. West, commander of the Department of Arizona, had relayed information to him concerning rumors of the recently deposed Confederate governor of Arizona, Baylor. Apparently Baylor was just back from Virginia with orders to launch another attack into the territory. According to Colonel West, Baylor was in San Antonio readying 6,000 Texans for a second invasion. Carleton explained to Plympton that he believed the Texans would travel through the Texas Panhandle, follow the Canadian River west, move north when the stream neared the Tucumcari Peaks, then move on to their intended target, Sibley’s original goal, Fort Union. The general warned Plympton to prepare for such a

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<sup>18</sup> Carleton to Capt. William H. Backus, 12 October 1862, Letters Sent, Department of New Mexico, Record Group 98 [now 393], National Archives, in James W. Arrott Collection, Donnelly Library, New Mexico Highlands University, Las Vegas [hereafter LS, DNM, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection], Vol. 10, pp. 264–265.

circumstance by having the “Artillery drill twice a day,” to continue work on a new abattis, and ensure that all soldiers perform target practice three times a day.<sup>19</sup>

Camp Easton soon proved its value. On 1 November, 1862, only six days after the camp was established, a group of Comanches approached a patrol led by Lt. George L. Shoup of Backus’ Company C with information about a large wagon train traveling on the Fort Smith road toward Texas. The next day, along with the Comanches, Backus and his troops sought out and apprehended eighteen Confederate sympathizers and their families not far from Camp Easton. Green Russell, one of the prospectors who first found gold at Cherry Creek, Colorado, was the caravan’s leader. Their last stop had been Las Vegas, New Mexico, where they had re-supplied and prepared for the journey across the Texas Panhandle. Once Company C stopped the caravan, the Comanches demanded at least one of the travelers and half the party’s possessions as reward for their assistance. Backus explained to a growing group of agitated Indians, including a Chief “Mowa,” that he was willing to pay them for their services, but the prisoners, would remain under his protection. Company C escorted the entire party to Fort Union. Twenty-eight thousand dollars was confiscated from the Confederate sympathizers, as well as several bags of gold dust. Released a few months later, Russell eventually showed up in Georgia, where he did join the Confederate Army and assembled a company to do battle.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Thompson, ed., *New Mexico Territory during The Civil War*, 10; Frazier, *Blood and Treasure*, 208–30. For specifics on John R. Baylor, see Carleton to Capt. Peter W. L. Plympton, 16 November 1862, LS, DNM, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 10: 351; Ben C. Cutler to Capt. Joseph Updegraff, 15 November 1862, LS, DNM, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 10: 348. The numerous communiqués between headquarters and field officers regarding a second invasion might seem a bit paranoid when looking back 150 years later, yet the men charged with maintaining the integrity of the Union in New Mexico had to face that reality. Captain Backus and his Colorado volunteers, as well as Captain Plympton and the Seventh United States Infantry, had already drawn and shed blood against the Confederates at Fort Craig, the Battle of Valverde, and Glorieta Pass. The war was tangible, the Texans were deadly, and Carleton knew that to have a chance he must be forewarned of another assault.

<sup>20</sup> Backus to Carleton, 1 December 1862, *OR*, Ser.1, Vol. 15, 153–58. “Chief Mowa” was more than likely Chief Mowway of the Kotsoteka Comanches. See Thomas W. Kavanagh, *The Comanches: A History 1706 – 1875*

Over the next several months, similar patrols set out from Camp Easton, mainly on the look-out for rebel invaders. Soldiers' reports were peppered with incidents related to coming upon "mexicans" making their way onto the Llano Estacado with carts and wagons loaded with goods, prepared to trade with the Comanche. Sorting out who these people were and what to do about them took up much of the army's time after the war ended. As the United States cavalry would soon learn, such travelers and traders knew the area much better than they did.<sup>21</sup>

By the middle of 1863, plans were being put in place for a more permanent Canadian River outpost. By then, Capt. Edward H. Bergmann of the First New Mexico Volunteer Cavalry, Company I, stationed at Fort Union, was operating out of Camp Easton. In response to a request from Bergmann for some large trowels to fashion adobe bricks, Carleton responded favorably, but did not stop there: "Make a plan for a compact (not too compact) post for two companies – with stables, corrals, hospital, guard house, carpenter shop, saddle shop, blacksmith shop, coal room, corral detached for hay, etc. The work should be built on a square, face in. Have walls connect-logs holed- and enfiladed by some sort of block house and diagonal corners. Can you make the cavalry part?"<sup>22</sup>

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(Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), 5, 383; Thompson, ed., *New Mexico Territory during The Civil War*, 223.

<sup>21</sup> Such reports include Capt. Nicholas S. Davis to Headquarters, 30 October 1864, *OR*, Ser. 1, Vol. 15, p. 212. Davis led Company B, First New Mexico Volunteer Infantry. See also George H. Pettis, "The California Column, Its Campaigns and Services in New Mexico, Arizona, and Texas During the Civil War," *Historical Society of New Mexico* 11 (Santa Fe: New Mexico Printing Co., 1908), 8; Lt. Thomas Henderson to Headquarters, Fort Bascom, LS, DNM, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 49: 33; and Capt. George W. Letterman to Acting Assist. Adj. Gen. Maj. Cyrus de Forrest, 31 August 1867, LS, DNM, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 49: 31. Letterman was captain of the 125th United States Colored Infantry. During this period he was also Fort Bascom's post commander. Company K of the 125th Colored Infantry was stationed at Fort Bascom in portions of 1866 and 1867. See Compiled Records Showing Service of Military Units in Volunteer Union Organizations, Kentucky 125th Regiment at <http://www.archive.org/details/compiledrecords0217unit> (accessed August 21, 2011). Originally a member of the First Colorado Volunteers, De Forrest served as Carleton's aide-de-camp and assistant adjutant general. See Pettis, "The California Column," 35.

<sup>22</sup> Carleton to Camp Easton, 21 June 1863, LS, DNM, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 11: 291.

Carleton was not the first officer to make the decision to place a post closer to the Llano Estacado. By the late 1850s, mounted patrols working out of Fort Union (Carleton was stationed there at the time) had reduced depredations along the Santa Fe Trail and created a good deal of confidence among merchants and pioneers moving west. The situation was not the same along the Fort Smith road, where Southern Plains Indians still controlled much of the region. At the time, many officers lobbied for a new supply and command post farther south and east, along either the Pecos or Canadian rivers. Fort Butler was approved on 12 March 1860, but was never built. Logistics, costs, and the looming conflict in the East shelved plans for this garrison, which was to have been positioned along the Gallinas River at the Fort Smith road crossing. That such plans were approved indicates just how serious officials were about shifting their resources closer to Texas. In the late 1850s, before the Confederacy was a certainty, the army's greatest regional concern was the Comanches and Kiowas, who controlled much of eastern New Mexico and northwest Texas. Fort Butler's location would have addressed that concern by creating a new supply post and operational base on the doorstep of Comanchería. Yet it had not been built.<sup>23</sup>

While Captain Backus and Company C of the Colorado Volunteers were still building their make-shift shelters at Camp Easton, construction on another federal outpost began further south. Fort Sumner was constructed along the Pecos River in November of 1862, but unlike Fort Butler, it was never intended to supplant Fort Union. After the Civil War began, thoughts of abandoning or reducing Fort Union's work load evaporated, and it once again became one of the United States most important western posts. It would remain so for decades to come. As for Fort Sumner, situated in the midst of another significant Comanchero trade route, it quickly became a

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<sup>23</sup> See Fort Butler, Records of the War Department, Office of the Adj. Gen., LS, DNM, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 56: 408; and Robert W. Frazer, "The Fort That Almost Was," *New Mexico Historical Review* 43 (Oct., 1968): 258–63.

facility charged with overseeing and keeping control of Native Americans that were sent to the new Bosque Redondo Indian Reservation. The same month construction began on Fort Sumner, General Carleton ordered Col. Christopher “Kit” Carson to capture the Mescalero Apaches who were causing problems in southern New Mexico. Carson and his First New Mexico Volunteer Cavalry accomplished this task, and then, per Carleton’s orders, took them to Bosque Redondo. The commanding general envisioned an agricultural oasis emerging on this reservation. He believed Southern Plains Indians who were re-established along the Pecos River would quickly learn European American farming techniques perfected in Arkansas, Illinois, and Kentucky, resulting in abundant rows of corn and vegetables. The Department of New Mexico’s commander was ignorant of the arid top-soils of the Pecos and Canadian river valleys, which held little of the organic material needed to sustain crops.<sup>24</sup>

Not long after Colonel Carson and his New Mexico volunteers’ successful mission against the Mescaleros, they received a similar, if much larger and difficult task, in 1864. That year, Carleton ordered the ex- mountain man and his soldiers to remove the Navajos from their Canyon de Chelly homeland and escort them to Bosque Redondo. Using scorch-and-burn tactics in the middle of winter, Carson and his men were successful. Soon, thousands of Navajos were walking or riding in wagons across New Mexico to Bosque Redondo. Once the Mescalero realized the Navajos, their sworn enemy, were not only going to be their new neighbor, but would also outnumber them ten to one, they simply got up one night and left, never to return. The Navajos remained at the reservation for years. Over the next several months, thousands of

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<sup>24</sup> Lynn R. Bailey, *Bosque Redondo: An American Concentration Camp* (Pasadena, Calif.: Socio-Technical Books, 1970), 27, 47; Lawrence Kelly, *Navajo Roundup: Selected Correspondences of Kit Carson’s Expedition Against the Navajo, 1863 – 65* (Boulder: Pruett Publishing, 1970), 12; Thomas W. Dunlay, *Kit Carson and the Indians* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 247; Jerry Williams and Paul E. McAllister, eds., *New Mexico in Maps* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1986), 65.

Navajos who had heard of Carson's tactics in Canyon de Chelly began to assemble at Forts Canby and Wingate. From these posts, the military escorted them to Fort Sumner and the reservation. In the not too distant future, the forced migration of these Native Americans created many problems for the soldiers stationed at Fort Bascom. By 1868, over 8,000 Navajos lived at the Bosque Redondo Indian Reservation. Starvation and disease, precipitated by crop failure, poor planning, and corrupt business practices, would eventually force the government to allow them to return to a portion of their homeland. Long before that happened, the Navajos of Bosque Redondo began to stream north through the Pecos and Canadian River valleys, impacting Fort Bascom soldiers and operations.<sup>25</sup>

Yet in the summer of 1863, General Carleton had more pressing issues on his mind, such as the location of Baylor and the Confederate force he was rumored to be collecting around San Antonio. This explained his instructions to Captain Bergmann concerning the creation of another large-scale federal outpost. If Carleton's order to make a plan for a "compact (not too compact) post" appears ad-hoc in nature, that was simply how many frontier posts came to be in the nineteenth century. Much was left to each department's commanding officer regarding the specific location and design of such posts. Regulations regarding living quarters had to be followed, which included maintaining a certain amount of square feet per soldier, but other specifications were lacking or not followed. Aside from air-space stipulations, commanders

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<sup>25</sup> Dunlay, *Kit Carson and the Indians*, 309, 317; Williams and McAllister, eds., *New Mexico in Maps*, 65; Kelly, *Kit Carson's Expedition Against the Navajo*, 134, 135.

retained a lot of discretion regarding building frontier facilities, and thus they were able to adapt their construction methods to fit the surrounding environment.<sup>26</sup>

The men who inhabited and traveled to and from such posts had concerns regarding their safety, regardless of whether a Texan or a Confederate ever set foot in New Mexico again. By 1863, the Canadian River was being used quite heavily by soldiers traveling between Fort Union, Fort Sumner, and the various temporary base camps that were set up in the Eroded Plains. In their travels and during patrols, the troopers were cognizant of the fact that despite the apparent emptiness that seemed to permeate the Canadian River Valley, it was a very dangerous place. On 22 July 1863, while headquarters was discussing the plans to transition operations from a base camp to a full-fledged military outpost, the valley's "sublimity" turned into chaos. Herding cattle for the nearby troops, Sgt. Jose Lucero and Privates Juan F. Ortiz and Jose Barreras of Company I, First New Mexico Volunteer Cavalry, were attacked at the junction of the Conchas and Canadian Rivers, Conchas Springs, by a group of Navajo raiders. The Navajos wanted the cattle. Lucero, Ortiz, and Barreras became trapped near the springs and a gun battle ensued, lasting until sundown. Eventually, the soldiers were overwhelmed, and the raiders left the area with all the livestock. All of the New Mexico troopers lay on the ground, riddled with arrows. One attacker, meaning to ensure his enemy was dead, used a rock to bash every Hispano over the head. Somehow, Private Barreras managed to survive this final assault. After the Navajo rode away, Barreras dumped his deceased compatriots' guns in Conchas Creek and walked back to camp with eight arrows protruding from his body. Captain Bergmann led several troopers from

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<sup>26</sup> Carleton to Camp Easton, 21 June 1863, LS, DNM, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 11: 291; Alison Hoagland, "Village Constructions: U.S. Army Forts on the Plains, 1848 – 1890," *Winterthur Portfolio* 34 (Winter 1999), 224.

Company I after these raiders, eventually catching up, killing two, and wounding several. Most of the cattle were lost. The volunteers returned to Camp Easton with three beeves.<sup>27</sup>

On 15 August 1863, three weeks after the attack on Lucero, Ortiz, and Barreras, Capt. Peter W. L. Plympton led Company F of the Seventh United States Infantry out of Fort Union to replace Camp Easton with a permanent outpost. Captain Bergmann's company of New Mexico volunteers were also placed under Captain Plympton's command, and together these two units, one Regular Army and one volunteer, became the first soldiers to occupy the new post. The recent attack was still a bitter memory to Company I as the men established themselves at the new location. It was Bergmann whom Carleton had originally called on to develop a plan for the fort, and it was Bergmann who selected the site. He located it on the south side of the Canadian River, about 15 miles further west than Camp Easton, where the northern Canadian bent toward Texas. He located it about fifty miles from the Texas border and eleven miles north of the Tukumcari Peaks, where the Fort Smith road passed. It is interesting to note that despite Carleton's obvious confidence in Bergmann, the post's first commander was a veteran of the regular army, Captain Plympton, Company F, Seventh Infantry. As will be explored later, both captains and companies had served at the Battle of Valverde.<sup>28</sup>

Territorial Delegate Watts, who a year earlier had urged General Halleck to remember the strategic importance of the region, leased two square miles of his property to the government for the new post. While headquarters had urged Captain Backus of the Colorado volunteers to use

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<sup>27</sup> "Synopsis of Operations in the Department of New Mexico, May 16 – December 28, 1863," in *OR*, Ser. 1, Vol. 26, pt. 1, pp. 23, 26.

<sup>28</sup> Cutler, General Orders No. 20, 11 August 1863, LS, DNM, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 49:1. In November and December of 1863, thirty officers and soldiers of the Seventh Infantry called this post home. At the same time, seventy-five men of Company I of the First New Mexico Volunteer Cavalry were stationed there. See Lt. Charles C. Brown to Headquarters, Fort Bascom, 21 December 1863, LS, DNM, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 49: 1. On Captain Bergmann selecting the site, see Thompson, *New Mexico Territory During the Civil War*, 247.

the Comanches as lookouts against a second invasion while stationed at Camp Easton, Union field officers quickly distanced themselves from this idea. In General Orders No. 20, Acting Assistant Adjutant General Ben C. Cutler noted that Fort Bascom would “be an outpost to New Mexico during the present rebellion, its advanced pickets watching the roads from Arkansas and Texas, it will be of great importance in preventing the predatory incursion of the Comanche and Kiowa Indians.” Thus these Native Americans were not considered to be serious allies by the time Fort Bascom was built.<sup>29</sup>

Three years after army officers had first begun to argue that a post should be built closer to Comanchería, Fort Bascom became a reality. It was named for twenty-six-year-old Captain George N. Bascom of the Seventh United States Infantry, who was killed on 21 February 1862 at the Battle of Valverde. Long before he died, Captain Bascom was a well-known officer in the region. In October 1860, while a lieutenant in the Seventh United States Infantry stationed at Fort Buchanan in New Mexico, Bascom was ordered to search for a boy believed to have been stolen by a band of Chiricahua Apaches led by Cochise. The meeting quickly degenerated into violence. As a result, some of Cochise’s relatives were killed, sparking a series of Chiricahuan raids and reprisals across the Southwest. A few months later, a contingent of the Seventh United States Infantry, by then under Bascom’s command, were trapped by these same Chiricahuas at Apache Pass in present-day Arizona. Army Surgeon Bernard J. D. Irwin led a group of volunteers to these soldiers’ rescue, which resulted in Irwin receiving the Medal of Honor, the earliest action to achieve this honor. That Bascom died in the heat of battle in 1862 came as no

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<sup>29</sup> John S. Watts acquired the land after serving as the “Attorney for the Petitioner.” Watts was an attorney for the heirs of the previous owner, Pablo Montoya. This land was later developed into the Bell Ranch, one of the largest cattle enterprises in the United States. See Reports of the Committee on Private Land Claims, Senate Miscellaneous Document 81/3, 44<sup>th</sup> Cong. 1<sup>st</sup> Session [Serial Set 1836-2].

surprise to his peers. Captain Plympton, also of the Seventh, as well as Captain Bergman, were also participants in the battle where Bascom died. Thus, in August 1863, the newly constructed fort was named in honor of one the Seventh Infantry's fallen leaders.<sup>30</sup>

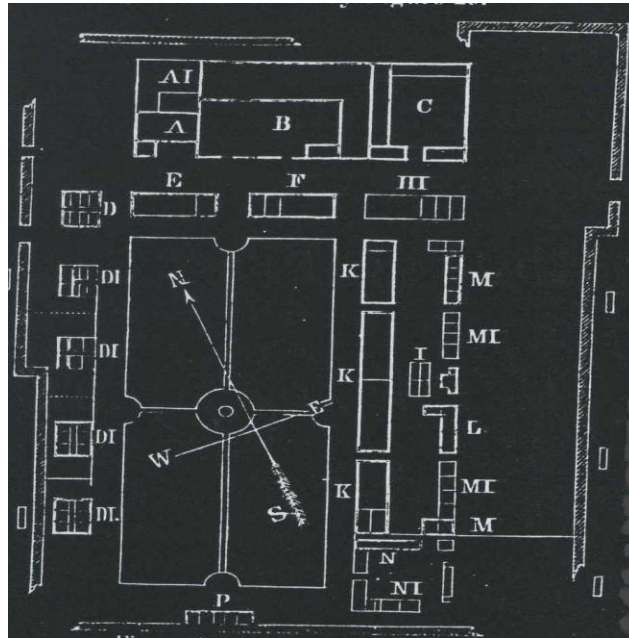
On paper, the creation of this post appears matter-of-fact and clearly representative of frontier posts throughout the West. Yet official descriptions of army posts seldom capture the reality imposed upon the men that served there. The lack of timber, other than the cottonwoods that grew along the river, meant most of the structures were made of adobe. The on-the-fly nature most department commanders had to take regarding construction of such posts often led to less than the desired results. In the midst of a war, Carleton, like Canby before him, was forced to improvise and make choices he possibly could have avoided during peacetime. Throughout the war, the federal government devoted most of its resources to the East. This was especially true in the early years of the conflict. Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton had bigger fish to fry than determining how to keep the Texans out of New Mexico, or keep Santa Fe freighters safe. General Robert E. Lee and the Army of Northern Virginia ensured that Carleton and his men were left to their own devices. This meant utilizing a creative construction process that involved a lot of local civilians and privates doing most of the work. While Captain Backus's Colorado

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<sup>30</sup> Over the years, historians have disagreed on who was responsible for starting this war. For a negative view of Bascom's role, see LeRoy R. Hafen and Carl C. Rister, *Western America: The Exploration, Settlement, and Development of the Region Beyond the Mississippi* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1950), 500; and Foster, "History of Fort Bascom, New Mexico," 11, 12. For an opposing view see Robert M. Utley, *Frontiersmen in Blue: The United States Army and the Indian, 1848-1865* (1967; repr. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1981), 161-63; and Dan Thrapp, *The Conquest of Apacheria* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1967), 16-19. Although Bernard Irwin performed his actions on 13 and 14 February 1861, he did not receive the Medal of Honor until 24 January 1894. For more on Irwin's Medal of Honor, see <http://ameddregiment.amedd.army.mil/moh/bios/irwin.html> (accessed August 21, 2011). In General Orders No. 20, Cutler noted the fort was named for Bascom, "to perpetuate the memory of the gallant Captain George N. Bascom . . . who fell in the defense of our colors," LS, DNM, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 49: 1.

volunteers had to cobble together Camp Easton on their own, the department's quartermaster did hire twenty civilians to help construct Fort Bascom. After the war,

Illustration 1. Government Sketch of Fort Bascom



A and AI cavalry stables; B, cavalry corral; C, quartermaster's corral; D and DI, officer's quarters; E, quartermaster's storehouse; F, commissary's storehouse; III, store-house; K, barracks; L, mess-hall; M, MI, laundresses' quarters; N, old hospital; NI, new hospital; P, guard house. From "Descriptions of Military Posts" LS, DNM, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 49: 1.

Fort Sumner fared much better when ninety-nine civilians were hired to help build additions to that post. Thus many of the subsequent problems regarding faulty construction were not unique to Fort Bascom, nor surprising.<sup>31</sup>

Captain Bergmann located Fort Bascom "on a plateau about 20 feet above the river bottom, and 500 yards from the bed of the river, which, [at that time was] . . . about 25 feet wide and 2 or 3 feet in depth. . . . On the opposite side of the stream is a bluff from 50 to 60 feet in height, beyond which the country is rolling and broken." The water was noted to be best from

<sup>31</sup> Miller, *Soldiers and Settlers*, 224, 225.

November to March, before the spring snow melt. As levels rose, the river became “muddy and loaded with organic matter.” Its positioning made it the eastern-most garrison facing both Confederate Texas and the homeland of numerous bands of Comanche and Kiowa Indians. Fort Union, about 140 miles to the northwest, was a good three-day ride. Fort Sumner was a day closer, about ninety miles to the south.<sup>32</sup>

Discussions regarding the construction of Fort Bascom involved more than Captain Bergmann. In October, after Captain Plympton had taken charge of the new site, he suggested to Carleton that the post be built of logs, not adobe. The department commander approved Plympton’s change, yet for the most part, the post was still built with adobe bricks. While the documents do not explain this divergence from Carleton’s approval, it is likely that Bergmann’s original plan was the most plausible, if not the most desirable.<sup>33</sup>

Fort Bascom consisted of five officers’ quarters, commissary storehouses, a mess hall, a block-house, four barracks large enough to house two full companies, a kitchen, laundry area, and stables. A perimeter adobe wall and an accompanying trench one thousand feet long and fifty feet wide surrounded the garrison. Plympton’s desire for log walls might have been for the best, for from the beginning there was a problem with the adobe. At Fort Sumner, the lack of organic matter in the soil was the most critical component of crop failure. At Bascom, it was the soil of the adobe bricks that created problems, breaking down during prolonged weather events. Rows of logs were used on the roofs, which were then covered with a layer of sod, but this design did not prevent rain water from finding a way in. Gregg had been right when he observed

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<sup>32</sup> Quotes are taken from Description of Military Posts, LS, DNM, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 49: 1-3. There is no identification within this letter as to who these civilians were, yet since they would be working with adobe, it is probable they were local Nuevo-mexicanos.

<sup>33</sup> Carleton to Plympton, 14 November 1863, LS, DNM, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 12: 293.

that the soils around the Canadian seemed to “melt” when touched by water. For the duration of its existence, the fort was plagued with roof leaks and water intrusions. Such problems, and the costs associated with correcting them, contributed to the decision to quit using Fort Bascom as a full-time post after 1870.<sup>34</sup>

Like most frontier posts, soldiers found little to like about Fort Bascom. The original design, never completed, provided space for four companies of infantry, yet it never adequately housed more than two. The barracks were one hundred by twenty feet square. Each barrack, built to withstand the valley’s harsh winters, had hard-packed dirt floors and three fireplaces. With the fireplaces and thirteen foot ceilings, the post met the government’s minimum standards regarding air-flow. Like most frontier forts, the five officers’ quarters were built on the opposite side of the parade ground, directly across from the privates’ barracks. Each of these quarters was fifteen by nine feet. These roofs also leaked. Only a few years after the fort was built, post commander Maj. Andrew J. Alexander reported that water intrusion had ruined many of the rooms, declaring that only two were habitable. Yet despite what her husband wrote to his headquarters, Eveline Alexander described Fort Bascom as “a neat little post . . . of some importance” with officers quarters that, although small, were quite comfortable. Whether the discrepancy was due to memory loss, literary license, or a commander’s wish to build a case to not spend any more

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<sup>34</sup> Description of Military Posts, Fort Bascom, 11 August 1863, Circular 4, Surgeon General’s Office, 1870, LS, DNM, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 49: 1-3; Carleton to Camp Easton, 21 June 1863, LS, DNM, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 11: 291; Carleton to Plympton, 14 November 1863, LS, DNM, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 12: 293; Josiah Gregg, *Commerce of the Prairies*, ed., Max L. Moorhead (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1954), 349; Eveline Alexander, *Cavalry Wife: The Diary of Eveline M. Alexander, 1866-1867*, ed. Sandra L. Myers (College Station: Texas A&M Press, 1977), 114.

money on this post, there is no clear answer. What is certain is that like most garrisons made of adobe and covered with sod roofs, there were constant maintenance issues.<sup>35</sup>

Aside from building issues, other problems also nagged the soldiers stationed to this post. One concerned access to the river. The Canadian ran below ground level, which prevented the soldiers from being able to dig an acequia, thus they could not easily access water for their gardens. Taking care of their gardens, like other tasks, required that daily water-wagon details leave the fort and journey over to the stream, where soldiers filled several large casks before returning to the fort. Capt. John V. Dubois of the Third United States Cavalry found he had not appreciated his previous position at Fort Sumner as much as he should have. In a letter to his mother, he fondly recalled that the Fort Sumner ice house diverted enough water out of the Pecos River each winter to create 640 pounds of ice. Despite the inconveniences, most army personnel tried to make the best of it. Perhaps Eveline Alexander found few negatives to write about because of officers like Captain Dubois. In a letter to his mother, he explained how he was able to make a “great show” of his military home while stationed at Fort Bascom with just a few books, pictures, and “scant” furniture.<sup>36</sup>

In those first winter months of 1863 and 1864, Captains Plympton of the Seventh United States Infantry and Captain Bergmann of the First New Mexico Volunteer Cavalry were charged with dual missions, building the post and remaining on the lookout for both Confederates and Southern Plains Indians. If the Confederates, mainly Texans, arrived from the east, they would

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<sup>35</sup> Description of Military Posts, Fort Bascom, 11 August 1863, Circular 4, Surgeon General’s Office, 1870, LS, DNM, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 49: 1-3; Maj. Andrew J. Alexander to Headquarters, 1 February 1867, LS, DNM, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 49: 107-08; Alexander, *Cavalry Wife*, 114.

<sup>36</sup> Capt. John V. Dubois to Mother, 5 April 1867, LS, DNM, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 62: 209-10. Dubois was in the Third United States Cavalry, and he was brevetted to lieutenant colonel while commanding at Fort Bascom for portions of 1867.

probably follow the Canadian River out of the Llano Estacado right down the Fort Smith road. Comanches also roamed this valley, but Union forces were also concerned with various bands of Apaches and Navajo who remained threats to local villages, raiding up and down the river, all the way to Raton Pass. Thus from the beginning, Fort Bascom was constantly sending out patrols in all directions, some lasting for several weeks.

As would be the case for the next several years, it was the First New Mexico Volunteer Cavalry that performed most of these early scouts. Captain Bergmann led Company I away from the post on 29 August, traveling up the Canadian through the Narrows, a steep-walled canyon where red volcanic boulders seemed to be arrested in time as they spilled over its edges. They moved passed Conchas Springs, where two of their compatriots had been killed in the Navajo ambush just a few months earlier, not turning around until atop the rim of Canyon Largo, sixty miles from the post. Canyon Largo, like Palo Duro Canyon, was known to harbor Native Americans who refused to cooperate with the federal government's plans to funnel them onto specific lands not of their choosing. Navajos running away from the Bosque Redondo, as well as Kiowas or Comanches, used this location to hide or position themselves for raids against local villages or isolated travelers. On 16 November 1863, Bergmann again patrolled north between Bascom and Fort Union, looking for raiders. At the same time, remaining forces continued to work on the post or do duty as pickets along the Fort Smith road. About ten days after Bergmann's November scout, Lt. Juan Marques led another with fifteen days rations, in search of "a party of Indians" who had run off with the post's livestock. In January, with Captain Bergmann once again in the saddle, Company I took twenty-five days rations and began a circuitous route across "Mesa Rica, Canyon Largo, and Carazon Mountain." Cerro de Carazon, a part of the Canadian Escarpment, overlooks the Canadian River Valley, rising 2,000 feet above

the river. It is topped by the Las Vegas Plateau, the route leading to the town of Las Vegas, and beyond that, Fort Union. Over the next several years, the soldiers of Fort Bascom would become very familiar with the gutted topography of the Eroded Plains. Companies of volunteers and regulars followed Comanchero trails up the side of Carazon Mountain and across grassland prairies in search of escaping Navajo and Cheyenne raiders. In the opposite direction they scaled the Caprock and crisscrossed the Llano Estacado seeking out the Comanches, trying to disrupt the Comanchero trade. Small numbers of men from this post were scattered over large expanses of some of the harshest environments on the North America continent in search of a people who did not want to be found. Fort Bascom troopers were first charged with alerting headquarters of an approaching invasion and then placing themselves in the path of the invading army. Later, its soldiers took part in the military process of gaining control of the Southern Plains Indians and dismantling an economic culture that seemed as embedded in the Canadian River Valley as the “red bed” walls of the mesas that looked down on the garrison. Like most military missions that took place in occupied territory, this duty was neither easy nor glorious, and would take much longer than government officials believed necessary. When Captain Bergmann picked out the spot to lay the foundation for this new post, he initiated a new chapter in the United States’ conquest of the Southern Plains.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Plympton to Headquarters, 29 August 1863, 16 November 1863, 9 December 1863, 12 January 1864, LS, DNM, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 49: 8-10, 13.

## CHAPTER 4

### TRANSITION, ADAPTATION, REALLOCATION

The Civil War changed military dynamics within the New Mexico Territory, both demographically and strategically. When the majority of regular troops were sent east, five regiments of New Mexico volunteers were enlisted to help fill in the gaps. Volunteers from Colorado and California also played important roles in the defense of the territory. After the war, these dynamics continued to shift, as officials transferred various companies of regulars and volunteers from post to post. The contributions from Anglo soldiers in both the national conflict and the Indian wars have often overshadowed the actions of their Hispano colleagues in arms. United States Army officers who fought in conjunction with the New Mexico Volunteers at the Battles of Valverde and Glorieta Pass later reported that Nuevo-mexicanos did not fight well. The Union's commanding officer in New Mexico claimed that the Army was better off without them. Such accounts were used by eastern newspapers, and later, public and academic historians to craft histories that denigrated these men's role in the repulse of the Confederates and their overall contributions to gaining control of the Southwest. The New Mexico volunteers and their officers often disagreed with the characterizations. A thorough reading of official documents, when coupled with some contemporary accounts of the major battles, indicates that fear and panic, as well as steadfastness and bravery, were common experiences shared by all soldiers in New Mexico, regardless of ethnicity.

Debates over who fought at and who fled from the Battle of Valverde lingered long after Confederate Brigadier General Henry Hopkins Sibley led his troops back to Texas. When Hispano privates and their officers re-enlisted after the war, negative opinions from eastern troopers continued, as some believed locals' actions made relations worse with Southern Plains

Indians. This was due, regular officers argued, because New Mexicans had violent histories with communities of Navajos, Utes, and Comanches. Army officers explained that militia and volunteer units used their position within the military to exact revenge on their longtime enemies for past depredations. Fort Bascom's first commander, West Point graduate Capt. Peter W. L. Plympton, expressed the general consensus of most Regular Army officers posted in New Mexico: scorn. The second commander of the post, Capt. Edward H. Bergmann, was a volunteer from the Territory, and thus the target of this disrespect. Originally Plympton's subordinate, Bergmann was also posted to Fort Bascom at its inception, and so his story is closely linked to that of the post.<sup>1</sup>

This chapter develops the context in which such tensions developed prior to Fort Bascom's construction and the role volunteers and regulars played in its history. Many of the soldiers who occupied the frontier garrisons of New Mexico were veterans of the territory's bloody Civil War. Such was the case with Plympton and Bergmann. Both the Regular Army and volunteer companies brought raw memories of the conflict with them to the Canadian River post. As already noted, Fort Bascom was named for Capt. George N. Bascom, killed in the Valverde Valley on 21 February 1862. Thus, investigating the circumstances of his death is an important part of the post's history, and a window into understanding the relationships that existed between

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<sup>1</sup> Charles and Jacquelin Meketa, *One Blanket and Ten Days Rations: First New Mexico Volunteers in Arizona 1864 – 1866* (Globe, AZ: Southwest Parks and Monuments Association, 1980), vi; Col. Edward S. Canby to Headquarters, February 22, 1862, in *The War of Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, 70 in 128 vols. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1888-1901) [hereafter *OR*], Series 1, Vol. 9, p. 487-491. Martin Hardwick Hall's work is peppered with references to the "competency" of the New Mexico volunteers. See Martin Hardwick Hall, *Sibley's New Mexico Campaign* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2000), 50, 68, 70, 72. For a Hispano perspective from a participant, which attacks Canby's report, see *Albuquerque Evening Citizen*, 16 June 1893. For additional context on relations between the Regular Army and volunteers, see Durwood Ball, "Fort Craig, New Mexico, and the Southwest Indian Wars, 1854 – 1884," *New Mexico Historical Review* 73 (April, 1998), 153, 157; and Sherry L. Smith, *The View from Officers Row: Army Perceptions of Western Indians* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1990), 3, 126. The reference to negative "histories" comes from Thomas W. Dunlay, *Wolves for Blue Soldiers: Indian Scouts and Auxiliaries with the U.S. Army, 1860 – 90* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), 25, 26 – 28.

regular and volunteer soldiers during the war and afterward. A chronological detail of all of the regiments, companies, cavalry, and infantry who served at Fort Bascom, from inception to closure, will follow. Transition, adaptation, and reallocation are three words that describe this post from 1863 to 1874. Despite the lack of historiographic attention, those details confirm that military officials were aware of this post's significance. Although it was officially closed in the fall of 1870, the Army continued to place men and resources there until the Southern Plains Indians were defeated in 1874.<sup>2</sup>

The first two commanders of Fort Bascom were battle tested leaders from completely different backgrounds, typical of the differences found between regular and volunteer officers. Captain Plympton was a career officer, whose father had also been an Army officer. Born in Missouri in 1827, Plympton graduated from West Point in 1847 and served in both the eastern and western division of the Army prior to the war. Captain Bergmann was born in Prussia in 1832. His early life is unclear, but he appeared in the records after joining Company C of the First New Mexico Volunteer Infantry as a first lieutenant in July of 1861. Plympton died on Galveston Island on 10 August 1866 of unknown causes while still in the service of his country. Bergmann retired from military service in 1867 with much of his life still in front of him. After attempting to run a ranching operation near the post, Bergmann directed the New Mexico State Penitentiary in Santa Fe and later ran a mining operation for Lucien Maxwell in Colfax County.

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<sup>2</sup> Acting Assist Adj. Gen. Ben C. Cutler, General Orders No. 20, 11 August 1863, Letters Sent, Department of New Mexico, Record Group 98 [now 393], National Archives, in James W. Arrott Collection, Donnelly Library, New Mexico Highlands University, Las Vegas, NM [hereafter cited as LS, DNM, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection], Vol. 49, p. 1.

He also operated a hotel and other businesses in Springer, New Mexico. He died in 1913 at the age of eighty-one.<sup>3</sup>

Plympton just missed participating in one of the Union Army's most embarrassing episodes in 1861. In April of 1861 First Lieutenant Plympton, Company B of the Seventh United States Infantry, was stationed at Fort McLane under Maj. Isaac Lynde. After being promoted to captain of Company F, Plympton was reassigned to Fort Union on 26 May 1861. In July, Major Lynde took his six companies of Seventh Infantry to Fort Fillmore. Confederate Lt. Col. John R. Baylor's Second Texas Mounted Rifles and like-minded individuals from Arizona were already occupying the Mesilla Valley. Lynde's job was to prevent a Confederate advance up the Rio Grande. The same month that Lynde moved to Fort Fillmore, Plympton left Fort Union with Company F for Fort Craig, south of Socorro. Believing Baylor would scamper back to Fort Bliss if he led his forces against him, Lynde moved south to confront him, but was repulsed by the Confederates. Stunned by this turn of events, the Major lost his nerve and retreated from Mesilla. After deciding (without real evidence) that he was being trailed by an overwhelming force, Lynde also abandoned Fort Fillmore. Having already lost many soldiers in the repulse, he ordered his remaining men to march toward Fort Stanton, but they never made it. In the midst of a hard country containing few streams, the exhausted Seventh Infantry was soon overtaken by the Confederates. Baylor ordered Lynde to surrender his force or face annihilation. Lynde did just that, only to find out afterwards that his troops far outnumbered the enemy's. It was a

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<sup>3</sup> George W. Cullum, *Biographical Register of the Graduates of the Military Academy*, p. 341 from [http://www.penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/.../Cullums\\_Register/home.html](http://www.penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/.../Cullums_Register/home.html), (accessed August 1, 2012); 1880 Census, Springer, Colfax County, New Mexico, Precinct 12, Enumerated District 7, 3 June 1880, from <http://www.rootswebancestry.com/~iadesmoi/Documents/Declaration/B/b.html> (accessed August 31, 2012); *Santa Fe Daily New Mexican*, 4 December 1895, p. 4; Jerry D. Thompson, ed., *New Mexico Territory during the Civil War* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2008), 247. The First New Mexico Infantry later merged into the First New Mexico Cavalry.

disgraceful showing by the Union Army and a great victory for Baylor. Each of the Seventh's captured companies was eventually forced to swear they would never defend the Union in New Mexico Territory again. Already at Fort Craig, Company F escaped this humiliation.<sup>4</sup>

Like elsewhere in the United States, New Mexico Territory became a chaotic place in the first months of the conflict. As volunteers continued to muster in at Santa Fe and Fort Union, General Canby moved soldiers from post to post in an effort to maximize his defensive profile. While Baylor was making short work of Major Lynde's forces, units of New Mexico volunteers continued to organize and were dispersed to various forts throughout the territory. On 3 July 1861, about the same time Plympton was leaving Lynde's command for Fort Union, Bergmann was mustering into the First New Mexico Volunteer Infantry at Santa Fe as a first lieutenant for Company C. On 14 September, First Lieutenant Bergmann and his new company were also ordered to Fort Union. There, Bergmann was detailed to the quartermaster department. By then Plympton had left this post and was on his way with Company F to Fort Craig. On 15 February, 1862, just a few days before the Battle of Valverde, Captain Santiago Valdez of Company H in the First New Mexico Volunteer Infantry resigned, and Bergmann replaced him. The new captain remained in charge of this company until May of 1862, leading it against the Confederates in the Valverde Valley.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Cullum, *Biographical Register of the Graduates of the Military Academy*, p. 341; Returns From Regular Army Infantry Regiments, 1821 – 1916, Fort McLane March 1861, Fort McLane May 1861, Fort McLane, July 1861, from <http://search.ancestry.com/search/db.aspx?dbid=2229> (accessed June 21, 2012); Donald S. Frazier, *Blood and Treasure: Confederate Empire in the Southwest* (College Station: Texas A&M Press, 1995), 60.

<sup>5</sup> Thompson, *New Mexico Territory During the Civil War*, 247; Cullum, *Biographical Register of the Graduates of the Military Academy*, p. 341 (accessed June 21, 2012); Returns From Regular Army Infantry Regiments, 1821 – 1916, Fort Craig, November, December 1861, and Fort Craig, January 1862; Compiled Service Records of Veteran Union Soldiers Who Served in the Organization for the Territory of New Mexico, <http://www.fold3.com> (accessed Aug 15, 2012).

