

Dragoons in Apacheland

Anglo-Apache Relations in Southern New Mexico, 1846-1861

by

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## ABSTRACT

During the 1850s, Indian policy objectives pursued by the civil and military branches of government in New Mexico would have a lasting impact on future relations between the two cultures. Many later policies originated in this antebellum period, but often receive only a summary analysis by scholars who focus on the more popular post-Civil War period. Debates over proper policies and enforcement would proliferate in the 1850s as military and civil officials vied with one another over their own perceived authority. Many officials pursued viable policies, but did not remain in office long enough to ensure their implementation. Additionally, personal egos and stubbornness often undermined interagency cooperation. An overall cultural misunderstanding regarding Apache tribal structure and the inability to distinguish between subgroups exacerbated the conflict. Anti-Indian sentiments prevailed in the military, which often contradicted the more humanitarian approach advocated by the Indian Department. As a result, a contention for power and prestige emerged on three separate fronts: civil government leaders, military leaders, and within the Apache tribe. This thesis offers a contextualization of events that transpired during the 1870s and 1880s by demonstrating how these three entities contended amongst each other for power, undermining policy objectives in the antebellum era.

Americans sought to conquer and control—to exert authority and power—over all components of the western landscape in order that they might realize its full economic potential. The Apaches formed a part of this landscape much the same as lofty mountain ranges, raging rivers, and parched deserts. All of these

required conquering before that nineteenth century American dream could be fully imbued in the Southwest, and over the several decades following Kearny's arrival countless individuals streamed westward in torrents intent on accomplishing just that. The Apaches, like all western tribes, thus fell into an unstoppable cycle of conquest driven by an insatiable Anglo-American obsession with exerting control. Just as swarthy lawyers challenged claims to gain legal dominion over western tracts of land; just as engineers constructed dams and sought ways to manipulate streams and rivers; just as the plow tilled millions of acres of raw lands; just as the miner's pick slowly chipped away at formidable peaks; so too did the United States Army subdue the Apaches, all of these being a means towards a common end for the American West.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

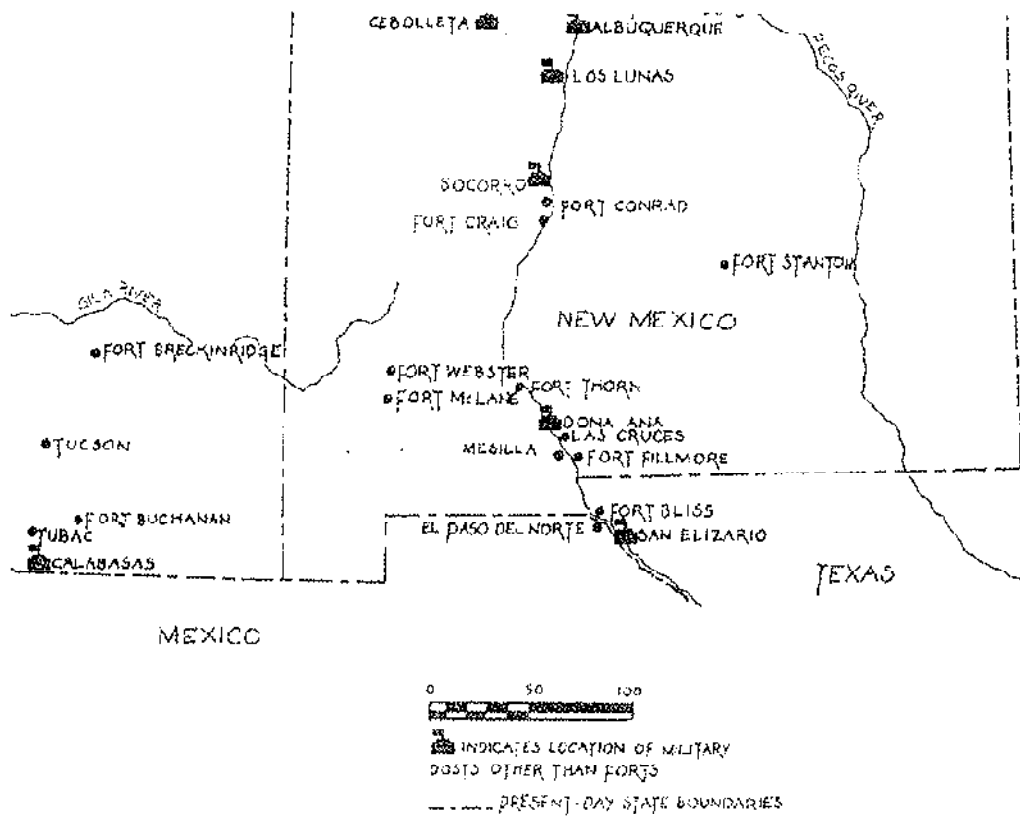
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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF FIGURES .....	iv
CHAPTER	
INTRODUCTION.....	1
1    THE SOLDIERS.....	10
2    THE APACHES.....	31
3    THE EARLY YEARS OF MILITARY OCCUPATION.....	45
4    THE WOES CONTINUE.....	83
5    THE MILITARY CAMPAIGNS OF 1856-1857.....	120
6    THE DRAGOONS' FINAL YEARS.....	146
CONCLUSION.....	163
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	168

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1. U.S. Military Area of Operations, 1848-1861.....	vi
2. Rio Grande Valley of Southern New Mexico, 1857.....	50
3. Col. Edwin V. Sumner.....	63
4. James S. Calhoun.....	63
5. Fort Fillmore, 1854.....	69
6. Fort Fillmore, Modern-Day.....	70
7. William Carr Lane.....	84
8. Dr. Michael Steck.....	100
9. David Meriwether.....	103
10. Fort Thorn, 1856.....	110
11. Ojo de Lucero.....	154



U.S. Military Area of Operations, 1848-1861

## INTRODUCTION

The administration of federal Indian policy in New Mexico during the 1850s has commonly been given short shrift among scholars and historians in favor of later policies and events during the 1870s and 1880s. It is during the 1850s, however, with New Mexico in its infancy as a United States territory, that the roots of later Indian policy can be found. Indeed both federal and local Indian policies throughout this time period deserve an in-depth analysis. Continuous conflict existed between civil and military leaders regarding proper policies, their implementation, and their enforcement. As a result, a contention for power and prestige emerged on three separate fronts: civil government leaders, military leaders, and within the Apache tribe. This thesis examines both the civil and military governments in New Mexico throughout the 1850s, demonstrating how these two entities worked with and against each other, including the overall effect that their actions had on relations with the Apache Indians.