In the lead-up to this important battle, Brigadier General Sibley was unable to take advantage of Baylor's victory over Major Lynde's Seventh Infantry. Sibley had waited too long to get his so-called Army of New Mexico moving north. By this time, February of 1862, deep winter had settled on the region. When Sibley moved up the Rio Grande, both Plympton's Company F and Bergmann's Company H were within Fort Craig's walls, preparing for the Southwest's first major battle of the Civil War. On February 21, Sibley's men lingered on a mesa that overlooked this fort, daring the Union army to come out and fight. The Confederates were low on supplies, confident in their abilities, and almost desperate for the foodstuffs and other goods they knew were stocked behind its adobe walls. Union General Canby, protected from the elements, preferred to sit tight and force Sibley's hand. After feigning an attack, Confederate leaders realized the Union general was not going to bite and shifted their focus toward Santa Fe. There was no large Union force between Fort Craig and the capital. The Confederates anticipated that once they started for Santa Fe, Canby would have no choice but to respond.<sup>6</sup>

Shortly after Sibley's forces started toward the capital, Canby ordered two battalions under Capt. Henry R. Selden to sally from Fort Craig and get ahead of Sibley's Army of New Mexico. Captains Plympton and Benjamin Wingate of the Fifth United States Infantry led these battalions toward the Valverde Valley. They were soon followed by all seven of Col. Kit Carson's volunteer companies, including Bergmann's. The battle soon commenced, with neither side gaining an advantage. When General Canby arrived on the scene about 3 p.m., he ordered Capt. Alexander McRae and his artillerymen to cross the Rio Grande and take a position on the Union left. Canby hoped that direct fire from McRae's battery would send the Confederates back to Mesilla. Plympton, commanding several Regular Army units, also crossed the stream. Shortly

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<sup>6</sup> Hall, *Sibley's New Mexico Campaign*, 64, 66.

thereafter, Carson's troops followed. These volunteers were placed in the center of the Union line that formed up on the east side of the Rio Grande. The Confederates, spotting the batteries, launched a fierce charge in their direction. The New Mexicans sent a withering fire into this first charge, forcing the Texans back. Union artillery began to blast large holes in the Army of New Mexico's center. Suddenly Confederate Col. Tom Green's regiment appeared from behind a series of large sand hills and came crashing down on the Union left flank. A wild melee ensued, with both sides battling for control of the guns. During fierce hand-to-hand combat, McCrae was killed and the howitzers were taken. This precipitated a fierce Union counter-attack. While some federal troops on the west side of the river moved toward the fighting, others, volunteers and regulars alike, ran in the opposite direction. Efforts to regain the guns were unsuccessful. The captured howitzers were trained on the Union counter-attack, forcing the remaining volunteers and regulars to retreat. A hail of bullets followed them across the river, resulting in additional casualties. Canby found his position untenable and ordered his men back to Fort Craig. Although Sibley had not destroyed the Union army, his force would not be challenged again on their march to Santa Fe.<sup>7</sup>

In his report to headquarters, Plympton wrote that when Colonel Green attacked, the New Mexico volunteers ran. He contended that if they had stood their ground, McCrae would still be alive and the Union would have prevailed, stopping Sibley's advance. Union commander Canby's report echoed Plympton's. These documents noted that soldiers from the Seventh Infantry also fled during the engagement, yet both excused the regulars by explaining that when

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<sup>7</sup> Hall, *Sibley's New Mexico Campaign*, 60; John McLellan Taylor, *Bloody Valverde: A Civil War Battle on the Rio Grande* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995), 80-83; Col. Edward S. Canby to Headquarters, "Engagement At Valverde, N. Mexico," February 22, 1862, *OR*, Ser. 1, Vol. 9, pp. 487-491; Capt. Peter W. L. Plympton to Capt. Henry R. Selden, February 24, 1862, in John P. Wilson, *When the Texans Came: Missing Records From the Civil War in the Southwest 1861 -62* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2001), 242-43.

the volunteers broke for the rear, they started a general stampede. Contrary to the implications in these reports, Colonel Carson's New Mexico volunteers, including Company H under Captain Bergmann's command, had destroyed the first Confederate charge, yet neither Plympton nor Canby noted their actions. Despite these reports, Bergmann later received a promotion, in part because of his leadership during this battle. Still, Canby had almost nothing good to say to his superiors concerning the New Mexico volunteers. In fact he explained to Washington that they were worthless; like Plympton, he blamed the Hispano soldiers for his defeat.<sup>8</sup>

Certainly this damning criticism derived, at least in part, from the disgrace and anger officers were grappling with just a couple of days after the battle. Prejudice toward the Hispanic population, as well as a desire to protect their own careers, also played a role in how they crafted these reports. Regardless of their true motivations, the Regular Army would not soon forget the Battle of Valverde. Three federal outposts were named for commissioned officers who were killed in this engagement. When Green attacked McRae's battery, Captain Benjamin Wingate, Fifth United States Infantry, led his men across the river to join the counter-attack. During the attempt, he was hit in the leg by a mini-ball. Wingate's thighbone was shattered, and the captain soon died of his wound. (Fort Wingate was established on 22 October 1862.) As earlier noted, after the Texans surprised his battery, McRae was killed defending his guns. Fort McRae opened on 3 April 1863. In his report, Plympton emphasized that along with various companies of the Seventh Infantry, Capt. George N. Bascom, commanding Company C of the Seventh, remained on the field when Green's men smashed into the Union left flank. Plympton recalled that like the rest of the Seventh, Bascom continued to fight until the Union's own guns were turned on them.

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<sup>8</sup> Col. Edward S. Canby to Headquarters, February 22, 1862, *OR*, Series 1, vol. 9, p. 487-491; Plympton to Selden, February 24, 1862, Fort Craig "Union and Confederate Correspondence," in Wilson, *When the Texans Came*, 243.

Captain Bascom was shot during the general retreat, Plympton recounted, as he waded back across the Rio Grande. So it was that on 15 August 1863, Captain Plympton, Company F, raised the first United States flag over Fort Bascom, named for a fellow regular in the Seventh Infantry who fell in battle.<sup>9</sup>

Just a few weeks after the Battle of Valverde, the Confederate invasion was repulsed just east of Santa Fe, at Glorieta Pass. In the middle of April, under Canby's command, as a part of the Union army that followed Sibley's men back down the Rio Grande, Bergmann's Company H participated in the Battle of Peralta, a minor engagement that ensured the Texans would not linger on the edges of the territory. The following month, Bergmann was transferred to Company I of the First New Mexico Volunteer Cavalry, where as captain, he also served as a commissary officer at the Las Lunas base camp. A year later, after being stationed at Fort Union, he was ordered to perform scout duty in the Canadian River Valley. It was also during this period that the new commander of the Department of New Mexico, Brig. Gen. James H. Carleton, ordered Bergmann to find the best location along this river for a new federal outpost.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Plympton to Selden, February 24, 1862, in Wilson, *When the Texans Came*, 243; "Fort Wingate, Office of the New Mexico State Historian," from [www.newmexicohistory.org/filedetails\\_docs.php?fileID=21315](http://www.newmexicohistory.org/filedetails_docs.php?fileID=21315) (accessed September 15, 2012); "Fort Wingate", DNM, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 55: 2 ; "Fort McRae", DNM, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 56: 249; Wilson, *When the Texans Came*, 242, 243. On Plympton's report, also see Jaquelin Meketa, *Legacy of Honor: The Life of Rafael Chacón, a Nineteenth-Century New Mexican* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1986), 177, 178. While it is true the some Hispanos dropped their guns and ran during the battle, so did many of their Anglo counterparts. Much has been written about Union officers criticizing Nuevo-mexicano actions in this campaign. Although there is an occasional aside that relates to isolated incidents where New Mexican Volunteers stood fast and fought bravely, the most publicized histories characterize the majority of these volunteers as undependable. Yet if Hispanos were so undependable, why were so many killed or wounded during these campaigns? Although Company B of the 5<sup>th</sup> New Mexico Volunteers suffered a 53 percent casualty rate defending Capt. Alexander McRae's battery at the Battle of Valverde, this fact seldom came out in the weeks that followed the battle. For more information on the battle, Wingate's injury, who ran, who stood firm, and Hispano casualty rates, see Donald S. Frazier, *Blood and Treasure: Confederate Empire in the Southwest* (College Station: Texas A&M Press, 1995), 176, 177. A Hispano veteran took issue with the Regular Army's report in the *Albuquerque Evening Citizen*, 16 June 1893.

<sup>10</sup> Don Alberts, *The Battle of Glorieta: Union Victory in the West* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1998), 134-142; Compiled Service Records of Union Soldiers Who Served in Organization from the Territory of New Mexico, <http://www.fold3.com> (accessed August 15, 2012).

Captain Plympton was Fort Bascom's first commander, but he did not remain there long. While serving together at the post, Plympton and Bergmann oversaw its construction, and led scouts throughout the Eroded Plains. In December 1863 Plympton was reassigned to Santa Fe on a recruiting detail. Although Capt. Charles Rawn was put in charge of Company F, Seventh Infantry, it was the volunteer, Bergmann, who became the post commander. Company F of the Seventh Infantry remained on regular duty at Fort Bascom until May 1864. Plympton never returned. Bergmann led this post for the next two and one-half years, only turning over command during scouts, major expeditions, or during one odd case for a few months after being promoted to major. No post commander spent more time at Fort Bascom than Bergmann.<sup>11</sup>

In preparation for Company F's May 1864 departure, Company M of the First New Mexico Cavalry arrived in late April. Thus by 1 May 1864 only New Mexico volunteers were stationed at the post. This was not unusual, as after the Confederate defeat, many of the Regular Army units were ordered to the eastern theatre. While this was not the case with the Seventh Infantry's Company F, which remained in New Mexico, most frontier outposts were manned by either New Mexican or California volunteers for the rest of the war. When the New Mexico volunteer infantry was mustered out, many of its soldiers were reconfigured into new volunteer cavalry companies, assembled as the First Battalion under Colonel Carson. Captain Bergmann was brevetted to lieutenant colonel. With the California Column, New Mexico's volunteers

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<sup>11</sup> Returns From Military Posts, Fort Bascom, December 1863, May 1864, August 1866, Record Group 94, National Archives, Washington, DC (Microfilm 617A, Roll 81) [hereafter Returns, Fort Bascom, followed by month and year].

formed the main fighting force left to defend the territory against a possible second invasion and Indian depredations during the war.<sup>12</sup>

In the summer of 1864, Indian raids against army supply wagons and stage lines were particularly devastating along the Santa Fe Trail. Comanches and Kiowas regularly attacked trains as they crossed the Arkansas River, spurring Carleton to send Captain Bergmann and eighty troopers to protect the country between Fort Union and Fort Larned. While Bergmann's men covered the Upper Cimarron Springs, two forces of similar size patrolled Cimarron Springs proper and the Lower Cimarron Springs. In Bergmann's absence, which turned out to be sixty days, Capt. Charles Deus of the First New Mexico Volunteer Cavalry commanded Fort Bascom with sixty men.<sup>13</sup>

The fall of that same year proved to be even more violent. In the middle of November, Colonel Carson left Fort Bascom with 400 men on an expedition to the Texas Panhandle. General Carleton ordered Carson to chastise several communities of Kiowas and Comanches that he believed were responsible for many of the raids along the Santa Fe Trail. Bergmann remained at the post, but many Fort Bascom soldiers participated in this mission, which culminated in the Battle of Adobe Walls. Chapter 6 details why the outcome of this battle was not what Carleton had hoped, despite his official report to the contrary. Just a couple of weeks later in Colorado Territory, Col. John Chivington led a much larger group of volunteers in a savage attack on a Cheyenne village on Sand Creek near Fort Lyon, killing over 500 men, women and children.

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<sup>12</sup> Charles and Jacqueline Meketa, *One Blanket and Ten Days Rations: First New Mexico Volunteers in Arizona 1864 – 1866* (Globe, AZ: Southwest Parks and Monuments Association, 1980), vi.

<sup>13</sup> Returns, Fort Bascom, August 1864. The two other forces were led by Captain Nicholas S. Davis and Major Joseph Updegraff; see Leo E. Oliva, *Soldiers on the Santa Fe Trail* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1967), 155; Aurora Hunt, *The Army of the Pacific: Its Operations in California, Texas, Arizona, and New Mexico* (Mechanicsville, PA.: Stackpole Books, 2004), 161.

Although these Cheyenne, led by Black Kettle, were not the perpetrators of depredations in the area, they became the target of a revenge raid that turned into a massacre. This event gave credence to Regular Army officers' argument that volunteers often exacerbated, more than helped, the relationships between the United States and Plains Indians.<sup>14</sup>

The new year began as 1864 ended, with plenty of activity at Fort Bascom. In January, two hundred soldiers operated out of this post. In February, Captain Bergmann became Major Bergmann, in command of four companies of the First New Mexico Volunteer Cavalry and one company of the United States Fifth Infantry. At this time, the Fifth was one of the few Regular Army units left in New Mexico. Troops helped with construction, did picket and scout duties, and escorted the mail along the "Palo Duro route" to Fort Larned, which began at Fort Sumner and ran through Bascom and Union before leading into Kansas. By April, only Fort Union and Sumner housed more troops in the territory. When the post heard about President Lincoln's assassination, work was suspended for the day, and flags were flown at half-mast. Also, as the major reported, in honor of "that Great and Good man," all soldiers wore black arm-bands for thirty days. Not long after, the Fifth Infantry's Company E left for Fort Sumner. It was quickly replaced by Company D of the First New Mexico Volunteer Cavalry, which arrived from Fort Union.<sup>15</sup>

As the war in the East officially came to a close, frontier troopers began to focus completely on the Plains Indians. On 1 August, officials reported that four Hispano ranchers

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<sup>14</sup> William Leckie, *The Military Conquest of the Southern Plains* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1963), 21-26; Carson to Carleton, January 31, 1865, *OR*, Ser. I, vol. 48, p. 699; Returns, Fort Bascom, November and December, 1865.

<sup>15</sup> The First New Mexico Volunteer Cavalry companies were I, G, E, D, and M. Company E of the Fifth United States Infantry was also there. See Fort Bascom, January-February-March 1865 Returns; Palo Duro quote from Carleton to Brig. Gen. James H. Ford, April 26, 1865, *OR*, Ser. 1, Vol. 48, pt.2, p. 218; see also Headquarters, Fort Bascom, May 5, 1865, LS, DNM, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 49: 19.

were killed by Apaches about twenty miles north of Fort Bascom. As to the nature of the army's strategy concerning gaining control the region's violence, Maj. Gen. Henry W. Halleck, Army chief of staff, ordered Carleton to "operate without regard to the department line." In other words, the department commander was to prosecute the war against the Comanches and Kiowas as he saw fit.<sup>16</sup>

August 1865 began with a series of transfers and command changes that would continue through the rest of the year. Company M of the First New Mexico Volunteer Cavalry left for Fort Sumner on 26 August. Companies D and G of this same regiment were transferred to Fort Stanton on 29 September, just as Company M returned from Fort Sumner. The most significant event occurred on 22 August, when Major Bergmann was relieved of command and replaced by Lt. Col. Oscar M. Brown of the First California Volunteer Cavalry. Bergmann remained "attached" to the garrison as Acting Assistant Quartermaster. Lieutenant Colonel Brown arrived at the post with two fellow officers from the California Column, taking charge of Companies D and G of the First New Mexico Volunteer Cavalry until those troopers left in late September. Additionally, Company D of the First New Mexico Volunteer Cavalry only remained until 7 October. These companies were replaced by Companies E and L of the First New Mexico Volunteer Infantry. While such shifting might seem disruptive and not conducive to good order, such comings and goings were normal within the Department of New Mexico in the last half of

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<sup>16</sup> On the Conchas deaths, see *Report of the Joint Special Committee Appointed under Joint Resolution of March 3 1865 [An Appendix]*, 39<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, Report No. 156 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1867), 262; Halleck quote from Glen Sample Ely, "What to do about Texas," *New Mexico Historical Review* 85 (Fall 2010), 378.

1865. Lieutenant Colonel Brown's tenure at Fort Bascom accentuates this theme, as he was relieved on 23 November and Major Bergmann once again took command.<sup>17</sup>

Regarding the garrison of the post, the first eight months of 1866 would resemble prior years at Fort Bascom, with volunteers carrying out most of the duties there. Attached to the post on 10 February was Maj. Albert H. Pfeiffer, a frontiersman of Dutch ancestry who moved to New Mexico in the 1850s. On 20 June 1863 while traveling to the newly opened Fort Wingate, Major Pfeiffer's small party was attacked by group of Navajo. Pfeiffer was bathing in a stream when he heard the first shots. By the time he could get to the camp, his wife and another woman had been removed by the party. He found her a few hours later with wounds so severe that she soon died. Thus, for this officer, gaining control of the Southern Plains was more than an abstract policy. The post was reduced to one company of infantry and one of cavalry by April, but Company K of the First New Mexico Volunteer Cavalry arrived in May, forming the garrison that would occupy the post through the end of July. By then a sea change in frontier military operations was in process, one that would impact the majority of volunteers who had been serving in some capacity since the beginning of the Civil War, including those at Fort Bascom.<sup>18</sup>

One of General William Tecumseh Sherman's first priorities as commander of western forces was to re-establish the Regular Army's presence in the territories. Despite Sherman's orders to start this process, General Carleton resisted as long as possible. Carleton believed the wholesale removal of experienced volunteer units was a mistake. Sherman listened to his Regular Army field commanders, who argued that volunteers exacerbated their problems with

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<sup>17</sup> Returns, Fort Bascom, August, September, October, November, 1865.

<sup>18</sup> Returns, Fort Bascom, April, May, June, July, 1866. For details on Mrs. Pfeiffer's death, see "Indian Scouts and Their Results for the Year 1863-Headquarters Department of New Mexico, Santa Fe, New Mexico, February 24, 1864," in Frank Moore and Edward Everett, eds., *From the Rebellion Record: A Diary of American Events* (New York: G. P. Putnam, 1864), p. 746.

Native Americans, often inciting violent reprisals against Anglos for perceived injustices. Regular officers argued that such animosities created a need for manpower the military did not possess. So by the middle of 1866, Carleton could no longer delay the inevitable, and everyone in the Department of New Mexico began to prepare for the upcoming changes.<sup>19</sup>

Major Bergmann left Fort Bascom in an official capacity for the last time on 22 August 1866, returning to Fort Union with 141 New Mexico volunteers. Maj. Nicolas Quintana of the First New Mexico Volunteer Infantry took command of the post until Lt. Col. Silas M. Hunter and three companies of the Fifty-Seventh United States Colored Infantry arrived. Over one-thousand volunteers mustered out during this period, drastically reducing overall troop strength throughout the Southwest. The volunteers who did remain were consolidated into the First Battalion under Lt. Col. Kit Carson on 31 August 1866. Bergmann survived this re-organization, and he would do duty against the Navajos near Tierra Amarilla in the fall. Yet by the spring of the following year, Bergmann, one of Carson's leading volunteer officers during the Civil War and afterward, was ready to retire from the service and begin the next phase of his life, which he did on 8 April 1867.<sup>20</sup>

Lieutenant General Ulysses S. Grant hoped the arrival of Regular Army troops in New Mexico would help eliminate the cycle of violence that seemed to erupt in the Southwest every spring and summer. He inserted Black soldiers into the territory as a part of this plan, knowing men from the Fifty-Seventh Infantry had no grudge against the Kiowas, Navajos, and

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<sup>19</sup> Thomas Dunlay, *Wolves for Blue Soldiers: Indian Scouts and Auxiliaries with the U. S. Army, 1860-1890* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1982), 43.

<sup>20</sup> Company E, First New Mexico Volunteer Infantry, and Companies I and K, First New Mexico Volunteer Cavalry, left with Bergmann for Fort Union. Companies L, E, and G of the Fifty-Seventh Colored Infantry arrived with Hunter. See Returns, Fort Bascom, August and September, 1866. By November, Bergmann was at Tierra Amarilla, where he established a base similar to Camp Easton to help eliminate the raiding of nearby settlements by the Navajo. See Leckie, *Conquest of the Southern Plains*, 27.

Comanches whom Fort Bascom soldiers were likely to encounter. Yet the African Americans who made up this regiment could not have cared less about this strategy. Companies of the Fifty-Seventh, originally a part of the First Arkansas Infantry (USA) during the Civil War, did not want to go to New Mexico. Some resisted. Many of their fellow soldiers were mustering out and returning to civilian life. They had joined the Union to fight the Confederacy, not Comanches. This small mutiny was quickly put down by men within the company and its officers. Soon they were on their way toward their first destination, Fort Leavenworth. Afterward, three companies of this regiment were ordered to Fort Bascom.<sup>21</sup>

This new phase of military operations continued at Fort Bascom and other southwestern posts through the fall of 1866. On 1 September Capt. William Hawley of the Third United States Cavalry arrived with eighty-two troopers of his Company A from Fort Union. Under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Hunter, Company A and Companies L, E, and G, Fifty-Seventh United States Colored Infantry, performed regular scouts throughout the month. Soldiers were also placed on construction duty. Captain Hawley, from Washington, D.C., was another career officer. On 6 October he took command of Fort Bascom when Lieutenant Colonel Hunter was ordered back to Fort Union with all three companies of the Fifty-seventh. Company A of the Third Cavalry performed scouts and patrols in the Eroded Plains on their own for the rest of the month.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Returns, Fort Bascom August 1866; William A. Dobak, *Freedom by the Sword: The U.S. Colored Troops, 1862-1867* (Washington: U.S. Army Center For Military History, 2011) 493. Sherry L. Smith, *The View From Officer's Row: Army Perceptions of Western Indians*, (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1990), 126. A company of the Fifty-Seventh rode with Major Andrew J. Alexander, his wife Eveline, and an attachment of the Third Cavalry when they first visited Fort Bascom on their way to Fort Union in August of 1866. On both the Fifty-seventh's revolt and the journey west, see Eveline M. Alexander, *Cavalry Wife: The Diary of Eveline M. Alexander, 1866 – 1867*, ed. Sandra L. Myers (College Station: Texas A&M Press, 1977), 138, 71.

<sup>22</sup> Returns, Fort Bascom, September 1866, and October 1866.

In November Hawley's company was joined by Company K of the 125<sup>th</sup> United States Colored Infantry. Led by Lt. George W. Letterman, this group was raised in Kentucky with the rest of its regiment in the spring of 1865. Of the eighteen Black regiments that were formed during the war, by the end of 1866 only two remained, the Fifty-Seventh and the One Hundred and Twenty-fifth. Both served at Fort Bascom. All of the black regiments and their individual companies were led by white officers. Lieutenant Letterman was from Pennsylvania, where he received his college degree before joining the Union Army to fight against the Confederacy. Letterman and Company K became a fixture at this post, taking part in regular patrols up and down the Canadian River for over a year.<sup>23</sup>

On 30 December, Maj. Andrew J. Alexander, Ninth Cavalry, accompanied by his wife and Company G of the Third Cavalry, arrived at the post after a four day ride from Fort Union. Major Alexander was one of the most prominent officers to serve at Fort Bascom. Under Maj. Gen. George Stoneman, he participated in cavalry operations during the Peninsular Campaign and also served on George B. McClellan's staff. Under the command of General Sherman, a close friend, Alexander also fought in Tennessee, Georgia, and Alabama. Alexander was also close to Grant. After the war he was transferred to the District of New Mexico. Only thirty-three, Alexander was brevetted to colonel. His wife, Eveline, kept a diary of their travels across the Southwest. Upon arriving at Fort Bascom, she noted that it was "a post of some importance," an impression she possibly drew from her husband. They were greeted by Maj. Nicolas Quintana, First New Mexico Volunteer Infantry, temporarily in command of the post because Captain Hawley was out on a scout. With her husband, she had first met Major Quintana when she

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<sup>23</sup> Returns, Fort Bascom, November 1866; Dobak, *Freedom by the Sword*, 49. Once he mustered out of the service, Letterman taught in Missouri for twenty years and was a botanist of some notoriety. See Charles Sprague Sargent, *The Silva of North American*, Vol. 8 (New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1902), 79.

passed by the post in August, and she was impressed with Quintana's excellent command of the English language.<sup>24</sup>

Major Alexander assumed command of Fort Bascom in January 1867, a position he would hold for three months. During this period he was able to capture a band of Navajos raiding in the area. His greatest impact on the region came from a written assessment of the post he sent to headquarters. On 1 February he reported to Acting Assistant Adjutant General Cyrus de Forrest that Fort Bascom was in poor structural condition. He estimated that the money needed to bring it up to adequate standards would require at least twenty thousand dollars. He personally believed sinking such funds into improvements would not be prudent unless a new "military necessity" required such action. Oddly enough, this report contradicted the Major's first report on Fort Bascom, which he had made to de Forrest thirty days earlier. In a 1 January report, he wrote: "The Post is in very fine condition. . . ." This conforms to what his wife had to say about the post. She noted "the officers thought this a very nice looking post." A month later, Alexander's 1 February document referenced numerous roof leaks and the unfinished state of many of the buildings.<sup>25</sup>

Lieutenant General Grant read this report. In distant Washington, D.C., the men ultimately in charge of all things military were concerned about their lack of control over what was going on in New Mexico Territory. Similar reports and accusations of malfeasance

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<sup>24</sup> Alexander, *Cavalry Wife*, 15, 114, 71; James H. Wilson, *The Life and Times of Brevet Brigadier General Jonathan Alexander, United States Army* (New York, 1887), 17, 101. Company K of the One-Hundred and Twenty-Fifth United States Colored Infantry was still at Fort Bascom when Mrs. Alexander and her husband returned to the post in late December. Returns, Fort Bascom, September, October, December 1866.

<sup>25</sup> Captain Hawley left with Company A, Third Cavalry for Fort Marcy in the latter part of January, leaving only Company G of this regiment and Company K, 125<sup>th</sup> United States Colored Infantry at Fort Bascom. See Returns, Fort Bascom, January 1867. Alexander to de Forrest, 1 February 1867, LS, DNM, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 49: 92, 107; Alexander, *Cavalry Wife*, 71; Wilson, *Life and Times of Brevet Brigadier General Andrew Jonathan Alexander*, 101.

occasionally made their way across the desk of a congressmen or officer, yet here was report from someone Grant trusted. Almost immediately the General-in-Chief relieved Alexander of his command and ordered him to do similar inspections on all of the posts in New Mexico.

Alexander began this new mission in April, taking his wife and her colorful anecdotes with him. Over the next two months he inspected every post in the District of New Mexico. Alexander's route back to the Canadian River Valley would take several years, with detours to New York on a recruiting mission and other commands.<sup>26</sup>

In Alexander's absence, Lieutenant Letterman of the One-Hundred and Twenty-Fifth Infantry took charge. A month later, Captain John V. Dubois of the Third Cavalry replaced him, arriving with Company E from Fort Sumner. Letterman's company remained at the post under Dubois's command. Toward the end of June, Company G of the Third Cavalry returned to Fort Union. Company E, Third Cavalry and Company K of the 125<sup>th</sup> United States Colored Infantry also remained on duty there. In November, Company K and other members of this regiment that were posted to frontier posts were ordered back to Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, and shortly thereafter mustered out of the service. While some of these soldiers re-enlisted in the Ninth and Tenth Cavalry Regiments, most returned to civilian life in Kentucky.<sup>27</sup>

Like a military version of musical chairs, changes in both the commanders and garrisons of the District of New Mexico's posts continued. With Captain Dubois still in command, Company D, Third Cavalry replaced Company K at Fort Bascom on 17 December 1867.

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<sup>26</sup> Alexander to de Forrest, 1 February 1867, LS, DNM, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 49: 92, 107; Alexander, *Cavalry Wife*, 71; Wilson, *Life and Times of Brevet Brigadier General Andrew Jonathan Alexander*, 101. General Carleton took umbrage to Alexander's reports, believing they led to his removal as commanding general of the Department of New Mexico. See *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant*, Vol. 18, *October 30, 1867 to June 30, 1868*, ed. John Y. Simon (Carbondale & Edwardsville, Illinois: Southern Illinois Press, 1991), 74.

<sup>27</sup> Returns, Fort Bascom, April – November 1867; Dobak, *Freedom by the Sword: The U.S. Colored Troops 1862-1867*, 496.

Companies E and D of the Third Cavalry served together at Bascom through March of 1868. Dubois spent much of February in Santa Fe testifying in a general court martial. In his stead, Capt. Francis M. Wilson, Third Cavalry, ran the post. Capt. Louis Morris with Company F of the Thirty-Seventh United States Infantry arrived at Bascom on 21 March. Ten days later Dubois was relieved of command and transferred to Fort Bayard with Company E. Captain Morris took his place and would remain at Fort Bascom through the end of the year.<sup>28</sup>

While one of the goals of this chapter is to make a chronological record of the companies that operated out of Fort Bascom, events occasionally require more context to gain a better understanding of why manning this post was so volatile. In October of 1867 a United States peace commission had assembled at Medicine Lodge, Kansas, with leaders of the Southern Plains Indians to work out an equitable arrangement to end hostilities. The treaty that came out of this meeting created specific reservations for each of the Native American groups who attended. Within the agreement were stringent requirements that forced these groups to remain in designated reservations for the rest of their lives. Not every Comanche, Kiowa, Cheyenne, or Arapaho tribe was present at this meeting, so as far as they were concerned, they were not bound to such stipulations. As winter gave way to spring in 1868, many of these groups continued to live outside the boundaries of the treaty, making their home along the Canadian and Red rivers. They also continued to raid farms, ranches, merchants and civilians from Kansas to Texas. Thus after General Philip A. Sheridan took command of the Department of Missouri, he began to formulate a plan to stop the depredations and force the Indians onto their reservations. This included an operation that originated out of Fort Bascom. While this event is more thoroughly

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<sup>28</sup> Returns, Fort Bascom, December 1867 – April 1868.

covered in in Chapter 7, it is important to address the troop movements related to this post during this event.<sup>29</sup>

Major A. W. Evans of the Third United States Cavalry arrived at Fort Bascom on 5 November 1868. General Sheridan had picked Evans to lead the Canadian River portion of his assault, which also included Maj. Gen. Eugene A. Carr moving down with a battalion from Fort Lyon, Colorado, and a group led by Maj. Gen. George A. Custer that included his own Seventh United States Cavalry, which would move toward the Washita River from Fort Dodge, Kansas. The goal was for Evans's and Carr's troopers to push the wayward Indians toward Custer. When Evans arrived at Fort Bascom, its commander was not there. Captain Morris was out with fifteen men and two mountain howitzers, a part of his own small scout. Evans was told that Morris had been gone for over three weeks. The same day Evans arrived, a familiar group of faces also returned to Fort Bascom, Company A of the Third Cavalry, under Captain Hawley's command. Captain Morris arrived on 9 November with worn-out horses and tired men to find that Evans had taken over the post. He learned headquarters had initiated a much larger expedition. Suddenly the Canadian River Valley was alive with troops, supply wagons, and friendly Native Americans. On 11 November, Company L of the Third Cavalry arrived. Over one hundred Utes were also there, having been encouraged to take part in this mission. In the meantime, Company G of the Third Cavalry rode in on 13 November, further expanding the post's population. After being supplied with rations, weapons, and warm clothing, the Utes began to drift away, either unwilling to sit still and wait while the expedition was completely organized, or already satisfied with what they had acquired upon their arrival. To no avail, Evans and Morris implored them to

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<sup>29</sup> Paul Hutton, *Phil Sheridan and His Army* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1985), 42, 52, 53; C. J. Kappler, ed., *Indian Affairs, Laws and Treaties* Vol. II (Washington, D.C., 1903), 891, 892; Carl Coke Rister, ed., "Colonel A. W. Evans Christmas Day Indian Fight (1868)," *Chronicle of Oklahoma* 3 (Sept., 1938), 277 – 82.

stay. The vanguard finally left the post on 18 November 1868. A total of 468 soldiers and officers soon followed. Captain Morris remained behind with fifty men to guard the post. Lt. John K. Sullivan of Fort Bascom led the balance of Company F, Thirty-Seventh United States Infantry east, his unit officially attached to Company I of the same regiment. Evans also placed Sullivan in charge of the expedition's howitzers and all ordnance.<sup>30</sup>

From 18 November until the first days of February, Fort Bascom acted as a supply depot and way station of sorts for the soldiers shuttling back and forth to the front. Captain Morris was charged with facilitating men, materiel, and information across the Canadian River in both directions. A dozen men from Company H of the Thirty-Seventh Infantry arrived on 5 December 1868 with orders to act as escorts. Soon, twenty-two empty ox-drawn wagons returned from the Texas Panhandle for more supplies. Evans had not anticipated the volume of grain that his animals would need to survive a Llano Estacado winter, or just how long the mission would take. After restocking on 10 December, Company H escorted this caravan out of the post and back through the Canadian River Valley toward Texas. Additional soldiers from Fort Union arrived at Bascom to escort similar supply trains in January. Men from Company K, Thirty-Seventh Infantry filed in on 2 January, and two days later soldiers from Company L, Thirty-Seventh Infantry also arrived. All were soon escorting supply trains east. On 5 January 1869, nineteen troopers from Company A, Third Cavalry, passed through with several horses on their way to join Captain Hawley.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Returns, Fort Bascom, October and November 1868; Rister, "Colonel A. W. Evans Christmas Day Indian Fight (1968)," 281, 282.

<sup>31</sup> Returns, Fort Bascom, December 1868, January 1869; Rister, "Colonel A. W. Evans Christmas Day Indian Fight (1968)," 290.

Custer's massacre of the Cheyenne encamped along the Washita River overshadowed other wings of this operation, but the Canadian River component did strike a large village of Southern Plains Indians in the latter part of December 1868. Yet this chapter only focuses on the role Fort Bascom played in this battle. It is important to record the actual flow of men through this post to get a sense of its place within the history of southwestern frontier outposts. By the middle of January, Colonel Evan's operation was coming to a close. His horses were worn out, his men exhausted, and the lack of input he received from Sheridan left him on his own. By the middle of February, the various companies that were a part of the Canadian River Expedition, as it came to be called, began returning to their respective posts, their mission, as far as Evans was concerned, completed.<sup>32</sup>

Captain Morris remained post commander for the next nine months. Company D, Thirty-Seventh Infantry, was transferred to Fort Union on 15 February, the same day that Company L, Thirty-Seventh Infantry returned from the expedition. Thus from the middle of February until the middle of October, Company F and L, Thirty-Seventh Infantry, operated out of Fort Bascom, performing fatigue and scouting duties on a regular basis.<sup>33</sup>

As was often the case at this post during the fall, organization changes began to occur in September. Company D, Thirty-Seventh Infantry once again arrived on 17 September 1869, but it only remained a month. Those troops left two days before Company D of the Fifteenth United States Infantry arrived from Fort Selden. That September, Captain Morris and Company F, Thirty-Seventh Infantry were transferred to Fort Union. Arriving to take Morris's place was Maj. Horace Jewett of the Fifteenth United States Infantry. Born in Maine, Jewett was a veteran of the

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<sup>32</sup> Returns, Fort Bascom, February 1869.

<sup>33</sup> Returns, Fort Bascom, February – October 1869.

Battle of Shiloh and had served with the Fifteenth Infantry in the Atlanta campaign. After the war he was transferred with this same unit to New Mexico. Company L, Third Cavalry remained at the post with Company D, Fifteenth Infantry through January 1870.<sup>34</sup>

With Jewett in command, Fort Bascom continued to function as a full-time military post until November of 1870. Its last year was much like the rest, with constant re-allocations of manpower and continual scouts through the Eroded Plains and onto the Llano Estacado. Company L, Third Cavalry was transferred to Fort Union on 26 February. It was replaced by Company C of the same regiment for a few days, but then that company was sent back to Fort Union for re-assignment as well. This left Fort Bascom basically unoccupied, as only six Fifteenth Infantry privates were recorded as being at the post as a small guard in March. The situation remained bleak in April, when one more enlisted man was added. This number doubled in May but the major event for that month occurred on the twenty-first, when fifty-one troopers from Company D, Eighth United States Cavalry arrived. The Eighth Cavalry would play a significant role during the last years of Fort Bascom's history, for although it was "officially" closed in November, each summer for the next four years the United States Army continued to send Eighth Cavalry troopers into the region. Sometimes they were stationed at Fort Bascom, sometimes they camped a few miles to the east. This would continue until the Comanches and their Kiowa allies were finally defeated. In June 1870, Lt. Cyrus M. Delaney arrived with twenty Fifteenth Infantry recruits from New York. This brought Bascom's present "for duty" tally to seventy-six, a far cry from the six that had inhabited the post in March.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Returns, Fort Bascom, September – December 1869; Returns, Fort Bascom, January 1870.

<sup>35</sup> Returns, Fort Bascom, February – May 1870.

Fort Bascom enjoyed a growth spurt for several months, as officials ordered more patrols down the Canadian River to break up the trade between the Comanches and the Comancheros. This activity provided an important lifeline to Southern Plains Indians, who refused to give up their way of life. On 16 July 1870, Company F, Eighth Cavalry, arrived and was soon on a scout after “hostile Indians” known to be in the region. Ten more green recruits arrived to join Company D, Fifteenth Infantry, on 5 August. Several scouts, one totaling 409 miles, occurred during the month, and on its last day, Company D of the Third Cavalry was transferred back to Fort Union to await new orders. This left Company D of the Eighth Cavalry and Company F of the Fifteenth Infantry at the post. Both received more new recruits in September.<sup>36</sup>

Special Order 105 officially sanctioned Fort Bascom’s closure on 20 October 1870. Company D of the Eighth Cavalry left on 26 October for Fort Union. In November, only Major Hewett and Company F of the Fifteenth Infantry remained to move supplies to Fort Union. While it is true that the post was “officially” closed by the end of the month, the history of Fort Bascom was far from over. Its position along the cusp of Comanchería demanded that it be utilized during the next four years as a forward base of operations.<sup>37</sup>

Two months after its closure, in anticipation of future operations, Fort Bascom was being resupplied with enough forage for “135 horses and 54 mules.” The same day guide Frank Delisle and Companies D and F of the Eighth Cavalry were ordered south from Fort Union to “break up the Comanche trade.” On 1 May 1871, Col. J. Irwin Gregg, Eighth Cavalry, assumed command

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<sup>36</sup> Returns, Fort Bascom, June – September 1870.

<sup>37</sup> Assist. Adj. Gen. William A. Kobbe, Special Orders No. 105, 20 October 1870, DNM, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 24: 191; Returns, Fort Bascom, October – November 1870. Both Company D and F of the Eighth Cavalry were noted to be “in the field near Fort Bascom since April 3, 1871.” See Colonel J. Irwin Gregg to Headquarters, Department of Missouri, September 20, 1871, LS, DNM, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 26: 149-56.

of the District of New Mexico. Gregg placed Maj. D. R. Clendenin in charge of four officers and 135 troopers, the Companies F and D, and L, at Fort Bascom. Company L, Eighth Cavalry, had arrived on 12 June 1871 under the command of Capt. James F. Randlett. These companies bivouacked at the post but also camped along the Canadian River. Clendenin noted in a report that some of his men were camped in the old commissary building that had been shingled. These troopers would continuously scout through November, their mission being to seek out and eliminate the Comanchero trade.<sup>38</sup>

Five months later, the United States Army was still trying to put an end to the barter between Comanches and Comancheros. Once again it allocated substantial resources to the Canadian River Valley. This time Colonel Gregg left his headquarters and camped with his men in the field. His tent, or tents, as Private Eddie Mathews sarcastically counted them, and the rest of the camp was established about five miles east of “old Fort Bascom,” in a “bottom land” about one hundred yards from the river. Gregg situated himself among his own old troop, Company M, Private Mathews’ Company L, and Company B. The Eighth Cavalry’s “summer camp” came to an end in late July when, after several days of rain, the Canadian flowed out of its banks and destroyed many of their tents and supplies. This forced the troops back to Fort Bascom. Mathews reported that one man from Company M drowned when trying to cross the river on his horse. Despite this tragedy and the forced change in plans, more troops continued to arrive. By early August, approximately 300 cavalrymen were there, preparing for a major expedition to the east. Five companies soon moved through the Eroded Plains toward the Texas Panhandle, intent on

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<sup>38</sup> Chief QM to Lt. John Lafferty, Eighth Cavalry, February 25, 1971, DNM, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 25: 124, 125; Act. Assist. Adj. Gen. to Colonel J. Irwin Gregg, September 20, 1871, LS, DNM, NA, in Arrott Collection, 26: 149, 156. The report on the commissary building comes from Maj. D. R. Clendenin to Act. Assist. Adj. Gen., September 17 and November 8, 1871, DNM, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 26: 147, 188.

gaining control of the loose bands of Native Americans that still defied the sovereignty of the United States government. Yet despite remaining out until mid-September, the expedition did not accomplish this task. Shortly after returning to the post, the troops packed up their belongings and headed back to Fort Union. Further attempts to complete their mission would have to wait until the following spring.<sup>39</sup>

Three companies of the Eighth Cavalry were ordered back to Fort Bascom in April 1873. Aside from their main goal this season, which involved breaking up the illicit barter, there was an additional reason to patrol the area. Eighty Cheyennes had recently bolted from an Oklahoma reservation and were reported to be headed west down the Canadian. Private Mathews' Company L was back on the Canadian River, and would remain there until deep into winter. Some of this time was spent stationed at Fort Bascom, yet more often than not these cavalymen were placed "in summer camp," somewhere along the river. The documents do not indicate what happened to the Cheyenne, or what progress, if any, the troops made that summer trying to eliminate transactions between Nuevo-mexicanos and Southern Plains Indians. Once again Colonel Gregg camped with his men, which included companies M and K. Yet despite countless patrols, the Comanches and Kiowas continued to foil any attempts by the military to terminate the Comanchero trade or better yet, find the Comanches' main camps.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Gregg to Assist. Adj. Gen. R. William, April 13, 1872, DNM, LR, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 27: 91; Eddie Mathews, "Letters From Home and Journal of His Military Years," transcribed by Ora Mathews Bublitz, transcribed by Ora Mathews Bublitz, typescript, n.d., Fort Union National Monument Archives, Fort Union National Monument, Watrous, New Mexico. The Mathews letters used for this study include "Camp Near Fort Bascom," June 25, 1872; "Camp at Fort Bascom, N.M.," August 3, 1872; "Camp at Fort Bascom, N.M.," August 6, 1872; and "Camp at Fort Bascom, N.M.," September 1872."

<sup>40</sup> Lt. Edward Luff to Gregg, April 18, 1873, DNM, LR, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 28: 45; Mathews, "Fort Bascom, N.M.," April 2, 1873, "Fort Bascom, N.M.," July 3, 1873, "Fort Bascom, N.M.," August 20, 1873, "Fort Union," December 16, 1873.

In 1874, the military used Fort Bascom as a forward base of operations one more time. With the spring thaw, Arapaho, Cheyenne, Comanche, and Kiowa bands were once again raiding settlements in Kansas, New Mexico, Texas, and Oklahoma. Sheridan, as commander of the Military Division of Missouri, of which the District of New Mexico was a part, directed his field commanders to place troops as close as was practical to these Indians' stronghold. Kwahadi Comanche Quanah Parker led approximately 2,000 Southern Plains Indians within the Llano Estacado, an area cartographers had long noted as a part of Comanchería. No fort was closer to Parker's base of operations than Bascom. Capt. Andrew J. Alexander returned to this post in June with Companies M, L, and B of the Eighth Cavalry. Alexander had last commanded this post in early 1867. Capt. Louis Morris, post commander in parts of 1868 and 1869, also returned in June, this time to lead Company L, Eighth Cavalry. While these troops did fatigue duty and regular scouts, Sheridan drew up another plan to extend control over the Indians. On 14 July, Maj. Gen. John Pope recalled Companies M and B to Fort Union, but ordered L to remain in the field, knowing they would soon be joined by other troopers. Morris had been present when Major A. W. Evans led the last great military expedition out of Bascom in 1868, but having just returned from a thirty-day scout, he was left behind to care for the post. Part of Sheridan's plan called for a similar advance down the Canadian River into Texas. Companies C, E, and K from Fort Wingate and H from Fort McRae also assembled at Fort Bascom. Thus when Maj. William Price led these 225 troopers east, Morris was a part of the five-pronged attack that finally hemmed in Parker and his followers and led to their defeat. Further details on this battle and the role Fort Bascom soldiers played in gaining control of the Southern Plains will be discussed in

the following chapters. The four companies that followed Price down the Canadian were the last to serve from Fort Bascom as a component of military operations in the Southwest.<sup>41</sup>

From inception to closure, some of the Southwest's best officers and soldiers performed their duties at Fort Bascom. Its early history illuminates the tensions that existed between regular and volunteer soldiers. The record illustrates the fluidity and constant organizational challenges that confronted military commanders trying to staff these frontier outposts during the 1860s and 1870s. Fort Bascom is a portal from which these challenges can be viewed. This chapter has also illustrated that Fort Bascom was a conduit through which the United States government funneled resources and manpower from 1863 until the Army finally gained control of the Southern Plains Indians.