Previous scholarship has examined, in detail, the relationship between the Apaches and the United States government in the post-Civil War era, often focusing on either Cochise, Victorio, or Geronimo in mostly biographical analyses of their roles as Apache leaders. Renowned Apache historian Dan L. Thrapp published extensively on the subject, becoming the foremost authority on Apache history. Thrapp's most well known work, entitled *The Conquest of Apacheria*, outlined the entire history of the Apache wars in the Southwest, beginning in 1846 and extending through Geronimo's surrender. In so doing,



Thrapp provided only a superficial examination of the antebellum era and instead focused the majority of his monograph on the post-Civil War period. Another of Thrapp's works, entitled *Victorio and the Mimbres Apaches*, served as a biography of that famous leader. While providing the academic community with an invaluable piece of Apache scholarship, this work once again highlighted the 1870s and 1880s. By emphasizing the roles of such leaders as Victorio and Geronimo, it only briefly analyzed pre-Civil War occurrences that led to those later conflicts. Similarly, historian Edwin R. Sweeney has published three excellent books about the Apaches, including *Mangas Coloradas*, which represents the most comparable secondary source to this manuscript. In his work, Sweeney outlined the relationship between the Apaches and the Mexican army and government in tremendous detail. By conducting considerable research in the Mexican archives to tell that portion of the story, Sweeney pioneered Apache-Mexican scholarship. Sweeney therefore provides a unique insight into that component of the conflict, but, in so doing, his work omits many important occurrences in the 1850s between the Apaches and the American government. This thesis offers a detailed analysis of this early period in Apache and Anglo-American relations, from 1846 to 1861, in order to contextualize the more well-known events of the 1870s and 1880s, when such leaders as Cochise, Victorio, and Geronimo rose to prominence.

The implementation of United States Indian policy in New Mexico can be traced back to June 1846, when General Stephen Watts Kearny<sup>1</sup> departed Fort Leavenworth, Kansas en route to New Mexico with a command of 1,586 United States troops, collectively christened the “Army of the West.”<sup>2</sup> This military force acted in conjunction with two other equally large commands, the “Army of the Center” and the “Army of Occupation.” Together, the three armies marched towards Mexico in a war that would come to perpetuate the Manifest Destiny ideology. Kearny’s “Army of the West” had orders from the secretary of war to travel through New Mexico and take possession of that Mexican province in the name of the United States.

A temperate man emanating from a prevalent New England family, Kearny enlisted in the New York militia prior to the War of 1812 and spent the rest of his life serving in the U.S. Army. By the time he led the Army of the West during the Mexican War, Kearny already boasted more than three decades of military experience. Kearny and his troops marched westward along the Santa Fe Trail, entering New Mexico during August, 1846. As the command approached the New Mexican settlements they remained wary of a possible attack; after all, the locals perceived them as hostile invaders.

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen Watts Kearny was born in Newark, New Jersey on August 30, 1794. He joined the United States Army during the War of 1812, and served with distinction throughout his military career. He was wounded twice at the Battle of San Pasqual on December 6, 1846. In 1848, he served as civil governor of Vera Cruz and Mexico City. Kearny died in St. Louis on October 31, 1848.

<sup>2</sup> Howard R. Lamar, *The Far Southwest, 1846-1912: A Territorial History* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1993), 52.

Entering Las Vegas, Kearny climbed atop an adobe roof and orated the first of several speeches to the Mexican people. Kearny informed them through an interpreter that he had come to take New Mexico for the United States and hoped to do so peacefully, although he would use force if necessary. He pledged that the United States government would provide the people with greater protection from hostile Indians than had been afforded by their previous government. He promised, perhaps without knowing the difficulty entailed in keeping such a bold pledge, complete protection from both the Apaches and the Navajos. "I have come amongst you by the orders of my government," Kearny declared, "to take possession of your country and extend over it the laws of the United States . . . from the Mexican government, you have never received protection. The Apaches and Navajos come down from the mountains and carry off your sheep, and even your women, whenever they please. My government will correct all this."<sup>3</sup> Indeed, under the previous Mexican government, little protection had been provided to the inhabitants from Navajo and Apache raiding. The U.S. government aimed to reverse this tradition and alleviate the people from Indian depredations.

Kearny could not have imagined how incredibly difficult it would be for his government to make good on this promise. He certainly understood that the

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<sup>3</sup> Ross Calvin, ed., *Lieutenant Emory Reports: Notes of a Military Reconnaissance from Fort Leavenworth, in Missouri, to San Diego, in California* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press), 50; Ralph Emerson Twitchell, *The History of the Military Occupation of the Territory of New Mexico* (Chicago: The Rio Grande Press, 1963), 49-50.

responsibility would fall on the shoulders of his successors, as his orders were not to remain in New Mexico, but to press on towards California. Indeed, numerous New Mexican officials would grapple with Indian affairs in upcoming years, all of whom came to know the difficulties entailed therein. Several years later, New Mexico's Superintendent of Indian Affairs James L. Collins lamented that, "Kearny ... did not remain long enough in the Territory to find out his mistake, for mistake it certainly was,"<sup>4</sup> referring to Kearny's promise to the people that the federal government would protect them from Indian raids. Had Kearny understood the tremendous burden he placed on the military in preventing Indian depredations, he might have reconsidered his words to the New Mexicans.

Kearny pressed onward towards Santa Fe, where Mexican Governor Manuel Armijo<sup>5</sup> awaited his arrival with a sizable military force to thwart the American invasion. One might have reasoned, and in fact Kearny expected, that Armijo would resist the invading army. Governor Armijo had difficulty making the decision whether to stand and fight, or turn and run. He possessed the

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<sup>4</sup> James L. Collins to C.E. Mix, September 27, 1858, in *1858 Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1858), 188. Collins continued: "When Governor Kearny took possession of New Mexico he found a war existing, and which had existed for many years, between the Mexicans and Navajoes [sic], and, judging from the general's promises to the Mexicans, which were often repeated, he must have considered it an easy matter to relieve them from the war, and to protect them against further depredations from this formidable foe."

<sup>5</sup> Manuel Armijo served three terms as governor of New Mexico, having been first appointed in 1827. He is perhaps most famous for his harsh treatment of the men composing the Texan-Santa Fe Expedition of 1841. After surrendering New Mexico to Kearny in 1846, Armijo was tried in Mexico City for cowardice and desertion. He died in 1853.

capability of mustering a military force that could have rivaled that of Kearny based on manpower, but even so, Armijo's troops would have been considerably overmatched in any engagement with the better equipped Americans.

Governor Armijo made the last minute decision to surrender New Mexico to General Kearny; thus, U.S. forces took control of the territory without firing a single shot. Scarcely in all of U.S. history has such a bloodless conquest occurred. With a late-1840s population estimated at about 5,000, Santa Fe experienced a rapid growth overnight with the arrival of over 1,500 troops. While this increase benefitted local commerce, it also burdened the townspeople to supply so many men with provisions.<sup>6</sup>

On September 25, 1846, Kearny departed Santa Fe and left behind the majority of his 1,500-man military force, which he placed under the command of Colonel Alexander W. Doniphan.<sup>7</sup> He did, however, take with him a force consisting of 300 dragoons. A fourteen-man topographical engineering unit led

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<sup>6</sup> Robert W. Frazer, *Forts and Supplies: The Role of the Military in the Economy of the Southwest, 1846-1861* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1983), 14.

<sup>7</sup> Alexander William Doniphan was born on July 9, 1808 in Mason County, Kentucky. He served in the Missouri state legislature in 1836, 1840 and 1854. At the onset of the Mexican War, Doniphan became colonel of the 1<sup>st</sup> Regiment of Missouri Mounted Volunteers and accompanied Kearny to New Mexico. Doniphan marched from Santa Fe south into Mexico in 1846, where his men won the Battle of Sacramento and successfully captured Chihuahua. He died on August 8, 1887 in Richmond, Missouri.

by Lieutenant William Helmsley Emory also accompanied Kearny to record and map the route across southern New Mexico to California.<sup>8</sup>

On his march to California, Kearny traveled directly through Apache country. Kearny's expedition represented the first contact between an American military force and the Chiricahua Apaches. Kearny dispatched an advance party to meet with the Indians, hoping to prevent them from taking flight because of the sudden arrival of such a large body of foreigners in their homelands.<sup>9</sup> On October 19, the troops reached the Gila River in southwestern New Mexico. There they met Mangas Coloradas, the principal chief of the Chiricahua Apaches, a leader who would come to be well known to the United States military over the next two decades. Mangas swore his complete allegiance to the United States and assured Kearny that his Apache followers would allow Americans to pass peacefully through their country in the future, telling him that they could sleep amongst his people in safety and without fear of attack.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, the Apache chief offered to furnish the Americans with guides to ensure their safe passage through

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<sup>8</sup> Averam B. Bender, "Government Explorations in the Territory of New Mexico, 1846-1859," *New Mexico Historical Review*, Vol. 9 (January 1934): 4.

<sup>9</sup> Dwight L. Clarke, ed., *The Original Journals of Henry Smith Turner: With Stephen Watts Kearny to New Mexico and California 1846-1847* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1966), 84-85.

<sup>10</sup> William H. Goetzmann, *Army Exploration in the American West, 1803-1862* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1959), 135.

the region.<sup>11</sup> If Mangas had known what the future held, he likely would not have made that commitment.

General Kearny displayed a sense of respect for these Indians, who could have forcibly contested his march westward had they chosen a course of hostility rather than friendship. In his personal accounts of the march, Lieutenant Emory recollected the encounter, noting that, “several [Apaches] wore beautiful helmets, decked with black feathers, which, with the short skirt, waist belt, bare legs and buskins, gave them the look of pictures of antique Greek warriors.” With a little imagination, they most definitely would have fit that description. Emory further described the encounter: “The Mexican dress and saddles predominated, showing where they had chiefly made up their wardrobe. One had a jacket made of a Henry Clay flag, which aroused unpleasant sensations, for the acquisition, no doubt, cost one of our countrymen his life.”<sup>12</sup>

At this formal initiation of Anglo-Apache relations, no open hostility occurred. Indeed, the two sides professed friendship and amity towards one another. Having had little previous intercourse with Americans, the Apaches had no reason to profess hostility and therefore showed a friendly disposition towards the visiting white men. It would not take long, however, for these feelings of benevolence to dissipate and be replaced with open distrust and hostility towards

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<sup>11</sup> Clarke, ed., *The Original Journals of Henry Smith Turner*, 85.

<sup>12</sup> Calvin, ed., *Lieutenant Emory Reports*, 101.

one another, largely as a result of unwarranted treacherous acts and inevitable reciprocation by both sides.<sup>13</sup>

Following the Gila River valley westward into modern southern Arizona, Emory's topographical team composed the first written records and maps ever recorded of this area, as remote as any in the western United States. Emory would later return to the region while serving as the "Chief Astronomer" for the United States Boundary Commission in the early 1850s. These maps and records proved invaluable over the next decade as the U.S. military embarked on numerous campaigns against the Apaches in the rugged mountains of southwestern New Mexico.

After General Kearny's contact with the Apaches in 1846, conflict would be continuous, oftentimes the result of violent reciprocity on the part of both sides. Much of the conflict can be traced to several basic causes. Cultural misunderstandings, political corruption in Santa Fe and Washington, anti-Indian ideologies, and a general inability of civil and military officials to cooperate with one another all contributed to New Mexico's struggle to arrive at an effective Apache Indian policy.

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<sup>13</sup> Edwin R. Sweeney, *From Cochise to Geronimo*, 17.



## CHAPTER 1

### THE SOLDIERS

The Indian-white conflict in southern New Mexico prior to the Civil War involved two groups, the Anglo-Americans and the Apaches, who found themselves opposing one another on a regular basis. Each group struggled to understand one another. Anglo-American officials and soldiers struggled to cope with the unforgiving New Mexican environment and the various shortcomings resulting from poor equipment, poor living quarters, and grueling campaigns in the field. Their counterparts, the Apaches, called southern New Mexico home and lived in different regions based on their tribal structure, with the tribe being broken down into smaller bands or local groups. It is important to understand the daily lives of these two opposing forces in 1850s New Mexico in order to appreciate the hardships each side faced.

The rigors of life as a frontier soldier in antebellum New Mexico are often overlooked because much of the primary source material on the subject area emanated from higher ranking officers who enjoyed privileges not available to enlisted men. In his diary that he kept from 1850 to 1856, Private James A. Bennett of Company I, First Dragoons provided a rare glimpse of daily life for soldiers. Bennett arrived in Santa Fe at the age of eighteen after enlisting in the army, little knowing the hardships that he would face. During his six years in New Mexico serving with the First Dragoons, Bennett would be stationed at over half a dozen different posts. He saw action against the Navajos, Utes, Jicarilla

Apaches, and Chiricahua Apaches, traveling thousands of miles on horseback while enduring scorching hot summers and brutally cold winters with only limited provisions.

On March 30, 1854, during a skirmish with hostile Apaches, Bennett received a gunshot wound through both thighs, the ball ultimately lodging itself about two inches below the groin. “The horses dragged me one half mile [before] I managed to mount my horse . . . blood flowed freely,” he recorded. Arriving back at his post, “I was taken off my horse, having ridden 25 miles after being wounded.” Bennett would spend the next several months in the hospital recovering from his wounds, partially due to the fact that “the doctor we have here knows nothing. I asked him to extract the ball last night but it was not done until today.”<sup>1</sup> With only limited medical resources and personnel available, many other soldiers shared Bennett’s excruciating experience during this primitive antebellum era.