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<sup>41</sup> Robert Utley, *Frontier Regulars: The United States Army and the Indians 1866 – 1891* (New York: MacMillan Publishing, 1973), 219 – 233; Returns, Fort Bascom, June, 1874; John Pope to Gregg, July 14, 1874, LR, Fort Leavenworth, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 29: 75; Maj. William Price to Lt. John H. Mahnken, August 10, 1874, LR, DNM, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 29: 141; Price to Lafferty, August 20, 1874, LR, DNM, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 29: 142.

## CHAPTER 5

### THIS BEAN-BELLIED ARMY

In their mission to gain control of the Southern Plains, Fort Bascom soldiers endured many challenges that had nothing to do with Comanches or Comancheros. A broad investigation into life at this post illuminates the difficulties many of the men and women who passed through the Canadian River Valley experienced in the 1860s and early 1870s. Such a study includes looking at post life from a variety of angles. Construction problems, the search for supplies, social issues, and demographics; how these troopers entertained themselves, health concerns, racism, and desertion rates all impacted the mission to subdue the Comanches and stop the Comanchero trade. Lack of fresh produce and beef, and water concerns were also challenges that had to be met, as was acquiring proper forage for horses and mules. Investigating these challenges places Fort Bascom soldiers' ultimate mission within its proper context. Such a study builds a starting point from which to assess the patrols, scouts, and expeditions that originated from this post, and it also provides a compelling perspective on the challenges of the Canadian River Valley environment.

In her reminiscence of life on the frontier, Eveline Alexander characterized Fort Bascom as a "neat little post." Maj. Andrew J. Alexander originally concurred with his wife, yet a month later, he changed his mind. In January of 1867, he reported on the poor condition of the fort's buildings. Thus, a study of post-life should begin by looking at Bascom's ongoing maintenance issues. Bad weather and poor accommodations bedeviled soldiers while stationed in the Eroded Plains of New Mexico.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Eveline M. Alexander, *Cavalry Wife: The Diary of Eveline M. Alexander, 1866 – 1867*, ed. Sandra L. Myers (College Station: Texas A&M Press, 1977), 114.

Building problems bedeviled this post from its inception and would continue throughout its history. Construction began in the fall of 1863 but was halted in January 1864 after Capt. William Shoemaker complained to Gen. James H. Carleton about its location. Shoemaker, the ordnance officer at Fort Union, argued that Bascom should be located farther north at Conchas Springs, where the Conchas and Canadian Rivers come together. This spot was a well-known crossing for Navajos, Kiowas, and Comancheros. After receiving this negative report from Shoemaker, Carleton apprised Capt. Edward H. Bergmann of its content. By then Capt. Peter W. L. Plympton, the original post commander, had been transferred to Santa Fe. It was Bergmann who originally decided where the post should be built. Whatever concerns Carleton might have had regarding Shoemaker's recommendations, on 28 February he gave Bergmann permission to proceed with construction at the original location, closer to the Llano Estacado. In the same letter, Carleton noted that he would visit Fort Bascom in March.<sup>2</sup>

Construction continued for the rest of the year. One carpenter, eleven general laborers, and thirteen teamsters were contracted to help build the post. Additionally, some of the 109 New Mexico volunteers stationed at Bascom were ordered to help. When Lt. Col. Oscar M. Brown took command a year later, construction was still not complete. Apparently, soldiers were not the best construction workers. By then, the carpenter Bergmann had hired was gone, as were the contract laborers. Brown pleaded with Headquarters to send him at least one more carpenter and

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<sup>2</sup> James H. Carleton to Edward H. Bergmann, January 12, February 28, 1864, Letters Sent, Department of New Mexico, Record Group 98 [now 393], National Archives, in James W. Arrott Collection, Donnelly Library, New Mexico Highlands University, Las Vegas [hereafter cited as LS, DNM, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection], Vol. 13, pp. 30, 129.

two masons so the officers' quarters and the hospital could be finished before the end of the year.<sup>3</sup>

Any discussion regarding everyday activities at Fort Bascom must consider these ongoing building projects. Construction issues affected the quality of life at the post. Challenges associated with the environment, the mission, and logistics were made worse by the leaking roofs, eroding walls, and almost endless repairs or improvements. Heavy rains in the spring and summer of both 1864 and 1865 hampered this work. Sections of new walls and sod-covered roofs sprang leaks. Despite such problems, by August 1865, Bergmann reported that barracks for three companies were complete. He also wrote that there were plenty of storage facilities, and made a point of noting that none of the rooms were leaking.<sup>4</sup>

Yet, maintenance issues would not go away. Perhaps the leaks stopped for a while, but were never more than temporarily repaired. In February 1867, Major Alexander described Bascom as “not fit for dogs to live in.” The following year, civilian William H. Ayres of Albuquerque shipped 250,000 adobe bricks to the post. Evidently, Alexander’s harsh characterization opened the federal purse strings a bit, for other contractors began to deliver building materials as well. Pedro Martinez sold 84,000 feet of lumber to Fort Bascom. During this same period, H. D. Gorman, who lived just north of Anton Chico, shipped 610 vigas to this post. Yet as late as 14 May 1870, work still needed to be done, or redone. Post Commander Horace Jewett wrote a letter to Headquarters itemizing its deficiencies. Before the summer was

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<sup>3</sup> Returns From Military Posts, Fort Bascom, March 1864, Record Group 94, National Archives, Washington, DC (Microfilm 617A, Roll 81) [hereafter Returns, Fort Bascom, followed by month and year]; Lt. Col. Oscar M. Brown to Chief Quartermaster H. N. Enos, August 26, 1865, LS, DNM, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 13: 129.

<sup>4</sup> Doris A. Miller, *Soldiers and Settlers: Military Supply in the Southwest, 1861 – 1885* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1989), 225.

out, contractor James Patterson had a crew on-site, replacing the flat-roofed barracks with pitched shingle roofs. These repairs were still in process when the Army decided to cease full-time operations at Fort Bascom just a few months later. For the next four years, soldiers returned to this post each spring and remained until the first winter snows. Although it remained a seasonal base of operations, money would never again be expended on its upkeep.<sup>5</sup>

Construction and maintenance issues, leaky roofs and crumbling adobes, were just one of a myriad of challenges frontier soldiers faced that had nothing to do with subduing the Southern Plains Indians. Access and the availability of water was another challenge the Army had to overcome at this post. Scarcity, as well as its chemical make-up, often came up in reports to Headquarters. At one point, efforts were made to dig a post well, yet this enterprise was not successful. Both officers and enlisted men complained about the half-mile distance between the Canadian River and the post. Daily trips in water-wagons exposed soldiers to the elements and possible surprise attacks. In 1866, privates attached to such details were ordered to deliver water casks to the nearby sutler's store. A lack of water at certain times of the year also affected laborers ability to make adobe bricks, which delayed construction. Stacks of adobes remained exposed on unfinished walls that could not be completed until it rained. Additionally, the river, several feet below ground-level, meant soldiers were unable to dig an *acequia*, or ditch, from the stream to their gardens. This topography was what led to the failed attempt to dig a well. Gardens had to be watered from large wooden casks hauled from the river. Finally, the water that was extracted from the Canadian was often saturated with organic material, or simply tasted bad due to its alkalinity. Such problems created both psychological and physical issues with the

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<sup>5</sup> For Bergmann's positive report, Alexander's quote, and the contractors' orders, see Miller, *Soldiers and Settlers: Military Supply in the Southwest*, 225; Capt. Horace Jewett to Acting Assist. Adj. Gen. Cyrus De Forrest, May 14, 1870, LS, DNM, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 49: 227, 228.

soldiers who lived on this post, for water extraction was dangerous, labor intensive, and at certain times of the year, the water produced was unhealthy to drink.<sup>6</sup>

Despite these water issues, Fort Bascom remained the center of operations for company after company of volunteers and Army Regulars during the mid 1860s and early 1870s. It was built on a square, and centered on a plaza, or parade ground. To the east of this plaza were the barracks. To the west of the plaza were the officers' quarters. To the north were the commissary and the hospital. Fort Bascom was surrounded by a perimeter adobe wall and an accompanying trench, each 1,000 feet long and 500 feet wide. Privies were constructed 75 yards behind the barracks and officers' quarters. Each Sunday morning at seven a.m. troopers stood at dress parade on the plaza for battle inspections. During the week, life within this post was a regimented affair, with the trumpeter sounding reveille at 5 a.m. Fifteen minutes later, the soldiers stood at attention on the plaza awaiting roll call. If not posted to picket details or out on patrols, they were assigned "fatigue" duty. This included cleaning out the stables, making adobes, hauling wood and water, and peeling potatoes.<sup>7</sup>

The original design for the barracks was meant to house four companies. While at one point Captain Bergmann optimistically reported that it could hold three, it never adequately housed more than two. Despite the barracks' construction issues, these buildings were able to withstand New Mexico's extreme winters. Each barrack was 100 feet wide by 20 feet long, and housed three fireplaces. Although no documents specifically describe the enlistee's bunking

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<sup>6</sup> For a general description of river topography, see General Order No. 20, 11 August 1863, LS, DNM, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 49: 1-3; Brown to Enos, 26 August, 1865, LS, DNM, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 13: 29; Capt. John V. D. Dubois to Mother, 5 April 1867, in Arrott Collection, 62: 209, 210.

<sup>7</sup> Description of Military Posts, Fort Bascom, 11 August 1863, Circular 4, Surgeon General's Office, 1870, LS, DNM, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 49: 1-4; Leo E. Oliva, *Soldiers on the Santa Fe Trail* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1967), 195, 196; Fort Bascom Post Returns, July 1867.

arrangements, it is reasonable to assume that they would resemble those found in nearby forts of the period. At Fort Craig, the barracks had single bedsteads. The men at Fort Stanton slept in single tiers of double bunks. All of these beds consisted of iron framing of a few simple pieces that could easily be broken down and put back together. Bed sacks stuffed with straw served as mattresses. Each soldier kept warm with a government issued wool blanket that measured seven feet by 5 ½ feet and weighed five pounds. These blankets were also carried on picket patrols and scouts. Some type of shelf usually ran along a wall of each barrack for each soldiers' personal items, but rifles were kept together in a rack in the middle of the room.<sup>8</sup>

With little time to themselves, soldiers cherished the few hours they had at the end of each day. Many made the most of these short respites by using their fireplaces and candles to extend the light of their surroundings. Candles were also taken on patrols. After a long day of fatigue duty or scouting through the Eroded Plains, privates and officers settled down and began to read newspapers and books, or write letters to their loved ones by candlelight. Candles were popular items because the War Department outlawed the use of kerosene lamps on military posts in 1869 due to their propensity for starting fires. Fires were a major concern at these frontier garrisons. In 1868 a fire destroyed the Fort Bascom cookhouse. When a soldier's candle ration ran out, he improvised, creating his own homemade illumination, called slush-boxes. This device was made of old sardine cans, with parts of old rags used as its wick. The final touch was to pour

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<sup>8</sup>David A. Clary, *These Relics of Barbarism: A History of Furniture in Barracks and Guardhouses of the U.S. Army, 1800 – 1800* (Harpers Ferry: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1981), 338, 275, 282; Eddie Mathews, "Letters From Home and Journal of His Military Years," transcribed by Ora Mathews Bublitz, transcribed by Ora Mathews Bublitz, typescript, n.d., Fort Union National Monument Archives, Fort Union National Monument, Watrous, New Mexico. The Mathews letters used for this chapter include "Camp Near Fort Bascom," July 1, 1872; "Camp Near Fort Bascom," July 25, 1872; "Camp at Fort Bascom," August 3, 1872; "Camp at Fort Bascom," August 26, 1872; "Fort Bascom, N.M." March 26, 1873; and "Summer Camp on the Canadian River, N.M.," September 5, 1873. In this instance, see "Camp Near Fort Bascom," July 1, 1872; Dan Rickey Jr., *Forty Miles on Beans and Hay: The Enlisted Soldiers Fighting the Indian Wars* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1963), 79.

a layer of old cooking grease on the rag wick. When on patrol, soldiers secured these improvised lamps to their tents' ridge-pole with baling wire. When candles were available on these scouts, troopers were known to insert them into their rifles' bayonet sockets, which served as candle holders. After a long day in the saddle in April of 1871, Private Eddie Mathews informed his parents that he would have to close his letter home because: "It will be taps in a few moments, and my candle is just about to be a sixteenth past an inch long." Improvisation in the field and at the post, by both officers and enlistees, became the rule at Fort Bascom, for government-issued goods never met the demands of this territorial outpost.<sup>9</sup>

Establishing any garrison on the western frontier was fraught with logistical challenges, but none was greater than supplying its men with adequate food. Railroad lines were non-existent in New Mexico during the 1860s and early 1870s, thus most supplies had to be freighted in by wagons or mules. Fort Bascom was approximately 140 miles from Fort Union, the army's main western supply depot. Yet the land between Union and Bascom was neither flat nor hospitable. Las Vegas, the only real town along the route, was ninety miles northwest of the Canadian River garrison. In winter, blizzard-like conditions could quickly roll off the Sangre de Cristo Mountains and blanket the Eroded Plains with several feet of snow. In summer, much of the route resembled a rock-strewn desert. Even so, monsoon-like rains were possible in both July and August. The Canadian was known to rise fifteen feet up its steep banks within twenty-four hours of such a deluge. These storms washed out roads and made crossing streams next to impossible and halted freighters in their tracks. The monsoon rains were also known to occasionally carry away supplies, animals, and soldiers. As a result, delivering government issues, both food and forage, was a challenge. Topography and weather were as dangerous as the

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<sup>9</sup> Clary, *These Relics of Barbarism*, 283, 339; Fort Bascom Returns, June 1868.

Native Americans who lived there. Thus the military looked to local Nuevo-mexicanos to help supply its forts.<sup>10</sup>

The Department of New Mexico sought regional contractors to offset the lack of fresh food and the high costs of delivering goods from Missouri and points east. Yet dealing with local citizens produced its own set of challenges. Sometimes contracts between officials at the post and locals were not kept, or the product delivered was of poor quality. In January of 1866, Lt. Thomas Smith of the First New Mexico Cavalry ordered the Commissary of Subsistence at Bascom to look elsewhere for fresh beef since the original contractor could not supply the fort's needs. He stated in his letter that if the post was required to break a contract, he ordered that any difference in cost be charged to the original contractor. A year later, problems procuring beef at reasonable prices remained a top priority. In 1867, Post Commander Andrew J. Alexander wrote to Headquarters about the exorbitant price of fresh beef. Alexander inserted a proposal with this correspondence from William B. Stapp and Charles S. Hopkins that offered beef for nine cents per pound, half of what they had been paying. Like any other market, scarcity and control shaped pricing in New Mexico. Maj. E. W. Eaton of Fort Wingate provides an even more illustrative example of such problems. He noted that the only cattlemen he could procure beef from were Native Americans. These Puebloans proved to be hard bargainers, only accepting silver or gold in exchange for their cattle. In discussing this issue with Chief Commissary of Subsistence A. F.

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<sup>10</sup> Records note at least two soldiers drowned in the Canadian River as a result of these monsoons. Private John Hendricks of the Third Cavalry drowned while herding cattle on 18 August 1868. See U.S. Returns From Military Posts, Fort Bascom, U.S. Army, RG 94, NA, M617A, Roll 81, August 1868 (hereafter cited as Fort Bascom Returns, [month-yr]). Private Eddie Mathews of the Eighth Cavalry noted in 1870 that "one man of 'M' Troop drowned and one horse of our Troop shared a similar fate," in Eddie Mathews, "Letters From Home and Journal of His Military Years," transcribed by Ora Mathews Bublitz, typescript, n.d., Fort Union National Monument Archives, Fort Union National Monument, Watrous, New Mexico. National Monument Archives, letter dated 3 August 1872, from "Camp at Fort Bascom." The reference to the Canadian's quick rise out of its banks comes from Description of Military Posts, Fort Bascom, 11 August 1863, Circular 4, Surgeon General's Office, 1870, LS, DNM, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 49: 1-4.

Garrison, Eaton wrote that he hoped Garrison would “devise some means of having us supplied with good beef [,] which we have not had since I have been at the Post, and I am credibly informed that there has not been any beef here really fit for issue for a long time.”<sup>11</sup>

Commissary officers were charged with providing each post with the daily necessities. Soldiers were seldom supplied with enough vegetables because they had often spoiled before reaching the post. As a result, frontier garrisons often depended on their own gardens for corn, tomatoes, and cabbage. Fort Bascom was no exception, yet issues with water made for poor crops. As stated above, since the Canadian ran below ground level, water could not be channeled via ditches to the post's gardens. Commissary officers had better luck procuring beans, potatoes, corn, and bacon than they did beef. Forage was also an issue in this arid region, thus commissary officers were responsible for procuring tons of oats and hay for each post. Trees around Bascom were quickly utilized in the construction process so the acquisition of wood for lumber, cooking, and heating purposes was another resource that was to be purchased from ranchers. Small parties of soldiers with one or two wagons spent two to three days away from the post on such details. These assignments required them to chop, stack, and haul the wood back to the fort. Such activities broke up the monotony of post life, yet like any journey away from the fort, they included a certain amount of danger. Small groups made the most inviting targets.<sup>12</sup>

While the commissary department worked to meet the needs of the frontier soldier, it seldom provided enough good food. Fort Bascom soldiers' main diet consisted of bread, bacon,

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<sup>11</sup> Second Lieutenant Thomas Smith to Commissary of Subsistence, January 11, 1866, Alexander to Acting Assist. Adj. Gen. Cyrus De Forrest, January 2, 1867, LS, DNM, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 49: 38, 93; Maj. Gen. A. B. Eaton to Capt. A. F. Garrison, Chief Commissary of Subsistence, Headquarters, February 24, 1864, LS, DNM, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 55: 94.

<sup>12</sup> Alexander to De Forrest, January 26, 1867, LS, DNM, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 49: 93; Mathews, “Camp at Fort Bascom,” August 3, 1872.

beans, and water. The bread was often too hard to eat. When not too hard, it was often laced with worms. Such staples were occasionally complimented by fresh beef and the meager pickings extracted from the post's garden. Fresh meat also came from afternoon hunts. Most troopers looked forward to the chance to bring down an antelope, bison, and occasionally a bear, to enhance the evening meal. Yet such excursions generally offered only momentary respites from typical army fare. Private Mathews expressed it best in 1874: "When I say we have had bean soup for dinner, and baked beans for supper every day for the past month and that I have eaten heartily of them at every meal, and that I like them, I only tell the truth. Still [,] when one has beans for about a thousand meals in succession [,] the thing becomes monotonous and considerable on the order of sameness. And I have no doubt but that I would fight if any person said beans to me when I leave this bean bellied army. (Excuse the expression.)"<sup>13</sup>

Soldiers at Fort Bascom sought to incorporate fresh vegetables into their diet for more than the obvious reasons. It was well-known throughout the Army that vegetables provided protection against scurvy. Elliot Coues, Fort Whipple's post surgeon, recommended issuing extra rations of "molasses, vinegar, and desiccated vegetables and potatoes as antiscorbutics." While medical personnel were not quite sure what caused scurvy, they did know that providing vegetables to the troops helped to suppress it. Thus, there was a standing order for each post to grow their own vegetables, or make efforts to procure produce from nearby villages. Since 1932 doctors have known that scurvy is caused by a lack of vitamin C, which is found in a variety of citrus and vegetables such as tomatoes, potatoes, and cabbage. Scurvy is also a side-effect of poor nutrition, something that afflicted most soldiers in New Mexico. Captain Dubois noted that

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<sup>13</sup> Miller, *California Column*, 24. Private Mathews described the bread and the worms in Mathews, August 26, 1872. The "bean bellied army" quote comes from Mathews, "Fort Bascom, N.M." July 17, 1874.

this “curse of the Army” was a serious issue at Fort Bascom in 1866. In a letter to Maj. Gen. A. B. Eaton, Commissary General for the Army, Dubois complained that his order for ten gallons of molasses had been “disallowed.” He explained to Eaton that he had made this order because twenty Fort Bascom soldiers were afflicted with scurvy. In an obvious attempt to by-pass the Department of New Mexico’s subsistence officer, who had cancelled the shipment, Dubois, probably trying to get ahead of any questions concerning whether someone at the post had a sweet tooth, noted that Henry Duane, the post’s surgeon, had directed him to order the molasses.<sup>14</sup>

The sutler’s store also provided soldiers with the opportunity to purchase additional goods if they had the cash. Stapp and Hopkins’ establishment was positioned about 300 yards to the north of the post. As Robert W. Frazer explained in *Forts and Supplies: The Role of the Army in the Economy of the Southwest*, civilians were more than happy to provide whatever necessities the military could not, or would not, to their soldiers, for a price. This included canned fruit, sardines, and crackers. These stores also sold glassware, shirts, pants, tobacco, candy, and liquor, but not necessarily in that order.<sup>15</sup>

Frontier soldiers’ dietary challenges were not limited to logistics. The cooks who fed the troops were generally pulled from the ranks and trained at the post. Amateur cooks wasted food in a variety of ways, from burning to spoiling. Few knew their way around a large wood-burning stove, or the first thing about feeding hundreds of hungry men at the same time. They knew less

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<sup>14</sup> Miller, *Soldiers and Settlers*, 42; Dubois to Eaton, July 5, 1867, LS, DNM, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 49: 119; Fort Bascom Returns, March 1866.

<sup>15</sup> Information on location of sutler’s store from Leonard Slesick’s hand-drawn map, found in Slesick’s files, located at the Panhandle-Plains Historical Museum Research Center, Canyon, Texas, 79105. Robert W. Frazer, *Forts and Supplies: The Role of the Army in the Economy of the Southwest, 1846 – 1861* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1983), 55; Rickey, *Forty Miles a Day on Beans and Hay*, 36.

about how to store food so it would not rot. Lack of knowledge in the kitchen led to a great deal of waste. The scarcity of eggs, milk, and butter also contributed to the monotonous character of a soldier's meals.<sup>16</sup>

Once food was dished from the boiling cauldrons and onto tin plates, the soldiers retired to the mess hall. Officers took their meals in the privacy of their quarters or together, away from the enlistees. Individual companies usually sat together at long wooden tables. Soldiers ate with iron knives and forks and drank from tin cups. While at the post, mealtimes were as regimented as reveille and taps. One of the few things officers and enlistees shared in the mess hall was their poor opinion of the food.<sup>17</sup>

Procuring forage for the cavalry's horses was also crucial to carrying out the western army's military mission. Just as hungry men lacking proper nutrients made for poor soldiers, ill-fed horses could not be counted on to perform as needed in the Eroded Plains or on the Llano Estacado. Hay was the nineteenth-century equivalent of today's oil. Without proper forage, military operations in the West came to a standstill. Unlike the sub-humid regions east of the Mississippi River, cavalry could not rely on New Mexico's prairie grasses to sustain their horses and mules throughout the year. This was certainly obvious by fall, when snow often covered the ground for weeks. Quartermasters were constantly negotiating with local populations for hay, oats, and other grains. Due to the unpredictable nature of the market, these officers preferred to secure prices far in advance of the post's needs. Like their experiences acquiring beef and produce, they were not always successful. Quartermasters were often caught between the Department's edict not to buy above a certain price, and local farmers' bottom line. Officers

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<sup>16</sup> Rickey, *Forty Miles a Day on Beans and Hay*, 116, 121.

<sup>17</sup> Rickey, *Forty Miles a Day on Beans and Hay*, 82

were pressured into securing contracts by early summer to ensure enough forage was available for winter. Hay-cutting season began in mid to late July. Timing was crucial, as hay cut and stacked in June or too early would dry out before it was needed, eliminating the nutrients horses required to remain healthy all winter. Hay cut too late would not cure properly, which could bring on intestinal problems. A contract between Fort Bascom and J. E. Whitman was very specific about what was required concerning the condition and type of hay to be delivered. It was to be cut by 30 July and delivered to Bascom's stables "on or before October 20, 1869." If such contracts were not executed on time and carried out as promised, winter patrols and expeditions would have to be curtailed, which hindered the military's overall operations in the region.<sup>18</sup>

The specificity found in hay contracts, and other correspondence concerning forage, reveal some of the ongoing issues subsistence officers experienced trying to meet Fort Bascom's needs. In Whitman's contract, one-hundred tons of "bottom grass" was to be purchased at eighteen dollars per ton, "free of dirt, sticks, and roots." Bottom grass was stipulated because, grown in New Mexico's river valleys, it made the most nutritious hay. This agreement also called for Whitman to produce and deliver 225 tons of feed grains at twenty-five dollars per ton. Once these goods arrived at the post, they were weighed and tabulated. It was important to insert the stipulation regarding dirt and sticks in these contracts. The absence of such materials not only indicated the quality of the forage, but also impacted the total weight being tabulated, and thus costs. A contractor might occasionally try to undermine this process by hiding fifty pounds of sand or stone under his hay.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>Miller: *Soldiers and Settlers*, 99; Second Lieutenant John K. Sullivan to Chief Quartermaster Marshal I. Ludington, July 3, 1869, LS, DNM, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 49: 210.

<sup>19</sup>Sullivan to Ludington, July 3, 1869, LS, DNM, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 49: 210; Miller, *Soldiers and Settlers*, 98.

The post-Civil War military was forced to cut costs everywhere, which made it hard for post commanders to provide enough forage to keep their troops on horseback. In the winter of 1867, a frustrated Captain Dubois informed the quartermaster in Santa Fe that his horses had gone without adequate rations of hay and grain since summer because headquarters had not allowed him to purchase hay above a certain price. Dubois explained to Lt. Edward Hunter that “no one could sell at those prices.” Thus pricing policies often played as significant a role in gaining control of the region as troop reductions or tactics. Transactions between civilians and the military were as much a competition as a partnership, which resulted in a steady undercurrent of tension between the two. This friction was not restricted to pricing or contracts.<sup>20</sup>

The sale of liquor also promoted discord on the base. In 1864, General Order Number 51 specified that the establishment operated by sutlers William B. Stapp and Charles S. Hopkins could only open between the morning hours of seven and eleven, and in the afternoon from one to four-thirty. This order also declared that no soldier could buy liquor without the written approval of Post Commander Edward H. Bergmann. Five years later, Capt. Louis Morris forbade the sale of spirits at any time. Such edicts did not occur in a vacuum. Officers were prompted to issue such measures as a result of past experiences.<sup>21</sup>

Orders denying men access to whiskey often proved problematic. The sutler’s desire to make a profit and the soldiers’ desire to quench their thirst conflicted with the post commander’s intent to maintain order. As already related, privates detailed to water-wagons were required to

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<sup>20</sup> Dubois to First Lieutenant Edward Hunter, Acting Assist. Adj. Gen., Headquarters, December 17, 1867, LS, DNM, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 49: 146.

<sup>21</sup> Robert W. Frazer, *Forts and Supplies: The Role of the Army in the Economy of the Southwest 1846-1861* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1983), 55; Lt. Col. Frank Abreau to Headquarters, Fort Bascom, General Order No. 51, November 5, 1864, Capt. Louis Morris to William B. Stapp and Charles S. Hopkins, March 7, 1869, LS, DNM, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 49: 16, 199.

replenish the sutler's casks before returning to the fort. One hot June day in 1866, while laboring at this task, some soldiers developed a thirst for something more powerful than Canadian River water. After rolling up to Stapp and Hopkins, they informed Hopkins that he would get his water after he sold them whiskey. Ignoring the rule about written permission, as Hopkins explained it later, he sold them a "small amount" of liquor. Yet this small amount was enough to inebriate these privates, who in turn created a disturbance of some kind outside the walls of the post, which eventually led to their military arrest and incarceration on the post. Speaking for the post commander, Lt. Thomas Smith gave a blistering rebuke to Hopkins for his knowingly breaking the rules. Smith did not want to hear any excuses about how the men had forced Hopkins to sell them whiskey. He made it clear that disobeying Captain Bergmann's rules was unacceptable, and future violations would jeopardize their business standing.<sup>22</sup>

As noted earlier, Captain Dubois characterized scurvy as the "curse of the Army," but alcohol was another curse that haunted the frontier army. Soldiers fell victim to alcohol-related injuries more often than they did from Comanches. Captain Morris reported that one mail carrier's fondness for drink was detrimental to good communications, noting it had become his habit to become inebriated somewhere between Crouch's Ranch and Fort Bascom. Such problems affected all military ranks. Reports noted officers' involvement in drunken brawls from Mesilla to Fort Sumner. Alcohol-related accidents were as common as bar fights. The two were often related. In a letter home, Private Mathews reported that a trooper from Company M, Eighth Cavalry, riding in rough country about twelve miles north of the post, fell from his horse and later died. The following year, he related that this same troop experienced another similar fatality. Company M, having left Fort Union on the way back to Bascom, stopped for the night at

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<sup>22</sup> Smith to Hopkins, June 8, 1866, LS, DNM, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 49: 63-65.

Taylor's Ranch, a midpoint of sorts below the Canadian Escarpment. While at this location, they "got drunk and as a natural consequence fought among themselves and in the melee that followed one of the party, a young man named McCaffery, was shot in the head and instantly killed." Disgusted, Mathews continued: "It is too bad that a young man should be killed in that manner, but nearly all deaths of any Soldier on the frontier occur in this manner." In 1872, Capt. Ranald S. Mackenzie stopped by Fort Bascom to resupply his Fourth United States Cavalry companies after scouring the Llano Estacado for Comancheros and Comanches. According to Scout Henry Strong, some of these troopers got so drunk during this respite that they "wallowed around in the mud like hogs in a mud-hole." Thus the concerns of Bergmann and Morris regarding the purchase of liquor were well-founded.<sup>23</sup>

Soldiers at Fort Bascom also found ways to entertain themselves that did not include whiskey. After fatigue duties were complete, soldiers had several hours to occupy themselves before taps. As earlier noted, candles were in great demand on frontier military bases. When supplies ran out, soldiers improvised by making "slushboxes," or crude lamps. Troopers spent the remainder of their day reading and rereading letters from home by candlelight, playing cards, or perhaps having a smoke or chew. They also read old newspapers and books. If not reading, many were penning replies to their loved ones. Communication with loved ones, especially after the mid 1860s, was a key source of entertainment for soldiers posted far from home. Before a prolonged scout, some troopers would write several letters because they did not know when they would get another opportunity. A few kept journals of their experiences and then mailed them east after returning to the post. Stacks of letters often awaited their return. Soldiers like Private

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<sup>23</sup> Morris to Acting Assist. QM, Fort Bascom, December 19, 1869, LS, DNM, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 49: 190; Mathews, "Fort Bascom, N.M.," March 30, 1873" Fort Union, N.M.," December 16, 1873. Henry Strong's recollections found in Rickey, *Forty Miles a Day on Beans and Hay*, 34.

Mathews of the Eighth Cavalry and Captain Dubois of the Third Cavalry often spent their first hours back at Fort Bascom catching up on what was happening with their families. They returned the favor by penning replies to family and friends about their experiences in the Canadian River Valley. Fort Bascom received its mail from Santa Fe (barring delays due to inebriation or some other malady) every week or two. Yet there was more than family correspondence to occupy a soldier's free time. Mathews bragged to his father that "ours was a very literary troop, when any ten cent novels are to be had." While stationed at Fort Bascom, he read *The House of Seven Gables* and noted that all the New York papers, as well as the "*Democratic Advocate*," circulated among the men. Reading materials helped to pass the time, yet their acquisition held an intrinsic value as well. Captain Dubois related to his mother that with just a few books, pictures, and "scant" furniture, he was able to make a "great show" of his quarters while stationed at Fort Bascom. Thus such items, including newspapers and dime novels, were both links to the world they had come from and intellectual status symbols among their peers. In November of 1869, Lt. Wilson Hartz, Fifteenth United States Infantry, acting in the role of post treasurer, placed an order for several books and volumes with D. Appleton and Company of New York. The titles included *Arabian Nights*, *Burn's Poetical Works*, all available publications by Anthony Trollop, and the *Reveries of a Bachelor*, by I. K. Marvel. Whatever the topic, such media proved to be both informative and transformative, allowing the lonely trooper the opportunity to escape the isolation he associated with the Eroded Plains environment.<sup>24</sup>

Off-duty time of a longer nature allowed soldiers to participate in events organized for larger groups, or everyone at the post. It was during such events that the barriers between officers

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<sup>24</sup> Description of Military Posts, Fort Bascom, 11 August 1863, Circular 4, Surgeon General's Office, 1870, LS, DNM, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 49: 3; Mathews, "Fort Bascom, N.M.," March 26, 1873; Dubois to Mother, 5 April 1867, LS, DNM, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 62: 209-10.

and enlisted men melted away. Such events occurred on weekends or on special occasions, like the Fourth of July or Christmas. Horse racing, shooting competitions, and footraces were held on the parade grounds, as were picnics and musical presentations. Baseball had taken the nation by storm by the 1870s, and Fort Bascom was not an exception. The Eighth Cavalry brought the game to the Canadian River Valley. Mathews noted that along with additional rations and ammunition, Company L brought along their bats and balls on one particular scout. Imagine the puzzlement, or possible envy, of a party of Kwahadi Comanches upon stumbling onto a game taking place on the banks of the Canadian River.<sup>25</sup>

Women also lived at Fort Bascom. Officers' wives often traveled west with their husbands, lending an outsiders' perspective to military life on the Southern Plains. Perhaps Martha Summerhayes, stationed in Arizona with her husband, characterized a soldier's life best when she called it a "glittering misery." As to Fort Bascom, the few women who did live there managed to represent both ends of the social spectrum. It was not unusual to find a private's wife living on the post, earning her keep as a washerwoman or performing other menial chores. As a result of their presence, either at the post or in the towns that sprang up nearby, prostitution was also a concern.<sup>26</sup>

While women's presence at these posts alleviated officers and enlisted men's dealings with some of the drudgeries of everyday post-life, a percentage acquired reputations as prostitutes, using their job as laundresses as fronts to procure additional income. Because of this possibility, single females were seldom hired at military installations, yet an enlistee's wife was able to live

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<sup>25</sup> Miller, *California Column*, 26. References to Company L, Eighth Cavalry, and baseball can be found in Mathews, "Fort Bascom, March 26, 1873," and "Summer Camp on the Canadian River, N.M.," September 5, 1873.

<sup>26</sup> Miller, *California Column*, 25; Rickey, *Forty Miles a Day*, 35.

on, or near, the base in return for washing clothes, cleaning an officer's quarters, and doing some cooking. Finding single women on the base was unusual, but it did occur. Marian Sloan worked as a cook with her mother at Fort Union. But the great majority of women were married. Once hired, they were provided a food ration, a stipulation that helped feed the family, for many times they brought their children with them as well. In the early 1860s, these positions were filled by Hispanic women because it was their husbands who were stationed at Fort Bascom. They had followed their men out of the mountain villages of San Miguel and Mora County, about a week's journey until they began to perform their duties at the post.<sup>27</sup>

Headquarters believed the requirement that such women workers be married was often circumvented by enterprising enlistees. Some Anglo soldiers, lonely and sick of the post's mundane tasks, sought out local girls for companionship. When mustering out, many of these men abandoned these women, and any offspring. Other more entrepreneurial sorts, both Anglo and Hispanic, not as interested in companionship as money, sometimes offered their new brides to their buddies for a price. As a result, Special Order Number Four was issued at Fort Bascom on 22 January 1865 by Captain Bergmann. It read: "All women living at this post not lawfully married, or other than servants to officers will leave today with the Government train for Chapiarita [sp] and in the future no one at the post will be allowed to harbor any woman without permission." A similar order was issued throughout New Mexico. Officers had to establish the legality of any marriage by reviewing the actual certificate. If there was no certificate, the woman could not remain on the post. Captain Bergmann explained to his superiors that while on the surface, such an order made perfect sense, especially if it was issued in Missouri or Illinois, it

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<sup>27</sup> Miller, *California Column*, 25. Details on providing rations to women who worked at this post are found in Bergmann to Capt. W. H. Bell, Chief Commissary of Subsistence, Headquarters, Santa Fe, August 17, 1865, LS, DNM, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 49: 25.

did not make much sense in New Mexico. To explain his reasoning, he offered up the case of Sgt. Antonio Sandoval of Company I, First New Mexico Cavalry. Sandoval had joined the Union cause in 1861. After his time was up, he re-enlisted in 1863 and at the time of the letter was a soldier at Fort Bascom. When Bergmann noted that Private Sandoval joined to defend the United States against the Confederate invasion, he did so, “with his family.” The post commander explained that the Sandovals had two children, ages three and twelve, but no marriage certificate. Mrs. Sandoval worked at Fort Bascom as a laundress, and if she lost her ration because they could not provide a marriage certificate, this family would not be able to properly support their children. That same month, Lieutenant Colonel Brown took temporary command of the post and immediately wrote a similar letter. A “legal certificate” of marriage, Brown explained, came with a price most Nuevo-mexicanos could not afford. The Catholic priests required fifty cents for an official marriage license, so most locals did without. Brown argued that Bergmann had already vouched for the woman, and, “In a court of law, one living witness is worth a dozen certificates.” The new commander “respectfully [recommended] that the Department Commander be induced to reconsider his actions and modify his orders.” for this specific case. Thus, despite their rarity, post-life at Fort Bascom included women. Their presence revealed how orders from headquarters were often disconnected from reality.<sup>28</sup>

Probably the most famous woman to live at Fort Bascom was Eveline Alexander, wife of Post Commander Andrew J. Alexander. Mrs. Alexander followed her husband west in 1866. She kept a journal of her experiences in New Mexico Territory. Alexander’s journal illustrates how

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<sup>28</sup> Miller, *California Column*, 24 – 26; Thompson, Special Order No. 4, Headquarters, Fort Bascom, January 22, 1865, Bergmann to Capt. W. H. Bell, Chief Commissary of Subsistence, Headquarters, Santa Fe, August 17, 1865; Brown to Bell, August 31, 1865, LS, DNM, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 49: 18, 25, 28; Returns, Fort Bascom, August, September, October, November, 1865.

officers' wives were at the center of social functions that took place on frontier posts throughout the West. They helped put together large holiday parties, and coordinated entertainment events such as musicals and plays. These women also occasionally provided the officer corps with delicious alternatives to government issued beans and beef. Their physical presence softened the atmosphere for all soldiers on the base; they were a welcome relief to the emptiness and isolation found on the Southern Plains.<sup>29</sup>

Upon Eveline Alexander's arrival at Fort Bascom, she noted that a few women already lived there. Maj. Nicholas Quintana of the New Mexico Volunteer Infantry, temporarily in command when she arrived, gave the Alexanders a warm greeting and subsequently introduced his wife. Mrs. Alexander noted this greeting, yet had nothing positive to say about the "Mexican" woman. Conversely, Eveline spoke highly of the Anglo post surgeon's spouse. She found pleasure in Mrs. J. N. De Weisse's company, noting this woman's mastery of Spanish, which she evidently had learned in a short period of time. Alexander couched this accomplishment as an indication of Mrs. De Weisse's talents, yet failed to address why such a task was worthy of this woman's time. It seems clear that learning Spanish afforded Mrs. De Weisse the opportunity to converse with Mrs. Quintana, one of the few women on the post. While social interaction, regardless of ethnicity, seems to have been the driving force, Alexander failed to connect the dots. While many frontier soldiers were drawn to women of any ethnicity, some were especially fascinated with any Anglo who ventured west. Young soldiers sought their company for a variety of reasons, including polite conversation. Officers' wives seldom interacted with the enlistees,

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<sup>29</sup> Alexander, *Cavalry Wife*, 111, 114.

yet they were still regarded as military royalty, someone to admire at a distance. Engaging the opposite sex in conversation reminded soldiers of their own girlfriends, mothers, and sisters.<sup>30</sup>

On rare occasions, the soldiers sought more meaningful relationships. As an example, an officer in the California Column, Richard D. Russell, spotted young Marion Sloan working as a cook with her mother at Fort Union in 1866. Russell pursued Ms. Sloan for several months, even following her back to Santa Fe after she quit her job at Fort Union. He courted and convinced her to marry him. Russell mustered out of the California Column and joined the New Mexico volunteers, becoming a first lieutenant for Company E, First New Mexico Infantry. When he was transferred to Fort Bascom, he carried his new bride, Marion Sloan Russell, with him. Mrs. Russell, like Eveline Alexander, kept a journal of her experiences on the frontier that were eventually published in book form. While neither woman met with personal harm in New Mexico, the possibility of sudden tragedy was never far away. Not long after arriving at Fort Bascom, the Russells' three month old baby boy became ill and died. What role isolation, the environment, or the hardship of moving to the Canadian River Valley played in the death is unknown. For parents to second guess their own actions in such a devastating blow is quite natural. Richard and Marion certainly would have ruminated about their transfer to this post, and what relationship it might have had to the death of their son, the only child ever buried in the Fort Bascom cemetery.<sup>31</sup>

The Canadian River Valley, always a dangerous place for soldiers, was doubly so for women. Maj. A. H. Pfeiffer surely thought of these dangers when he was transferred to Fort

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<sup>30</sup> Returns, Fort Bascom, May 1866; Alexander, *Cavalry Wife*, 71.

<sup>31</sup> Marion Russell, *Land of Enchantment, Memoirs of Marion Russell along the Santa Fe Trail*, as dictated to Mrs. Hal Russell (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1981).