Throughout the 1850s, several thousand United States troops belonging to dragoon, mounted rifles and infantry regiments occupied New Mexico. These troops received orders from Washington to pursue and chastise hostile Apache bands and enforce the government’s Indian policies in an attempt to protect the territory’s frontier settlements from Indian raids. Their efforts in this regard continuously placed them in harms’ way throughout the 1850s.

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<sup>1</sup> James A. Bennett, *Forts and Forays: A Dragoon in New Mexico, 1850-1856* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1948), 54.

In 1833 an act of Congress organized the United States Regiment of Dragoons (the predecessor to the cavalry). In 1836 these soldiers became the “First Regiment of Dragoons,” after the raising of another regiment, the Second Dragoons. For almost thirty years, these two dragoon regiments served throughout the western territories, with many of the respective companies being stationed at New Mexico’s posts. The dragoons, together with the infantry and regiment of mounted rifles, had the unenviable task of thwarting Apache and Navajo raiding in New Mexico until the onset of the Civil War in 1861.

Each dragoon regiment contained a maximum of 652 men, with roughly sixty men assigned to each company (there being ten companies in each regiment).<sup>2</sup> For the most part, no dragoon company ever boasted full strength, largely due to debilitating illnesses (especially malaria) and the frequency with which soldiers deserted from their posts, oftentimes averaging several per month.

The Regiment of Mounted Rifles (commonly abbreviated ‘R.M.R.’) could best be described as another dragoon regiment, answering to a different name. They fought as infantrymen when engaged in battle, but rode horses to expedite their travel. The army did not strictly adhere to this philosophy in New Mexico, because fighting the elusive Apaches as infantrymen seldom proved successful. The regiment, originally consisting of only four companies (A, B, C and D), was

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<sup>2</sup> Robert M. Utley, *Frontiersmen in Blue: The United States Army and the Indian, 1848-1865* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1967), 22.

created in December, 1845.<sup>3</sup> Each company contained a maximum of sixty-four privates. For the most part, these “riflemen” did not receive assignments in New Mexico until 1851 due to their being occupied in other geographic areas.

Afterwards, they played an active role in the territory alongside the dragoons, especially after 1856, at which time the War Department transferred all mounted rifleman companies from Texas to New Mexico.<sup>4</sup>

Finally, the infantry participated in many skirmishes with the Apaches during these years as well, fighting alongside their dragoon comrades. While infantry troops often bore the burden of performing duties as laborers at their respective posts, they nevertheless received considerable exposure to life in the field. Along with the dragoons, the infantry often participated in military operations against the Apaches. Several of the most prominent and influential military officers in New Mexico during the 1850s, including Colonel Dixon S. Miles at Fort Fillmore, belonged to the infantry.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Marion Grinstead, *Life and Death of a Frontier Fort: Fort Craig, New Mexico, 1854-1885* (Socorro: Socorro County Historical Society, 1973), 9-10.

<sup>4</sup> Frazer, *Forts and Supplies*, 122.

<sup>5</sup> Dixon Stansbury Miles was born on May 4, 1804 in Maryland. He graduated from the United States Military Academy in 1824, and served with the 7<sup>th</sup> Infantry until 1847, when he was transferred to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry. Miles was given the brevet rank of lieutenant colonel because of “gallant and meritorious” actions during the Battle of Monterrey. On January 19, 1859 he was transferred to Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, and would never again serve in New Mexico. During the Civil War Miles commanded the federal arsenal at Harper’s Ferry, where he was killed on September 16, 1862. Francis Heitman, *Historical Register and Dictionary of the United States Army, From Its’ Organization, September 29, 1789, to March 2, 1903*, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1903), 708.

The majority of the soldiers comprising these three branches of the army had seen service in the Mexican War, although many newly-arrived raw recruits also served in New Mexico. As mounted troops, dragoons held a distinct advantage over infantry in that they could take the field in pursuit of Indians at a moment's notice. And that is precisely what they did repeatedly throughout the 1850s, with varying measures of success in recovering stolen livestock and chastising hostile Apache bands.

Frontier life presented a daunting undertaking, perhaps even more so for the soldiers than any others who ventured out west. They performed under less than favorable conditions in most circumstances. One can scarcely imagine the seclusion and isolation these men felt, thousands of miles away from what they considered to be civilization. As attested to in numerous diaries and journals, the small Mexican villages throughout the territory did not constitute civilized life in the eyes of the newly arrived soldiers.

Private Josiah M. Rice, who saw a considerable amount of military service in New Mexico, frequently observed the unbecoming tendencies exhibited by some of the native New Mexicans whom he encountered. “[Mexicans] are the meanest and most contemptible set of swarthy thieves and liars to be found anywhere,” he wrote in his diary; “the rich ones will cheat and swindle and the poor [will] sneakingly pilfer anything.”<sup>6</sup> Nor did Rice come away with a

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<sup>6</sup> Josiah M. Rice, *A Cannoneer in Navajo Country* (Denver: The Denver Public Library, 1970), 47.

favorable opinion of the clergy, who he viewed as even worse. “The priests are high in position and always rich, but in morals and character they are, with few exceptions, even below their followers,” the young private observed.<sup>7</sup> The sentiments of military department commander Colonel Edwin V. Sumner, a native of Massachusetts and lifelong military officer, reflected those of Private Rice. In 1852 he wrote that, “The New Mexicans are thoroughly debased and totally incapable of self-government, and there is no latent quality about them that can ever make them respectable . . . they have more Indian blood than Spanish, and in some respects are below the Pueblo Indians, for they are not as honest or as industrious.”<sup>8</sup> Another army officer concurred, stating that, “the population [of New Mexico] at this time with individual exceptions was not half civilized.”<sup>9</sup>

While these ethnocentric observations did not hold true of all Mexicans in the territory, they provide an overview of the often prejudiced thoughts shared by soldiers. One difficulty arising between New Mexicans and Anglo-Americans stemmed from a significant language barrier. The two cultures oftentimes had considerable difficulty communicating with one another because, with few exceptions, neither effectively spoke the language of the other, and interpreters were few and far between.

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>8</sup> Original quote cited in Lamar, *The Far Southwest*, 83.

<sup>9</sup> William Woods Averell, *Ten Years in the Saddle: The Memoirs of William Woods Averell, 1851-1862* (San Rafael: Presidio Press, 1978), 133.

Ironically the soldiers sometimes suffered at the hands of their own government and commanding officers. Most troops in New Mexico received substandard clothing and inadequate provisions from the federal government. The army paid little attention to the necessities of soldiers stationed in a territory so far removed from the bulk of the eastern population. In terms of federal financial expenditures, officials in Washington concerned themselves more with those soldiers stationed in the east, especially with the inevitable Civil War looming on the not-so-distant horizon. In the minds of contemporary politicians, more important things demanded their attention than equipping the soldiers to fight hostile bands of Indians. Reports showed that New Mexico was the most expensive military department in the nation to supply and maintain, with expenditures averaging 2.2 million dollars annually prior to 1853.<sup>10</sup>

In 1852 Secretary of War Charles M. Conrad suggested that New Mexico be abandoned altogether. He believed that all civilian inhabitants residing in the territory should be compensated for their property and forced to move elsewhere, thereby eliminating the necessity of troops in New Mexico. “Even if the government paid for the property quintuple its value,” he wrote, “it would still, merely on the score of economy, be largely the gainer by the transaction, and the

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<sup>10</sup> Robert W. Frazer, *New Mexico in 1850: A Military View* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1968), 59-61.

troops now stationed in New Mexico would be available for the protection of other portions of our own and of the Mexican territory.”<sup>11</sup>

The majority of officers stationed in New Mexico graduated from the United States Military Academy at West Point and had previously served in the Mexican War. Most of the higher-ranking officers had served in the army for their entire careers. Many freshly-graduated West Pointers started out at the lower rank of second lieutenant because “the army had no way at that time of adding new officers to the ranks each year. Since there existed no effective retirement system and because almost all promotions were based on seniority, an officer literally had to wait until someone died or left the service before he could be promoted.”<sup>12</sup> This ranking system caused friction between “old guard” veterans and recently graduated officers who continually found themselves vying for the positions held by their elder superiors.

Commanding officers continuously pressured the government paymaster in order to ensure that their troops got paid on time. The typical salary for a dragoon private was only eight dollars per month. In 1854, under the administration of President Franklin Pierce, Congress passed legislation mandating a four-dollar raise in wages for all military personnel, bringing a dragoon private’s monthly pay to twelve dollars.<sup>13</sup> In May, 1852, Colonel Dixon

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<sup>11</sup> Original quote cited in Robert W. Frazer, *Mansfield on the Condition of Western Forts, 1853-1854* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1963), xxii.

<sup>12</sup> Averell, *Ten Years in the Saddle*, 55 n. 2.

<sup>13</sup> Utley, *Frontiersmen in Blue*, 36.



S. Miles, in command at Fort Fillmore, reported that a portion of his garrison had not been paid in more than six months, despite military regulations requiring the paymaster to visit each fort bi-monthly. This six-month lapse, while not adhering to regulations, nevertheless became typical throughout the territory. Transporting money across the plains to secluded New Mexico often proved difficult. Miles called the situation at his post “burdensome,” and requested that headquarters send a paymaster to Fort Fillmore without further delay.<sup>14</sup> Other officers throughout the department experienced similar problems. Major Enoch Steen, in command at Fort Buchanan south of Tucson, wrote to the paymaster in 1857 complaining that his men had not been paid in over ten months. “This long non-payment has caused a great deal of inconvenience,” Steen lamented, “and no little grumbling among the soldiers.”<sup>15</sup>

The long delays between payments, however, might have been a blessing in disguise. When the paymaster did make his irregular appearance, the soldiers could almost immediately be found gambling away their wages. In March, 1851, Private James Bennett wrote in his diary that, “[The] paymaster arrived yesterday.

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<sup>14</sup> Ironically the situation at Fort Fillmore seems to have gone from one extreme to another. Less than a year after Colonel Miles’ complained about the lack of funds to pay his troops, Colonel J.K.F. Mansfield reported that the paymaster at Fort Fillmore, Major B.W. Brice, had on hand \$35,576, which was kept in an iron safe, and being regularly distributed to the troops. Frazer, *Mansfield on the Condition of Western Forts*, 57.

<sup>15</sup> Enoch Steen to W.A. Nichols, June, 1857, U.S. War Department, *Registers of Letters Received by Headquarters, Department of New Mexico, 1849-1853*, RG393, M1102, LR, DNM, Rolls 1-7 (Washington, D.C.: National Archives), Roll 6.

Paid off the troops . . . all were interested in playing cards. Money exchanged hands as fast as possible. Up jumped one cursing himself, his parents, his God, his evil fortune. Another that fiendish smile exhibited because he had won his fellows' money . . . . Morning found many still gambling. Lost their sleep and their money. This is a practice followed very much by soldiers.”<sup>16</sup> The proclivity of some troops to gamble away their hard-earned wages demonstrated the immense boredom at many frontier posts in the far west.

Each year, a brief but welcome respite from boredom came on Christmas Day, when most posts suspended daily routines such as reveille and allowed a special dinner to mark the occasion. Even this, however, fell far short of a lavish feast. On Christmas Day, Bennett recorded in his dairy that “in the morning we were informed we would not drill and that we would have an extra dinner. Our hopes and expectations were raised high. Dinner came! Of what did it consist? *Boiled beef, cabbage, and potatoes . . . .*”<sup>17</sup>

Still other shortcomings haunted the troops stationed in 1850s New Mexico. The majority of southern New Mexico's eight forts never had adequate supplies or provisions on hand. Each military installation required four distinct types of supplies: ordnance, clothing and equipment, medical stores, and

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<sup>16</sup> Bennett, *Forts and Forays*, 22-23.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

subsistence stores.<sup>18</sup> With the exception of subsistence stores, most of these items had to be freighted over a thousand miles across the Santa Fe Trail to western supply depots, such as Fort Union in New Mexico, and finally distributed to the smaller forts.<sup>19</sup> Needless to say, some shipments of goods never made it across the Plains due to the countless perils faced en route to New Mexico. As a result, the military department frequently issued private contracts in order to keep the forts supplied. In 1855 the War Department issued 237 civilian contracts for forage, fuel, subsistence and transportation within New Mexico.<sup>20</sup> Even with so many contracts being granted, these basic necessities always remained in short supply, and many military campaigns failed due simply to the fact that the troops lacked adequate provisions.

Most frontier forts consisted of poorly-built structures with living quarters for troops often being deplorable. In the 1850s, most New Mexico posts consisted of adobe bricks with wooden roofs that almost always leaked. Lydia Spencer Lane, the wife of an officer in the Regiment of Mounted Rifles, noted the inconveniences resulting from the poor construction of buildings. During her brief stay at Fort Craig in 1856, she and her infant son resided in the best room the post had to offer. Even so, “the rain streamed through the roof like a shower-bath,

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<sup>18</sup> Averam B. Bender, “Military Transportation in the Southwest, 1846-1860,” *New Mexico Historical Review*, Vol. 32 (April 1957): 124.

<sup>19</sup> Utley, *Frontiersmen in Blue*, 52.

<sup>20</sup> Bender, “Military Transportation in the Southwest, 1846-1860,” 134.

and, though everything was saturated in the room . . . we took it.”<sup>21</sup> This same description of living quarters applied to the enlisted men as well. Modern amenities such as plumbing, electricity, or running water simply did not exist at frontier military posts.