Bascom in February of 1866. Three years earlier his wife had been slain in an attack at Conchas Springs, about a day's ride to the north. At the time, they had been traveling with a small party to Pfieffer's new posting at Fort Wingate. While violent death was a rarity, when it came, it was usually without warning. In 1870, as reported by Capt. Horace Jewett, a female employee of the post sutler, William B. Stapp, was attacked as she slept in her bed by a small group of Arapahos and Cheyennes. They broke into her house at one a.m., stabbed and scalped this "Mexican woman," and then stole three horses. These raiders subsequently made their way to the post and tried to break into the stables, before being chased off. Despite such dangers, women remained at Fort Bascom throughout its history.<sup>32</sup>

The 1870 Census reveals that several women and their children lived at the post at the beginning of the decade. Some were connected to the officers who ran the garrison. Like Eveline Alexander, thirty-six year-old Harriet Jewett followed her husband, Maj. Horace Jewett, to Fort Bascom. Three year-old daughter Elizabeth and their Black cook, Emma Billingly, also made the trip. Corp. Ernest Nown of Wurtemberg, Germany, met his future wife Teresa after entering the Territory. The Nowns lived on the Fort Bascom Military Reservation with their three- year-old son. Teresa listed her occupation as housekeeper, as did Mary Ann Dorsett, the thirty-one year-old wife of John Dorsett, a farmer who worked for Stapp, the post sutler. The 1870 Census notes that fourteen adult women were either living within the post or on the military grounds, which encompassed two-square miles. Twenty children of various ages also lived there. Seven of these women and one sixteen-year-old female were Nuevo-mexicanos, but Teresa Nown was not the

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<sup>32</sup> "Indian Scouts and Their Results for the Year 1863 – Headquarters Department of New Mexico, Santa Fe, New Mexico, February 24, 1864," in Frank Moore and Edward Everett, eds., *From the Rebellion Record: A Diary of American Events* (New York: G. P. Putnam, 1864), 746; Fort Bascom Returns, February 1866; Capt. Horace Jewett to Assistant Adjutant General William Kobbe, June 15, 1870, Headquarters, Santa Fe, LS, DNM, RG 98 [now 393], NA, in Arrott Collection, 49: 232-33.

only local that was married to an outsider. Felicita Kelly's husband, Private Thomas Kelly, originated from Newfoundland. Conversely, not all of the post's laundresses and washerwomen hailed from New Mexico. They came from as far as New York, Pennsylvania, and Ireland.<sup>33</sup>

Such diversity among the female population gives a hint as to the demographics found in Fort Bascom's muster rolls. Many of the Anglo Nuevo-mexicanos who joined the Union army in the early 1860s were mustered in as officers. At the same time, Hispanos made up the majority who filled the ranks of volunteer companies from 1862 to mid 1866. Several of the officers were first and second generation immigrants. Captain Bergmann was born in Prussia. Lieutenants Thomas Henderson and Michael Cronin, both serving at Fort Bascom in 1864, were second generation Irishmen. Officers Saturnino Baca and Quintana, native New Mexicans, were the exception, not the rule. Yet early on, the typical Fort Bascom enlistee was of Hispanic origin; men like Antonio Sandoval, Juan F. Ortiz, and José Banneras. Sandoval rose through the ranks, serving as a sergeant at Fort Bascom in 1865. Both Captain Bergmann and Colonel Brown vouched for this soldier's integrity and loyalty. Privates Ortiz and Banneras were killed by Navajos in 1863. Historians Charles and Jacqueline Meketa have argued that Nuevo-mexicanos have seldom received recognition for their role in helping gain control of the Southern Plains, yet the Union could not have functioned in the Territory without them.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> United States Bureau of the Census, 1870 Census, New Mexico, San Miguel County, Division: Fort Bascom Military Reserve, <http://ftp.us-census.org/pub/usgenweb/census/nm/sanmiguel/1870> (accessed 3/22/2011) [hereafter cited as 1870 Census, New Mexico, San Miguel County].

<sup>34</sup> 1880 Census, New Mexico, Colfax County, ; Fort Bascom Returns, November 1864; Bergmann to Bell, August 17, 1865, LS, DNM, RG 98 [now 393], NA, in Arrott Collection, 49: 25; "Synopsis of Operations in the Department of New Mexico, May 16 – December 28, 1863," *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, 70 in 128 vols. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1888–1901), Ser. 1, Vol. 26, pt. 1, p. 26; Charles and Jacqueline Meketa, *One Blanket and Ten Days Rations: First New Mexico Volunteers in Arizona 1864 – 1866* (Globe, AZ: Southwest Parks and Monuments Association, 1980), vi; Saturnino Baca was a man of some significance in the Territory, settling down in Lincoln County, New Mexico after the war and becoming a part of the Billy the Kid saga. See Frederick Nolan, *The West of Billy Kid* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998), 39.

As the threat of another Confederate invasion diminished and Regular Army companies transferred east to help in the Western and Eastern theatres of war, federal officials authorized a robust recruiting effort to replace them within the Territory of New Mexico. Military recruiters stationed at the frontier posts offered one-hundred dollar bounties to enlistees. These recruiters were veteran officers assigned to seek out young men in nearby villages. An immediate, two-dollar bonus was paid to those who joined up of their own volition. Such income in cash-poor mountain communities had the desired effect, bolstering enlistments. This bonus was also offered to officers who procured new enlistees. Lt. Thomas Henderson was Fort Bascom's recruiter in 1864. The muster rolls for this post note that Cruz Aragon enlisted as a musician on 15 February 1864 for twelve dollars per month. This was the standard salary for a musician in the frontier army. Yet Aragon could not have enlisted without Henderson's help. A note that was attached to the muster roll, in Henderson's hand, acknowledged that he was the fifteen-year-old Aragon's legal guardian. Acting as both recruiting agent and guardian, the Lieutenant certified that he had "freely consented to Aragon's volunteering as a soldier in the Army of the United States for a period of three years." The note did not indicate who received the two-dollar bonus, or how young Aragon's bounty or salary, as a minor, was to be distributed.<sup>35</sup>

Regular Army units returned to the frontier after the Civil War ended, and the Nuevo-mexicano volunteers began to muster out for good. Captain Bergmann led the last of these men out of Fort Bascom on 22 August 1866. They were replaced by a company of the Third United States Cavalry and three companies of the Fifty-Seventh United States Colored Infantry. Black soldiers would serve periodically at this post until its official closure in 1870. Many white

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<sup>35</sup> Ben C. Cutler, Assistant Adjutant General, General Orders no. 25, Headquarters, Santa Fe, September 22, 1863, LS, DNM, RG 98 [now 393], NA, in Arrott Collection, 12: 195 – 97; Muster Rolls, March 8, 1864, Fort Bascom, Box 10822, folder 03, Item 01, New Mexico State Records Center and Archives, Santa Fe.

officers looked upon African-American soldiers, like the Hispanics they replaced, as unwanted necessities. Disdain, rooted in racism, colored officers and outsiders' comments.<sup>36</sup>

The correspondence regarding Black troops does not praise their service, but officers' comments still illustrate the unique challenges these soldiers faced in the Canadian River Valley. In referencing men of Company K of the One Hundred and Twenty-fifth United States Colored Infantry, who were posted to Fort Bascom in April of 1867, Captain Dubois, Third Cavalry wrote: "Besides my company I have a company of niggers. They are poor soldiers and very stupid [,] but then I manage them very well." This officer seems to confirm that the men of Company K obeyed orders, but took the credit for anything positive that could be derived from their activities. In an equally devastating characterization, the post commander's wife for a part of 1867, Eveline Alexander, described members of the Fifty-Seventh Colored Infantry as "hideous blacks," which perhaps indicated Major Alexander's own views. It is also possible that Captain Dubois' distaste for Black soldiers shaped his opinions on how the military should operate in New Mexico. In one message to Headquarters, he noted that the "Comanches will not come in to talk. The last reports say they [the Comanches] believe this post in charge of negro [sp] troops only. The Comanches will not kill negroes, they have many negroes among them. In consequence this is a bad place to use Negro troops." Despite Dubois's reluctance to be associated with Black soldiers, the Comanches, whom many Army officers respected for their tactics and bravery, seemed to have had a different opinion, at least according to this captain. Another report concerning "colored" men seen riding with both Comanches and Comancheros

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<sup>36</sup> Fort Bascom Returns, April, May, June, July, 1866. See Chapter Four for a full detailing of the African-American companies who served at this post.

indicates that such soldiers sometimes chose to desert and take their chances on the Llano Estacado instead of remaining under the command of men like Dubois.<sup>37</sup>

Over its history, Fort Bascom soldiers represented a variety of nationalities and ethnicities. Aside from African-Americans, Hispanos, Germans, and Irishmen, Americans from all regions of the country were posted to this garrison at one time or another. First and second generation Irish had a particularly strong presence in New Mexico both during and after the war. From Capt. William Brady and Lieutenant Henderson in 1864 to Sgt. John Welsh and Private Martin Shea in 1870, Irishmen served at Fort Bascom in the federal government's efforts to gain control of the Southern Plains. David M. Eammons has noted that by 1870, Irish immigrants made up about a fourth of the entire frontier army, thus it is not surprising to find them scattered throughout the documents concerning this post.<sup>38</sup>

Immigrants, like African Americans, joined the Army because their next best option restricted them to low-paying, menial jobs that no one else wanted. Enlisting gave both a means of escaping overcrowded slums and majority populations that were unwilling to accept them as anything more than a subservient class. The Army offered guaranteed meals and board, as well as an escape from urban decay and the cotton economy. There was also the possibility that once their military obligations were fulfilled, they might put down roots in a region more accepting of different nationalities and ethnicities. Yet as Captain Dubois indicated, not everyone who joined the Army fulfilled those obligations. Some deserted.

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<sup>37</sup> "Dear Mother," Dubois Journal, April 15, 1867, LS, DNM, RG 98 [now 393], NA, in Arrott Collection, 62: 109; Alexander, *Cavalry Wife*, 73; Dubois to De Forrest, May 24, 1867, LS, DNM, RG 98 [now 393], NA, in Arrott Collection, 49: 116.

<sup>38</sup> Fort Bascom Returns, August, 1863, January 1864, April 1866; 1870 Census, New Mexico, San Miguel County; David M. Eammons, *Beyond the American Pale: The Irish in the West, 1845 – 1910* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2010), 213.

Soldiers deserted for a variety reasons. Army life along the Canadian River was not what many of the early enlistees had signed up for. They joined to shoot Confederates. They had also been enticed by cash bounties paid out for signing up. Once mustered into the service, they soon realized that a soldier's life was 98% boring and 2% dangerous. As earlier noted, the food was bad and the work was hard. Privates spent a lot of time stacking adobes, chopping wood, shoveling horse manure, and hauling water; all within an area most considered an isolated wasteland. Even the water, when it was available, often had to be purged of organic material before it could be consumed. Enlistees found themselves at the beck and call of frustrated, alcoholic officers who felt as trapped as they did. Poor nutrition and bad water often led to sickness and misery. It was also true that soldiers were more fearful of cholera than Comanches, for both the medical personnel and facilities were seldom up to par. Thus men deserted.

The Post Returns indicate desertions effected all regiments and companies. Looking at one year, 1867, illustrates this fact. Four enlistees of Company E, Third Cavalry deserted in July. In August another cavalryman from this troop disappeared. In September three more troopers from Company E deserted. Before the year was out, two more would also melt into the Eroded Plains. Men from Company K, 125<sup>th</sup> Infantry also deserted during this period. Private Mathews estimated that over a three-year span, one-hundred men of Company L, Eighth Cavalry deserted. He explained to his family "small and inferior rations, too much work, and rough treatment" by superior officers drove men to flee the army.<sup>39</sup>

It is possible that some of these desertions were in response to outbreaks of disease at the post. In June 1867, Lt. John D. Lee died of typhoid fever. Two more soldiers died in August.

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<sup>39</sup> Returns, Fort Bascom., July 1867, August 1867, September 1867, October 1867, December, 1867; Mathews, August 20, 1873

Private John Hendricks of Company E in the Third Cavalry drowned while trying to cross the Canadian River. Private John Taylor, Company K, One-hundred and Twenty-fifth Infantry, died from undisclosed “wounds.” A second trooper from Company E of the Third Cavalry died in September, yet his name was not listed, nor was his cause of death. Clues as what was killing soldiers can be found in a compilation of illnesses made in 1868. Bascom’s “mean strength,” or monthly average, in 1868 was one-hundred and thirty-three. During this same period, medical personnel reported 112 cases of diarrhea, 22 cases of malarial fever, twenty-three cases of venereal disease, and thirty-two cases of rheumatism. Typhoid was not mentioned. Yet it is clear from the records that poor water quality and a lack of vegetables reduced the health of soldiers serving at Fort Bascom and would have created conditions some might have thought worthy of desertion. As noted earlier, prostitution, while was never explicitly identified as having occurred at this post, was certainly a concern, and circumstantial proof of its presence is obvious from the cases of syphilis this post recorded in 1868. Each post in the Territory was assigned a “surgeon,” to take care of the various maladies and injuries associated with Army life. The quality of care varied. Distance from the states and a lack of funding occasionally required the Army to hire civilian doctors to fill the voids. Eveline Alexander noted that J. N. De Weisse was the civilian doctor assigned to the post in 1867. Army doctor Henry Duane served at Fort Bascom for parts of 1868 and 1869. While stationed at Fort Bascom in the summer of 1873, Private Mathews, sick with a sore throat, was diagnosed as suffering from an “ulcerated throat . . . The doctor burnt my throat with caustic this morning.” Ten days later Mathews noted he was feeling better, yet not everyone recovered from the illnesses they contracted while stationed along the Canadian.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Fort Bascom Returns, August 1868, September 1868. Compilation of ailments in 1868 supplied by “Information furnished by Assistant Surgeons George S. Rose and W. H. H. Michler, and Acting Assistant Surgeon

In the fall of 1869, Lt. Wilson T. Hartz reported that seventeen enlisted men and one child were buried at Fort Bascom. The child was surely Lt. Richard Russell and his wife Marion's young son, who died of some unknown illness shortly after arriving in the Canadian River Valley. Hartz, with an endorsement from Post Commander Horace Jewett, informed Headquarters of the cemetery's poor condition, and requested funding to build a wall around the graves. If funding was not possible, he suggested that their remains be taken to another military cemetery.<sup>41</sup>

Unfortunately, Lieutenant Hartz did not forward a list of the soldiers who were buried at Fort Bascom with his request. The Quartermaster General's office published a list in 1869, yet it only contained seven names. Post Returns and other official correspondence note three additional soldiers who died at this post, yet the list remains incomplete. In 1972, the superintendent of the Fort Leavenworth National Cemetery reported that thirty-one people that were originally buried at the Fort Bascom Cemetery were re-interred at Fort Leavenworth. He noted that eighteen of the deceased were soldiers, but did not include their names. Still, a compilation of the partial list has historical implications. While no publication references their role at Fort Bascom, African Americans were buried in the post cemetery. Such permanence signifies these men were just as present in the Canadian River Valley as the Third Cavalry troopers and Hispano volunteers historians have recognized. Their role at Fort Bascom is obscure, and deserves further study.

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H. Duane United States Army," LS, DNM, RG 98 [now 393], NA, in Arrott Collection, 49: 1-3; Mathews, "Summer Camp on the Canadian River," September 23, 1873.

<sup>41</sup> Miller, *California Column*, 26; First Lieutenant Wilson T. Hartz to Chief Quartermaster M. F. Ludington, Santa Fe, November 18, 1869, Headquarters, Fort Bascom Endorsement Book, LS, DNM, RG 98 [now 393], NA, in Arrott Collection, 49: 217.

Private Michael Smith	Seventh U.S. Infantry	September 1863 (D)
Private Antonio Hernandez	First New Mexico Cavalry	July 1866 (D)
Sergeant Thomas Craddick	Third U.S. Cavalry	October 1866 (D)
Corporal Aaron Cooper	125 <sup>th</sup> U. S. Colored Troops	November 1866 (D)
Private Thomas Smith	125 <sup>th</sup> U.S. Colored Troops	November 1866(D)
Bugler Isaac Hammond	125 <sup>th</sup> U.S. Colored Troops	March 1867 (D)
Second Lieutenant John D. Lee	Third U.S. Cavalry	June 1867 (R)
Private John Taylor	125 <sup>th</sup> U.S. Colored Troops	August 1867 (D)
Private John Hendricks	Third U. S. Cavalry	August 1868 (R)
Lieutenant Robert Carrick	Eighth U.S. Cavalry	August 1870(A) <sup>42</sup>

It should be clear that executing United States power over the Southern Plains involved more than chasing the Kwahadi Comanches and putting a stop to the Comanchero trade. The men of Fort Bascom faced challenges that had nothing to do with Native Americans. Boredom, illness, loneliness, and hunger were also enemies that had to be defeated, or at least stalemated, if the military was ever going to gain control of the region. In the midst of these challenges, volunteers and Regular Army troops were charged with defeating the Southern Plains Indians, a people not bored with their surroundings, or burdened with feelings of isolation. In fact the opposite was true. The Eroded Plains and the Llano Estacado was their homeland, not a wasteland. In spite of the daily challenges Fort Bascom soldiers faced within the confines of the post, their greatest challenge remained beyond its walls.

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<sup>42</sup> List is a compilation of the following sources: "Civil War Burial Records in New Mexico," by Christina Devita, <http://NewMexicoalhn.net/military/tsfortbascom> (accessed June 2011) [noted with the letter D]; Fort Bascom Returns, June 1867, August 1868 [noted with the letter R]; and Post Adj. W. D. Lang, Special Order 87, Fort Bascom Headquarters, August 26, 1870, LS, DNM, RG 98 [now 393], NA, in Arrott Collection, [noted with the letter A], 49: 250.

## CHAPTER 6

### HUNDREDS OF DAYS AND HUNDREDS OF MILES

New Mexico volunteers operated out of Fort Bascom from 15 August 1863 to 22 August 1866. Capt. Peter W. L. Plympton planted the first post flag south of the Canadian River, while Colonel Kit Carson was making plans to venture into Canyon de Chelly. Even before Colonel Carson and his men started this operation in January of 1864, isolated bands of Navajos were already escaping into the Canadian River Valley and points farther south and west. By the middle of 1864, thousands of Navajos had been relocated to the Bosque Redondo Reservation, about ninety miles south of Bascom. As a result of this demographic shift, the region between the Sangre de Cristo Mountains and the Texas border became much more volatile. At the same time, with most of the Regular Army east of the Mississippi River, raids along the Santa Fe Trail increased. Brig. Gen. James H. Carleton was worried that isolated incidents over such a widespread area had the potential to develop into a full blown war if the region's Utes, Comanches, Kiowas, Apaches and Navajos formed a stronger alliance. No frontier post was closer to Comanchería, where many of the raiders lived, than Fort Bascom. During its first three years, this post's volunteers played a major role in efforts to stop depredations, return runaway Navajos to the Bosque Redondo Reservation, and circumvent the illegal trade between the Comanches and the Comancheros. Troopers spent untold hours in the saddle riding hundreds of miles in all directions to accomplish these tasks. Their patrols took them through much of New Mexico and the Texas Panhandle. The United States Army launched its first major expedition against the Southern Plains Indians who lived in the Canadian River Valley from Fort Bascom in 1864. What the New Mexico volunteers learned in this battle would be passed on to commanders in the future who took the same route, on similar missions, in search of the same enemy. Thus the study

of the scouts, patrols, and expeditions that originated from this post from 1863 to 1866 helps to explain how the Army finally gained control of the Southwest.

Before the first adobe bricks were laid at the new fort, General Carleton ordered Post Commander Plympton to send Lt. William Brady into the field on a scout with twenty-two troopers from Company I of the First New Mexico Cavalry. Brady led these men up the Canadian River to, as Carleton put it, “hunt up and destroy any parties of Navajoes or Apaches which may be found.” The relocation of both Mescalero Apaches and Navajos to the Bosque Redondo Reservation became a launching point for desperate Native Americans who could not stomach their new confines. Many followed the Pecos and Canadian Rivers’ north, toward the Sangre de Cristo Mountains. Such trajectories sent them through Fort Bascom’s domain. Carleton’s directive made it clear that no women or children were to be “destroyed,” just the males, on Army patrols.<sup>1</sup>

As Brady moved north, the landscape grew more rugged. Hispanos called this region *Los Angosturas* (the narrows). Here, the river cut a winding path through the valley. Red and orange boulders as large as houses looked down on the river. Rust colored lava beds, frozen in time, fell down the canyon’s walls and into sunken arroyos. Outcrops and crevices hid the stream and anyone who did not want to be found. Company I moved toward Conchas Springs, where a month earlier, Sgt. Jose Lucero and Private Juan Ortiz were killed by a band of Navajos. Brady’s ultimate destination was Canyon Largo, an Indian rendezvous of sorts, situated between the

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<sup>1</sup> Capt. Peter L. Plympton to Gen. James H. Carleton, 29 August 1863, Letters Sent, Department of New Mexico, Record Group 98 [now 393], National Archives, in James W. Arrott Collection, Donnelly Library, New Mexico Highlands University, Las Vegas, NM [hereafter cited as LS, DNM, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection], Vol. 49, p. 8. William Brady later became sheriff of Lincoln County, and was killed by William H. Bonney, aka Billy the Kid. See Alan J. Holmes, *Fort Selden, 1865 – 1891: The Birth, Life, and Death of a Frontier Fort in New Mexico* (Santa Fe: Sunstone Press, 2010), 6; John Miller Morris, *El Llano Estacado: Exploration and Imagination on the High Plains of Texas and New Mexico, 1536 – 1860* (Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 1997), 190.

Llano Estacado and the Sangre de Cristo Mountains. Here the river cut a huge swath out of the Canadian Escarpment on its descent into the valley. Comanches, Kiowas, Navajos, and Apaches were known to congregate at this point after raiding along the Santa Fe Trail. Brady and Company I remained in the field for thirty days in the process of ascending the escarpment, venturing across the Las Vegas Plateau, and scouting into Canyon Largo. The lieutenant also made notes on the best location to place a military road that could connect Union and Bascom. Such scouts had multiple goals. All officers throughout the Department of New Mexico had orders to execute any wayward male Indians on the spot. This directive was distributed at the Bosque Redondo to force Navajos to reconsider leaving the reservation. Additionally, such patrols were meant to signal a new, more permanent presence in the valley for the United States Army. Such a presence could not be ignored by Confederate Texans, Southern Plains Indians, or Comancheros.<sup>2</sup>

While the impetus for building the post derived from concern over a second Confederate invasion, the need to protect local citizens from Indian raids quickly became the volunteers' main focus. Ranchers and other civilians who lived or traveled between Forts Union and Bascom were often the preferred native targets. Livestock, particularly sheep, were constantly being stolen. As 1863 came to a close, Capt. Edward H. Bergmann and Lt. Juan Marques both pursued raiders who were working the region. Lieutenant Marques's company hauled enough rations and ammunition to remain in the field for two weeks. Mesa Rica, the massive mesa to the west of the post, was proving to be the perfect shield for these raiders, often Navajos who had just slipped away from the reservation. By the time such thefts were reported to the post, the perpetrators were riding along the western face of the mesa, or hiding within one of its deep folds. By the end

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<sup>2</sup> Plympton to Carleton, 29 August 1863, LS, DNM, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 49: 8.

of December, Plympton was reassigned to Santa Fe. Bergmann became the post's commander. The scouts continued.<sup>3</sup>

In early January, as Colonel Carson led his forces into Canyon de Chelly, Lt. Thomas Henderson of the First New Mexico Cavalry, leading twenty-two privates and a train of pack-mules, traveled atop Mesa Rica on another search and destroy mission. After traversing the mesa's summit, they continued north to Corazon Mountain. Corazon, more a two-thousand foot wall than a mountain, rose above the valley where the river bent to the east. The troopers followed a winding, ancient footpath to the top of the Canadian Escarpment. To the north was a rolling prairie, the Las Vegas Plateau. At their backs was the Eroded Plains, full of mesas and arroyos, which seemed to stretch all the way back to the post. They had traveled forty miles as the crow flies, yet their meandering search encompassed much more than that. As instructed, Lieutenant Henderson kept the troops moving to the northeast, avoiding local villages as they made their way to Canyon Largo. From this point, they descended into the valley once again and struck the river. From there they began the trek back to Fort Bascom. They were gone twenty-five days.<sup>4</sup>

Between such excursions, troopers pitched in with Fort Bascom's construction. Company F, Seventh United States Infantry, remained through the spring of 1864. In May, Capt. Charles Rawn led them back to Fort Union. The Regular Army would not return to this garrison for two

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<sup>3</sup> Returns From Military Posts, Fort Bascom, December 1863, Record Group 94, National Archives, Washington, D. C. (Microfilm 617A, Roll 81) [hereafter Returns, Fort Bascom, followed by month and year].

<sup>4</sup> Capt. Edward H. Bergmann to Headquarters, 12 January 1864, LS, DNM, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 49: 12.

years. For the rest of the war, volunteers conducted all operations, charged with maintaining order in the region.<sup>5</sup>

During the summer of 1864, Native Americans stepped up attacks on the Santa Fe Trail. They raided both merchants and military personnel. The volunteers were charged with protecting the territory's citizens and keeping the highway between New Mexico and Kansas open. Isolated patrols along the Trail were seldom enough. As a result, military supply trains, frontier posts, and civilian freighters remained targets.<sup>6</sup>

The Southern Plains Indians favorite raiding points were located near Cimarron, Territorial Kansas, where the Santa Fe Trail broke into two routes. One path was longer than the other, but provided better access to water. This longer trail ran in a more western direction, towards the Sangre de Cristo Mountains. The shorter, drier course, the Cimarron Cut-Off, was the most popular because it took less time to get to Santa Fe. Time was money. Not far from Cimarron, both of these routes crossed the Arkansas River. When a wagon-train approached any river, logistical issues had to be dealt with, which meant delays. Traders and military supply wagons were at their most vulnerable at these junctures. The areas where both the longer and shorter routes crossed the Arkansas were called the Upper and Lower Crossings.<sup>7</sup>

Due to the raiding, General Carleton sent Capt. Nicholas Davis on an expedition into Kansas. Davis was gone forty days, and his report prompted Carleton to send a larger contingent of volunteers to the region. Davis noted that on 7 August 1864, about seventy Comanches and Kiowas had attacked a civilian wagon-train that was camped at Lower Cimarron Springs, killing

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<sup>5</sup> Returns, Fort Bascom, May 1864.

<sup>6</sup> David Darcy, *The Santa Fe Trail: Its History, Legends, and Lore* (New York: Penguin Books, 2000), 272.

<sup>7</sup> Marc Simmons, *Following the Santa Fe Trail: A Guide For Modern Travelers* (Santa Fe: Ancient City Press, 1986), 116.

five American teamsters. Three days later, thirty Indians of unknown origin absconded with 135 mules from a caravan that was camped on the Upper Cimarron Crossing. A few days later, mules were again stolen from another civilian train that was camped on this same crossing. Ten days later, Kiowas and Comanches were blamed for major raid along the “Dry Route (the Cimarron Cut-Off),” where “240 head of oxen” were taken. The wagon-master, a man the captain only noted as Blanchard, was killed in this attack. About the same time, Indians made off with much of the livestock that was grazing next to Fort Larned. Davis also reported that a July attack at Walnut Creek left ten Americans dead. Two boys, who had been scalped, survived their ordeal. Additionally, two teamsters were killed near Cow Creek. On 23 August, Davis and his patrol reached the camp on the Lower Cimarron where the 7 August attack had occurred. They, “gathered up and buried” the scattered remains of the five Americans. Some Hispano teamsters who had also been in this wagon-train were spared. The Comanches had given these men a “yoke of oxen and a wagon,” and told them to return to their homes. According to Davis’ report, the Comanches told these survivors that they had no quarrel with Nuevo-mexicanos, but “they would kill every white man that came on the road.” This message was particularly galling to Carleton. He believed that most of his problems with Southern Plains Indians were related to an unspoken alliance that existed between Comanches and Nuevo-mexicanos.<sup>8</sup>

Even before he received Davis’s report, Carleton was already putting a plan together to stop the Santa Fe Trail depredations. This plan involved having large patrols stake out the key river crossings near Cimarron, Kansas. Fort Bascom’s Captain Bergmann was commanded to gather up eighty troopers and march to the Upper Cimarron Springs, one of the most volatile

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<sup>8</sup> Capt. Nicholas S. Davis to Headquarters, 30 October 1864, in *The War of Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, 70 in 128 vols. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1888 – 1901), [hereafter *OR*], Series 1, Volume 15, p. 212.

points on the trail. He was also instructed to take the post's guide, Frank de Lisle, with him. De Lisle was one of the army's most experienced frontier scouts, having led patrols and expeditions across the Southern Plains for eighteen years. Carleton left it up to Bergmann as to exactly where to set up camp, yet was very specific as to the actions he wanted him to take. Capt. Charles Deus, a fellow German immigrant and veteran of the volunteer service, became the temporary post commander. Deus was to ensure that construction did not stop while his superior was gone. Bergmann led fifty men out of Bascom to Fort Union, where they were fitted out for a fifty day scout. He also picked up an additional thirty troopers there, and then left for the Upper Cimarron Springs. The journey from Bascom to the Kansas crossings encompassed 430 miles.<sup>9</sup>

Carleton assigned two other large patrols to the same region. Maj. Joseph Updegraff and one hundred soldiers were ordered to the Lower Cimarron Springs about a two days' ride from Captain Davis, still camped on the Upper Cimarron Springs. Carleton ordered Davis to spread the news to civilians that the military was operating, and trade along all the routes was safe. Any other possibility was not good for the regional economy. This economy, centered in Santa Fe, was also Carleton's headquarters. A continuance of such raids, whether against civilians or military trains, tarnished his reputation. He knew that violence along the Santa Fe Trail meant both the War Department and Congress would keep their attention focused in his direction.<sup>10</sup>

A few weeks later, the commander received information that prompted him to launch a much larger military operation. Rancher Lucien Maxwell informed Carleton that the nearby Ute Indians were interested in taking part in any future war against their blood-enemies, the Kiowas

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<sup>9</sup> Assist. Adj. Gen. Ben C. Cutler to Bergmann, 22 August 1864, *OR*, Ser. 1, Vol. 41, pt. 2, p. 812. Reference to de Lisle's experience is derived from Darlis Miller, *Soldiers and Settlers: Military Supply in the Southwest, 1861 – 1885* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1989), 266.

<sup>10</sup> Cutler to Davis, 22 August 1864, *OR*, Ser. 1, Vol. 41, pt. 2, p. 811.

and the Comanches. Maxwell lived in Cimarron, New Mexico, near Raton Pass, not far from the Ute's village. General Carleton began to formulate a plan. He wrote to Colonel Kit Carson, at the time resting at his home in Taos, ordering him to ride to Maxwell's Ranch and confer with these Indians, many of its warriors having recently served with Carson at Canyon de Chelly. If Maxwell's information was correct, Carson was instructed to convince as many of the Ute warriors as possible to join him on a mission into the Texas Panhandle. A strike into their common enemy's homeland provided an opportunity to extract a rich bounty of bison robes and livestock to all who were interested. Carleton informed the veteran Indian fighter that three patrols, including Bergmann's, were to his northeast, and were at his disposal for any reason he might need.<sup>11</sup>

Carleton had more in mind than a quick strike into Comanchería. He had ordered Carson to Cimarron because he was fearful of the Southern Plains Indians forming some grand alliance. Before any such scheme could be hatched, he wanted Carson to take advantage of Maxwell's message and get the Utes involved against the Comanches and the Kiowas. Carleton believed a joint attack into Comanchería, even a minor engagement, would help to scuttle the future possibility of such a confederation. He had a similar idea regarding the Navajos at Fort Sumner. In this plan a contingent of Navajos and volunteer cavalry would move east and join forces with Carson's group somewhere down the Fort Smith road. Such an action would destroy any future alliance between these Indians and the Comanche.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Carleton to Col. Kit Carson, 24 September 1864, *OR*, Ser. 1, Vol. 41, pt. 3, pp. 243, 244.

<sup>12</sup> For the formulation of this plan, see Carleton to Capt. Cyrus De Forrest, 24 September 1864, *OR*, Ser. 1, Vol. 41, pt. 3, p. 353.

About the time Carleton began devising this plan, a dispatch arrived from Capt. Charles Deus, temporarily in command of Fort Bascom. Deus informed the General that several Comanche and Kiowa chiefs were camped outside the fort and were talking peace. Comanche Chief Paruasemen, also known as Ten Bears, was apparently their spokesman, communicating that they were ready to negotiate a peace. In reply, Carleton warned Deus to be on his guard. The general believed that this might be the same group that had absconded with Fort Larned's livestock just a few weeks earlier. He instructed the captain to inform the chief that the only way there could be peace was if his people immediately produced all the livestock they had stolen over the last several months and bring the animals immediately to Fort Bascom. He told Deus to make sure Paruasemen knew that Carleton considered him his enemy and would continue to believe this until all the animals were returned. He also informed the captain that Major J. Francisco Chavez was on his way to take command. He warned Deus that once he delivered this message, the post might be attacked, and to prepare his men to do battle. It took several days for Carleton's reply to get back to Fort Bascom. By then the Comanche chief and his followers were gone. Carleton believed this confirmed his suspicions about Paruasemen's original intentions, which were to take an inventory of the post's stock and see how easy or difficult it would be to steal it.<sup>13</sup>

Major Chavez refused to take command of Fort Bascom. Once Carleton received this surprise, he quickly explained to the major that it was never meant to be a permanent assignment. Captain Deus was not able to run the garrison, and he only needed someone to command it until

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<sup>13</sup>This visit is noted in both Thomas W. Kavanagh, *The Comanches: A History, 1706 – 1875* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 398, and Charles L. Kenner, *A History of The New Mexican – Plains Indian Relations* (Norman: University of New Mexico Press, 1969), 146. De Forrest to Capt. Charles Deus, 24 September 1864, *OR*, Ser. 1, Vol. 41, pt. 3, p. 423. The order for Major Chavez to take command of Fort Bascom can be found in, Carleton to De Forrest, 26 September 1864, *OR*, Ser. 1, Vol. 41, pt. 3, p. 399.

Bergmann returned from Kansas. During the Battle of Glorieta Pass, Chavez had led Col. John Chivington to the Confederate rear, where the Union troops destroyed the enemy's supply wagons. Chavez was thus a war hero and a man of many connections in New Mexico. Almost apologizing, instead of taking command of Fort Bascom, Carleton sent him to Los Pinos on a recruiting detail. Lt. Col. Francisco P. Abreu of the First New Mexico Infantry was ordered to take his place. Some of Chavez's connections were with persons loosely linked to the Comanchero trade. It is possible that Chavez did not want to serve on a post so close to Comanchería.<sup>14</sup>

Carleton's plans for a military expedition of some sort continued to evolve as September gave way to October. Carson informed Carleton that he planned to leave Taos for Cimarron on 8 October. In this same correspondence, he requested of his commander to "please don't forget to remember Capt. E. H. Bergmann in the appointment for majorship [sp], as I consider him fully entitled to the position." Bergmann was in Kansas, patrolling along the Upper Cimarron Springs. On 9 October, Abreu arrived at Fort Bascom and notified the commander that there were sixty-nine soldiers at the post. These men "could be well mounted for any service required." Abreu also reported that some Hispano traders had informed him that they had seen a large group of Indians, as many as 3,000, "about two hundred miles from the post." This encampment was northeast of Palo Duro Canyon, along the Canadian River. Carleton discounted the Hispanos' estimate as gross exaggeration, and awaited the outcome of his most able officer's meeting with the Utes. Carson arrived at Lucien Maxwell's ranch in Cimarron, New Mexico, on the tenth. He met with several veterans of the Canyon de Chelly Campaign, including the Ute's leader, Kan-

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<sup>14</sup> Carleton to Lt. Col. J. Francisco Chavez, 1 October 1864, Carleton to Lt. Col. Francisco P. Abreu, 1 October 1864, *OR*, Ser. 1, Vol. 41, pt. 3, p. 550.

ni-at-ze. Afterwards, he reported to Carleton that they were willing to participate in an expedition, but needed rations for both themselves and their families. The colonel also requested a hundred rifles, ammunition, and blankets for the men.<sup>15</sup>

October communications with Santa Fe reveal the logistical and tactical wheels that whirled within Carleton's head as he formulated his strategy. It involved the three patrols that were currently in Kansas, along with the Utes, who would travel down the Canadian to Fort Bascom before moving into the Texas Panhandle. A separate column, involving Navajo auxiliaries, would leave Fort Sumner at the same time. Additionally, Carleton contacted Maj. Gen. James G. Blunt of Fort Leavenworth with another idea. Blunt was already pursuing the Kiowas and Comanches who had raided the area the around Fort Larned. Carleton informed the major-general that he was sending "a force of three hundred volunteer troops . . . and, say, one hundred Ute and Apache Indians . . . all, under Colonel Christopher Carson, to attack the Kiowas and Comanches." He hoped Blunt could meet Carson somewhere near Palo Duro Canyon, so "a blow may be struck which those two treacherous tribes will remember." On the fourteenth, Carleton informed Carson that he could not provide beef and bread to the Ute's families. He explained this was the responsibility of the Department of Indian Affairs. Rifles and other supplies for the warriors would be available at Fort Union, and they could acquire sugar and coffee rations when they arrived at Fort Bascom. He urged Carson to get his forces moving south as soon as possible. As winter approached, orders continued to fly out of Santa Fe.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Carson to Carleton, October 7, 1864, Abreu to Cutler, 10 Oct 1864, Carson to Carleton, 10 October 1864, Carleton to Abreu, 24 October 1864, *OR*, Ser. 1, Vol. 41, pt. 3, pp. 696, 771.

<sup>16</sup> Carson to Carleton, 10 October 1864, Carleton to Carson, 14 October 1864, *OR*, Ser. 1, Vol. 41, pt. 3, pp. 771, 877; Carleton to Carson, 20 October 1864, Carleton to Maj. Gen. James G. Blunt, 22 October 22, 1864, *OR*, Ser. 1, Vol. 41, pt. 4, pp. 151, 197-98.

The expedition continued to evolve as weather, logistics, and realities reshaped Carleton's plans. Once apprised of the goal, Carson told Carleton that he needed at least three hundred volunteers, as well an additional two hundred Indian auxiliaries to accomplish the mission. Even as Carson tried to keep the Utes on board, the commanding general had to scale back the expedition. He again told Carson that he could not feed the warriors' families while they were gone. He also admitted that the entire column, including Indian auxiliaries, would not amount to more than three hundred men. Fort Sumner's Navajos refused to play a role in any type of attack. Eight days later Carleton's plan continued to evolve. Bergmann's cavalymen and mounts were too worn out to take part in another prolonged excursion away from the post. Captain Deus and Company M of Fort Bascom would replace him, becoming the largest force to take part in the upcoming expedition.<sup>17</sup>

On 23 October, the day after Carleton suggested to Major General Blunt that they coordinate their attacks, he sent a copy of General Orders 32, Carson's order of battle, to Blunt's superior, Maj.Gen. Samuel R. Curtis. Carleton attached a note to this order that implied Bergmann and Curtis agreed to working together "to put a stop to the Comanche and Kiowa depredations." This was a coy attempt on Carleton's part to gain Curtis's approval without asking for it. A positive response from Curtis could be copied and delivered to Blunt, almost forcing him to move south and join Carson somewhere near Palo Duro Canyon.<sup>18</sup>

Michael Steck, the superintendent of Indian affairs in New Mexico, soon caught wind of the impending expedition. He tried to stop it by immediately writing and explaining to Carleton

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<sup>17</sup> Carleton to Carson, 14 October 1864, *OR*, Ser. 1, Vol. 41, pt. 3, p. 877; Carleton to Blunt, 22 October 1864, *OR*, Ser. 1, Vol. 41, pt. 4, pp. 197 – 99. On the Navajos' refusal, see Brig. Gen. Marcellus M. Crocker to Cutler, 30 September 30, 1864, *OR*, Ser. 1, Vol. 41, pt. 3, p. 525.

<sup>18</sup> Carleton to Maj. Gen. Samuel R. Curtis, 23 October 1864, *OR*, Ser. 1, Vol. 41, pt. 4, p. 213.

that the Texas Comanches had nothing to do with the recent Santa Fe Trail depredations. Steck's proof was information gained from Hispano traders. In Carleton's reply, the reader can almost hear the ink sizzling across the page. Depredation by depredation, Carleton detailed for Steck the eyewitness accounts that indentified the Comanches and Kiowas as the culprits. He was "not surprised" at the denials of the Hispanos because of these same traders' "desire to control the trade . . . with the Comanches." In other words, Carleton told the superintendent that he was wrong, and that his letter would have no effect on plans.<sup>19</sup>

In early November, as winter crept across the Sangre de Cristo Mountains, Carleton formulated his final plan. Cavalry and infantry units from Fort Bascom, Fort Sumner, and Fort Union would participate in the mission. Although the Navajos refused to make war on the Comanches, a few Mescalero Apaches from Fort Sumner were willing to join the expedition. Despite Carleton's unwillingness to provide additional supplies for the Utes, Carson had managed to keep them interested with promises of Comanche livestock and buffalo robes. A four-day snow storm blew in at the end of October, almost cancelling the expedition. The skies finally cleared on 3 November, and Carson led the warriors south. He sent one more request to his commander as he left Cimarron, urging him to find a way to provide for the families of the eighty Utes who had agreed to join him. After moving down the northern Canadian River, they stopped at Fort Union to acquire rifles and ammunition, and then continued on to Fort Bascom.<sup>20</sup>

Having left Fort Union a few days before Carson arrived, Maj. William McCleave led several companies into Bascom on 4 November. Companies K and M, First California Cavalry, Company K, First California Infantry, Company A, First California Veteran Volunteer Infantry,

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<sup>19</sup> Carleton to Michael Steck, 29 October 1864, *OR*, Ser. 1, Vol. 41, pt. 4, pp. 320 – 22.