Family life also did not exist among most enlisted men; even among the officers, only a select few brought their families to live with them. The aforementioned Lydia Lane, who spent the majority of her early adult life traveling throughout the southwest with her husband in the Regiment of Mounted Rifles, represents a rare exception to this rule. Colonel Dixon S. Miles was another exception, having moved his family from Baltimore to Fort Fillmore in 1854. As a military man throughout his entire adult life, Colonel Miles’ family became well acquainted with the hardships of the frontier. Of his eight children, three were born at military posts. Four of Miles’ children died before reaching the age of two, a testament to the difficulties faced by families on the frontier.<sup>22</sup>

New Mexico’s desert climate presented a constant hardship to the soldiers. In the summers, the desert sun bore down on the men and made them miserable in the triple-digit temperatures. Water and whiskey were often the only drinks available at military posts. Those who chose whiskey frequently found themselves confined in the guardhouse until the following morning. Indeed many

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<sup>21</sup> Lydia Spencer Lane, *I Married a Soldier, or, Old Days in the Old Army* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1987), 48.

<sup>22</sup> Richard Wadsworth, *Forgotten Fortress: Fort Millard Fillmore and Antebellum New Mexico* (Las Cruces: Yucca Tree Press, 2002), 119-27.

soldiers spent months confined in post guardhouses awaiting trial. The conduct of the troops at each post directly mirrored the strictness of discipline enforced by their commanding officers. Some officers, such as Colonel Miles at Fort Fillmore, operated as strict disciplinarians and always adhered to military protocol. One contemporary officer described Miles as being “undaunted in the face of hardships and privations and ready to accept any responsibility . . . [and] a strict constructionist of orders.”<sup>23</sup> Others, such as Brevet Colonel May and Brevet Captain Campbell, who intermittently held command at the Socorro post, concerned themselves little with discipline. In an 1850 review of that post, inspector George McCall noted that, “Those of the Infantry are well instructed. The Dragoons are less perfect.”<sup>24</sup>

Communication between posts presented another obstacle. The telegraph, although invented in 1844, remained nothing more than a figment of the imagination in the isolated New Mexico Territory until after the Civil War. All correspondence took place by mail or in person; either way, any communication had to be carried for many miles over rough trails and wagon roads. Rarely did any message reach its destination in less than a couple of days. This inability to quickly spread news of Apache depredations had a severe hamstringing effect upon the army.

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<sup>23</sup> Averell, *Ten Years in the Saddle*, 171.

<sup>24</sup> Frazer, *New Mexico in 1850*, 163.

Although the soldiers possessed relatively modern firearms, they remained inadequate for fighting frontier Indians in guerrilla-like warfare situations. When the dragoons arrived in New Mexico in the late 1840s, the metallic cartridge had not yet been invented. The military's regulation-issue ammunition consisted of a .69 caliber round lead ball and gun powder, all contained inside a paper cartridge. Muskets, the most common firearms issued to the troops, had been a regulation-issue item since 1842. The highly inaccurate smooth-bore muskets lacked rifling in the barrel, rendering them ineffective at long ranges. Even worse than the standard-issue musket, the Model 1847 musketoone was a sawed-off version of the musket issued to infantrymen. One soldier who bore the misfortune of carrying one lamented that, "[The musketoone] kicked like blazes, had neither range nor accuracy, and was not near as good as the musket, and was only used because it could be more conveniently carried on horseback."<sup>25</sup> Colonel Joseph K.F. Mansfield, while inspecting the department in 1853, commented further on the uselessness of these weapons: "The musketoone as an arm for the dragoon or mounted man in any way is almost worthless . . . there is no probable certainty of hitting the object aimed at, and the recoil [is] too great to be fired with ease." In contrast, Mansfield noted that the carbine and Sharps rifles "can be fired with rapidity and with suitable practice with great certainty."<sup>26</sup> Constantly moving and

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<sup>25</sup> Zenas R. Bliss, "Extracts from the Unpublished Memoirs of Major General Z.R. Bliss," *Journal of the Military Service Institution of the United States*, Vol. 38, 128.

<sup>26</sup> Frazer, *Mansfield on the Condition of Western Forts*, 66. Richard Stoddert Ewell was born on February 8, 1817 in Georgetown, D.C. and was raised in

concealing themselves during skirmishes, the Apaches presented a difficult target for the troops' inaccurate muskets.

In November 1853, experimental models of the Sharps carbine underwent a six-month trial period with Captain Richard S. Ewell's dragoons at Los Lunas, New Mexico.<sup>27</sup> Ewell's report of the trials offered nothing but praise for the carbines. "[They] are fired far more rapidly than Hall's carbine or the service rifle," Ewell boasted, "with equal accuracy below two hundred yards, and rapidly increasing superiority ahead of that distance." He claimed that his dragoon company would be "doubly efficient with the Sharps carbine than the present arm."<sup>28</sup>

Colonel Daniel Chandler, commanding at Fort Conrad in 1854, likewise received a sampling of these new carbines for experimental use in the field. On an expedition against the Mescalero Apaches, Chandler selected several of his dragoons to carry the carbines. He praised the guns overall, albeit much less so than Ewell. Chandler noted several faults, including the fact that the weapons lacked a shoulder strap for ease of transport. Because of the absence of this

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Virginia. In 1840 he graduated thirteenth in his class from the United States Military Academy. During the Mexican War, Ewell served under General Winfield Scott and was promoted to the rank of captain for his actions at Contreras and Churubusco. He resigned from the U.S. Army on May 7, 1861 and enlisted as a brigadier general in the Confederate Army. Ewell died on January 25, 1872. Heitman, *Historical Register*, 410.

<sup>27</sup> David C. Pfanz, *Richard S. Ewell* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 76.

<sup>28</sup> Richard S. Ewell to AAG, May, 1854, RG393, M1102, LR, DNM, Roll 3.

feature, the dragoons had difficulty holding on to the gun while riding, a shortcoming clearly manifested during a running fight that took place between Chandler's troops and the Apaches. Soldiers found it nearly impossible to control the horse, aim, and shoot the gun during combat situations. Despite these shortcomings, Chandler concluded that the Sharps carbine would be a much more suitable armament for his dragoons than the muskets they carried.<sup>29</sup>

Despite the positive overall results during these field trials, it would be several years before the army issued the Sharps carbine to the troops; not until 1858 did it become the standard firearm for the dragoons.<sup>30</sup> Major advancements in firearm technology came in 1855, when the United States Army officially adopted .58 caliber conical projectiles. Offering an appealing alternative to the old, inaccurate .69 caliber smooth-bore muskets, this new invention by Claude Etienne Minié of France revolutionized firearm technology. Despite the paramount importance of this invention to the art of warfare, it came too late to help most of the dragoons in New Mexico.

The hardships faced at New Mexico's forts, severe as they may have been, paled in comparison to the difficulties endured by the soldiers in the field. Some of the more active dragoon companies traveled between 2,000 and 3,000 miles each year in pursuit of Indians. These campaigns placed a tremendous burden on the soldiers and their horses alike. Rations, consisting of bread, coffee, beans and

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<sup>29</sup> Daniel Chandler to W.A. Nichols, May, 1854, Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Utley, *Frontiersmen in Blue*, 26.



either salt beef or pork comprised the soldiers' principal diet, but the issuance of these items seldom proved liberal enough to fulfill their daily needs.<sup>31</sup> Not at all infrequently did the dragoons and infantrymen endure month-long campaigns on rations enough for only a week or two. In the summers especially, water became scarce; soldiers often had to camp without it, sometimes for two or three nights in a row. When water could not be located, grass for the animals often could not be found either. During one such expedition, Private Josiah Rice recalled that, "Our poor mules and horses were screaming and howling in want of grass all night long, which made our lieutenant so angry that he swore he would gag the whole of them."<sup>32</sup>

On most campaigns, the weather could almost invariably be counted on to present hardships. New Mexico's climate undergoes drastic changes from one season to the next one: in the winter it can be unbearably cold, and in the summer hellishly hot. Summer rains, although providing a temporary respite from the heat, brought with them considerable misery for the soldiers when in the field. Private Rice, accompanying an expedition in the early 1850s, recalled these unenviable circumstances: "At night, it rained tremendously hard, and [having] no tent, we crawled under the limber of our gun, to preserve ourselves from the rain . . . the water came running into us like a river, and in the morning, wrapped in a soaking blanket, were our men crawling around the fire to warm themselves;

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<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>32</sup> Rice, *A Cannonner in Navajo Country*, 79.

a more woe-begone set of men you never saw.”<sup>33</sup> Standard government-issue winter clothing, especially boots and shoes, nearly always lacked in quality and durability. Infantrymen oftentimes returned to their posts barefoot, their shoes quickly becoming worn out by the rocky, mountainous terrain.

Occasional jokes and pranks provided the men with their only entertainment beyond that which might be considered immoral. On April 1, 1853, Private James Bennett provided himself with a laugh at the expense of his comrades. He recalled that he “sent over 20 men to the Commanding Officer for various pretexts, where they were informed that they were ‘April Fools.’” His unfortunate victims probably failed to view the incident with as much humor as Bennett.<sup>34</sup>

Poor living conditions severely hampered the morale of most frontier soldiers, and rightfully so. Besides practical jokes they played on each other, the only other entertainment to be found came in the form of saloons and brothels in the small Mexican towns. These activities appealed to many troops despite the severe consequences that came with such behavior. James Bennett, while stationed at Albuquerque, wrote, “The soldiers will be out of camps nights in spite of orders of officers. Four *fandangoes* [dances] every night in town and the camp is full of women.”<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 66.

<sup>34</sup> Bennett, *Forts and Forays*, 42.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 38.

The military kept strict orders in place at every post prohibiting the soldiers from leaving without first being granted a leave of absence, but any attempts to keep their men away from the towns generally failed. Occasionally soldiers caught away from the post would be charged with deserting, a criminal charge for which severe punishment could be expected. One dragoon private, after being caught attending a fandango in Albuquerque, received the typical punishment for deserters: a court martial ordered that he be drummed out of the service, forfeit all of his pay, have his head shaved, receive fifty lashes on the back, and be branded on the hip with the letter “D” for deserter.<sup>36</sup>

In spite of the severe repercussions if caught deserting, many soldiers joined the army for that very reason. A significant number of men enlisted for the sole purpose of traveling westward free of charge and under the protection of the army. They would then desert immediately after they arrived, heading west to try their luck in the California gold fields. This type of occurrence proved especially true at Forts Bliss, Fillmore, and Webster, the three southernmost forts in the Department of New Mexico during the 1850s.<sup>37</sup> The road to California went directly through Forts Fillmore and Bliss, and passed a mere half-day ride south of Fort Webster. The ease with which soldiers could depart from these three locations and quickly be on their way to California led to a higher percentage of

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<sup>36</sup> Utley, *Frontiersmen in Blue*, 39.

<sup>37</sup> Fort Bliss, although located in Texas, remained under the jurisdiction of the Department of New Mexico. It did not become a part of the Department of Texas until December 8, 1860. Robert W. Frazer, *Forts of the West* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1965), 143.

desertions. The many immigrant parties traveling to California always welcomed deserters into their groups, realizing that when passing through the Indian country strength could be found in numbers.

In October, 1852 seven soldiers (six dragoons and one infantryman) deserted from Fort Webster.<sup>38</sup> Following this incident, Colonel Miles, commanding at Fort Fillmore, acknowledged the frequency of desertions at his post as well, noting that “California Fever” had afflicted his men. Not surprisingly, a pattern of desertion began to develop. Every time the soldiers were paid, one or two would be missing from the fort the next morning.<sup>39</sup>

The life of the 1850s frontier soldier posed innumerable hardships. Equipment and provisions seldom met the troops’ expectations, several months often passed in between visits from the paymaster, sickness and disease haunted many of the posts, discipline remained mediocre because of prostitution, gambling and alcohol available at nearby civilian settlements, and morale proved difficult to maintain as a result. Thus the life of the frontier soldier in southern New Mexico can truly be described as one of extreme hardship, exposing them to many perils on a regular basis in addition to skirmishes with hostile Indians. The characteristics of their surrounding environment often had a direct impact on their performance in the field and undermined their ability to discourage Indian raiding and chastise guilty bands within the tribe.

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<sup>38</sup> Gouverneur Morris to John C. McFerran, October 10, 1852, RG393, M1102, LR, DNM, Roll 5.

<sup>39</sup> Wadsworth, *Forgotten Fortress*, 82.

Superior officers in Santa Fe and Washington, D.C. who had not personally experienced these hardships did not fully understand the daily struggles of the troops. Many of the orders being carried out in frontier New Mexico emanated from men sitting in offices far removed from the scene of action. This absence resulted in many orders that simply could not be satisfactorily fulfilled. Superior officers expected to see definitive results from their troops in the field, not understanding the shortcomings they faced when operating against hostile Apaches in their own homelands. Because they had only a minimal knowledge of operations in New Mexico, higher ranking officials did not adequately equip their troops and therefore undermined their ability to carry out orders in southern New Mexico. Many of the hardships faced by the troops can therefore be attributed not only to the Apaches whom they fought and the rough environment in which they operated, but also to the military chain of command and its failure to adequately prepare its troops. These three components of antebellum New Mexico military operations coalesced in the frequent failure of military operations against the Apaches.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE APACHES

To Anglo-Americans in the mid-nineteenth century southwest, the Apaches presented perhaps the most formidable of all foes. As New Mexico Indian agent John Greiner put it, the Indians “were at home anywhere.” While the soldiers suffered in the difficult southern New Mexico climate and terrain, the Apaches thrived in it. Southwestern New Mexico had been their home for countless generations, and they knew every tactic necessary to ensure their survival under even the most adverse conditions.