<sup>20</sup> Carson to Carleton, 3 November 1864, *OR*, Ser. 1, Vol. 41, pt. 4, p. 422.

and Company D, First New Mexico Cavalry filed in and began making preparations for the mission. Carson arrived a few days later with the Utes. As Carleton directed, Captain Deus and Company M of the First New Mexico Cavalry composed the balance of the expeditionary force. Ammunition, food, and other accoutrements of war were loaded into twenty-seven supply wagons. The goods they took with them were all they would have to sustain them for several weeks. After quickly organizing the column, he prepared to move out. On 12 November 1864, 321 volunteer soldiers, fourteen officers, seventy-two Utes and Apaches, and the wagon train left the post for Confederate Texas. Lt. George H. Pettis of Company K, First California Infantry, was put in charge of the post's two mountain howitzers. Carson placed Bascom's Lt. Charles Haberkorn in charge of the Indian auxiliaries. Bergmann and his fifty men remained behind, but his guide, Frank de Lisle, moved east with Carson down the Canadian River in search of the Comanches.<sup>21</sup>

The war of words between the commander of the Department of New Mexico and superintendent Steck continued. Just as the expedition was about to leave, Steck informed Carleton that he had no authority to instigate a war between the Utes and the Comanches. All interactions between the United States government and Southern Plains Indians must be approved through his office. Carleton sneered back that it was clearly evident that Indian coalitions were afoot and he felt it was in their best interest to get the "savages of the mountains"

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<sup>21</sup> George H. Pettis, "Kit Carson's Fight with the Comanches and Kiowa Indians at the Adobe Walls on the Canadian River, November 25, 1864," *Battle of the Rebellion* 5 (Providence: Providence Press, 1878), 8; Carson to Carleton, 4 December 1864, *OR*, Ser 1, Vol. 41, pt. 1, p. 940. Reference to Company D, First New Mexico Cavalry, in Returns, Fort Bascom, November 1864. The discrepancy in the number of Native Americans is due to the various reports. Carson was originally going to leave Cimarron with seventy-two auxiliaries, but his 3 November 1864 letter indicated that he had picked up eight more before he left. Later documents, including Pettis's, puts the number back at seventy-two. Other references in Pettis's account indicate a few Ute women also accompanied the expedition, which could also account for the discrepancy.

on their side while it was still possible. He reminded the superintendent that as commander of the Department of New Mexico, it was his duty to protect civilians by any means necessary.<sup>22</sup>

About a week after the expedition left Fort Bascom, Major General Curtis replied to Carleton's sly attempt to add another military prong to his plan. Curtis began by noting that he assumed Carleton knew that events had forced him to cancel Blunt's own expedition against the Kiowas and Comanches. Confederate cavalry in Missouri and Kansas required Blunt's men to help in a Union repulse. Curtis urged Carleton to demand that telegraph lines be installed "in the direction of your country." He believed if communications had been available, an earlier plan of attack might have resulted in the serious blow they were all looking for.<sup>23</sup>

Another event involving volunteers in Colorado Territory was about to take place that would impact relations between Southern Plains Indians and the United States Army for the next decade. Just to the west of Blunt's forces, near Cedar Bluffs, the First Colorado Volunteers were involved in rounding up wayward Arapaho and Cheyenne bands that refused to go to their Federal reservations. Settlers north of New Mexico Territory were also victims of raiding parties. As encroachment onto Indian lands increased, so did regional violence. Just a couple of days after Carson's expedition neared its target, Col. John M. Chivington led his Colorado volunteers into the villages of a large group of Arapahos and Cheyennes that were camped on Sand Creek, not far from Fort Lyon. These Indians had been directed to report to this fort or face severe consequences. Yet despite their intentions, they were attacked by the volunteers on 29 November 1864. In the ensuing battle, many women and children were killed. This action became known as

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<sup>22</sup> In Carleton's reply, he referred to a 5 November letter he had received from Michael Steck. See Carleton to Michael Steck, 8 November 1864, *OR*, Ser. 1, Vol. 41, pt. 4, pp. 496, 497.

<sup>23</sup> Curtis to Carleton, 28 November 1864, *OR*, Ser. 1, Vol. 41, pt. 4, p. 709.

the Sand Creek Massacre, and would forever sear into the psyche of the Southern Plains Indians' that the American army could not be trusted.<sup>24</sup>

At the same time, far to the south, Carson marched down the Canadian in search of the Comanches. Carleton's instructions, written 22 October, explained that he expected his most experienced Indian fighter to engage the enemy:

You know where to find the Indians; you know how to punish them. The means and men are placed at your disposal to do it, and now all the rest is left with you. . . . women and children will not be killed – only men who bear arms. Of course, I know that in attacking a village, women and children are liable to be killed, and this cannot, in the rush and confusion of a fight, particularly at night, be avoided; but let none be killed willfully and wantonly.<sup>25</sup>

Fourteen years later, Lieutenant Pettis's experiences on this expedition were published. Coupled with Colonel Carson's official report, a fair account of what happened to these men and the Indians they encountered was recorded. When the column left Bascom, it moved east through the Eroded Plains and then ascended onto the Llano Estacado, keeping the Canadian River on its southern flank. Winter followed them. As they penetrated Confederate Texas, northern winds cut across the prairies and through their ranks. Occasional snow fell, slowing the march. Adding to the bitter winds, Pettis complained that the men had a hard time getting any sleep because the Utes, in preparation for war, remained up half the night singing and dancing. When the troops began to pack up each morning, some of these same Indians were ironically already miles ahead, searching for the first signs of Comanche and Kiowa villages.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> William H. Leckie, *The Military Conquest of the Southern Plains* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1963), 21 -26; David Dary, *The Santa Fe Trail: Its History, Legends, and Lore* (New York: Penguin Books, 2000), 272.

<sup>25</sup> Carleton to Carson, 22 October 1864, *OR*, Ser. 1, Vol. 41, pt. 4, pp. 198, 199.

<sup>26</sup> Pettis, "Kit Carson's Fight with the Comanches and Kiowa Indians," 9, 10.

Those first signs illustrate just what a foreign world the United States Army was operating in, and why the subjugation of the Southern Plains Indians would take much longer than the defeat of the Confederate Army. On 24 November, after following an old Indian trail for eighteen miles, Carson called a halt to the day's march. They were about sixty miles north, and slightly east, of present-day Amarillo. The soldiers dismounted and began to set up camp at a place called Mule Springs. Pettis explained that just as everyone finished and began to relax, the Utes, already at rest, jumped up as one, and began to talk excitedly among themselves. The soldiers looked around in confusion, but saw nothing on the horizon that would cause this commotion. After a lengthy translation, the news spread that two of Carson's scouts had spotted the enemy about ten miles in the distance. Pettis and the other soldiers continued to stare across the Llano, yet they could see nothing. Writing from a perspective that contained both awe and confusion, the lieutenant recalled that even after some of the Utes pointed to a distant point across the prairie, neither he nor his men could see any movement. Additionally, Pettis was mystified as to how these men were aware of their compatriots' arrival long before the soldiers were. After a while, the soldiers did see two distant specks moving toward them. Twenty years earlier, Josiah Gregg had been similarly stunned by Comanche Tabequeena's ability to scratch out a map of the entire Southwest, using only memory as a reference. In 1864 the United States Army was only beginning to understand that the Plains Indians had a deep connection with the land. This connection seemed to make little distinction between the animate and inanimate, and it apparently gave them the advantage of a sixth sense. This would bode well for the Southern Plains Indians, who preferred open prairies to the reservation. Carson's recent victories over the Mescaleros Apaches and the Navajos had made him confident that he would replicate those

successes in Comanchería, yet he was about to receive a stern reminder of why he had originally informed Carleton that he needed a much larger force for any such mission.<sup>27</sup>

Shortly thereafter, the two scouts arrived in camp and met with Carson. A large Indian village was just a few miles to the east. He brought his officers together and organized a plan of attack. He ordered Colonel Abreu and one of the infantry companies, to remain behind with the supply wagons. They were to catch up with the rest of the column later. Carson was concerned about the noise twenty-seven wagons would make bumping along on an old Indian trail and the added distraction of having to protect the wagons during a battle. The cavalry, artillery unit, and Indian auxiliaries mounted up and followed Carson east. Around midnight they descended from the rim of the valley to the river-bottom. The ground was cut-up with horse hooves, lodge poles, and foot traffic. Carson ordered his men to dismount, stand in silence, and hold their horses by their bridles until morning. Cigars and pipes were forbidden. From midnight until daybreak, the volunteers stood as silent sentinels in the middle of Comanchería.<sup>28</sup>

At the first hint of dawn, 25 November, they were ordered to mount up. Pettis recalled that as Carson led them east, the Utes and Apaches, completely covered in bison skins and robes, were scattered in haphazard fashion all around him. It did not take long for the column to spot a few Comanches on the south side of the river. Carson ordered Major McCleave, Captain Deus, and Company M to cross the river and attack. The Ute and Apache auxiliaries bolted into

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<sup>27</sup> Pettis, "Kit Carson's Fight with the Comanches and Kiowa Indians," 11-14; Carson to Carleton, 4 December 1864, *OR*, Ser. 1, Vol. 41, pt. 1, p. 940.

<sup>28</sup> Pettis, "Kit Carson's Fight with the Comanches and Kiowa Indians," 14, 15.

a stand of tall grass, discarded their robes, and then chased after Company M, their bare skin covered in war-paint.<sup>29</sup>

Carson and the rest of the column followed, the sound of gunshots echoing across the valley. After about five miles, they moved through an empty Kiowa village. At this point, Carson ordered the rest of the cavalry to charge toward the sound of the guns. He remained behind with Lieutenant Pettis' two howitzers. Ahead, McCleave, Deus, and the various cavalry units were engaged against hundreds of Kiowas. These Indians, led by Chief Little Mountain, performed a screening action as their families fled in the opposite direction. By the time Carson and Pettis passed through the Kiowa village, Utes were already rounding up loose cattle and horses. The lieutenant had an odd thought when he first spied the village, wondering how the Kiowas had accumulated so many Sibley tents. Carson explained to Pettis that he had mistaken the gleaming white bison hides that covered the village's teepees for military issue. Carson and Pettis continued through the encampment towards the fighting. The old Indian fighter was confident the battle might conclude before they got there. For one of the few times in his fighting career, Carson was wrong.<sup>30</sup>

The colonel and the artillery battery caught up with the rest of the column around ten in the morning. The men were dismounted, their horses corralled behind the crumbling ruins of an old adobe fort. The soldiers had created a defensive perimeter, and everyone faced east. In their front, just out of rifle range, about two-hundred Indians sat on their horses staring back. McCleave informed Carson that the cavalymen had already repulsed several charges. Pettis's attention was drawn to what loomed behind these warriors. In the distance, he could see

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 17,18.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 20.

approximately 1,200 Indians standing in front of another large village. The lieutenant later estimated 350 lodges were a part of this community. Here was the heart of Comanchería.<sup>31</sup>

After a moment's pause, Carson ordered Pettis to unlimber one of the howitzers. Within seconds of the first shot, all of the Indians dispersed. Instead of pursuing, the colonel ordered his men to break out their haversacks and have a quick lunch. He suspected the howitzers had performed their service for the day and began to consider how he would approach the huge Comanche village in the distance. He believed the enemy was in retreat and would not seriously challenge him again. At this point Carson received his first surprise. Just as the men began to prepare their first meal of the day, the Comanches and Kiowas returned, rimming the horizon. Over the next hour, the Indians charged from different vantage points, trying to break through the cavalrymen's defensive perimeter. The mountain howitzers proved to be the great equalizer, yet the warriors refused to leave. Carson later reported that he feared that once night fell, the Kiowas and their allies would return to their encampment and remove their winter supplies. He did not want that to happen. One of the main goals of the expedition had been to destroy as much winter supplies as possible. Additionally, the colonel voiced his concern regarding Col. Abreu and the infantry, whom he had not seen since morning. According to Pettis, against the wishes of many of his men, Carson made the decision to fall back, destroy the Kiowa village, and rejoin the infantry somewhere along the way. Carson assured his officers that once this was accomplished, they would regroup and mount a full-blown assault on the Comanche village.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Lt. Pettis estimated that the second village contained 500 lodges. See Pettis, "Kit Carson's Fight with the Comanches and Kiowa Indians," 24. Carson estimated 350 lodges; see Carson to Carleton, 4 December 1864, *OR*, Ser. 1, Vol. 41, pt. 1, p. 941.

<sup>32</sup> Carson to Carleton, 4 December 1864, *OR*, Ser. 1, Vol. 41, pt. 1, p. 941; Pettis, "Kit Carson's Fight with the Comanches and Kiowa Indians," 33.

Retreat in the face of the enemy, regardless of the century, is never easy. On this late November day in 1864, Carson faced an almost impossible situation. The column was outnumbered at least three to one. He ordered Capt. Emil Fritz to take thirty men from Company B of the First California Cavalry to dismount and guard the right flank of the retreat. Fort Bascom's Company M of the First New Mexico Cavalry was deployed on both the right flank and in the rear. Once the Comanches realized the column was on the move, they set fire to the prairie. As fire and smoke roiled over the valley, the troopers faced the full ramification of having ventured into Comanchería. When the column made it back to the Kiowa village, it was full of warriors trying to salvage their goods. While Deus's and Fritz's men continued to defend the flanks and the rear, Carson ordered the rest of his troops to attack the village. Once the Kiowas scattered, he gave the order to set the village on fire. Now smoke from the lodges mixed with smoke from the prairies as the village burned to the ground. Between 150 and 170 lodges, along with large amounts of dried meat, berries, and bison robes were either taken or destroyed. As evening approached, the battle subsided. Carson kept the men moving west, and met Abreu and the infantry about five miles west of the old adobe fort. His earlier promise to launch another attack after connecting with the infantry was not fulfilled. Instead, the old Indian fighter ordered the column west toward New Mexico.<sup>33</sup>

On 4 December, camped at Rita Blanco, about one hundred miles east of Fort Bascom, Carson reported that he was returning to the post because his horses were worn out and the column was low on ammunition. Ten days later, while camped just outside of Fort Bascom, he glossed over the expedition's realities by listing the types and amounts of winter goods his men

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<sup>33</sup> Carson to Carleton, 16 December 1864, 943, *OR*, Ser. 1, Vol. 41, pt. 1, 943; Pettis, "Kit Carson's Fight with the Comanches and Kiowa Indians," 33.

had destroyed. He also expounded on the fact that they had discovered a large cache of “powder, lead, [and] caps.” Carson argued that Comancheros had reached the Indian camp about ten days before the expedition and alerted the Comanches. Because of this, two of his men were dead and ten were wounded. Yet despite this declaration, he saved most of his wrath for Michael Steck. The colonel claimed that Steck had given these traders the passes that allowed them into Comanchería and warn the Comanches of their approach.<sup>34</sup>

The second letter, written while Carson was still at Fort Bascom, reveals his mindset as he attempted to come to terms with an outcome very different than what he experienced at Canyon de Chelly. On the one hand, he believed a victory against the Comanches was still possible, yet this prediction came with a cautious caveat. Certain conditions must be met before any such attempt was made. First, his horses and mules needed at least six weeks of rest and good forage. Second, he needed at least a thousand men for the follow-up expedition. Two more artillery pieces were also needed. Clearly, Carson was shaken. Carleton had neither the means nor the men to carry out such an operation. Carson knew this. Deus and Company M returned to Fort Bascom. The other units rode back to Fort Union and Fort Sumner. Carson spent Christmas with Bergmann and his men. Four years would pass before another serious attempt would be made to defeat the Southern Plains Indians. By then, the task belonged to the Regular Army. One of Carleton’s goals, however, was accomplished as 1864 came to a close: Steck lost his job as superintendent of Indian affairs in New Mexico.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Carson to Carleton, 16 December 1864, *OR*, Ser. 1, Vol. 41, pt. 1, p. 943.

<sup>35</sup> Carson to Carleton, 16 and 26 December 1864, *OR*, Ser. 1, Vol. 41, pt. 1, pp. 939, 943. More on Carleton and Steck’s differences can be found in Kenner, *A History of New Mexican – Plains Indian Relations*, 149.

The Sand Creek Massacre in Colorado Territory and Carson's expedition into the Texas Panhandle occurred almost simultaneously. Southern Plains Indians immediately linked the two operations. Those most resistant to the reservations had long believed the United States government did not see them as human beings. The execution of women and children at Sand Creek and Carleton's orders to Carson justify such linkage. The Kiowas and Comanches of the Texas Panhandle believed their fierce defense of their Canadian River homeland allowed them to escape a similar fate. While such warfare was not completely incompatible with their own, the timing of these two battles galvanized the Southern Plains Indians and forged a small, but hard-core, minority of resistance fighters who would remain off the reservation for the next ten years.<sup>36</sup>

In the first months of 1865, the word spread that the Comanches and Kiowas held the soldiers of Fort Bascom responsible for the destruction of the Kiowa village and planned to exact retribution. Arthur Morrison delivered such a message to Carleton after returning from Texas. Morrison, a former officer at Bascom, had gone to Texas in early February loaded with several wagons of supplies, seeking the release of some Anglo women and children. While he was never allowed to enter the Comanches' main camp, he did converse with some of the Indians stationed on the perimeter. Upon returning to Santa Fe, he reported that he had heard a rumor that obstinate Confederates were urging the Comanches to take their revenge on Fort Bascom and nearby Hispanic villages. Some of Bergmann's local contacts had supplied him with similar information. In early March, he requested additional men to protect the fort. Carleton complied with this request, shuttling Regular Army and volunteer units in and out of the post in April. At

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<sup>36</sup> The Comanche raid on Elm Creek in Texas illustrates this point. This was a battle between Anglo women and children and Comanche warriors, led by Little Buffalo. See David Paul Smith, *Frontier Defense in the Civil War: Texas' Rangers and Rebels* (College Station: Texas A&M University, 1994), 132.

different times during the month, four companies of the First New Mexico Cavalry were supported by Company E, Fifth United States Infantry, and Company F, Seventh United States Infantry. In the spring of 1865, of the fourteen posts Carleton had under his command, Fort Bascom housed the third largest force.<sup>37</sup>

Such an attack did not occur, yet Carleton's reallocation of men to the Canadian River Valley might have helped dissuade such a possibility. Raids of this nature were not uncommon. As a detail of soldiers and herders watched over a large herd of cattle grazing outside of Fort Larned, a company of Union cavalry appeared, or that is what the herders took them for. In reality, they were Comanches wearing army issue blue overcoats. The trick worked. Before the fort could react, the Indians had absconded with the cattle. Such were the conditions that most frontier posts operated. Under the right conditions, Indians often invaded the military personnel's private space.<sup>38</sup>

It turned out that Morrison's information about a Confederate – Comanche alliance was accurate, for the Texans, as the Civil War came to an end, made an earnest attempt to create one. The reality was that Native Americans seldom maintained an alliance of any sort with Anglo Americans. This last attempt by the Lone Star State was as much an effort to stop depredations upon their own people as any grand plan to form an Anglo – Indian alliance. Comanches and Kiowas were more likely to raid frontier Texans during the war than a Union fort. The frontier

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<sup>37</sup> Carleton to Bergman, 21 February 1865, Bergmann to Carleton, 9 March 1865, LS, DNM, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 16: 106, 122. The four companies were Company D of the First New Mexico Cavalry, led by Lt. Charles Haberkorn, Company E of the First New Mexico Cavalry, led by Capt. Saturnino Baca, Company I of the First New Mexico Cavalry, led by Lt. Michael Cronin, and Company M of the First New Mexico Cavalry, led by Capt. Charles Deus. See "Abstract for 1865," *OR*, Ser. 1, Vol. 48, pt. 2, p. 278. For the recap on Morrison's journey into Comanchería, see Arthur Morrison to Carleton, 10 May 1865, *OR*, Ser. 1, Vol. 48, pt. 1, p. 310.

<sup>38</sup> See the report from Maj. William F. Armstrong, Second United States Volunteer Infantry, 9 June 1865, Fort Dodge, Kansas, *OR*, Ser. 1, Vol. 48, pt. 1, p. 311.

defense forces of Texas attempted to carry out an invasion into Indian Territory to quell such attacks in late 1864, a mission similar in purpose and scope to Colonel Carson's. Maj. Charles Roff of the Border Regiment was ordered into the Wichita Mountains with four-hundred men to find and eradicate the Comanches responsible for frontier depredations. This group was even less successful than Carson, returning after ten days because of bad weather and a general lack of will. This failure and the subsequent desperation it generated led to the Confederates' final attempt to forge an alliance. Unaware that the war was over, Texas Brig. Gen. James W. Throckmorton met with some Comanche and Kiowa bands in Oklahoma on 15 May, 1865. Gifts and captives were exchanged. Throckmorton returned to Decatur believing progress had been made. Yet such progress went for naught because the government which executed it was no longer in existence. The Southern Plains Indians had another reason never to put faith in a white man's promise.<sup>39</sup>

After the war, Fort Bascom patrols continued, yet there were now three areas of focus; Mesa Rica, Canyon Largo, and traffic down the Fort Smith road into Texas. Bergmann was ordered to post pickets and send patrols down this road. In April, Lt. Richard Russell led a scout around Mesa Rica, and Lt. Cornelius Daley camped with a picket detail at Canyon Largo. The following month, Capt. Patrick Healy of the First New Mexico Infantry led seventeen men back to Mesa Rica and Lieutenant Daley returned to Canyon Largo with another group of First New Mexico Cavalry. Responding to reported raids in the area, General Carleton ordered Bergmann to personally oversee these two scouts. He directed the captain to meet with both officers in the field and specify where they were to set up pickets. The two patrols were to remain in the field and "destroy all Navajoe [sp] and Apache Indians (men)" who did not have passports. Bergmann

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<sup>39</sup> Smith, *Frontier Defense in the Civil War*, 141 – 43.

then followed Russell's party and placed a picket on the southeast side of the mesa. Afterwards, he spent three days searching "that Mesa," but he never found Navajos or Apaches. With Capt. Charles Hubbell of the First New Mexico Cavalry at his side, Bergmann rode down the north side of Mesa Rica and continued north. Near Don Francisco Lopez's ranch, he met Capt. B. F. Fox and men from the First Colorado Volunteers, who had just made their way from Canyon Largo. Fox was also searching for raiders, but had not seen any. Bergmann retraced Fox's journey and positioned Lieutenant Daley and his cavalrymen in the canyon. He then returned to Fort Bascom, having been gone a total of eight days.<sup>40</sup>

Bergmann's frustration becomes evident in the report he sent to his commanding officer. It was clear that before this last patrol, he had been ignoring some of the locals' pleas for help. He explained to Carleton that on numerous occasions he had responded to the "almost daily" reports of outrages by sending scouts, but they had never found a trace of the supposed pillagers. In recent weeks he had come to the conclusion that many of the reports that crossed his desk were "invented." He contended that such reports were a part of a larger plan to distract him from illegal traders who continued to sneak down the Canadian River toward the Llano Estacado.<sup>41</sup>

One report was neither a ploy nor a lie. In May of 1866, after leaving Fort Bascom, the mail carrier did not arrive at his next destination, Hatch's Ranch, when he was expected. Hatch's Ranch was a military camp located about three miles south of Chaperito, a small Hispanic village. Some herders informed Bergmann that they had seen an unknown group of Indians waylay the carrier on "the Chaperito Road." Lt. Antonio Abeyta, back from a patrol, delivered a

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<sup>40</sup> Lt. Thomas Smith to Bergmann, 15 November 1865, LS, DNM, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 49: 33; Carleton to Bergmann, 28 April 1866, LS, District of New Mexico [hereafter DNM], RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 18: 74.

<sup>41</sup> Bergmann to De Forrest, 12 May 1866, LS, DNM, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 49: 42 – 43.

different version of the attack. He informed Bergmann that the expressman, whose last name was Chambers, had been attacked near Conchas Springs, “about 12 [miles] E of Hatch’s Ranch.” Bergmann ordered Captain Hubbell to scout in the region north and west of Mesa Rica for the body and the mailbag. While the post commander emphasized the importance of finding Chamber’s remains, he was just as concerned about the mail. In correspondence with both Fort Union’s quartermaster and Carleton, Bergmann expressed that he was “astonished to learn that my A.A.Q. M. has never kept a record of the waybills since he was placed in that position .” The waybill was a record of all the mail Chambers carried. This was a particularly embarrassing event that indicated proper procedures were not being followed. Neither the mailman, nor the mail, was found. It would not be the only time questions concerning proper record keeping cropped up at Fort Bascom.<sup>42</sup>

On 25 July 1866, Major Bergmann participated in his last significant mission from Fort Bascom. Carleton ordered him deep into Texas to try and negotiate the release of several white captives. While on this mission he was to keep an eye out for livestock that had been stolen from the Bosque Redondo Reservation and Fort Sumner. Much of the impetus for the journey surrounded the story of ten-year-old Rudolph Fisher, of Fredericksburg, Texas. On a raid into the Texas Hill Country in 1860, the Comanches had stolen the boy from his family. Five years later he remained in their possession, living the life of a herder. Gottlieb Fisher, the boy’s father, never gave up hope of retrieving his son, sending a constant stream of requests to officials across the country. One plea went directly to President Andrew Johnson. Gottlieb was constantly badgering Texas and New Mexico military officials to do something. When General Carleton

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<sup>42</sup> Bergmann to Capt. Charles Hubbell, 24 May 1866, Bergmann to Capt. J. Farnsworth, 27 May 1866, Bergmann to Carleton, 29 May 1866, LS, DNM, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 49: 50, 53, 54.

received concrete information of Rudolph's whereabouts, he acted. Trader Marcus Goldbaum had seen this boy and twenty other white captives with a large band of Kwahada Comanches "near the Texas settlements." Carleton ordered Bergmann to venture into Texas and make an attempt to negotiate their release.<sup>43</sup>

Bergmann rode out of Fort Bascom on 10 July 1865. He was not looking for a fight, only taking eight troopers and "two citizens" with him. The lack of firepower was intentional, as the major wanted to communicate to the Comanches that he was not a threat. Goldbaum and Diego Morales were the citizens that accompanied the troopers. According to Bergmann, Goldbaum and Morales were men "who have been acquainted with these Indians for many years and who are enjoying their confidence." As traders, they were very possibly associated with Comancheros. Goldman had recently spoken with a young man named Rudolph while bartering goods in Texas. The fellow knew German, as did Goldbaum. When this trader returned to New Mexico, he communicated this information to Carleton, which initiated the mission. Goldbaum volunteered to accompany Bergmann, another immigrant from Prussia, back into Comanchería to seek the boy's release.<sup>44</sup>

This journey took Bergmann and his men across trade routes that had been in existence for centuries. On their departure, they passed the Canadian River's Comanchero Trail, a route used by mountain and plains people for centuries. Moving south through a land of rolling prairies and isolated mesas, they passed the Quitaque Trail, about fifty miles from the post. To the west,

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<sup>43</sup> Bergmann to Headquarters, Santa Fe, 11 August 1866, LS, DNM, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 49: 70 – 73; Kavanagh, *The Comanches*, 406, 407, 470.

<sup>44</sup> Gregory and Susan Michno, *A Fate Worse Than Death: Indian Captives in the West* (Caldwell, Idaho: Caxton Press, 2007), 279, 289; Kavanagh, *The Comanches*, 406, 407. Goldbaum supplied beef to the army that Kavanagh reveals came from transactions with Comanches. See Kavanagh, *The Comanches*, 470. Quotes from Bergmann to Headquarters, Santa Fe, 11 August 1866, LS, DNM, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 49: 70 – 73.

this path ran beyond the Tucumcari Peaks until it hit the Pecos River. Here, it turned north, following the river all the way to the Sangre de Cristos. To the east, this trail eventually ended in Palo Duro Canyon. Bergmann reported that they traveled to the southeast for about 250 miles, which would have led them across Río de Tierra Blanca and Agua Frio, two thin streams that followed the *Las Escabardas* Trail. This Comanchero trail originated fifty to seventy miles to the west of the Bosque Redondo Reservation, which at the time was the home of eight-thousand Navajos. For generations, mountain traders had followed the Pecos south, some stopping at the junction known as Quitaque, while others continued south to the Bosque Redondo campsite, where the reservation and Fort Sumner were built. From Bosque Redondo, the traders' route depended on their final destination. Some remained along the Pecos and awaited the arrival of the Comanches. By the Civil War, most transactions occurred in Texas.<sup>45</sup>

Although Bergmann's exact route is not known, his trajectory would have led him down the last great Comanchero trail, *La Pista de Vida Agua* (The Trail of Living Water). This route was popular because water was almost always available. About thirty miles southeast of present-day Lubbock, the North Fork of the Double Mountain Fork of the Brazos River gouges its way two-hundred feet below the plains, creating a five to six mile-wide canyon. A known rendezvous site, *Canyon del Rescate*, or Ransom Canyon, was a place where captives of all ethnicities were bartered--as viable a human market as any found in antebellum South Carolina. Mexicans, Anglo, African Americans, Mescalero Apaches, and Navajos were all exchanged for weapons, food, and livestock. It was possible that Bergmann would find who he was looking for within

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<sup>45</sup> For the streams and Comanchero trails Bergmann crossed, see Morris, *El Llano Estacado*, 185 – 190.

this canyon's steep yellow walls, but the distance he traveled indicates he kept riding to the southeast, deeper into Texas.<sup>46</sup>

Averaging approximately thirty miles per day, Bergmann and his companions began to see signs that confirmed they were getting close to their goal, including abandoned campsites. Bergmann sent Goldman and Morales ahead to make contact and assure the Comanches that they meant no harm. He wanted the traders to set up a meeting between himself and the Comanche leaders. Yet, the Comanches and Kiowas were not so sure. They feared that this group could be an advance guard of a much larger force, similar to the one Carson had brought into the Texas Panhandle in 1864. Goldman and Morales returned empty-handed, but on 31 July the expedition stumbled onto two Hispanics who were working for the Indians as spies. Bergmann convinced or forced these men to show him where the village was.<sup>47</sup>

Now, approximately 225 miles from Fort Bascom, the eight New Mexico cavalrymen and two citizen traders made their final approach toward a very large Southern Plains Indians' community. Their path put them somewhere between Muchaque and present-day Jayton, Texas, on the eastern edge of the Llano Estacado. Both of these locations were well-known Comanche – Comanchero rendezvous sites. An additional clue as to their location can be found in the major's report to Carleton. He noted that the Comanches were “very close to the Texas settlements.” In 1866, a 250-mile journey would have landed him about one hundred miles, of such settlements.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Morris, *El Llano Estacado*, 188; Bergmann to Carleton, 11 August 1866, LS, DNM, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 49: 70 – 73.

<sup>47</sup> Bergmann to Carleton, 11 August 1866, LS, DNM, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 49: 70 – 73; Bergmann reported that he traveled 250 miles in a southeastern direction. I derived my average per day by taking the distance and dividing by the days it took him to reach his destination.

<sup>48</sup> Bergmann to Carleton, August 11, 1866, LS, DNM, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 49: 70 – 73. On Comanchero locations, see Morris, *El Llano Estacado*, 184-186; Pekka Hämmäläinen, *Comanche Empire* (New

At this point, the troopers knew they were being followed. At first, isolated scouts were seen on the horizon, yet after a while, the soldiers spotted warriors “at elevated points in [on] the prairie.” Bergmann was not dissuaded, continuing on the course the two Hispanics indicated. An advance team of warriors finally approached, a verification that Bergmann was headed in the right direction. The major later recalled that as soon as he informed them of his intentions, this information, as well as how many were in his party, was quickly delivered back to the village, about twelve miles away, via an “ingenious” method of signals and relays. Bergmann likened the speed of the reply to that of a telegraphic message. “Bring them in,” it began, “you are welcome.”

Bergmann counted one-hundred and sixty lodges on the ride into this village, which was located on the Arroyo de Nuez. He had not accompanied Carson in late 1864. Instead, after just returning from a sixty-day scout in Kansas, he had been left behind to guard the post. In August 1866, under completely different circumstances, he became one of the few, if not the only, United States Army officer to ride into the heart of a Comanche stronghold while hostilities remained at a boil. His report of his experiences provides a glimpse into a world that few Americans ever lived to tell about.<sup>49</sup>

Rage was the word Bergmann used to describe the emotions emanating from the people he passed when riding into the village. All the men were well-armed, carrying pistols, rifles, and plenty of ammunition. He called them “savages,” but then explained that he understood why they were so angry. Bergmann wrote of a recently broken “flag of truce,” a reference to the Sand

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Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 317; Kenner, *A History of New-Mexican – Plains Indian Relations*, 163, 191; and Frederick Rathjen, *The Texas Panhandle Frontier* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1973), 200, 201.

<sup>49</sup> Bergmann to Carleton, 11 August 1866, LS, DNM, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 49: 70-73.

Creek Massacre, Carleton's refusal to seek a peace with the Comanches, or both. Bergmann explained that the Indians felt disrespected and were exacting revenge upon the perpetrators of this broken truce. Such animosity confirms the level of interconnectedness the Southern Plains Indians felt with one another and how Chivington and Carson's strikes were very much on their minds. Despite this animosity, his characterizations of the people he found there were both complimentary and disparaging. Kiowas, Comanches, and Hispanos populated the village. He made a point of reserving his most negative comments for the Hispanos he saw there:

These vagabonds are very dangerous and by far worse than the real Indians. Some of them, partly acquainted with the English language [,] are constantly employed as decoys and spies and it are [is] these wretches who understand so well to throw travelers off their guards. They delight in narrating their outrages and triumphantly show how they betrayed and entrapped and then afterwards butchered poor white men, who were foolish enough to believe these monsters.<sup>50</sup>

Bergmann was met by five chiefs, three Comanches and two Kiowas. For the next two days he attempted to negotiate the release of Rudolph Fisher and several other "white children."

Comanche Chief Quajipe led the discussions for both the Comanches and the Kiowas.

Comanches Sheer-kee-na-kwagh and Paruaquahip, as well as Kiowas Toche and Pi-ti-tis-che, also took part. Sheer-kee-na-kwagh was the chief who visited Captain Deus in the fall of 1864, in search of a truce. Before General Carleton's refusal was relayed to Fort Bascom, the chief was already gone, confirming Carleton's belief that this Comanche, also known as Ten Bears, had simply been scouting out the post. It is also possible that the boiling distrust the Southern Plain Indians expressed to Bergmann were a result of Carleton's unwillingness to make an agreement before Carson started down the Canadian.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Bergmann to Carleton, 11 August 1866, LS, DNM, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 49: 70 -73.

<sup>51</sup> Bergmann to Carleton, 11 August 1866, LS, DNM, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 49: 70-73. For the identification of these chiefs, I relied on Kavanagh, *The Comanches*, 407.

The major offered money, supplies, horses, and mules for the return of Fisher and the other captives, to no avail. On 2 August, he gave up. Bitter and disgusted, as he prepared to leave he contemplated taking them by force, yet he knew such an attempt was little more than suicide. He related to Carleton that in his negotiations, he had first tried kindness. When kindness did not work, he resorted to threats. Neither worked. He likened the negotiations to talking to “blocks of granite.” Bergmann described the chiefs as a cocky lot, men who did not seem to care one way or another about what the army did. They were confident that they could repulse any attack, just as they had on the Canadian River. In fact, they informed Bergmann that the United States Army needed to get ready for future operations in New Mexico, because they had already robbed the Texans of anything of value and it was time to look to the north.<sup>52</sup>

Finally, Bergmann’s quest to locate a large cache of stolen New Mexico horses and mules also came up empty. He did find five animals that belonged to Fort Sumner, and he took them back to their owners, but that was it. While the mission was not a success, what these ten men had undertaken required equal amounts of courage and fortitude, not uncommon traits of New Mexico volunteer soldiers. Their efforts seldom garnered more than a sentence or a footnote in the histories of the region. The Regular Army would struggle with economic constraints and lack of manpower for the next ten years, when the Southern Plains Indians were finally defeated. When assessing how control was ultimately gained, the historian should reflect on the influence expeditions such as Bergmann's foray into Comanchería had on future military strategy and operations, which is further explored in Chapter 7.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Bergmann to Carleton, 11 August 1866, LS, DNM, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 49: 70-73.

<sup>53</sup> Bergmann to Carleton, 11 August 1866, LS, DNM, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 49: 70-73.

Major Bergmann left Fort Bascom for the last time in an official capacity just eleven days after he had returned from this mission. Gen. William Tecumseh Sherman's push to replace the volunteer forces with regular army units was almost complete. On 22 August 1866, 141 New Mexico volunteers followed Bergman to Fort Union and mustered out. Their history included innumerable pickets, patrols, and scouts, with hundreds of days and hundreds of miles in the saddle. Bergmann's orbit around Fort Bascom encompassed 680 miles, covering territory from the Upper Cimarron Crossing in Kansas to the eastern face of the Llano Estacado. The most famous volunteer soldier in the Union Army, Colonel Kit Carson, launched the first major expedition against the Southern Plains Indians from this same post. Bascom soldiers represented the largest force that participated in this mission. The experiences of these Hispano and Anglo volunteers have, for the most part, been ignored by western historians, but that was not the case with the soldiers who followed them into the Canadian River Valley. The Regular Army would soon find out what the volunteers had long known. The mission to gain control of the Southern Plains Indians was not a black and white affair. Loyalties among locals regarding stopping the Comanchero trade and defeating the Comanches was ambiguous at best. Experiences gained in the conflict between the Union and Confederate armies had little value on the Eroded Plains of New Mexico. Defeating an enemy in his homeland, when that homeland lacked water, made becoming familiar with New Mexico geography an important part of military strategy. Such circumstances, little water and an arid landscape, created an illusion of endless isolation and emptiness. Such assessments were inaccurate. Southern Plains Indians were up-to-date on events in the Texas Panhandle and the Sangre de Cristo Mountains. Information flowed east and west across Comanchero trails, and north and south down the Pecos and the northern portion of the Canadian River. Bergmann knew this, and the Regular Army would soon learn it. In the process,

they would often rely on what the volunteer soldiers experienced while stationed at Fort Bascom from 1863 to 1866.

## CHAPTER 7

### BETWEEN COMANCHEROS AND COMANCHERÍA

In 1866, Major Generals William T. Sherman and Philip Sheridan knew more about prosecuting war than anyone west of the Mississippi River, yet this knowledge was acquired against enemies in grey who spoke the same language, often read the same newspapers, and to a certain degree, possessed the same world views. They would use the same techniques against the Southern Plains Indians, but victory would take twice as long. One reason was that defining the enemy was more complicated on the Southern Plains. The twenty-year-old privates from Kentucky and Indiana who manned the frontier forts had difficulty understanding the complicated alliances that often existed between the United States government and local populations. At times Comanches were to be treated as friends, while escaping Navajo men were to be shot on sight. At other times any Comanche was to be shot if he attacked a Navajo who lived at the Bosque Redondo Reservation. The Navajos hated the reservation, and were thus constantly escaping, closing the circle. In the midst of this confusion, Pueblo and Hispano traders who participated in the black-market economy often dressed and looked like Comanches. This chapter details the Regular Army's insertion into the Canadian River Valley, illustrates their impact in the region, reveals how some of its first officers came to grips with Brig. Gen. James H. Carleton's shoot-to-kill orders, and also explores the intoxicating pull of the black-market economy on some of the men who once served at Fort Bascom. Finally, this chapter looks at the role this post's soldiers played in prosecuting the War Department's strategy to subdue the Comanches and Kiowas who were raiding in Texas between 1866 and 1868.

The Regular Army took command of Fort Bascom in the last week of August 1866. General Sherman believed these soldiers were a better fit to serve on the frontier because they

had less of a history with the Southern Plains Indians. That was certainly true of the regiment which replaced Bergmann's men, the Fifty-Seventh United States Colored Infantry. Sherman argued that the insertion of soldiers who did not hold personal grudges against the Comanches and Kiowas for past injustices, and vice-versa, automatically eliminated tension in the area. Under the command of Lt. Col. Silas M. Hunter, three companies of the Fifty-Seventh remained at the post through September, performing scouts and fatigue duty. In October, they were replaced by Capt. William Hawley and Company A of the Third United States Cavalry. Captain Hawley and his troopers were immediately busy chasing down the continuous stream of Navajos who failed to appreciate Fort Sumner in the manner General Carleton envisioned. Instead, they rode into the path of Hawley's patrols, stealing ranchers' livestock along the way. Company A engaged these escapees in firefights, yet the captain was never satisfied with the results, as more often than not, the Navajos eluded capture. Many of his reports noted that they were disappearing across a large mesa to his west. In correspondence that must have seemed all-too-familiar to Carleton, Hawley explained that his attempts to apprehend these Indians had failed because of the "impassable nature" of Mesa Rica. Yet Carleton must have wondered if it was so "impassable," how did the Navajos manage use it so effectively as an escape hatch?<sup>1</sup>

At the bottom of one such report, Hawley brought up the order to shoot any Navajo found off of the reservation. This might have become the natural order of things for the volunteers, but it was a new concept for the Regular Army. Hawley related to Carleton that when he arrived at the post he was informed of this order, but could not find anything in writing. Probably as much

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<sup>1</sup> Returns From Military Posts, Fort Bascom, August – November, 1866, Record Group 94, National Archives, Washington, D. C. (Microfilm 617A, Roll 81) [hereafter Returns, Fort Bascom, followed by month and year]; Capt. William Hawley to Act. Assist. Adj. Gen. Cyrus De Forrest, 15 November 1866, Letters Sent, District of New Mexico, Record Group 98 [now 393], National Archives, in Arrott Collection, Donnelly Library, New Mexico Highlands University, Las Vegas, NM [hereafter LS, DNM, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection], Volume 49, p. 86.

to cover himself as any desire for clarification, the captain requested such a document. The Department Commander replied by special express to Lt. Col. George Sykes, commander of Fort Sumner, and Hawley. Sykes was to make the Navajos at Bosque Redondo aware of this message. It read, in part: “The Commanding officer at Fort Bascom will destroy every Navajoe [sic] man able to bear arms [who leaves the reservation without a pass].”<sup>2</sup>

Post command and personnel changed over the next two months. Lt. George W. Letterman and Company K of the 125<sup>th</sup> United States Colored Infantry joined the Third Cavalry at Fort Bascom in November. Lieutenant Letterman and his soldiers remained at the post for a little over a year. In late December, Maj. Andrew Alexander of the Ninth United States Cavalry and Company G of the Third Cavalry joined the garrison. Alexander relieved Captain Hawley, becoming the third post commander since Maj. Edward H. Bergmann’s departure in August 1866. Incoming officers continued to seek clarification regarding shoot-on-sight orders.<sup>3</sup>

Carleton ordered his new commander to patrol the Eroded Plains from Fort Bascom to Fort Sumner, ninety miles away. Just before he left, Alexander informed Sykes of his intentions. He also explained to Sykes that “My instructions . . . [are to]. . . kill every Indian [Navajo] capable of bearing arms.” The Comanches were to be informed of these instructions so they would remain clear of the area. With perhaps a touch of irony, Alexander told Sykes that he was to warn the Comanches that the Navajos were under his protection. Yet this protection

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<sup>2</sup> Hawley to De Forrest, 15 November 1866, LS, DNM, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 49: 86. Carleton’s reply came back as an endorsement attached to another Hawley correspondence, Hawley to De Forrest, 22 November 1866, LS, DNM, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 49: 88.

<sup>3</sup> Alexander was promoted to major in the Ninth United States Colored Cavalry in early December 1866. He was to report to New Orleans to take command but after Gen. Ulysses Grant read his report on Fort Bascom’s structural deficiencies, he ordered him to inspect every fort in New Mexico Territory. This delay circumvented his transfer to the Ninth. He never served in this regiment, later being transferred to the Eighth United States Cavalry. See Eveline Alexander, *Cavalry Wife: The Diary of Eveline Alexander*, edited by Sandra L. Myers (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1977), 162, Returns, Fort Bascom, November, 1866.

evaporated if these same Navajos strayed from the reservation, in which case they would be shot. The next day, Alexander sent a similar letter to Charles Hubbell, a recently retired New Mexico volunteer who had established a cattle ranch about fifty miles southwest of Fort Bascom. Hubbell sold beef to the military. Alexander informed Hubbell that his soldiers could not tell a Comanche from a Navajo, and to warn the Comanches to keep their distance. This was Carleton's attempt to prevent the accidental shooting of a Comanche, which could lead to new outbreaks of hostilities. A newcomer such as Alexander was probably a little confused as to frontier subtleties regarding gaining control of the region. On 7 January 1867, Fort Bascom's new commander left on his first patrol across the region.<sup>4</sup>

Alexander first rode to Hubbell's Ranch. After camping there, he divided his men into two units. He sent Lt. Lambert L. Mulford of the Third Cavalry with half the troopers toward Alamogordo Creek, located about twenty miles north of Fort Sumner. The major continued east, scouting out the high plains along the Texas border. After circling back toward New Mexico, Alexander's group struck a fresh Indian trail. They pursued it until they found a small band of Navajos led by Chief Manuelita. Alexander fired his pistol in the air to get the Indians to stop. When it had the opposite effect, the cavalymen raced across the valley in pursuit. At one point during the chase the Navajos set the prairie grass on fire. This created a formidable screen that Alexander and his men had to ride through. The tactic worked. The captain reported that the Indians disappeared into a "deep rock arroyo." He searched this defile and the surrounding countryside but could not find them. Lieutenant Mulford's group had even less success. Despite

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<sup>4</sup> Maj. Andrew Alexander to Maj. George Sykes, 3 January 1867, Alexander to Capt. Charles Hubbell, 4 January 1867, LS, DNM, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 49: 96, 97; Alexander, *Cavalry Wife*, 114, 115. Not long after mustering out of the First New Mexico Cavalry, Charles Hubbell was selling beef to the government. See Charles L. Kenner, *A History of New Mexico – Plains Indian Relations* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1969), 178.

being accompanied by the post guide (whom later Alexander characterized as worthless), they got lost on their way to Alamogordo Creek, and wandered across the Eroded Plains without water for “fifty-two hours.”<sup>5</sup>

Major Alexander refused to give up. While camped near the arroyo where he had lost Manuelita’s trail, he came up with a plan that revealed his true feelings toward Carleton’s shoot-to-kill policy. He sent a friendly Navajo in the chief’s direction, wanting his messenger to innocently leak the information to this group that all males who had escaped the reservation faced death if they were caught. Once he was sure they had this information, he allowed them to escape, certain they would return to Bosque Redondo on their own. With the Army literally turning their backs, these Navajos did return to the reservation. In this manner, Alexander ensured Carleton’s harsh order was distributed among the Navajo without having to kill anyone.<sup>6</sup>

The major’s first patrol out of Fort Bascom was important for several reasons. Alexander established the Regular Army’s presence in the Canadian River Valley. He also connected his command with Fort Sumner’s. Additionally, his discovery of the cattle trail that linked Texas to New Mexico revealed the vitality of this illegal barter. Hearing about the trade was different than experiencing it first-hand and having to grasp the difficulty of trying to enforce the law across such an immense territory. During this same scout, Alexander and his men came across several

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<sup>5</sup> Alexander to De Forrest, 12 January 1867, LS, DNM, RG now 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 49: 103-05. Also, see John Miller Morris, *El Llano Estacado: Explorations and Imagination on the High Plains of Texas and New Mexico, 1536 – 1860* (Austin: Texas State Historical Society, 1997), 185, and Kenner, *History of New Mexican – Plains Indian Relations*, 125, 181.

<sup>6</sup> Alexander to De Forrest, 12 January 1867, LS, DNM, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 49: 103-05; Alexander, *Cavalry Wife*, 132.

groups of Pueblo “Indian Traders,” all with passes signed by their agent, John D. Henderson. In his report to his superiors, he asked what he was supposed do about them.<sup>7</sup>

It is clear that the War Department paid particular attention to Major Alexander’s correspondence. This was surely due his personal ties with Generals Ulysses S. Grant, William T. Sherman, and Philip Sheridan. After the war, the Army was reorganized, and the Department of New Mexico became the District of New Mexico. This district became a part of the Military Division of Missouri, which was first commanded by Sherman. Not long after Alexander’s report of his scout reached Sherman at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, the Division commander recommended that all civilians who wished to trade with the Southern Plains Indians report to Fort Bascom on their way to the Plains. General Carleton, the District of New Mexico’s commander, explained to Sherman that he did not have the manpower to enforce such an edict and even if he did, had little faith in the New Mexico’s courts willingness to prosecute anyone who refused to follow it.<sup>8</sup>

Here again, Alexander’s presence in New Mexico brought forth new information, this time found in Carleton’s response to Sherman’s suggestion on how to deal with traders. The top brass within the War Department would have found such a response interesting on two levels. First, there was Carleton’s seeming lack of interest in trying something new. Was he really not interested in any serious attempt to stop the trade? If not, was he really the man the Army wanted running the District of New Mexico? On the other hand, did Carleton’s explanation as to why he made such a comment point the War Department toward a larger problem? If it was true that the

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<sup>7</sup> Alexander to De Forrest, 26 January 1867, LS, DNM, RG now 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 49: 106. This agent’s name is mentioned in Kenner, *History of New Mexican – Plains Indian Relations*, 176.

<sup>8</sup> The context for this paragraph comes from Kenner, *History of New Mexican – Plains Indian Relations*, 176, 177.

territorial courts in New Mexico were not prosecuting illegal traders, what did that say about the trade in general? It had taken a couple of years after the Civil War for the United States Army to refocus its attention on the Southern Plains Indians. Carleton's response illustrated that there was more to the problem than just rounding up defiant Comanches. Illegal trade connected Indians and American citizens, whether those citizens were Hispano or Anglo. Native Americans such as the Puebloan people were also connected to this economic activity. If the court system was not interested in prosecuting law-breakers, a deeper and more systemic problem that involved more than trading booze for cattle was at the root of the problem in New Mexico Territory.

Borderlands, by their very nature, are economic hot-spots. Within those hot-spots, regardless of their location, black-market economies thrive. When a borderland connects two disparate cultures who are also in conflict, such markets act as profit centers and a means to fund resistance movements. The illegal trade that Alexander stumbled upon was doing both.<sup>9</sup>

After Grant dispatched Alexander to inspect the rest of the posts in the Territory, interesting revelations concerning this trade began to come to light. Capt. George Letterman of the One-Hundred and Twenty-Fifth United States Colored Infantry was in command of Fort Bascom on 18 April 1867, when some of the post's cattle were stolen. A fresh trail was found and Letterman ordered Lt. John D. Lee, Third Cavalry, and six troopers from Company E, to

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<sup>9</sup> Several scholars have written about the link between borderlands and black-market economies. See David J. Weber, *The Mexican Frontier, 1821-1846, The American Southwest Under Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1982), 284; William deBuys, *Land of Enchantment and Exploitation: The Life and Hard Times of a New Mexico Mountain Range* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995), 114-19; James F. Brooks, *Captives and Cousins: Slavery, Kinship, and Community in the Southwest Borderlands* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 117, 337, 338; Pekka Hämäläinen, *Comanche Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 317; Kenner, *A History of New Mexico – Plains Indian Relations*, 97, 155; Robert Rosenbaum, *Mexicano Resistance In the Southwest: The Sacred Right to Self Preservation* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 26, 27. Similar shadow-economies crop up in borderland regions throughout the world. See Benjamin Nathans, *Beyond the Pale: The Jewish Encounter with Late Imperial Russia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 380.

pursue. After tracking the absconded herd for about forty miles, they found the rustlers about eight miles west of Hubbell's Ranch. After spotting Lieutenant Lee and his men, the thieves fled. Sam Smith, one of Hubbell's hired hands, informed Lieutenant Lee that Hubbell had "arrived a short time previous and immediately left." Captain Letterman made clear in his report to headquarters that Hubbell was his prime suspect. Subsequent reports reveal the military believed this man was trading weapons and whiskey for stolen livestock. Thus, as it turned out, Hubbell, an ex-military man, was not only selling the Army cattle from Texas, but their own cattle as well. Not surprisingly, Hubbell never returned to his ranch. Since this location appeared to be a Comanchero way-station of sorts, the Army decided it was a good place to establish a permanent picket detail, and took over the abandoned ranch.<sup>10</sup>

The New Mexico courts' unwillingness to prosecute illegal traders, along with the revelation that one of the Army's own was involved in the Comanchero trade, revealed just how systemic and deep-reaching these exchanges were. Pekka Hämäläinen's eloquent portrayal of Comanche dominance in the region notes the participation of the New Mexican traders in this black market economy, but he barely touches upon the Comancheros' impact. Bartering for agricultural and manufactured products was legal, which made stopping illegal transactions more difficult. It was almost impossible for the pickets stationed along the Fort Smith road (the main highway between the Llano Estacado and the Sangre de Cristos) to ensure only authorized traders used it. Officers like Alexander also complained that there were far too many permits being issued, yet General Carleton seemed unable, or unwilling to do anything about it. The War Department sought help from the Office of Indian Affairs, complaining that too many Indians

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<sup>10</sup> Capt. George Letterman to De Forrest, 27 April 1867, Capt. John V. D. DuBois to De Forrest, 23 August 1867, LS, DNM, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 49: 112, 130.

from the Rio Grande Pueblo communities were getting passes. The superintendent of Indian affairs in New Mexico, A. B. Norton, was ordered to stop giving passes to the Puebloans. He responded by pointing out that General Carleton had been freely handing out passes of his own to Hispano traders. Superintendent Norton explained to Washington officials that if they were serious about stopping illegal trade, the District of New Mexico's commander needed to stop issuing them as well.<sup>11</sup>

In the midst of these evolving concerns, General Carleton was removed from command in July 1867. Early on, the Bosque Redondo disaster reflected badly on his skills as a department commander. Later he had been slow to muster out the volunteers, and he seemed reluctant to listen to new ideas regarding how best to address the Comanchero problem. During the war, no such accusations were made because Carleton was constantly issuing orders to halt the trade. It is true that during the war his superiors gave him a free rein, and that was not the case in 1867. It is possible that Carleton was dragging his feet because he resented Sherman and Sheridan's interference. But Carleton believed Major Alexander's report on the conditions of the frontier posts was behind his removal. He defended himself against such charges, noting the lack of funds, manpower, and resources as the culprits behind disrepair and any reported neglect. Whether Alexander's report was the sole cause or just a convenient excuse is unknown, but in July of 1867, Col. George Washington Getty became the new commander of the District of New Mexico.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Alexander to De Forrest, 26 January 1867, LS, DNM, RG 98 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 49: 106; Kenner, *History of New Mexican – Plains Indian Relations*, 158, 177.

<sup>12</sup> On General Carleton's defense of his actions, see *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant, Volume 18: October 30, 1867 to June 30, 1868*, ed. John Y. Simon (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Press, 1991), 74.

Colonel Getty's ascension to command within the District of New Mexico was but one of many changes that would impact the Comanchero trade, and thus Fort Bascom operations, during this period. Change can usher in renewed vigor and positive results, but it can also bring about confusion. At the same time the New Mexico volunteers began to muster out, the superintendent of the Department of Indian Affairs in New Mexico, Felipe Delgado, was replaced by Norton. Norton ordered the Pueblo Indians to stop trading in Texas, as well as with any other Nuevo-mexicanos. The military also stopped issuing passes. These changes created an opening for Anglo American traders, at least for a while.<sup>13</sup>

Anglo American civilian traders were not new to the Eroded Plains or the Texas Panhandle, but the insertion of a military post along the Canadian River altered trade dynamics, at least in the short run. Situated between the Comanches and the Comancheros, soldiers became aware of the large volume of goods that flowed back and forth along the Comanchero trails. Exploring how some Fort Bascom's officers tried to insert themselves within this trade illustrates just how enticing it could be. Thirty years after the fact, one such trader, José Tafoya, claimed that Maj. Edward H. Bergmann hired him to trade with the Indians in 1864. It was true that Bergmann settled on a ranch about four miles south of the post after he retired, and he did sell cattle to the United States Army for a short period of time. It is also true that he once applied to Commissioner of Indian Affairs N. G. Taylor for a license in 1868, yet no contemporary account verifies that the government granted his request. Whatever plans he might have had regarding trading with the Indians, legitimate or otherwise, must have been short-lived because by 1870

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<sup>13</sup> Kenner, *History of New Mexican – Plains Indian Relations*, 177.

Bergmann was working in Colfax County, New Mexico, running Lucien Maxwell's mining operation.<sup>14</sup>

The records do show that Bergmann did act when he unearthed a fellow officer's scheme to trade government property for profit. In March of 1866, he ordered Capt. Charles Deus and Company M, First New Mexico Cavalry, to escort a supply train back "to the states." Bergmann directed Captain Deus to box up and label supplies the company would not be taking with it. He also ordered Deus to create a list of those goods. Once Deus was on his way, Bergmann compared the list with materials stored in the boxes and found that several old rifles were missing. During an inquiry into the matter, Deus and his sergeant, A. W. Branch, claimed the guns had been stolen. In a letter to Headquarters, Bergmann was clearly disgusted with Deus. As far as he was concerned, Deus was probably trading the rifles for profit.<sup>15</sup>

A small group of Fort Bascom officers believed they had an opportunity to make some money by filling the void left by the absence of legal traders on the plains. Prior to mustering out, one of these men, Capt. Patrick Healy of the First New Mexico Infantry was a member of the post's Council of Administration. This council broke down the costs of supplies for the post on a per-man basis. In January 1866, this group included post quartermaster Lt. Charles J. Jennings and the soon to be infamous Capt. Charles Hubbell. As an example, the cost for flour in January, as recorded by Captain Healy, was fourteen cents per man. The total cost for all goods

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<sup>14</sup> Deposition of José Piedad Tafoya, June 26, 1893, Indian Depredation Case No. 9133, Records of the U.S. Court of Claims, RG 123, NA, found in Kenner, *A History of New Mexican – Plains Indian Relations*, 157. For the most part, I have relied on Maj. Andrew W. Evans's official report of this expedition. Evans was brevetted to the rank of lieutenant colonel and is so noted in this report, but elsewhere I use his regular rank of major. See Bvt. Lt. Col. A. W. Evans, "Headquarters, Canadian River Expedition, Monument Creek Depot, January 23, 1869," edited by Carl Coke Rister, *Volume of Oklahoma* 16 (September 1938), 286 [hereafter cited as Evans, "Canadian River Expedition," and page number.].

<sup>15</sup> Capt. Edward H. Bergmann to De Forrest, 13 May 1866, Fort Bascom N.M. Collection, Panhandle Plains Historical Museum Research Center. Canyon, Texas, 79105.

purchased in January for this post was ten cents per man. In this manner these officers kept track of the cost of doing business on the frontier with the contractors who supplied goods to the military. After mustering out of the volunteers in August 1866, Healy and Jennings formed a partnership with two other officers, R. C. Rose and E. W. Wood, who had been stationed at Fort Bascom. Wood was once Carleton's adjutant in Santa Fe. These men sought to impose a monopoly on the Indian trade.<sup>16</sup>

Healy traveled to Washington, D.C., to meet with Commissioner of Indian Affairs D. N. Cooley to plead his case. Healy convinced Cooley that cleaning up the illegal barter in New Mexico required the elimination of the Hispano middleman, and the establishment of trade between Anglo Americans and the Southern Plains Indians. Such an exchange, Healy argued, would ensure that the Comanches and Kiowas would be provided with food and clothing, not whiskey and weapons. Additionally, if he and his partners were in charge of the trade, the flow of stolen livestock would cease, because he would not accept contraband in any form for his goods. Cooley was certainly looking for a new way to tackle the problem and agreed to supply Healy and his partners with trading permits.<sup>17</sup>

Healy returned to New Mexico believing the trade was his, yet he underestimated the entrepreneurial spirit of his main competitors, the Comancheros. At first, his trip to Washington seemed to have worked just as he had envisioned. General Carleton and local Indian Agent Norton received messages from their superiors to stop Hispanos and Pueblo Indians from traveling to Texas. This appeared to leave the door wide open for Healy and his partners. Yet

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<sup>16</sup> Capt. Patrick Healy [Recorder], 28 January 1866, Council of Administration, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 49: 67; Kenner, *History of New Mexican – Plains Indian Relations*, 159.

<sup>17</sup> While others have referred to this matter, all sources go back to Kenner; *History of New Mexican – Plains Indian Relations*, 159 – 160.

Puebloan and Hispano traders had seldom paid attention to whatever authority was in charge at a given period in time, whether it was the Spanish, Mexicans, or Americans. To Healy's dismay, this was still the case in late 1866 and early 1867. The Puebloans managed to extract passes from their agent, John D. Henderson, and the Hispanos who lived in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains continued to slip by authorities and make their exchanges anyway. Within weeks, Healy was in deep financial trouble, for not only had his scheme failed to corner the market, his competitors were flooding that same market with their own goods. Unable to compete, Healy and his partners tried to salvage their investments.<sup>18</sup>

While it is not clear if the four men remained partners, it is obvious that they all went into business with the Comancheros. Jennings, the ex-quartermaster, established a trading post at Hatch's Ranch. This abandoned ranch was once a military camp located on the west side of Mesa Rica along the Pecos River. Hatch's Ranch was also positioned in the midst of the well-traveled Comanchero travel route that ran from the Sangre de Cristo Mountains to Bosque Redondo. Jennings did business with experienced trader José Tafoya, and R. C. Vose made deals with Comanchero Manuel Chavéz. Later, these Hispanos struck deals of their own with other Comancheros, thus the ex-soldiers, trying to unload their goods, sparked a new wave of illegal trading in the Canadian River Valley. Comanches and Kiowas, aware of this influx of goods, began to round up the barter needed to make successful trades. By the time Colonel Getty replaced General Carleton in the summer of 1867, the black market economy was in full bloom across the Llano Estacado. One Fort Bascom officer reported that he had stopped "Sub. traders . . . scoundrels who succeed frequently in smuggling contraband goods." The traders had papers signed by Charles J. Jennings. As it turned out, Healy, who initiated this disaster, was charged

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<sup>18</sup> Kenner, *History of New Mexican – Plains Indian Relations*, 159 – 160.

with getting involved in the same illegal barter that he had promised Commissioner Cooley he would stop, if only given the chance. Getty revoked Healy's trading license on 12 September 1867, declaring that this "Indian Trader" had violated regulations by sending Hispanos into "Comanche country." Getty also ordered Healy's remaining merchandise confiscated and taken to Fort Bascom.<sup>19</sup>

Some of Jennings employees had a similar clash with a Fort Bascom patrol. After the garrison was "raided . . . by some Mexicans," Capt. John V. D. DuBois sent Sgt. Charles Brown of the Third Cavalry and seventeen troopers from Company E in pursuit. Sixty miles east of the fort, Brown apprehended six Hispano Comancheros leading eleven donkeys loaded with goods toward the Llano Estacado. Although not the perpetrators that Sergeant Brown had been seeking, they were clearly in violation of the law. The traders informed Brown that another group, further toward Texas, had their passes. The eleven pack mules were carrying:

About 200 pounds of corn meal, 500 of Mex. hard bread, 35 or 40 butcher knives, 9 files, Vermillion, a lot of shirts, some red and white flannel, one vest, some iron hoops, ticking, calico, Monte cans, and shelled corn, tea, sugar, flour, letter paper, candy, one regalia, one box of Army caps (100) about (400) percussion caps (small) – several pounds of lead, about 5 pounds of Powder and 16 Enongated [elongated] Balls Cav. Cal. 58.<sup>20</sup>

This itemized list illustrates the variety of goods Comancheros used to acquire Texas cattle and horses. By the time Sergeant Brown returned to the post, Captain Dubois had been reassigned. In his place, the recently promoted Capt. George W. Letterman of the One-Hundred and Twenty-fifth United States Colored Infantry made the official report to Headquarters. He made it clear that the Comanches were interested in more than weapons and whiskey, the most common

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<sup>19</sup> Letterman to De Forrest, 31 August 1867, LS, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 49: 132; Getty to DuBois, 12 September 1867, LS, DNM, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 21: 115.

<sup>20</sup> Letterman to De Forrest, 31 August 1867, LS, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 49: 132.

refrain concerning the Comanchero trade. On the contrary, Indians living along the Canadian River were apparently just as interested in purchasing dry goods, food staples, and hardware, as any American consumer in the nineteenth-century American West. Letterman also noted that his men were constantly stopping “several parties with trains on their way to the Comanche Country to trade.”<sup>21</sup>

Healy and Jennings thought their knowledge of the Comanchero trade would serve them well after they retired from the military, yet they failed to appreciate the fact that their competitors were not easily dissuaded by the law or regulations. This Anglo American attempt to take over the Southern Plains Indian trade remains the incident most scholars use when referencing Fort Bascom. Yet such shenanigans were not isolated to the men of this frontier post and remain inconsequential when inserted within a larger historical study. What is important about this failure is that it sheds light on the deeply engrained nature of the Comanchero trade in the region. Healy, Jennings, Rose, and Wood were not the first, nor the last, Canadian River Valley newcomers to underestimate the skill, tenacity, or power, this black market economy engendered in Hispano traders.<sup>22</sup>

Another report from Captain Letterman revealed that Fort Bascom soldiers were still busy patrolling along the Fort Smith road during early September. Over a ten-day period, different patrols rounded up eight-hundred cattle being herded into New Mexico. This stock was taken to Fort Bascom, where Letterman described a near impossible situation. He was not prepared to handle the care and feeding of so many animals which were not in the best of health.

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<sup>21</sup> Letterman to De Forrest, 31 August 1867, Letterman to De Forrest, 7 September 1867, LS, DNM, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 49: 132, 135; Hämäläinen, *Comanche Empire*, 318.

<sup>22</sup> Getty to DuBois, 12 September 12 1867, LS, DNM, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 21: 115.

Angry Hispano herders lingered outside the fort, demanding their property be returned to them. The beleaguered captain had also heard that there were Comanches in Texas about to move north with more cattle. These same Indians were reported to have in their possession some white children and “one negro captive.” Despite the frustration in his correspondence to Headquarters, a month later, Letterman was ready to withdraw his pickets from the same area: “The Comanche trade has entirely ceased.” He informed Getty that illegal activity on the Fort Smith road had also stopped.<sup>23</sup>

One possible reason for the cessation in traffic was the peace treaty that was signed between the United States government and several bands of Southern Plains Indians on 21 October, 1867. The Peace Commission, a select group of military and civilian leaders, including both General Sherman and Commissioner of Indian Affairs Nathaniel G. Taylor, had recently come to the conclusion that the United States was to blame for most of the violence, and an equitable and fair solution to the problem should be devised. This included creating a reservation for the Comanche and Kiowa, to be located between the North Fork of the Red River and the ninety-eighth meridian. It is possible that word of this agreement, known as the Medicine Lodge Treaty, had already spread to the Canadian River Valley, causing the exchanges to slow or come to a stop.<sup>24</sup>

Letterman’s request to remove his pickets from the Fort Smith road occurred just three days after the Treaty was signed. Distance had never been an impediment to Southern Plains Indians. By 24 October, illegal traffic into New Mexico had ceased, at least in the Canadian

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<sup>23</sup> Letterman to De Forrest, 7 September 1867, Letterman to Acting Assist. Adj. Gen. Edward Hunter, 24 October 1867, LS, DNM, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 49: 135, 144.

<sup>24</sup> Robert M. Utley, *Frontier Regulars: The United States Army and the Indian, 1866 – 1891* (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1973), 133, 134; Kenner, *History of New Mexican – Plains Indian Relations*, 182.

River Valley, and it is possible that events in Kansas impacted such activities. Yet peace would remain fleeting because the Treaty was flawed from the start. Chiefs Mowway and Tabaquena were not present at Medicine Lodge, Kansas, indicating they were not ready to contemplate moving to a reservation. After this agreement, approximately 1,500 Kotsoteka and Kwahada Comanches still remained on the Llano Estacado. Of the agreement, Chief Mowway said, “When the Indians . . . [on the reservation] . . . are treated better than we are outside, it will be time enough to come in.” Chief Tabaquena’s observation about the results of the Peace Commission’s plan was even more blunt. He preferred to “stay out on the prairie and eat dung” than be penned up on a reservation. Both of these men were very familiar with Fort Bascom. They had lived in the Canadian River Valley all their lives and did not plan on leaving any time soon. As a result, the year 1868 would prove to be another critical year in the history of this post.<sup>25</sup>

While officials in Washington, D.C., searched for a European-style, nineteenth-century solution to their problems with the Southern Plains Indians, such as sitting down at a table and coming to a verifiable agreement, the Navajos and Comanches continued to apply their own brand of negotiation to conflict, using survival skills that they had learned from their fathers and grandfathers. In late December 1867, seventeen Navajos raided Pedro Sandoval’s New Mexico ranch of 150 sheep, 7 mules, and 225 sacks of flour. In early January, Comanches attacked several isolated ranches in North Texas, killing twenty-five settlers and running off with fourteen children. In February, seven more Texas ranchers were killed, five more children were captured, and fifty horses and mules were stolen. During this period W. Fanning explained to Gov. James W. Throckmorton that Montague County was being depopulated. Fanning cautioned Governor

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<sup>25</sup> Both quotes come from Ernest Wallace, “The Historic Indians of the Llano Estacado,” *The West Texas Historical Year Book* (1982), 8.

Throckmorton not to take any solace from statistics that indicated a drop in thefts, for there was not enough livestock in his county left to count. Even before 1868, the Army, busy maintaining order in Reconstruction Texas, was unable or unwilling to protect the ex-Confederate ranchers who lived Montague County. As a result, this region was devastated by raids in 1865 and 1866, when Comanches and Kiowas extracted 20,375 cattle, valued at \$124,670.00. Of the Texans in Comanche County, H. Secrest wrote on 18 April 1867: “We cannot make a living. . . . I fear we will be compelled to give way.” On 7 August of the same year W. E. Jones, of New Braunfels, informed Governor E. M. Pease, “There is not safety for life or property . . . within forty or fifty miles . . . except immediately about the military posts or towns.” Such depredations stretched from the heart of Texas to the farthest reaches of New Mexico, spanning around eight-hundred miles in all directions. At the same time that Texans were screaming for help, the Army was in the process of scaling back its force. Such reductions were another reason why federal officials sought a nonviolent solution at the Medicine Lodge meetings. By then, the Army was reduced to 56,815 officers and soldiers, with more cuts on the way. Yet despite the forced reductions, by the spring of 1868 military leaders knew that the Peace Commission had failed.<sup>26</sup>

General Sheridan became commander of the Department of Missouri in the fall of 1867, but he did not take complete control until 1868. Once situated at Fort Leavenworth, he began to put together a plan that would force Indians onto reservations if they did not agree to go on their own. As he put together this strategy, four more Texas ranchers were killed along the Brazos River in July, seeming to validate *his* ideas. He believed that the Southern Plains Indians who

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<sup>26</sup> The raid on Pedro Sandoval comes from, Dubois to Hunter, 7 January 1868, LS, DNM, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 49: 150; Dorman H. Winfrey and James M. Day, eds., *The Indian Papers of Texas and the Southwest, 1825-1916*, 5 vols. (Austin: Pemberton, 1966 – 1995), 4: 182, 183, 237; Joseph P. Peters, *Indian Battles and Skirmishes on the Indian Frontier* (New York: Argonaut Press, 1966), 13, 14.

remained on Llano Estacado understood the language of violence much better than the language of peace. Sheridan was one of the Civil War's most articulate messengers of this language. In the waning days of the summer 1868, he put the final touches on the message he planned to send to Chiefs Mowway, Tabaquena, and their people. Once again, Fort Bascom would play a large role in the United States Army's effort to gain control of the region.<sup>27</sup>

In a plan that would have warmed General Carleton's heart. Sheridan called for three columns to converge on a section of the Canadian River and capture the recalcitrant Comanches and Kiowas in an unbreakable vise. The operation was scheduled for the dead of winter, when a lack of forage would find the Indians' horses at their weakest. Southern Plains Indians were less mobile from late November to the following spring, yet the timing of such an operation also posed significant hardships for the soldiers and animals charged with carrying it out. Sheridan knew this, but the tactical advantage he believed the Army could gain was worth the hardships. Due to its location on the doorstep of Comanchería, Sheridan could not help but include Fort Bascom in his plans.<sup>28</sup>

Orders for Sheridan's 1868 winter campaign were distributed in October. Maj. Andrew W. Evans, stationed at Fort Stanton, was to lead one column from Fort Bascom. This prong of the attack would penetrate into the Texas Panhandle and move toward the Antelope Hills. Comanches were known to winter in this location. A column led by Maj. Eugene A. Carr, also targeting Antelope Hills, was to move down from Fort Lyon. These two groups were to drive any

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<sup>27</sup> Peters, *Indian Battles and Skirmishes*, 13, 14.

<sup>28</sup> Utley, *Frontier Regulars: The United States Army and the Indian*, 145, 149, 154; Paul Hutton, *Phil Sheridan and His Army* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1985), 42; William H. Leckie, *The Military Conquest of the Southern Plains*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1963), 114.

Comanches or Kiowas found in the area to the east, where they would be attacked by another column, this one led by Col. George A. Custer and Col. Alfred Sully.<sup>29</sup>

Major Evan's specific mission included moving down the Canadian River to the old adobe fort, where Col. Kit Carson's troops had made their stand in 1864, and then find the best location for a supply depot. Once this was established, he would conduct military operations in whatever direction he deemed prudent. The supply depot was an essential component of the mission, because just like the Indians, the Army's horses would find little forage on the prairies, and the soldiers could only carry so much food in their packs. Custer and Sully were also required to construct a depot and did so about one-hundred miles south of Fort Dodge. They called it Camp Supply.<sup>30</sup>

The second front in the United States Army's war against the Southern Plains Indians was opened from Fort Bascom. Evans arrived at this post on 5 November. One of his first orders of business was to request that Headquarters send him Colonel Carson's Canadian River Expedition report. There were several similarities between the two operations. When Evans arrived at Fort Bascom, Post Commander Capt. Louis Morris, of the Thirty-seventh United States Infantry, was away on a prolonged scout with a portion of this regiment's Company F and three companies of the Third United States Cavalry. This is similar to what happened in 1864. When Carson arrived at Fort Bascom that November, Maj. Edward H. Bergmann had just returned from a major scout along the Upper Cimarron Crossing. Additionally, just like in 1864, the Army wanted Ute and Apache auxiliaries to join them in 1868. Like Carson before him, Col.

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<sup>29</sup> Hutton, *Phil Sheridan and His Army*, 52, 53.

<sup>30</sup> Hunter to Evans, Special Order No. 160, 20 October 1868, LS, DNM, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 22: 335; Evans, "Canadian River Expedition," 279-282.

Albert H. Pfeiffer, stationed at Fort Garland in 1868, was ordered to Cimarron, New Mexico, to convince these same Indians to participate in another expedition. When Evans arrived at Fort Bascom, the Utes were already at the post, outfitted, supplied, and ready to move east. That they were ready so early became a problem. The Army was far from ready and would not be for several more days. The Utes would soon become impatient. Captain Morris returned from his scout on 9 November 1868. Evans took one look and decided that just like Bergmann's men and mounts, most of Morris's troopers were too worn out to participate. Also like Bergmann, Morris was put in charge of coordinating all supplies and logistics at the post when the expedition moved out. Evans did select three officers from Morris's company to take part in the mission. Lieutenants Samuel Hildeburn, John K. Sullivan, and A. H. Luettwitz of the Thirty-Seventh Infantry were all given significant responsibilities during the expedition. By mid-November 1868, soldiers, civilians, and wagons were streaming into Fort Bascom from all directions.<sup>31</sup>

Fort Bascom was soon teeming with soldiers from all over the region, most of whom had served at the post in some capacity in the past. Capt. James H. Gageby arrived with Company I of the Thirty-seventh Infantry from Fort Stanton. Capt. Ezra P. Ewers led Company D of the Thirty-seventh Infantry from Fort Sumner. Company F of the Third Cavalry, as well as some men from Company F of the Thirty-Seventh Infantry, were already camped outside the post when Evans arrived. Capt. William Hawley and Company A of the Third Cavalry, rode into Fort

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<sup>31</sup> The idea that Fort Bascom opened up the "second front" on the Southern Plains Indians comes from a discussion with Durwood Ball on May 9, 2012. For Evans' request of Carson's report, see Leckie, *The Military Conquest of the Southern Plains*, 117. Captain Pfeiffer was a veteran of Fort Bascom; see Returns, Fort Bascom, February 1866; Evans, "Canadian River Expedition," 282; Hunter to Bvt. Lt. Col. A. H. Pfeiffer, Fort Garland, 20 October 1868, LS, DNM, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 22: 360.

Union from Cimarron on 28 October, and left the next day for Fort Bascom, accompanied by Maj. Elisha W. Tarleton and Company I of the Third Cavalry.<sup>32</sup>

Getting quality supplies delivered to the post with such short notice proved to be a daunting and frustrating task. Evans had to inspect the wagons as they rolled in from Fort Union, Fort Sumner, and local villages. At one point, he was forced to reject a wagon loaded with spoiled oats. Upon sending scouts to find out why a large delivery of bacon had not arrived, Evans found that the wagons carrying this load had broken down and off-loaded its goods on the side of the road. The major sent several Army wagons to retrieve the supplies. As all manner of medical supplies, food, and forage began to arrive, Evans concluded that the thirty-one wagons he had in his possession were not going to be enough to haul the materials he needed to survive a Texas Panhandle winter. In the midst of this confusion, he got word that the Utes had disappeared. Having grown tired of waiting for the expedition to get started, they had left for their homes in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains.<sup>33</sup>

Evans dispatched a letter to Lucien Maxwell, the same Maxwell that Colonel Carson had visited when he was charged with convincing the same Native Americans to join his expedition. Evans told Maxwell to inform the Utes that if they wanted to partake of the huge stores of bison robes, animals, and foodstuffs that awaited them in Texas, there was still time. Despite this plea, Evans' main focus remained getting the column headed east. Continually assessing his situation, he determined that he needed more wagons, and he commandeered sixteen that had been hauling

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<sup>32</sup> Captain Gageby and Company I, Thirty-Seventh United States Infantry, were familiar with Fort Bascom, having served there in July 1868. He was killed during the 1868 campaign. See Returns, Fort Bascom, November 1868. Captain Hawley and Company A of the Third United States Cavalry were also veterans of the post, having first been stationed there in September 1866. See Returns, Fort Bascom, September 1866; Evans, "Canadian River Expedition," 282.

<sup>33</sup> Evans, "Canadian River Expedition," 283.

corn between Bascom and Fort Sumner. This brought the expedition's total to forty-seven, which did not include three ambulances and a vehicle to haul the blacksmith's forge. The wayward bacon finally arrived on 17 November 1868. Evans immediately ordered everyone to prepare to move out. This portion of Sheridan's winter campaign started for Texas the next day.<sup>34</sup>

Scholarly works on the Indian Wars have seldom included more than a few sentences or a footnote about the Canadian River Expedition of 1868, yet a detailed study of Evans and his soldiers' role in efforts to gain control of the Southern Plains Indians reveals the challenges the United States Army faced on the frontier. The column left Fort Bascom on 18 November 1868. Four miles to the south, it passed Bergmann's ranch-house, then, as Major Evans reported, it turned east after striking Carson's old trail. The size of the caravan, almost biblical in nature, included four-hundred and forty-two enlisted men, ten officers, seven-two civilians, nine scouts, forty-seven supply wagons, three ambulances, three-hundred and twenty-nine horses, twenty-seven mules, and twenty packers. Hundreds of cattle were also a part of this caravan, ensuring the men a fresh supply of beef along the way. Evans' pre-occupation with wagons continued. Even as he made his final plans to depart, he contracted with civilian James Patterson for two ox trains. Obsessed with ensuring his animals would have enough to eat, these last-minute additions meant the Army could take a total of 93,000 pounds of corn and 64,600 pounds of oats into Comanchería.<sup>35</sup>

Evans' first goal was to establish the supply depot. Once this was accomplished, he could focus on the mission, search out and destroy the Comanches' main winter haunts. Every fall, the

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<sup>34</sup> Evans, "Canadian River Expedition," 283.

<sup>35</sup> Evans, "Canadian River Expedition," 284. The total forage number comes from combining the original tonnage in corn and oats with the amount acquired from James Patterson, as noted in Evans, "Canadian River Expedition," 284.

Southern Plains Indians left the plains for the shelter afforded them by deep-walled canyons and secluded mountain valleys. The War Department knew this, yet it had failed to mount a major mission into Comanchería in four years. There were several good reasons why this was so. The Civil War required the Union army to remain focused on Confederates, not Native Americans. After the war, there was a strong faction within the government that demanded a peaceful solution to their conflict with Native Americans. This resulted in the Peace Commission. Reduction in forces after the war also played a role. Some well-respected westerners argued that winter campaigns were just wrong-headed. When mountain man Jim Bridger heard what General Sheridan was up to, he openly voiced his objections to such a plan. Bridger asked why Sheridan thought soldiers from New Jersey and Kentucky would be able to handle the Llano Estacado winter better than its native people could. Sheridan was disturbed by this meeting but refused to change his plans. He believed his strategy was a good one, and he was determined carry it out, despite the hardships he knew his men would have to endure during the campaign.<sup>36</sup>

Major Evans' obsession with wagons illustrated his own concerns regarding the mission. Each enlisted man carried twenty days of supplies on his person or his horse. The wagons carried an additional forty days of rations for each soldier. Fifty-five Fort Bascom troopers participated. Most came from Company D of the Third Cavalry, but several officers from the Thirty-Seventh Infantry also took part. Lieutenant Sullivan of Bascom was put in charge of the column's four mountain howitzers and their twenty gunners. Many of the soldiers who came from other New Mexico posts had served at Fort Bascom in some capacity during the past year.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Evans, "Canadian River Expedition," 286. For Sheridan's discussion with Bridger, see Carl C. Rister's comments in Evans, "Canadian River Expedition," 289.

<sup>37</sup> Evans, "Canadian River Expedition," 282, 286.

Four days after leaving the garrison, Bridger's warnings proved prescient. On 22 November 1868, only forty-seven miles from the post, a blizzard struck the column. The caravan had traveled through the Eroded Plains and were high atop the Llano when the storm hit. Evans kept the men moving. The only defense against the elements was a single tent for each company. Headquarters was also confined to one tent. On the morning of the twenty-sixth, Evans was informed that his men were already running low on forage. That same day, 135 cattle and some oxen wandered off. One of the main arguments of this study is that while military tactics played the crucial role in defeating the Comanches and Kiowas, it was moments of adversity such this, and how American soldiers fought through them, that illustrate how the Army finally defeated the Southern Plains Indians.<sup>38</sup>

Evans ordered a search party to find the cattle, and he sent several wagons back to Fort Bascom for more forage. He led the rest of the column deeper into Texas. They passed the old adobe fort, the furthest penetration Carson and his New Mexico volunteers made in December 1864. At this point, the column angled off into the northeastern corner of the Texas Panhandle. Approximately thirty miles from the adobe ruins, they struck Wolf Creek, a Canadian tributary. The river and its creeks wound around low mountains and cut gaps in the high plains, leaving deep arroyos and canyons, a topography very similar to what Fort Bascom soldiers were familiar with. It resembled the country north of the post, near Corazon Mountain and Canyon Largo. Just north-east of present-day Borger, Texas, they entered a region where Native Americans had been living for centuries. Here, the Ogallala Aquifer bubbled out of the ground through a broken

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<sup>38</sup> Evans, "Canadian River Expedition," 282, 286, 287. Unknown to Evans, at about the same time his column was hit by the snowstorm, Sully, Custer, eleven companies of the Seventh United States Cavalry, and five companies of Nineteenth Kansas Cavalry were engaged in a battle with Black Kettle's Cheyenne in the Wichita Mountains. See Frederick W. Rathjen, *The Texas Panhandle Frontier* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1973), 188-189; and Leckie, *Military Conquest of the Southern Plains*, 95-97.

country of canyons, small mountains, and lush valleys. A stranger not familiar with the region might miss the spring-fed creeks entirely. The Antelope Creek Focus people of the fifteenth century knew them, and four-hundred years later both Comanches and Comancheros knew, for this was a well-known rendezvous site. Somewhere in this vicinity, about twenty or so miles north of the Canadian, Major Evans ordered the construction of the supply depot. He called it Monument Creek.<sup>39</sup>

Creating the depot took about a week. Soldiers and civilians cut down cottonwood trees and filled sand-bags with dirt. The logs were strategically placed between the bags to fashion earthworks of sorts. Within these earthworks several tents were erected to house the supplies. Once this task was accomplished, Evans placed Fort Bascom's Lt. A. H. Luettwitz, of the Thirty-Seventh Infantry, in charge of supplies at the depot with twenty men. Prior to leaving, he sent several empty wagons back to Fort Bascom to be refilled.<sup>40</sup>

Evans and his men moved out on 15 December, having no idea what Carr or Custer were doing. The Fort Bascom column rode south. On the twentieth it crossed the frozen North Fork of the Red River, and it crossed it again on Christmas Eve. Despite the bitter cold, campfires were restricted. Still moving east, the Wichita Mountains of the Indian Territory came into view. The temperatures kept dropping, at one point forcing the expedition to find shelter, halting behind a low bluff. On Christmas Day they rode through a recently abandoned campsite. At the same time, some of Evans' men alerted him that they were being followed. He ordered Major Tarleton

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<sup>39</sup> On early Native Americans in this region, see Lauren C. Hammack, *Archaeology of the Ute Dam and Reservoir of Northeastern New Mexico* (Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico Press, 1965), 4; Dan Flores, *Caprock Canyons: Journeys Into the Heart of the Southern Plains* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), 2; Alex D. Krieger, "The Eastward Extension of Puebloan Datings Towards the Cultures of the Mississippi Valley," *American Antiquity* 12 (Jan., 1947), 143; Evans, "Canadian River Expedition," 287.

<sup>40</sup> Evans, "Canadian River Expedition," 287-89.

to take Company I of the Third Cavalry and investigate. Tarleton pursued these Indians into a canyon.<sup>41</sup>

Although he did not know it at the time, Major Evans and his men had just found a large Nokoni Comanche village. These Nokonis, led by Chief Horseback, were suspected of many of the depredations that had occurred in North Texas during the previous summer. Terheryaquahip (Horseback), was probably away when the Army arrived. In his place, Chief Arrow Point led an attack on Tarleton and his men. Shortly thereafter, the captain sent a messenger back for help. Evans ordered Capt. Deane Monahan and Fort Bascom's Company G, Third Cavalry, to join the battle. A nearby band of Kiowas led by Chief Woman's Heart also heard the shots and came to the Comanches' aid. When Company G arrived, they found Company I heavily engaged with Indians in their front and above their heads, as many were hidden among the canyon wall's crevices. The two Third Cavalry troops managed to inch their way forward, pushing the Comanches and Kiowas down the mouth of the North Fork of the Red River. Evans remained on top of the plains, listening. It was clear that his men had kicked over a hornet's nest. He ordered Lieutenant Sullivan and his howitzer battery, along with Captain Hawley and Company A, to join the battle.<sup>42</sup>

According to Evan's official report, about 134 soldiers, both cavalry and infantry, were sent into the canyon. Once the soldiers made it around a large bend in the river, the Nokoni village came into view, its inhabitants in the midst of a chaotic evacuation. Evans later estimated

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<sup>41</sup> Evans, "Canadian River Expedition", 290-93. The location of this canyon is in present-day Greer County, Oklahoma, known at the time as Soldier Spring. Both the current location, and information concerning "Woman's Heart," comes from H. Allen Anderson, "CANADIAN RIVER EXPEDITION," *Handbook of Texas Online*, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/qfc01>, published by the Texas State Historical Association (accessed March 10, 2013).

<sup>42</sup> Evans, "Canadian River Expedition," 293; Rathjen, *Texas Panhandle Frontier*, 191, Leckie, *Military Conquest of the Southern Plains*, 114-18.

that this winter camp housed approximately five-hundred Comanche men, women and children. Of that five-hundred, 150 were warriors. Evans made no mention of how many Kiowas were also involved in this battle.<sup>43</sup>

After ordering Sullivan and Hawley to join the fight, Evans started the rest of the column in a wide arc around the canyon, trying to block the Indian villagers' escape. At the same time, Tarleton, Hawley, and the rest were pinned down by Comanche sharpshooters and fell back to await further orders. The officers expected Evans to ride up and take control of the scene. Yet their commander was half-way around the canyon when the messenger rode out. As a result, the soldiers in the canyon gave the Comanches just what they needed, an opening to escape. Despite Evans' efforts, the women, children, and most of the camp's horses made it out of the canyon. Once that happened, the warriors silently withdrew and melted into the Wichita Mountains.<sup>44</sup>

This Nokoni band escaped, but in the process the Indians lost six months of supplies, their homes, twenty of their best warriors, and their leader. Chief Arrow Point was one of the casualties. Evans' detailed inventory of what his troopers found included 25,000 pounds of dried bison meat, 200 sacks of corn meal, 1,200 pounds of "killikinick tobacco," 150 bushels of corn, copious amounts of sugar, hatchets, axes, and molds to form 250 pounds of lead into an innumerable amount of bullets. His men ate some of the dried beef, fed the corn to their horses, and then set fire to the camp.<sup>45</sup>

Although the battle was over, the soldiers' war against the elements continued. They spent the next several days scouting up and down the Washita River in search of Southern Plains

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<sup>43</sup> Evans, "Canadian River Expedition," 294.

<sup>44</sup> Evans, "Canadian River Expedition," 294-97.

<sup>45</sup> Evans, "Canadian River Expedition," 298.

Indians who refused to live on the reservation. Another winter storm blew in, covering the men, their horses, and the ground with snow. On 30 December 1868, four of Sheridan's scouts found them on the Washita River. Evans had no idea that they were only twenty miles from their commander's headquarters, Fort Cobb. He was informed that Custer had fought the Cheyenne on the same river in late November. The major sent Lt. Edward Hunter back with these scouts to file his report and request an immediate resupply of food and forage. While they waited, a Private Von Cleve from Company F, of the Thirty-Seventh Infantry, died from wounds received in the battle. As it turned out, Fort Cobb would not be sending supplies. One possible reason was that hundreds of Southern Plains Indians were filing into this post to surrender. They were hungry. Sherman ordered Evans and his column to return to their depot on Monument Creek. They had been gone for two and a half weeks. On the way back, their horses began to starve. Soldiers fed them the bark off of cotton-wood trees during the ten days it took to get back to the depot. One-hundred and seventy-two horses and sixty-six mules died from the elements, starvation, or both during the month-long expedition away from the depot.<sup>46</sup>

In their absence, Lieutenant Luettwitz had been busy sending empty wagons back to Fort Bascom and bringing supplies to Monument Creek. At Bascom, Captain Morris oversaw the expeditious exchange of draft animals and the proper packing of food to ensure the Army did not starve on the frozen prairies of Texas. The day after Evans and his men returned to Monument Creek, two wagon trains arrived from Fort Bascom with more food and forage.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Evans, "Canadian River Expedition," 298, Rathjen, *Texas Panhandle Frontier*, 191. The expedition left the depot on 15 December 1868 and returned on 13 January 1868. The death count for animals on this expedition is from Evans, "Canadian River Expedition," 300.

<sup>47</sup> Evans, "Canadian River Expedition," 299.

Evans's troops spent their last days in Texas hunkered down at the sub-depot trying not to freeze to death while they awaited new orders. During this wait, the major received word that a large band of Comanches, hiding far in Texas, wanted to surrender. He had yet to hear from Sheridan when he received this message. With each day, he had watched his men's rations dwindle away. After serious deliberation, Evans decided his column was in no shape to travel deeper into Texas to accept a surrender. Instead, he decided he could no longer wait for Sheridan and prepared move out. He later explained that his men were worn out, his animals were dying, and his chances of getting back to New Mexico were not certain. Like Carson in the winter of 1864, Evans could not stay put on the winter plains of northwest Texas.<sup>48</sup>

Major Evans immediate impression of his expedition was that it was a failure. He wrote that the blame could be placed on him. Yet he wrote these words without the luxury of hindsight. His report was also written in the afterglow of Custer's November victory along the Washita River. Unlike Carson or Custer, Evans did not have a champion at Headquarters to hail his achievements. Carson had Carleton. Custer had several well-placed advocates, including Sherman and the American press. So despite the obvious significance of the elimination of a major Comanche winter camp in 1868 by the Thirty-Seventh Infantry and the Third Cavalry, the operations of the Seventh Cavalry overshadowed those of Fort Bascom's men in Sheridan's overall mission.<sup>49</sup>

Custer left Sheridan at Camp Supply during a snowstorm on 23 November, leading eleven companies of the Seventh south toward the Antelope Hills. After striking a large trail in the snow, the column turned east, finding fifty Cheyenne lodges on the Washita River on the

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<sup>48</sup> Evans, "Canadian River Expedition," 301.

<sup>49</sup> Evans, "Canadian River Expedition," 300.

twenty-sixth. Custer divided his troops and attacked the village. In the battle that followed Black Kettle and 103 warriors, as well as fifty-three women and children, were killed. Such was the great victory that Sheridan reported back to Sherman.<sup>50</sup>

Sheridan's original plan of using three converging columns to smash the enemy was largely a success, but not in the way he intended. For the Cheyennes, Arapahos, Kiowas, and Comanches who continued to live independently between the Arkansas and Red Rivers, the idea of becoming wards of the United States seemed a fate worse than death. After watching their families suffer through the winter campaign, most of their leaders were forced to reconsider, and by the spring of 1869 they agreed to move to the Indian Territory. Their surrender was not simply a reaction to Custer's assault on Black Kettle and the Cheyenne. The destruction of the Nokonis's camp at Soldier Spring was just as important. A large contingent of Arapahos and Cheyenne remained on the defensive, unwilling to surrender, after Custer's victory. It was only after Evan's column destroyed Chief Horseback's village that the majority of Southern Plains Indians from across the region began to report to their designated reservations. This event did great psychological damage to Native Americans from Kansas to the Texas Panhandle. The total war concept Sherman and Sheridan perfected in Georgia during the Civil War began to produce dividends on the Southern Plains. In late December and early January, Cheyenne and Arapahos began to file into the reservation located next to Camp Supply. Many Comanche and Kiowa bands rode to Fort Cobb, also ready to submit. This second group was eventually located on the east side of the Wichita Mountains after Fort Sill was established. Additionally, some of the

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<sup>50</sup> Hutton, *Phil Sheridan and His Army*, 62-68.

Comanches who battled Evan's troopers showed up at Fort Bascom before the soldiers did, ready to surrender.<sup>51</sup>

Sheridan's winter strategy also forced two of the Comanche's most defiant bands, the Kwahadis and the Kotsotekas, to reconsider their options. They sent word to Santa Fe that while they were opposed to settling in the Indian Territory, they were willing to relocate to New Mexico. Colonel Getty, commander of the District of New Mexico, redirected them to Sheridan. Chief Mowway of the Kotsetekas ignored this reply and rode into Fort Bascom to plead his people's case. It should have come as no surprise that these Canadian River Valley Indians would lobby for a home in New Mexico, where they had both cultural and economic ties with the Hispano community. Major Morris sent Mowway with chiefs Wild Horse, Buffalo Robe, Quahip, and Ventura to Getty in Santa Fe. After participating in some negotiations with the District commander and Superintendent of Indian Affairs Norton, they decided coming to Santa Fe was not such a good idea and tried to slip away in the middle of the night. This led to their arrest and removal to Fort Union. Anglo and Hispano civilians were fearful that this turn of events would ruin any chance of a lasting peace. The five chiefs were later transferred to Fort Leavenworth, but they were eventually released.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> One of Kansas foremost frontier historians argues that Evan's attack had a major impact on the Cheyenne and Arapaho decision to move to the reservation. See Marvin Garfield, "Defense of the Kansas Frontier, 1868 – 1869," *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 1 (Nov., 1932), 467. Some scholars note that Chief Horseback (Terheryaquahip) was at the Soldier Spring battle. Kavanagh states he was at Fort Cobb when the fight took place. Major Evans reported that "Chief Arrow Point" was in command of the Indians during the battle. Rathjen simply stated that the attack was against Horseback's "village." Wilbur S. Nye declared that Horseback was there. Rathjen, *Texas Panhandle Frontier*, 191; Wilbur S. Nye, *Carbine and Lance* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1869), 79; Thomas W. Kavanagh, *The Comanches: A History 1706 – 1875* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 422.

<sup>52</sup> Kenner notes that the chiefs were moved from Fort Union to Fort Cobb. Kavanagh states it was Fort Leavenworth. Kenner, *History of New Mexican – Plains Indian Relations*, 182-83; Kavanagh, *Comanches*, 423.

While depredations across the Texas frontier subsided for a while, they did not cease. Sheridan believed Nuevo-mexicanos were to blame, as they continued to supply their trading partners with both food and weaponry. He believed the Comancheros were the main reason the Kwahadi were able to remain in the field after the winter campaign. Thus eliminating this trade was paramount to forcing the Comanches and their Kiowa allies onto the reservation. He ordered Colonel Getty to burn any trade goods found on Hispanos heading onto the Llano Estacado, and to shoot any cattle they led back into New Mexico. Such orders proved Sheridan was deadly serious about ending the trade. The United States Army soon came to appreciate what Carleton, Carson, and Bergmann had learned long ago: the Comancheros were more formidable than anyone in the War Department in distant Washington, D. C., could fathom. The black-market economy that tied Hispanos to Comanches was rooted in the region's culture, and the generational alliances that formed against common enemies could not easily be broken.<sup>53</sup>

In the summer of 1866, General Sherman replaced New Mexico's volunteers with regular army personnel. He had long believed this was the key to gaining control of the region, yet nine years would pass before the Southern Plains Indians were completely subdued. Shortly after the Regular Army took over at Fort Bascom, some veterans of the First New Mexico Cavalry tried to corner the market on trade with the Comanches, but they were easily outmaneuvered by the Comancheros. This failure has been used to denigrate the New Mexico volunteers stationed at this post. It is possible that their actions confirmed the Division commander's own thoughts concerning the volunteer soldiers, yet such myopia was not useful to either Sheridan or the historical record. Fort Bascom and its soldiers' contributions to the military's efforts to gain control of the region began in 1863 and did not end until 1874. Expanding upon the earlier

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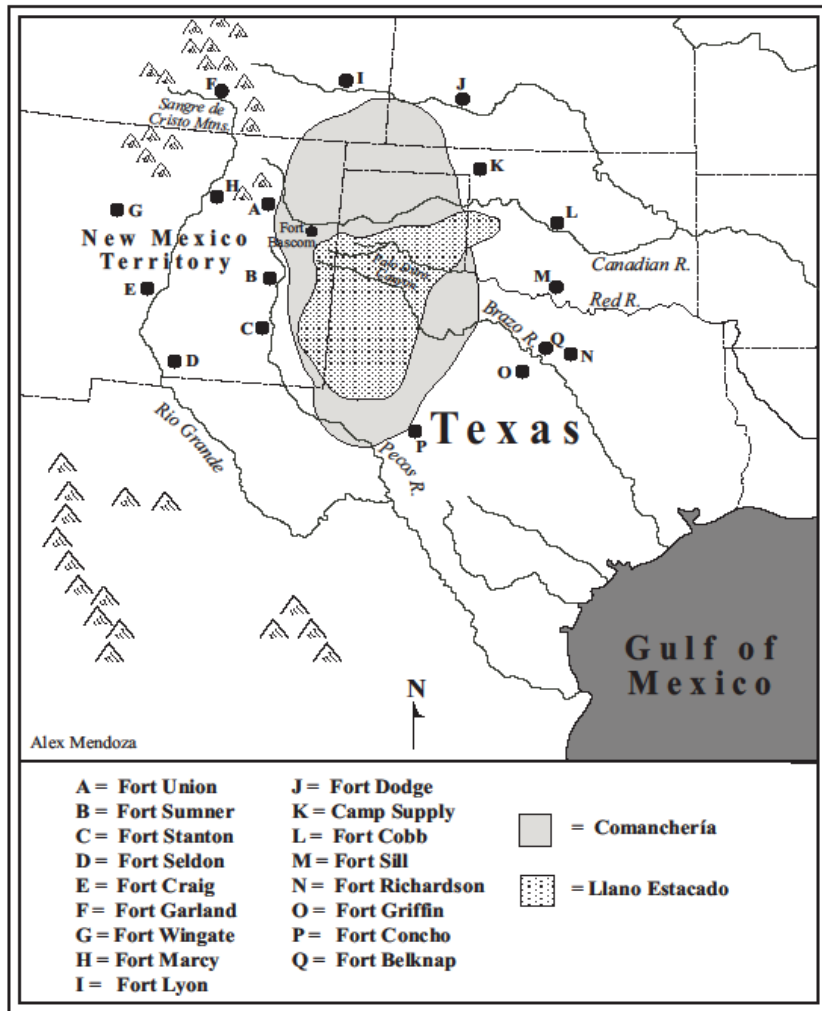
<sup>53</sup> Kenner, *History of New Mexican – Plains Indian Relations*, 184.

efforts of the volunteers, Regular Army regiments such as the Third Cavalry, the Fifty-Seventh United States Colored Infantry, the Thirty-Seventh Infantry and finally the Eighth Cavalry did yeoman service in the Canadian River Valley until the last Comanches filed into their reservation in southwestern Oklahoma. Constant scouts across the Eroded Plains and the Llano Estacado originated from Fort Bascom during this period. Major Evans' victory against the Nokoni at Soldier Spring is a specific example of this post's role in military operations. One weakness in Sheridan's strategy of converging forces was the omission of using troops from Texas. This allowed some of the Comanches and Kiowas to escape Sheridan's vise. Thus the Comanchero and Comanche continued to do business. As long as that was the case, the United States Army used Fort Bascom as a base of operations.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Such myopia can be found in Kenner's otherwise excellent work. He suggests the soldiers of Fort Bascom "were intimidated by the forbidding wastes which surrounded [Fort Bascom] it [and] paid little attention to the trade." He also characterized their patrols as "feeble attempts" to stop the trade, while in the same sentence he noted that they did halt some of the Comanchero exchanges. All other scholars use Kenner as the most important source on the Comancheros, and rightly so, however this dissertation counters his disdain or lack of respect for Fort Bascom's soldiers by illustrating that their attempts to stop the trade were far from feeble. See Kenner, *History of New Mexican – Plains Indian Relations*, 177.

Map 2. Southwestern military frontier in the 1860s



## CHAPTER 8

### TEXAS'S NORTHERNMOST FRONTIER FORT

The Kwahadi and Kotsoteka Comanches and their Kiowa cohorts remained a viable and dangerous force on the Texas frontier after General Philip Sheridan's winter campaign ended in 1869. They were able to maintain their way of life despite the Army's determination to bring it to an end, in part because of the Comancheros. Thus, despite Fort Bascom's official closure in the fall of 1870, hundreds of Fort Union troopers spent their summers at Fort Bascom for the next four years. From 1871 until 1875, they took part in regular patrols through the Eroded Plains and participated in major expeditions into Texas. This final chapter reinforces why Fort Bascom could be called Texas's northernmost frontier post. It also explores the impact the environment, culture, and the transnational black-market economy had on these soldiers' efforts to accomplish their difficult task.<sup>1</sup>

In early March of 1869, several men were murdered near the Texas border. Lt. William J. Cain of the Third United States Cavalry took ten troopers from Company C and rode east from Fort Bascom to investigate. Two days and sixty miles later, they found four dead men strewn about a dry lake bed. It was obvious that they had been extracting salt from this bed when they were attacked. The only Anglo American, a man by the name of Wright, was scalped. Cain did not know, or report, the names of the three Hispano workers found with Wright. He did note that all four of the victims had been shot in the head, and they were riddled with additional bullet holes. Cain also reported that the fingers and thumb of each man's right hand were missing. An

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<sup>1</sup> On Fort Bascom's closing, see Col. George W. Getty, Special Orders No. 105, 20 October 1870, Letters Sent, District of New Mexico, Record Group 98 [now 393], National Archives, in Arrott Collection, Volume 24, p. 191, Donnelly Library, New Mexico Highlands University, Las Vegas, NM [hereafter, LS, DNM, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, volume: page].

empty wagon sat near the lake's bank. The lieutenant found some stray cattle that he assumed belonged to the deceased party, hitched them to the wagon, and then loaded the bodies into its bed. Troopers found fresh horse-tracks nearby that led toward the Sangre de Cristo Mountains. Cain admitted that he had no idea who had committed these crimes. The lieutenant and his men returned to Fort Bascom with their tragic cargo.<sup>2</sup>

The citizens of New Mexico were not surprised by Cain's discovery. They immediately correlated this atrocity to Col. George W. Getty's recent arrest of five Comanche chiefs in Santa Fe. Locals believed these murders were in reprisal for the chiefs' incarceration and feared it was only the beginning. The *Daily New Mexican* reported that the Navajos were responsible, even though Cain had been unable to identify the culprits. Thus despite the success of the winter campaign, the Canadian River Valley was still a dangerous place, and it would remain so for several years.<sup>3</sup>

For the Southern Plains Indians, 1869 was a transitional year, as many of them started to settle on their designated reservations in Oklahoma. Even those who refused found it beneficial to make an occasional appearance so they could get government rations. Such was the case with Mowway's Kotsotekas and Satanta's Kiowas. But the Comanches and Kiowas who resigned themselves to the reservation system also continually expressed their displeasure with how it was being run. Indian Agent Lawrie Tatum and several officials who served on a Board of Indian Commissioners reported these Indians' grievances to Washington. Yet despite a willingness on

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<sup>2</sup> Lt. William J. Cain to Act. Assist. Adj. Gen. Edward Hunter, LS, DM, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 49: 200-01.

<sup>3</sup> *Daily New Mexican*, March 16, 1869, in Charles L. Kenner, *A History of New Mexican – Plains Indian Relations* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1969), 183. For the five chiefs' incarceration, see Thomas W. Kavanagh, *The Comanches: A History 1706 – 1875* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 423.

the part of some Native American leaders to cooperate with the government, a certain contingent could never quite leave their Canadian River homeland for good.<sup>4</sup>

There was a lull in Comanchero sightings during the summer of 1869. This was due, in part, because Colonel Getty publicized Sheridan's order to burn trade goods and kill all animals seized by the Army during its patrols. By the fall, the situation had changed. Fort Bascom's new commander, Maj. Horace Jewett of the Fifteenth United States Infantry responded to a renewed series of Comanchero sightings by sending thirty men on a three-week patrol into Texas. Lt. William Hartz of the Third United States Cavalry led these troopers on the scout to break up the trade "carried out by citizens of this territory and hostile Indians." After traveling one-hundred and sixty miles to the east, Hartz and his men were engulfed in a winter blizzard, forcing them to prematurely return to the post.<sup>5</sup>

While this patrol did not apprehend any Comancheros, similar operations yielded better results in 1870. Several Hispano traders were captured the following spring. They were caught traveling east, down the Fort Smith road to Texas. Afterwards, Jewett posted a picket between Fort Bascom and Fort Sumner to catch future caravans before they got out of New Mexico. He also informed his men to be on watch for a band of Cheyennes and Arapahos who abandoned their reservation in the Indian Territory. Jewett's own patrols delivered up two Comancheros returning to New Mexico with stolen livestock. To make clear that Army leaders meant what they said, Jewett had their cattle destroyed.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Kavanagh, *Comanches*, 423-425.

<sup>5</sup> Kenner, *History of New Mexican – Plains Indian Relations*, 184; Returns From Military Posts, Fort Bascom, December 1869, Record Group 94, National Archives, Washington, D. C. (Microfilm 617A, Roll 81) [hereafter Returns, Fort Bascom, followed by month and year]. Returns, Fort Bascom, December 1869.

<sup>6</sup> Kenner, *History of New Mexican – Plains Indian Relations*, 184; Acting Asst. Adj. Gen. William Kobbe to Maj. Horace Jewett, 2 July 1870, LS, DNM, RG 98, NA, in Arrott Collection, 24: 105.

Officers within the District of New Mexico knew their problems with the Southern Plains Indians were far from over. Between one and two a.m. on 15 June 1870, between forty and fifty Indians attacked William Stapp's ranch, located about a mile from the fort. The owner chased them away by firing several shots, but not before a "Mexican woman" who lived there had been scalped. During the raid, the Indians posted sentinels between Stapp's property and Fort Bascom to prevent anyone from alerting the post. After stealing several of this rancher's horses, they brazenly approached the fort and absconded with five of Hugh Masterson's mounts. Jewett noted: "These Indians were well-armed and mounted and had a change of animals [,] and are supposed to be under the command of Eagle Tail." Getty ordered Jewett "to check any demonstration that may be made in this direction. . . . Keep a Cavalry scout constantly in the field and on the move and relieving it from time to time by fresh detail." While posted to Hubbell's Ranch, Lt. Robert Carrick of the Eighth United States Cavalry reported to Jewett that he had discovered a new Comanchero campsite on the Llano Estacado. The major sent Carrick nine additional troopers from the Eighth and three privates from the Fifteenth United States Infantry and ordered him to pursue the Comancheros into Texas.<sup>7</sup>

Illegal traders became more active during this period for two reasons. One was related to government inefficiency, and the other to Fort Bascom's closing. Kiowas, Cheyenne, and Comanches that had agreed to move to the reservation grew tired of waiting on the federal

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<sup>7</sup> Jewett to Kobbe, 15 June 1870, LS, DNM, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 49: 232-33; Kobbe to Jewett, 2 July 1870, LS, DNM, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 24: 105; Jewett, Special Order No. 87, 26 August 1870, LS, DNM, RG 393, NA, Arrott Collection, 49: 250. Fifty-eight Eighth United States Cavalry troopers joined twenty-four Fifteenth United States Infantry soldiers at the post in May 1870. More Eighth Cavalry troopers arrived throughout the summer, indicating the Army's concern with the illicit traffic. See Returns, Fort Bascom, May, July, and August 1870. Research could not identify Jewett's "Eagle Tail," although in Nye's report on Major Price's expedition he references a Kiowa named Eadle-tau-hain who was also called Botalye. See Maj. William Redwood Price, Official Report, File 2815, Old Files, Adjutant General's Office, Washington, Files for 1874 – 75, edited by Captain W. S. Nye, "Excitement on the Sweetwater," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 16 (June, 1938), 245, 246 [hereafter known as Price, "Excitement on the Sweetwater," with page number].

government to come-through on their promises. Many returned to the plains and began steal cattle and horses from the settlements in north and northwestern Texas. Afterwards, they exchanged stolen livestock for goods they needed to sustain their old way of life. Despite this increased activity, the new commander of the Department of Missouri, Maj. Gen. John Pope, closed Fort Bascom in October 1870. This order led to more illegal activity throughout the Canadian River Valley and a burst of depredations across North Texas.<sup>8</sup>

Fort Bascom's official closure was explained as a cost-saving measure. The previous May, Major Jewett has submitted a repair estimate for the post's "hospital" of \$7,500 dollars to headquarters. Pope used such information to help him determine which frontier garrisons were not essential to gaining control of their prospective regions. By the fall of 1870, Forts Arbuckle, Gibson, Smith, and Bascom were notified that they would no longer function as full-time posts. Pope believed that the soldiers stationed at these garrisons could be re-allocated to larger bases for the winter and then sent back to the abandoned posts each summer on an as-needed basis. On 20 October Colonel Getty of the District of New Mexico ordered "all available transportation" from Fort Union to the Canadian River Valley post to remove its supplies (with the exception of three months of rations, medical supplies, and arms for eight men). By 26 October, government wagons full of Fort Bascom supplies were on their way back to Fort Union, leaving a window of opportunity open to the Hispano entrepreneurs who lived in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> On unhappy Comanches beginning to leave the reservations in the summer of 1870, see Kavanagh, *Comanches*, 427. On the uptick in raids as a direct result of Fort Bascom's closure, see Kenner, *History of New Mexican – Plains Indian Relations*, 185.

<sup>9</sup> Jewett to Kobbe, 14 May 1870, LS, DNM, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 49: 227-28; *Report to the Secretary of War*, United States Congress, House Ex. Doc. 1, pt. 2, 42<sup>nd</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> Session (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1871), 35, 36; Getty, Special Orders No. 105, 20 October 1870, LS, DNM, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 24: 191; Returns, Fort Bascom, November 1870.

On paper, General Pope's decision to close Fort Bascom made sense, but the new commander of the District of New Mexico who replaced Getty, Col. J. Irwin Gregg of the Eighth United States Cavalry, was keenly aware that a strong military presence along the Fort Smith rode would still be needed when the spring grasses began to grow. Colonel Gregg sent Frank Delisle, the region's long-time guide, on an undercover mission onto the Llano Estacado in early March to see what the Comancheros were doing. He ordered Delisle to travel through the Eroded Plains, check known trails into Texas, talk with settlers, look for signs of Comanches, and then report his findings to Maj. David R. Clendenin of the Eighth United States Cavalry. By the time Delisle returned, Clendenin had been relieved of his command at Fort Union and ordered, along with Companies D and F of the Eighth Cavalry, to Fort Bascom. Gregg ordered Clendenin to prepare his men for "for active service. . . . Each trooper will have two extra shoes fitted for his horse, and a quantity of nails pointed, to be carried in the saddle pouch." This directive makes clear the new commander's thought process regarding a spring campaign and his concern for the 135 horses and 54 mules that were to take part in it. Private Eddie Mathews of Company L noted that they were kept busy in March "making ration sacks [and] mending clothes," in preparation for a "six month scout."<sup>10</sup>

The closed Fort Bascom was teeming with Eighth Cavalry troopers by April 1871. Initial operations consisted of two companies in the field at all times, one patrolling between Bascom

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<sup>10</sup> Col. J. Irwin Gregg to Maj. David R. Clendenin, 25 February 1871, LS, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 25: 48. Animal count from Chief QM to 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. John Lafferty, Eighth Cavalry, 25 February 1871, LS, DNM, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 25: 124, 125; Private Eddie Mathews, "Letters From Home and Journal of His Military Years," transcribed by Ora Mathews Bublitz, typescript, n.d., Fort Union National Monument Archives, Fort Union National Monument, Watrous, New Mexico. National Monument Archives. The Mathews' letters and journal entries used in this chapter include "Fort Union, N.M.," March 3, 1871; "Fort Bascom, N.M.," April 3, 1872; "Camp at Fort Bascom, N.M.," June 25, 1872, "Journal," August 6, 1872 – September 6, 1872; "Fort Bascom, N.M.," March 26, 1873, "Fort Bascom, N.M.," July 17, 1874; and "Fort Union, N.M.," April 17, 1874. See also Mathews, "Fort Union, NM," March 3, 1871.

and Fort Sumner, the other scouting up and down the Fort Smith road. Major Clendenin made it clear that no “laundresses or camp followers” were to come near the post. He ordered his troopers to remain in the field as long as they had supplies. He also emphasized to his men that taking care of their horses was essential to the mission’s success.<sup>11</sup>

Capt. James F. Randlett soon found evidence to support Charles L. Kenner’s claim that Fort Bascom’s closure led to “the Indian Summer of the Comanchero.” His troop captured twelve traders headed toward Texas with “powder, lead, cloth, Trinkets and Fancy Articles,” loaded on twenty-three mules. Captain Randlett followed Sheridan’s orders to the letter, killing the mules and setting fire to their trade-goods. Randlett informed Clendenin that these Comancheros, from Mora, San Miguel, and Santa Fe counties, were led by “a Comanche squaw.” The next day Randlett’s company came across another group of traders herding five-hundred cattle back to New Mexico. These animals were taken to Fort Bascom. Of Randlett’s exploits, the *Daily New Mexican* wrote, “The vigorous campaign opened by the military authorities upon the Comanche traders, is already showing its affect [sic].” Clendenin rode to Fort Bascom before Randlett could order the cattle’s destruction, wanting Major Gregg to make that decision. Clendenin also informed Gregg of the rumor that more Comancheros would soon arrive in New Mexico with three-thousand more Texas cattle. Additionally, he had been told that these traders were prepared to fight to keep their livestock.<sup>12</sup>

In response to Clendenin’s report, Gregg ordered the major to keep the most recent herd of cattle in Fort Bascom’s corrals and “guard them until further orders.” The commander of the

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<sup>11</sup> Clendenin to Troops in the Field, Fort Bascom, N.M., 30 April 1871, LS, DNM, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 25: 161.

<sup>12</sup> Kenner, *History of New Mexican – Plains Indian Relations*, 185; Clendenin to Kobbe, 31 May 1871, LS, DNM, RG 98 [now 393], NA, in Arrott Collection, 25: 210. Second quote from *Daily New Mexican*, June 6, 1871.

Eighth Cavalry also sent Company L to join D and F at the post. These three companies did duty in the Canadian River Valley all summer, rotating back from extended scouts every thirty days. While at the post, some of the troops found sleeping arrangements inside the old commissary building. Others had to make-do with two-man tents on the parade grounds. Gregg's equivocation on Sheridan's order to slaughter all stolen livestock created problems in the latter part of the year. Some of the cattle in their possession wandered away or were stolen. Captain Randlett was court-martialed over their loss. Clendenin came to his defense, explaining it was impossible to protect all the animals they had collected over the summer. The major informed Gregg that 340 cattle were still being cared for in mid-September. As winter approached, he asked for further instructions on what to do with the animals and wondered how much longer his men needed to stay at Fort Bascom. Shortly thereafter, the animals were turned over to local authorities, and all but a handful of troopers left for Fort Union.<sup>13</sup>

In 1872 and 1873, the total damages exacted upon Texans by Southern Plains Indians, as estimated by the claimants, topped \$48,000,000.00. Almost all of that was lost in North and West Texas. Officials charged with determining the validity of these claims based such losses on current value alone. Although the amount officials verified was much lower, eleven million dollars, this was still a significant amount of money. Still, such staggering amounts for a two-year period are just statistics. They cannot begin to describe the destruction and disruption visited upon Texans in the early 1870s. While a portion of these losses can be attributed to Mescalero Apaches and Kickapoos working with Mexicans operating out of Mexico, the records also reveal that widespread physical and economic destruction occurred in the northwestern half

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<sup>13</sup> Act. Assist. Adj. John Lafferty, Eighth Cavalry to Clendenin, 3 June 1871, LS, DNM, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 26: 12; Kenner, *History of New Mexican – Plains Indian Relations*, 188; Clendenin to Lafferty, 17 September 1871, LS, DNM, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 26: 147.

of Texas during this period, and much of this devastation was directly attributable to the Comanchero trade.<sup>14</sup>

Reports to the United States House of Representatives recorded 262 submitted claims to the federal government for losses due to “Indian Depredations.” Twenty-four of these petitions for losses were submitted in north, north central, and northwest Texas. After reviewing each of these requests, authorities agreed that they were legitimate. The value of these claims totaled \$73,314.00. Such a snapshot can be used to help illuminate how the extraction of resources from the heart of Texas cut into the economic underbelly of the state. Three examples from the above list reveal that such numbers are more than statistics. On 1 October 1872, the Comanches swept into Llano County and took 48 of Daniel Moore’s horses from his ranch. His loss was assessed to be \$3,000.00. In January of 1871, 1,020 cattle and 55 horses were stolen from William Beddo of Palo Pinto County. He claimed \$36,100.00 in losses, yet the government approved only \$18,600. In August 1873, A. J. Henson lost five horses to Indians in Jack County, and then lost five more in November to raiders in Clay County. Federal officials awarded him \$1,250.00 for his trouble. The combined losses for these four instances came to \$22,850, yet the numbers did not account for related damages. Related damages included future income not realized due to the inability to bring stolen livestock to market or grow the herd. Crop losses sustained from not having the draft animals required to work the fields were not included. According to W. Fanning, not a month passed in 1867 which did not include Indian raiders passing through Montague County. The \$44,572,415.43 in claims for North and West Texas during 1872 and 1873 came from a total of

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<sup>14</sup> Dorman H. Winfrey and James M. Day, eds., *The Indian Papers of Texas and the Southwest, 1825-1916, Volume 4*, (Austin: Pemberton, 1966), 182, 183, 237; United States Congress, 43<sup>rd</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> Session, House Ex. Doc. 257 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1874), p. 3. Also see Glen Sample Ely, “Gone to Texas and Trading with the Enemy: New Perspectives on Civil War West Texas,” *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 60 (April, 2007), 446.

354 petitions detailing Indian depredations. Lewis A. Dickson of Wise County claimed that he lost cattle and horses worth \$159,750.00 in raids from 1868 to 1873. Direct evidence does not link the Comancheros to these specific claims, yet this study has documented their role in redistributing the wealth of Northwest Texas's pastoral economy into New Mexico's shadow-economy.<sup>15</sup>

During this period, Chihuahuan ranchers and Kansas cowboys operated on opposite ends of a Comanche conduit that funneled stolen horses and cattle onto the Llano Estacado and beyond. As a result, the United States Army, despite cut-backs, was forced to allocate more manpower in the Canadian River Valley. Colonel Gregg, commander of the Eighth Cavalry, was ordered to personally take charge of operations in this region in the spring of 1872.<sup>16</sup>

As Gregg made preparations to leave Fort Union, he requested both a packer and a guide be allocated to his command. He noted to Headquarters that a guide was crucial because neither his officers nor his troopers were familiar with the region. A good packer was also essential. As Darlis A. Miller has explained, few regular soldiers could master the art of packing. This art, Maj. Andrew J. Alexander once opined, was only "acquired after years of practice." He added that a poorly packed scout was destined for disaster.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> United States Congress, House Ex. Doc. 103, 50<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> Session [Serial Set 2651]; United States Congress, H. Report 1135, 48<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> Session [Serial Set 2256]; Winfrey and Day, *Indian Papers of Texas and the Southwest*, Vol. 4, p. 155; United States Congress, *Report of the United States Commission to Texas*, 43<sup>rd</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> Session, H. Ex. Doc. 257 (Washington: GPO, 1874), p. 3. Dickson's claim comes from Kenner, "The Great New Mexico Cattle Raid," *New Mexico Historical Review* 37 (Oct., 1962), 246.

<sup>16</sup> Kenner, *History of New Mexican – Plains Indians Relations*, 192; Pekka Hämäläinen, *The Comanche Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 315.

<sup>17</sup> Gregg to Acting Asst. Adj. Gen. W. Sartle, 9 May 1872, LS, DNM, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 27: 123. Alexander's quote from Darlis A. Miller, *Soldiers and Settlers: Military Supply in the Southwest, 1861 – 1885* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1989), 269.

Not long before Gregg and the Eighth Cavalry ventured into Texas to pursue the Comancheros, Col. Ranald S. Mackenzie of the Fourth United States Cavalry in Texas was ordered to do the same. Mackenzie scouted up the Brazos River and camped in Blanco Canyon, near the present-day town of Crosbyton. The colonel patrolled across the Texas Panhandle and into New Mexico, making a stop at Fort Bascom before returning to Fort Concho. Mackenzie failed to come across any Comancheros, but he reported to both Col. Gordon Granger, the new commander of the District of New Mexico, and Gen. Christopher C. Augur, Commander of the Department of Texas, that he had seen plenty of fresh cattle trails leading into New Mexico. General Augur hailed Mackenzie's patrol as "the first instance . . . where troops have been successfully taken across the Staked Plains." Augur's claim contributed significantly to the blank spot in the historical record regarding Fort Bascom's role in gaining control of the Southern Plains Indians. If given the opportunity, Bascom's troopers could have pointed out the numerous patrols across the Llano Estacado that they had participated in over the years, all long before Colonel Mackenzie first ventured into the Canadian River Valley.<sup>18</sup>

Both Army officers and Texas civilians were frustrated by the Comancheros' ability to avoid capture. It was doubly frustrating when traders who were apprehended did not face consequences for their actions. As far back as the summer of 1870, Fort Bascom's commander complained about local authorities' unwillingness to cooperate. Major Jewett believed the only way to stop the exchanges was to focus on persons who purchased the stolen livestock from the Comancheros. After capturing two Hispanos with a herd of cattle, Jewett dispatched them to

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<sup>18</sup> Kenner, *History of New Mexican – Plains Indians Relations*, 192. Col. C. C. Augur's quote comes from *Annual Report of the Secretary of War*, 1872, found in Kenner, *History of New Mexican – Plains Indian Relations*, 56. As earlier noted, both Frederick W. Rathjen and Ernest Wallace hailed Mackenzie's expedition as the first United States military expedition in the Llano Estacado. See Ernest Wallace, *Ranald Mackenzie on the Texas Frontier* (Lubbock: West Texas Museum Association, 1964), 56; Frederick W. Rathjen, *The Texas Panhandle Frontier* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1973), 202.

Santa Fe with the recommendation that Headquarters find a way to wring damaging information out of them. He declared, “My theory of this trade is that there are some wealthy and prominent Mexicans in the Territory who furnish means and supplies to the poorer chap [,] taking no risks themselves of apprehension, but the lion’s share of the profit.” Indian Agent A. J. Curtis voiced a similar complaint to Superintendent of Indian of Affairs, Col. Nathaniel Pope, noting that when soldiers did manage to make an arrest, the jurists in their trials were “composed wholly or in part of Mexicans, [and] there is little hope of justice.” Fed up with the situation, Texas cattleman John Hittson led a contingent of his fellow ranchers into New Mexico to retrieve their herds. Colonel Granger in Santa Fe sent word to Gregg to stay out of it. He ordered him to “take no part in the matter . . . unless to help avoid bloodshed.” Yet there was bloodshed. After arriving in the Territory, the Texans found many of their brands in the valleys that fronted the eastern side of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains. One of the most powerful men in the Territory, Eugenio Romero, kept a large ranch just outside of Las Vegas, New Mexico. Hittson found some Texas brands on Romero’s land, yet considering this man’s political connections, the Texans kept moving. They found more Texas cattle at Loma Parada, just outside of Fort Union, grazing on Edward Seaman’s property. According to Kenner, Seaman was the “police chief and post master” of area. He ordered the Texans off his ranch. Seaman was shot and killed for his trouble. The cattle became a part of a larger herd that was rounded up and taken back to Texas without any interference from the Army. Hittson later claimed that he recovered between five and six thousand of his own cattle in New Mexico.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Jewett to Headquarters, Fort Bascom, August 26, 1870, LS, DNM, RG 98 [now 393], NA, in Arrott Collection, 49: 251; U.S. Indian Agent A. J. Curtis to Col. Nathaniel Pope, 1 November 1872, in *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs to the Secretary of the Interior for the Year 1872* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1872), 689. Granger’s order is found in Sartle to Commanding Officer [Gregg], Fort Bascom, 1 August 1872, LS, DNM, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 27:192. Hämäläinen details the extraction of cattle from

An investigation into the Comanchero trade is wrapped within a larger story that includes common purpose, greed, and the economic destruction of Northwest Texas. This common purpose was often tied to an undercurrent of subtle resistance that did not originate from an ideological center. The Comancheros' role in extracting pastoral wealth out of the Lone Star State helped facilitate a transnational exchange that stretched from Nuevo Laredo to the Kansas plains. Such wealth enticed well-to-do Hispanos like Romero, Anglo cattlemen like the unfortunate Seaman, and American soldiers like Charles J. Jennings to participate in this trade. The redistribution of stolen Texas livestock did considerable economic damage to Americans living in the region, and it slowed expansion into the area for at least a decade. This is why Colonel Gregg of the Eighth Cavalry led his troops into Texas in August of 1872.<sup>20</sup>

The target was Quitaque Canyon, a popular Comanchero rendezvous about 170 miles to the southeast of the fort. Private Eddie Mathews of Company L wrote several letters to his parents in the days leading up to their departure. On 3 August Mathews noted that Companies C and D had joined M, L, and B at Fort Bascom to make preparations for their "move to the front." He anticipated that they would meet Colonel Mackenzie and the Fourth Cavalry along the way. By then, Mackenzie had already left Blanco Canyon and was scouting toward New Mexico. These two regiments did not cross paths, but covered much of the same ground in the coming weeks. Private Mathews complained of sunburn, the food, and the comforts that his commanding

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Texas by the Comanches, who in turn traded them to the Comancheros for goods during this period, which led to Hittson taking action on his own. See Hämäläinen, *Comanche Empire*, 315; Kenner, "The Great Comanchero Cattle Raid, 1872," 250.

<sup>20</sup> Despite Kenner's mischaracterizations of Fort Bascom's soldiers, no one has detailed the significance of the Comancheros as this historian has. Emerging scholarship on the region does note this resistance, but not its full implications. See Hämäläinen, *Comanche Empire*, 317; Brian Delay, *War of a Thousand Deserts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 110, 111; James F. Brooks, *Captives and Cousins: Slavery, Kinship, and Community in the Southwest Borderlands* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 291; and Ely, "Gone to Texas and Trading with the Enemy," 445.

officer enjoyed during the expedition. Mathews found it particularly galling that Gregg sent troopers on a five-mile trek each morning to purchase fresh milk while they were still camped on the Canadian. On 7 August 1872, with the Texas sun beating down, 214 Eighth Cavalry troopers, eleven officers, thirty-eight supply wagons, and a large herd of cattle moved east. Mathews was not too concerned about finding any Indians, and that was fine with the private of Company L: “The less we have [fighting] the better it will suit me.”<sup>21</sup>

Like all expeditions into the Texas Panhandle, the environment exhausted the soldiers and their animals. Uncertainty regarding water often forced the column to stop at mid-day if they came across a clear running stream. The Canadian River could not be counted on to always hold fresh water, especially during the summer season. Some sections were too alkaline, others too stagnant. Tributaries that flowed as a result of snow-melt, thunderstorms, and natural springs were the most popular campsites along the trail. Companies rotated their positions in the column so that no troop had to continually suffer from the choking dust that drifted into the faces of the trailing force. On both the eighth and tenth of August, the cattle herd stampeded in the middle of the night. Gregg ordered one company to remain behind each morning to find them. Continuing his negative commentary on his commander, Mathews opined that he did not “think he [Gregg] is much of a horseman, but like father, prefers lying off in an ambulance to horseback riding.” By 11 August, the column was deep into the plains. As a result of not being able to find any firewood, the soldiers were forced to collect buffalo chips. Mathews admitted that the dung

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<sup>21</sup> Mathews, “Camp at Fort Bascom,” June 25, 1872, “Camp at Fort Bascom,” August 3, 1872. While on this expedition, Mathews kept a journal that he later mailed to his parents. All items referenced during this expedition are noted with the reference, “Journal,” and date. Mathews, “Journal,” August 6 and 7, 1872. Colonel Gregg did not leave Fort Bascom until after the column left. Company M accompanied him. Mathews estimated 350 soldiers were a part of this caravan. Combining Gregg’s official report [214 troopers], with the number of teamsters needed for the wagons gives a more realistic estimate of 300 soldiers. Gregg’s count is found in Kenner, *History of New Mexico – Plains Indian Relations*, 198. The count on the wagons is found in Mathews, “Journal,” August 24, 1872. Mathews later kept the accounting books for the regiment, so his numbers cannot be dismissed.

served its purpose, but did not smell “like new mown hay.” Only the officers were allowed to bring tents, so each night the enlisted men pulled off their boots, rolled up in their blankets, and slept under the stars. On the fourteenth, they woke to a driving rain. Soaked to the skin, the column rode for four hours before going into camp tentless once again.<sup>22</sup>

On 15 August, near present-day Canyon, Texas, they were attacked by a band of Kiowas in the middle of the night. Mathews awoke to what “sounded to me like Devils incarnate, and [that] all the Demons of hell had issued forth in that one lonely [sp] spot to make the night hideous with their orgies.” Sans his boots, he fell-in with Capt. William McCleave’s Company B and began to fire into the darkness. Before this encounter, the young private explained to his family that he had no doubts about the Army’s capabilities in a fight, but that did not make him sleep any easier: “The dread of the Savages, and their unearthly yells . . . puts the fear of God in the white man’s heart.” In the ensuing battle, one soldier was wounded and four of the Kiowas were killed. According to Gregg’s official report, several more Kiowas were wounded.<sup>23</sup>

The column broke camp on 17 August. Moving in a southeasterly direction, they passed by Palo Duro Canyon. On the eighteenth, the troopers came across a large bison herd. They killed twenty, took the meat from three, and left the rest to rot on the Texas prairie. Over the next several days, they continued to come across such large herds that Mathews grew sick of looking at them. Gregg led his troops past the Prairie Dog Town Fork of the Red River and through the canyons along the Caprock, still moving in the direction of the Quitaque Peaks. On 23 August,

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<sup>22</sup> Mathews, “Journal,” August 8-11 and 14, 1872.

<sup>23</sup> Mathews, “Journal,” August 16, 1872; Kenner, *History of New Mexican – Plains Indian Relations*, 198; Joseph P. Peters, *Indian Battles and Skirmishes on the Indian Frontier* (New York: Argonaut Press, 1966), 33. The second quote is from Mathews, “Journal,” August 12, 1872.

Mathews wrote: “For the last few days we have been traveling over some of the roughest country I have ever saw [sic]. Country that a Maryland farmer would not risk driving his cattle over.”<sup>24</sup>

The environment’s withering grind eventually proved fatal. Private Hannah of Company B, Eighth Cavalry, posted to guard duty on 24 August, was so exhausted that he tied himself to his horse so he could remain upright, so as to give the appearance of continuing to do his duty. Unfortunately, something spooked his horse in the middle of the night, causing it to bolt across the prairie. Unable to extricate himself from the horse, Private Hannah was killed. As the troops prepared to bury their friend, the ever verbose Private Mathews contemplated death on the Llano Estacado: “I am sick and tired of this kind of living, but believe to die and be buried in this God forsaken country, [I] would never rest easy in my grave, this thought is horrible to dwell upon.”<sup>25</sup>

On 25 August, the troopers of the Eighth Cavalry could not help but dwell on death, for they buried Hannah that Sunday in the middle of nowhere. Mathews recorded:

At 10 a.m. the Command formed into a line. The remains placed in an ambulance. On each side walked four pall-bearers. In the rear of the Ambulance, his horse was led by one of the troop, following came the firing party. As the Ambulance came in front of the troops on the left of the line the troop presented Arms and soon as the remains passed the troop would wheel and march by the Company front to the grave. Arriving at the grave the body was lowered. When Lieutenant Boyd read the Episcopal burial service, this finished with three volleys over the grave, and [as] soon as it was filled up [,] one of the trumpeters sounded ‘Taps’ over the grave. . . . This death has cast a sadness over all the troop, and in fact over the Command.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Mathews, “Journal,” August 17-18, 23, 1872; Kenner, *History of New Mexican – Plains Indian Relations*, 198,199; Dan Flores, *Caprock Canyonlands: Journeys Into the Heart of the Southern Plains* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), 10.

<sup>25</sup> Mathews, “Journal,” August 24, 1872.

<sup>26</sup> Mathews, “Journal,” August 25, 1872.

When the column broke camp the next morning, the entire command, including the wagons and the cattle, rode over the grave to ensure that all signs of Private Hannah's recent internment were obliterated.<sup>27</sup>

An aura of disaster hung over the column for the rest of the expedition. They searched for Comancheros along the Red River's tributaries, but like Mackenzie, Gregg came up empty. As August came to a close, he ordered everyone on short rations. Turning back to the north, they ran short of water; many of the streams were dry, or too salty to drink. As a result, their horses began to give out. Many of the troopers had to shoot their mounts and walk. Despite having a guide, the Eighth Cavalry realized that they had lost their way deep within Comanchería. The column finally struck the Canadian River and turned west. On 14 September 1872, the caravan stumbled back into Fort Bascom, their condition similar to that of both Carson and Evans' forces after their returns to New Mexico. Instead of the blizzards and mind-bending cold snaps, Gregg's men suffered from summer's blistering heat-waves and dried-up creek beds. Neither Mackenzie nor Gregg accomplished their goals in 1872, yet the experience their men gained was not futile, for what they learned could be used in future operations. The following year, the Army once again sent the Eighth Cavalry back to Fort Bascom for summer operations.<sup>28</sup>

The townsfolk of Liberty were glad to see Companies L and M return in March 1873. Colonel Gregg placed Capt. Samuel Baldwin Marks Young in charge of the post, with orders to keep one scout in the field looking for illegal traders at all times. A few weeks before Captain Young and his troops arrived on the Canadian, Sgt. John Rowalt and a few of his Company L cavalymen had engaged the Kiowas in a firefight. This action had sent a wave of fear through

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<sup>27</sup> Mathews, "Journal," August 25, 1872.

<sup>28</sup> Mathews, "Journal," September 6, 1872; Mathews, "Journal," September 14, 1872.

the valley. One citizen was so happy to see Company L return to the region that he promised to bring them a milk-cow the following day.<sup>29</sup>

Almost immediately Captain Young requested more troops to patrol the region, but Pope, still commanding the Department of Missouri, denied the request. He bluntly told Young that if he used his men properly, he had enough to carry out his orders. Young originally requested help because Hispano traders were still getting past his patrols. This meant a number of Southern Plains Indians were able to remain off the reservation. A newly promoted Sergeant Eddie Mathews explained the situation to his father: “These territories are infested with a lot of scoundrels who trade with Indians. And I have no doubt [that] for one gun; twenty head of cattle would be given in exchange.” One such trader, Juan Lucero, was apprehended that summer with eighteen stolen horses and sent to Las Vegas, New Mexico, for prosecution. Judge J. G. Palen immediately let Lucero post bond. Young was infuriated. Judge Palen later determined that there was not enough evidence to prosecute Lucero and ordered his horses be returned to him.<sup>30</sup>

Such incidents led Mathews to comment: “It is a good thing for the Country when Indians kill Mexicans, for when they do this [,] they shut off their supplies.” Such comments were little more than wishful thinking, for while herders and traders did occasionally fall victim to attack, their losses were miniscule when compared to what was going on in Texas. Farmers in Montague County, Texas, were more concerned with protecting their families and livestock than trying to decipher Comanche motivations.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Mathews, “Fort Bascom, N.M.,” March 26, 1873.

<sup>30</sup> Mathews, “Fort Bascom, N.M.,” March 26, 1873; Kenner, *History of New Mexican – Plains Indian Relations*, 201, 202. Quote from Mathews, “Fort Bascom,” April 3, 1872.

<sup>31</sup> Mathews, “Fort Bascom, N.M.,” July 17, 1874.

Ongoing depredations in 1873 and 1874 created tensions between the various Departments and Districts. The commander of Camp Supply, Col. J. B. Brooks, blamed Gregg's inability to stop the Comanchero trade in New Mexico with the Cheyenne's access to alcohol in Indian Territory. Texas officials also blamed New Mexicans and the Army for the rampant plundering of their resources. Gregg blamed any failings on his lack of manpower and resources, which reflected back on General Pope, who refused requests for more men. Officers in the Territory were also not shy about charging a select group of Anglo and Hispano Americans living in Santa Fe, San Miguel, and Mora counties with funding Comanchero operations, yet few officials or ranchers outside the immediate zone of exchange were aware of the multiple layers of complicity that were at the root of the problem, or how difficult it was to stop.<sup>32</sup>

Orders issued from headquarters never quite squared with the reality soldiers faced in the Canadian River Valley. Despite this reality, whether Capt. Edward H. Bergmann or Captain Young, Fort Bascom's officers continued to carry out their orders, which often led them to Texas. Between 28 August and 24 October 1873, Young took fifty troopers from the Eighth Cavalry on a thousand-mile scout that carried them past Fort Sumner, Blanco Canyon in Texas, and the northeastern tributaries of the Canadian. Although they did not apprehend any Comancheros, they did determine that the traders had moved their main route north of this river. Additionally, in his report to Headquarters, Young noted that he had seen vast herds of bison in the Texas Panhandle, generally a good indication that Southern Plains Indians could not be far away. In the summer of 1874, the Eighth Cavalry would make good on their captain's assessment.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Kenner, *History of New Mexican – Plains Indian Relations* 192.

<sup>33</sup> Kenner, *History of New Mexican – Plains Indian Relations*, 203.

The history of Fort Bascom is inextricably linked to the history of the Canadian River, the history of the adobe fort, and the history of Indian depredations in Texas. The Canadian River provided a habitat for bison and other animals, and created an almost unbreakable bond between mountain and plains cultures. Charles Bent and Ceran St. Vrain were two of the first Anglos to try and establish a permanent business relationship with the Comanches on the Canadian River. From what is now known as Bent's Fort in southern Colorado (originally known as Fort William), these two ex-mountain men sent wagons of goods across the South Canadian River into Texas in the 1830s. Bent and St. Vrain had purposely placed a new post very close to the Comanche settlements to gain their trade, yet its location proved to be a double-edged sword. It was certainly true that these entrepreneurs maintained easy access to the Southern Plains Indians who lived in the Canadian River Valley, yet it was equally true that as a result of this placement they were vulnerable to attack. Profits eventually fell behind the losses incurred in raids and threats of raids, thus the famous partners abandoned the post in 1842. Afterwards, merchants, hunters, and military personnel continued to use the buildings as a way-station of sorts when they traveled between Texas, New Mexico, and Kansas. This site eventually became known as the Adobe Fort. Although never an official fort, it afforded Anglo travelers one of the few buildings in which they could seek sanctuary in when traveling along the Canadian River. Colonel Carson was no stranger to Adobe Fort when he led the first major United States Army expedition into the Llano Estacado in late 1864. In 1868, Maj. Andrew J. Evans carried Carson's Canadian River Expedition report with him as he prepared to battle the same Comanches and Kiowas. By 1868 the roof was missing from the old trading station, but its adobe walls were still intact. Thus when violence broke out along the Red and Canadian Rivers in 1874, the third major

military expedition to leave Fort Bascom sought the Adobe Walls as one of its only guideposts as it ventured into Texas.<sup>34</sup>

The fuse for further violence was lit in May 1874, when several bands of Comanches came together on Sweetwater Creek, not far from the North Fork of the Red River, to perform a Sun Dance. At the behest of Esatai, a Kwahada medicine man, both reservation and nonreservation Comanches gathered there. Throughout the month Kotsoteka and Kwahada Comanches, as well as various groups of Kiowas and Arapahos, made pilgrimages to this encampment. The purpose of these meetings was to engage in spiritual cleansings and discuss their future as a people. No Southern Plains Indian was happy with the government's inability to make good on their promises, but few were able, or willing, to do anything about their circumstances. Additionally, the massive bison herds Captain Young had reported in 1873 had lured hundreds of buffalo hunters into the area the following spring. The Indians at Sweetwater Creek discussed how the hunters were destroying the large herds of bison in the region. Comanche Chief Mowway remained discontented, belligerent, and still ready to defend his homeland in 1874. Some wanted to raid the settlements and take their revenge against the Texans for taking the sacred lands. One contingent wanted to raid the Tonkawa Indians down in Central Texas because these people often worked for the Army as scouts, while still others wanted to focus on the buffalo hunters, who symbolized everything the Indians hated about Americans. Others wanted no part of such reprisals because they feared everyone would be punished for the acts of a few.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> On the origination of the post, see Kavanagh, *Comanches*, 287. For references to Carson's expedition, see Chapter 6; for references to Evans's expedition, see Chapter 7.

<sup>35</sup> Kavanagh, *Comanches*, 445, 446; Rathjen, *Texas Panhandle Frontier*, 161; Hämäläinen, *Comanche Empire*, 338.

In anticipation of trouble, Maj. Andrew J. Alexander returned to Fort Bascom in May 1874 with Companies B, L, and M of the Eighth Cavalry. Capt. Louis Morris, another Fort Bascom veteran, led Company L. As in every summer season since Bascom's official closing, these soldiers were prepared to remain in the field until late fall. The *Chicago Tribune* noted: "The command will carry with it all subsistence and quartermaster stores" required to carry out operations in the region.<sup>36</sup>

In the meantime, after weeks of debate, Esatai, the Kwahadi medicine man, and Comanche war chief Quannah Parker convinced enough of their compatriots on Sweetwater Creek that they should attack the buffalo hunters who were camped at Adobe Walls. One reason the majority decided to follow Esatai was that he had convinced them that his powers made him invulnerable to bullets. He promised this medicine would help them eradicate the hunters and lead to the elimination of the Texans from their homeland. On 27 June, Esatai and Quannah Parker led several hundred Kotsoteka and Kwahadi Comanches on an attack against the buffalo hunters at Adobe Walls. Esatai quickly found out that he was not invulnerable to bullets. One of the buffalo hunters shot and killed him. The raid at Adobe Walls was quickly repulsed, yet Chief Parker and his followers were not through yet. They found refuge in the canyons that cut through the Llano Estacado, occasionally attacking isolated ranchers on the Texas frontier. Cheyennes and Comanches not affiliated with Parker rode north and raided merchant trains along the Santa Fe Trail. Small bands also ventured into Colorado and Kansas. General Sherman ordered

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<sup>36</sup> Returns, Fort Bascom, 1874; "Programme of Campaign in New Mexico," *Chicago Tribune*, May 4, 1874.

Department of Missouri Commander Sheridan to get control of the region. This led to the last major battles between the United States Army and the Southern Plains Indians.<sup>37</sup>

The 1874 military operation, the largest yet conceived for the region, has collectively become known as the Red River War. Sheridan's strategy involved the use of converging columns, with a general rendezvous within the Antelope Hills of the Canadian River Valley, located in the Indian Territory. This time, troopers from Texas would take part in the mission. The Military District of Texas had recently been placed under Sheridan's control to better manage operations in the region. One of the failures of the 1868 winter campaign was the absence of such a Texas column, which allowed many Indians to escape down the Red and Brazos Rivers. Once again, Sheridan incorporated Fort Bascom into his plans.<sup>38</sup>

Major William Redwood Price of the Eighth Cavalry at Fort Union was ordered to relocate to Fort Bascom and lead this portion of the mission into Texas. On 20 August his adjutant telegraphed Headquarters requesting Col. Kit Carson's report of his 1864 "scout" down the Canadian. He wanted it forwarded to Fort Bascom. Major Price left Fort Union with 119 troopers and traveled to Las Vegas, New Mexico, where he picked up an additional forty-six men. It so happened that Sergeant Eddie Mathews was also spending the night in Las Vegas. Mathews was on his way back to Fort Union to muster out of the service, having fulfilled his obligations to the United States Army. Of Price's mission, the always verbose Mathews noted: "The Indians seem to have made a great out break all over the country. I would not be surprise if the boys found plenty of work to do before the Summer was over." The next morning Mathews

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<sup>37</sup> Hämäläinen, *Comanche Empire*, 338, 339; Rathjen, *Texas Panhandle Frontier*, 206, 207.

<sup>38</sup> The Red River War has been thoroughly covered by others. See William H. Leckie, *The Military Conquest of the Southern Plains* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1963), 185 – 235; Rathjen, *Texas Panhandle Frontier*, 206 – 220; and Robert M. Utley, *Frontier Regulars: The United States Army and the Indian, 1866 – 1891* (1973; reprint, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984), 219-33.

bid goodbye and continued on his journey north. Major Price and a large contingent of Eighth Cavalry rode to the southeast, the Sangre de Cristo Mountains at their back, as they made their way across the Las Vegas Plateau toward the Canadian River Valley.<sup>39</sup>

It is significant that both Evans and Price requested Colonel Carson's 1864 report before they started on their own expedition because it highlights the important role Fort Bascom played in linking the history of the Army's efforts to gain control of the region. One of the oversights many scholars have made regarding this post is their inability to understand the importance of Bascom's unique location. The cumulative knowledge that was gained while posted there was assimilated and redistributed throughout the District, the Department, and Headquarters in Washington, D. C. Major Price's request supports the argument that operations that originated from Fort Bascom helped shape the government's strategies and policies regarding wresting control of the Texas Panhandle from Southern Plains Indians.

When Major Evans arrived at Fort Bascom in 1868, Captain Morris, the post commander, was absent on a major scout. A few days later, after three hard weeks in the field, Morris and his troopers returned to the post. Back then, Evans decided that Morris and most of his men were too worn-out to take part in the winter campaign. He was left behind to coordinate the expedition's logistical needs. When the 1874 column rode out of the post on 28 August 1874, Price took Morris and sixty-six men from Company L of the Eighth Cavalry, already at Fort Bascom, with him. With rations and forage for twenty days, this column, composed of 225 Eighth Cavalry troopers, moved east down the Fort Smith road toward Texas. At the same time, Maj. Gen. Nelson Miles moved south from Camp Supply. Two columns of the Fourth Cavalry, one led by

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<sup>39</sup> Mathews, "Fort Union, N.M.," August 17, 1874; Maj. William Redwood Price to Acting Asst. Adj. Gen. J. H. Mahnken, 20 August 1874, Lt. John Lafferty to Mahnken, Telegrams Sent and Received, DNM, 20 August 1874, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 29: 141, 142.

Colonel Mackenzie out of Fort Concho, the other commanded by Lt. Col. George P. Buell of Fort Richardson, also moved toward the Antelope Hills. Lieutenant Colonel John W. Davidson led the last contingent of troops on this mission, commanding the Tenth Cavalry out of Fort Sill, in the Indian Territory.<sup>40</sup>

Major Price and the Eighth Cavalry traveled about twenty-miles per day. On 4 September, they struck a fresh Comanchero trail. This led them between McClellan Creek and Mulberry Canyon. Two days later they traversed “White Sandy Creek,” finding evidence that Miles's column had already been in the area. Price followed these tracks down the Salt Fork of the Red River. On 7 September, they rode through a driving rain, finding Miles's camp during the late afternoon. It is clear from Price's report that Miles was not in a good mood. Amidst miserable conditions, the colonel informed Price that there were plenty of signs that Indians were “out,” but he could not find them. Miles related that he was low on forage and food, and was preparing to leave the area and find his supply train. Cavalry often left their wagon-trains far behind on major expeditions. To do otherwise defeated the purpose of inserting mobile troops into the field. By 10 September, Price found himself in a similar situation. By then, Miles and his men were gone. Camped on McClellan Creek, Price ordered his men to shoot flares into the night-sky to alert his own train as to his location. It continued to rain. The next day the column moved north until they reached Sweetwater Creek, near where the Comanches had gathered in May. On 12 September, they broke camp and continued toward Antelope Hills. Between

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<sup>40</sup> Price to Mahnken, 20 August 20, 1874, Telegrams Sent and Received, DNM, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 29: 141; Utley, *Frontier Regulars*, 219-33; Rathjen, *Texas Panhandle Frontier*, 207, 217.

Sweetwater Creek and the Dry Fork of the Washita, they came face-to-face with a group of Kiowa warriors.<sup>41</sup>

The Eighth Cavalry was soon engaged in their portion of the Red River War. The Kiowa warriors were positioned on a “steep ridge” between the troops and their village, which was in the process of evacuating. One of the warriors perched on this ridge was War Chief Set-maunte (Bear Paw). Price sent skirmishers in their direction. These troopers were immediately met by about fifty warriors, and shots were fired by both parties. Unlike Carson and Evans, Price would not be able to take advantage of the Army’s howitzers because several days of rain had rendered them ineffective. Over the next hour and a half the Kiowas unsuccessfully tried to break through Price’s lines. The major ordered three companies, including Captain Morris and troop L, to move around the enemy’s flank, which had the desired effect. The Kiowas disengaged and retreated down Sweetwater Creek. With the warriors keeping themselves between the soldiers and the villagers, a running gun-battle ensued, which covered seven or eight miles. The Kiowas were eventually able to make their escape across the rain-swollen creek. Price did not follow.<sup>42</sup>

Much like his predecessors’ experiences, the rest of the expedition turned into a struggle to survive. After the battle, the column camped on Sweetwater Creek. One reason Price did not continue the pursuit was because he had yet to link up with his supply train. By the thirteenth, he was more interested in finding these wagons than Indians. In the process of searching for his supplies, he stumbled across Billy Dixon, one of Miles’ scouts, wandering across the prairie.

Dixon and several other scouts had been ambushed on their way to Camp Supply by a large band

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<sup>41</sup> Price, “Excitement on the Sweetwater,” 245, 246.

<sup>42</sup> Price, “Excitement on the Sweetwater,” 246. In addition to including edited portions of Major Price’s report of the battle, Nye also used two Kiowa’s recollections. It was Botalye (also known as Eadle-tau-hain) who described their escape in Price, “Excitement on the Sweetwater,” 244.

of Comanches and Kiowas near Gageby Creek. Dixon led Price back to his compatriots, one of whom had died from wounds suffered in the attack.<sup>43</sup>

Price left his surgeon and an ambulance with these men but kept moving, still focused on finding his supply train. At one point, his troopers heard a cannon-shot. Price sent scouts in the direction of the boom, but could not find anyone. It turned out that what they had heard was a distress signal from Capt. Wyllus Lyman, who was in charge of Miles's wagon-train. At the time of the boom, Lyman and his men were being attacked by another group of angry and defiant Southern Plains Indians. Miles later charged Price with failing to come to the aid of his men, yet in light of the desperate circumstances the Fort Bascom column found itself in, it is hard to corroborate such charges. What is clear is that the challenges the United States Army faced in its endeavor to gain control of the Texas Panhandle were considerable.<sup>44</sup>

The most famous and successful piece of the mission occurred on 28 September 1874. On that morning, Colonel Mackenzie led the Fourth United States Cavalry into Palo Duro Canyon, surprising Quanah Parker and the most defiant group of Comanches left on the Llano Estacado. While few Comanches were killed in this attack, the Fourth Cavalry was able to take possession of over one thousand of their horses. Mackenzie ordered his men to shoot each one. This action illustrates how Sheridan's concept of total warfare was implemented during the southwestern Indian wars. The destruction of the Comanches' horses made them far less powerful. The psychological impact of this slaughter was just as damaging. No longer the masters of the Llano Estacado, both the Comanches and Kiowas eventually accepted their fate

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<sup>43</sup> Price, "Excitement on the Sweetwater," 247; Rathjen, *Texas Panhandle Frontier*, 213. Gageby Creek was named after Capt. James H. Gageby, Company I of the Thirty-seventh United States Infantry, who was killed during the battle at Soldier's Spring in 1868.

<sup>44</sup> Price, "Excitement on the Sweetwater," 248, 249; Rathjen, *Texas Panhandle Frontier*, 216.

and moved onto their reservations. To do otherwise would have forced them to watch their families freeze or starve to death.<sup>45</sup>

Mackenzie was able to locate Parker as a direct result of the converging columns strategy. Despite the blind-leading-the-blind aspect of the larger mission, Sheridan's plan worked because of the combined efforts of all the commands. After their battle on Sweetwater Creek, Price and his men finally reconnected with their supply wagon and were later placed under Miles's command. From August until late September, they crisscrossed the region, forcing the Indians to constantly move from one refuge to the next. By the time Mackenzie's cavalymen approached Palo Duro Canyon on 27 September, Price's and Miles's patrols had eliminated the space in which Parker could operate, effectively funneling him toward the Fourth Cavalry.<sup>46</sup>

Although the destruction of the Comanches' horses on 28 September led to their subjugation, small bands of Southern Plains Indians, particularly the Cheyenne, remained off their reservations until the spring of 1875. Major Price and the Eighth Cavalry continued to operate in the region until the end of 1874. The last battle of any significance that Fort Bascom soldiers participated in occurred, appropriately enough, just south of Adobe Walls. As a part of Miles's mop-up operations, on 6 November, Lt. H. J. Farnsworth and twenty-eight men from Company H of the Eighth Cavalry attacked about one-hundred Cheyenne along McClellan Creek. A very hot fire-fight ensued, with one trooper killed and ten wounded. Six cavalry horses were also killed. Lieutenant Farnsworth estimated that his men dispatched four to seven warriors in the engagement and wounded four others. The remaining Cheyennes escaped toward

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<sup>45</sup> Hämäläinen, *Comanche Empire*, 339; Robert G. Carter, *On the Border with Mackenzie, or Winning West Texas from the Comanches* (New York: Antiquarian, 1961), 487 – 95, Rathjen, *Texas Panhandle Frontier*, 218, 219.

<sup>46</sup> While the destruction of the horses was certainly the most significant loss in this battle, Comanche food-stuffs and winter robes were also destroyed, which contributed to their demise. See Rathjen, *Texas Panhandle Frontier*, 218, 219; Carter, *On the Border with Mackenzie*, 487 – 95.

Oklahoma Territory. Price's troopers also set up a supply-base during this period for the rest of Miles's command. On 28 December 1874, just a few weeks after Mackenzie and the Fourth Cavalry returned to Fort Concho, Price led his soldiers back to Fort Bascom for the last time. Miles remained in the field through the spring, chasing down the few remaining Cheyennes who refused to submit to the will of the United States government.<sup>47</sup>

After the Army gained control of the Southern Plains Indians, there was little need to continue summer operations along the Canadian River. The military continued to store grain and hay at Fort Bascom for the occasional patrols that ventured there from Fort Union. In May 1875, Major Alexander, again serving as the post commander at Fort Union, reported that the forage stored at Bascom was missing. He accused Wilson Waddingham, now owner of most of the land around the fort, of taking it. From beginning to end, forage and supplies were always points of contention in the Canadian River Valley. What should not be a point of contention is the role Fort Bascom played in gaining control of the region.<sup>48</sup>

Isolated from its historical context, this remote outpost does not appear to warrant much attention, yet the hundreds of cavalry and infantry that served at Fort Bascom from 1863 to 1874 would beg to differ. What these soldiers did and how they did it was important, regardless of how little has been written about them. Long before Mackenzie received his well-deserved acclaim, Fort Bascom's "horse marines" served in the heart of *Comancheria*. The soldiers took part in a gritty, slow process that seldom involved any grand or glorious bugle-led charges. Mackenzie's electrically quick victory at Palo Duro Canyon may obscure the importance of the

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<sup>47</sup> Peters, *Indian Battles and Skirmishes on the Indian Frontier*, 43; Rathjen, *Texas Panhandle Frontier*, 216-17.

<sup>48</sup> Alexander to Acting Asst. Adj. Gen., Headquarters, 1 May 1875, LS, DNM, RG 393, NA, in Arrott Collection, 29: 282.

work performed by Fort Bascom soldiers, yet their contribution, in the long run, was just as significant. Colonel Mackenzie and the Fourth Cavalry's early ventures into the Texas Panhandle failed to strike a blow against the Comanche or the Comanchero, yet the Commander of the Department of Texas, Auger, hailed them as a boon to the Army because of the knowledge gained in their efforts. If Auger was correct, then surely Private Mathews and Company L's journeys across this same "God forsaken country," were just as useful. Mackenzie's first expedition originated from Fort Richardson, which has often been called Texas' northernmost frontier fort. Yet this study has demonstrated that that title could easily belong to Fort Bascom. Perched on the edge of Comanchería, facing the Llano Estacado, located between the Comancheros and the Comanches, its role in gaining control of the Southern Plains deserves another look.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> An Eighth Cavalry trooper simply known as "Bugler" occasionally sent dispatches to the *Freeport Journal* about his exploits on the Canadian River. He used the phrase "horse marine" in these dispatches. See *Freeport [Illinois] Journal*, 16 October 1872. Fort Richardson is designated as such in "Fort Richardson" <http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us> (accessed 6/30/20-11). See also Mathews, "Journal," August 24, 1872.

## CHAPTER 9

### CONCLUSION

In the late 1860s and early 1870s, many New Mexicans and Southern Plains Indians profited from the well-developed shadow economy known as the Comanchero Trade. The Comanches transported plunder taken from south of the Rio Grande, the Edwards Plateau, and North Texas to rendezvous sites located between the Texas Panhandle and eastern New Mexico. Within well-concealed canyons, Comanchero middlemen exchanged their calico, bread, sugar, whiskey, and rifles for stolen livestock. They then redistributed these animals into the Sangre de Cristo Mountains. Although both Hispanic and Anglo merchants were involved in this traffic, the Comancheros facilitated much of the exchange. Men like José Piedad Tafoya, Julian Baca, José Medina, and Manuel Gonzalez sold cattle and horses throughout the mountains, and they also herded them to markets in Colorado and Kansas. Nuevo-mexicano mountain men played key roles in meeting the market's growing desire for horses and cattle, while Texas cattlemen were negatively impacted by this activity. Santa Fe Trail merchants and Midwestern ranchers were happy to purchase this influx of livestock, regardless of where it came from. Buyers were less interested in the odd brands seared into the animals' hides than they were the cost-per-head. Thus, during and long after the Civil War, the United States Cavalry had to remain on duty in the Canadian River Valley.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Brian DeLay, *War of a Thousand Deserts: Indian Raids and the U. S.-Mexican War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 109, 110; Pekka Hämäläinen, *Comanche Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 330, 353; John Miller Morris, *El Llano Estacado: Exploration and Imagination on the High Plains of Texas and New Mexico, 1536 – 1860* (Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 1997), 192. John Hittson declared that 100,000 head of cattle were redistributed from 1852 to 1872; see Charles L. Kenner, "The Great New Mexico Cattle Raid, 1872," *New Mexico Historical Review* 37 (Oct., 1862), 257. Other accounts of the first years after the Civil War note that Texas's northwest counties were hit the hardest. Carl C. Rister noted 30,000 cattle and 3,600 horses were stolen in this period. See Carl C. Rister, "Fort Griffin," *West Texas Historical Association* 1 (June, 1925), 419.

Depredations increased in Texas after Fort Bascom closed. This upsurge verified that Capt. Edward H. Bergmann's instincts were correct when he placed the post eleven miles north of the Tukumcari Peaks. On the surface, Captain Bergmann and Col. J. Irwin Gregg's journeys across the plains might appear to have been a waste of time, yet all of the information concerning terrain, water sources, and Comanchero trails were redistributed to, and used by, Army personnel throughout the Southwest. But it was only after the Department of Texas came under the control of the Department of Missouri, which coupled it with the Military District of New Mexico, that Texas' northwestern frontier became a safe for settlement. Placing New Mexico and Texas under Maj. Gen. Philip H. Sheridan's command facilitated better communication and cross-referencing of experiences between the two.

This move toward better coordination was significant, yet the key to military success in *Comanchería* remained the daily grind, the mere act of doing. Monotonous Fort Bascom patrols that never made the papers eventually blocked avenues of escape, reduced access to weapons, and funneled the remaining holdouts to their last refuge, Palo Duro Canyon. William H. Goetzmann, in his study of the Army's topographical engineers, wrote about the "importance of viewing exploration as activity rather than sequence." Bascom is a good example of what he was talking about. Daily patrols on tired horses, cold camps, and wild goose chases were essential actions that disrupted the economic lifeline that existed between Comancheros and Southern Plains Indians. Seen from such a perspective, Bascom becomes more significant, as do all the soldiers who never got their names in the newspapers. After Maj. Gen. John Pope closed Fort Bascom, the Comanchero trade exploded, resulting in economic ruin and a new wave of violence in North Texas. Such results highlight the significance of this post, and help to explain why

hundreds of troopers were transferred back to the Canadian River Valley for the next four years. Pope's cost-cutting measures cost the state of Texas dearly, as this study explains.

In 1875, the Eighth United States Cavalry left the Canadian River Valley for South Texas. Stationed at Fort Brown, and also operating out of Ringgold Barracks, Maj. Andrew J. Alexander and Captains James G. Randlett and David R. Clendenin used strategies honed on the Llano Estacado to track Mescalero Apaches, Kickapoos, and Mexicans in the Rio Grande Valley. Experiences gained in the borderland between Texas and New Mexico proved just as effective along the southern Mexican border. The same troopers that patrolled the Fort Smith road scoured the Rio Grande Valley. While some were posted to picket details, others remained in the saddle, occasionally rotating these duties so troopers were always in the field. Such was the life of a United States cavalryman in the latter part of the nineteenth century American Southwest.<sup>2</sup>

After the Eighth Cavalry left Fort Bascom for good, the military reservation reverted to private ownership. The Army had originally leased two square miles of Territorial Delegate John S. Watts' land in 1863, with the stipulation that once the post was abandoned, the contract would be voided. Local entrepreneur and cattleman Wilson Waddingham purchased Watts' stake in the Canadian River Valley in 1870, and he continued to buy land in the surrounding area. By 1875, he owned approximately 430,000 acres. His cowboys used the fort as their bunkhouse. Ten years later, Waddingham owned the largest cattle operation in the country, running 25,000 longhorns

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<sup>2</sup> *Report on Texas Frontier Troubles*, United States Congress, H. Report 343, 44<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> Session [Serial Set 1709]; Robert M. Utley, *Lone Star Justice: The First Century of the Texas Rangers* (New York: Berkeley Books, 2002), 164, 165.

on what became known as the Bell Ranch. This ranch still functions as one of the largest cattle operations in the country, but the site on which Bascom stood is no longer within its boundaries.<sup>3</sup>

The town of Liberty, which developed near Fort Bascom, tried to survive after the troops left, yet it never developed the way some military communities did. After the turn of the century, six enterprising ranchers read that the Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific Railroad's westward line would soon pass through Dalhart, Texas, before building in a southwestern direction across New Mexico. Gambling that the tracks would run near the Tukumcari Peaks, they began to purchase tracts of nearby land and incorporated as the Tukumcari Townsite and Investment Company in 1901. Their gamble paid off, as the railroad did run its tracks by their property. As a result, they were soon busy selling lots. The railroad town of Tukumcari sucked the remaining life out of Liberty. Once the railroad did come, the success of the Bell Ranch influenced the construction of a spur to old Fort Bascom, which maintained a second life as a cowboy barracks, shipping point, and post-office, for years to come.<sup>4</sup>

Tukumcari profited from its location along the old Fort Smith road. Route 66 construction workers followed this old Comanchero trail out of Texas in the late 1930s. Once the freeway was completed, it became the first town of any consequence for travelers coming from Amarillo to the east, or Albuquerque to the west. As a result of the post-war automobile boom, Tukumcari became a popular rest-stop for southwestern travelers. Yet when Interstate 40 was constructed a

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<sup>3</sup> David Remley, *Bell Ranch: Cattle Ranching in the Southwest, 1824 – 1947* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1993), 41, 48; Margaret A. Bickers, "Three Cultures, Four Hooves, and One River: The Canadian River in Texas and New Mexico, 1848 – 1939" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Kansas State University, 2010), 107, 137. The old Bell Ranch is now part of the Silver Spur Ranch, headquartered in Wyoming. Three-hundred thousand acres of the original ranch remain. See Burt Rutherford, "New Mexico's Iconic Bell Ranch Changes Hands," November 5, 2010, [beefmagazine.com/cowcalfweekly/1105-new-mexico-bell-ranch](http://beefmagazine.com/cowcalfweekly/1105-new-mexico-bell-ranch) (accessed April 4, 2013).

<sup>4</sup> Socorro, New Mexico continued to develop after Fort Craig was closed. As its name indicates, the town of Fort Sumner also survived after its post was closed.

few decades later, engineers were more interested in developing a road system that could get travelers from point A to point B without many stops along the way. The new freeway bypassed Tukumcari, which meant fewer travelers would spend their money there. Then in 1975, the looming national bicentennial celebration prompted one last official attempt to give Fort Bascom the recognition it deserved. In the lead-up to the nation's birthday, the federal government started allocating large amounts of money to each state so citizens could have proper commemorations.

This gave Alan Morris, the Tukumcari city manager, an idea. Morris had long heard the stories about the fort that had once existed just a few miles northeast of town. He put together a plan to build a replica of Fort Bascom, believing that such a site would generate income for the city. People that were currently bypassing the town might stop if they knew there was a frontier post nearby. Morris submitted his request to the New Mexico American Revolution Bicentennial Commission in Santa Fe to highlight the region's local history. It declared, in part, that "Today the importance of Fort Bascom cannot be underestimated, particularly when all the old Forts within New Mexico are either destroyed, in great disrepair, or designated as National or State Monuments." Morris requested \$30,565 from the state, which he planned to match with city funds. Yet Chris Krahlung, the director of the Commission, denied Morris's request. Perhaps it would have been more appropriate if Morris had asked the Texas Bicentennial Commission for the funds, for the men who served at Fort Bascom were often in Texas.<sup>5</sup> After all, Texans gained more benefit from the post than many New Mexicans, who often found their well-established, if illicit, commerce interrupted by the legalistic troopers at Bascom.

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<sup>5</sup> Alan Morris to Maureen B. Gregg, Projects Coordinator, NMARBCR, February 4, 1976; and Chris Krahlung, Director, NMARBCR, April 19, 1976, New Mexico American Revolution Bicentennial Commission Records, New Mexico State Archives, Santa Fe, N.M., Collection 1977-030, folder 524, box 14.

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