The Apache tribe of southwestern New Mexico and southeastern Arizona called themselves *tinneh*, or *indeh*, which means “man,” or “people.” The larger Apache tribe consisted of several separate, often autonomous subgroups that were recognized internally amongst themselves and, to a lesser extent, by the American officials as well. Each band typically had its own specific homeland, although they recognized no political or geographical boundaries and often intermingled with one another and roamed freely throughout the region.

Their vast desert homelands -- today comprising southwestern New Mexico, southeastern Arizona, northwestern Chihuahua, and northeastern Sonora -- are distinguished by basin-and-range topography and are generally very arid in nature. The Apaches utilized the drastic changes in altitude between the basins and ranges to their advantage depending on the changing seasons. During cold winter months they moved their villages, or *rancherías*, to lower elevations, and

during the hot summer months, they moved back to the higher elevations. Thus the geographical and meteorological characteristics of the southwestern desert landscape often determined the Apaches' settlement and migration patterns throughout the year. The harvesting of mescal also served as a determining factor in these patterns of tribal movement; at certain times of the year, the entire band would return to the region in which they harvested this important staple. In southwestern New Mexico, this region was Santa Lucia Springs near the headwaters of the Gila River. After the mescal harvest had been fully consumed, the tribe often resorted to raiding in northern Mexico and along the Rio Grande for the remaining months. These raids promulgated a bitter conflict between the Apaches and the Mexican people, one that existed simultaneously with the Apache-American conflict of the 1850s and therefore pitted the tribe against two separate foes. These dual wars required the Apaches to divide their forces and resources, rendering it more difficult for them to actively resist American encroachment.

These patterns within Apache culture remained mostly unchanged for centuries, until the mid-1800s when the Americans arrived in New Mexico and forever altered the Apaches' life-ways. The influx of American settlers--ranchers, farmers, miners, and soldiers--into southwestern New Mexico after 1846 drastically impacted the Apaches' ability to move freely and unmolested throughout their homelands. Important water sources often became the site of a cattle ranch or military post, rendering the important resource unavailable to the nomadic Apache people as they moved from one location to another. Sites that

the tribe considered sacred became the locations of small Anglo-American settlements. Settlers decimated wild game populations, especially deer and elk, forcing the Apaches to rely more heavily upon stolen livestock for subsistence. Unscrupulous white merchants distributed liquor among the tribes, giving rise to violent outbreaks (some of which would have never occurred) resulting directly from intoxication. Widespread Anglo-American encroachment had innumerable negative effects upon the Apaches. From these fundamental changes to their traditional life-ways arose the causes of a violent conflict that lasted for decades and cost the lives of countless men, women and children on both sides.

The three most prominent Apache bands, or subgroups, were the Chiricahua (who called themselves the Chokonen); the Mogollon and Gila/Mimbres (who called themselves the Chihenne); and the Janeros or Carrizaleños, who resided almost exclusively in the northern Mexican states of Chihuahua and Sonora and called themselves the Nednhi.<sup>1</sup> Further west in modern Arizona, the Western Apaches, consisting of the Aravaipa, Pinal, and Coyotero bands, lived mostly independently of the bands in New Mexico and rarely came into contact with American forces before the Civil War. This account pertains primarily to Apaches belonging to the Chiricahua, Mogollon and Gila/Mimbres bands of southwestern New Mexico.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Edwin R. Sweeney, *Cochise: Chiricahua Apache Chief* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), 4-5.

<sup>2</sup> Different scholars refer to these bands by different names, but these are the ones most generally used and therefore will be retained throughout this work.



The internal structure of the Apaches, being broken down into many smaller scattered bands, made it difficult for American officials to properly identify them and to estimate the population of the tribe. “The Apache embrace so many bands, and are so widely scattered, that it is extremely difficult to enumerate them,” wrote one observer, John Russell Bartlett, in 1851. “It is unusual to find 200 of them together,” he continued, stating his belief that the total Apache population did not exceed 5,000 at that time.<sup>3</sup> Indeed Indian agents continued to grapple with this numerical ambiguity for years to come, continually being frustrated in their attempts to accurately portray the tribe’s population.

The importance of each respective band to Apache culture cannot be overstated. These subgroups represented the basic structural component of the tribe, upon which all other tribal matters revolved.<sup>4</sup> Only when necessary would several bands unite for a common purpose. The complex structure of the Apache tribe made it difficult for the army to distinguish one band from another; as a consequence, many raids would be blamed on innocent groups. This frequent misidentification of Apache bands within the larger tribe negatively impacted future Anglo-Apache relations.

The army’s inability to understand Apache tribal structure is manifested in an 1859 report by department commander Colonel Benjamin L.E. Bonneville in

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<sup>3</sup> John Russell Bartlett, *Personal Narrative of Explorations and Incidents in Texas, New Mexico, California, Sonora and Chihuahua, 1850-1853* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1854), Vol. 2, 387.

<sup>4</sup> Grenville Goodwin, *Western Apache Raiding and Warfare* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1971), 14.

which he noted that, “the name Apaches is a general one . . . [the] Mogollon Apaches, Gila Apaches, Mimbres Apaches, Chiricahua Apaches, and Pinal Apaches merely designate their locality.”<sup>5</sup> While Bonneville did distinguish between groups in this comment, he erroneously asserted that all five of these comprised one and the same band and that the only difference between them came from the region in which they lived. Contrarily all five lived and operated mostly autonomous of one another. There was much more to their tribal structure than simple geographical considerations as outlined by Bonneville.

Because one band of Apaches committed robberies along the Rio Grande did not mean that every Apache had committed the crime. Contrarily, it meant every Apache *not* associated with the guilty band was completely innocent. Most whites never understood this simple concept; in countless cases the army failed to make any distinction between Apache subgroups. When one small band embarked on a marauding expedition, the army often sought to punish *all* of the Indians, paying little attention to the fact that those upon whom they wreaked havoc were in many cases innocent of the perpetrated crimes. Much of the success that the army experienced in chastising the Apaches came at the expense of peaceful bands; rarely did the army punish those members of the tribe guilty of a particular atrocity. The misunderstanding of Apache tribal structure thus exacerbated the tension between the two cultures.

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<sup>5</sup> Benjamin Bonneville to Lorenzo Thomas, July 15, 1859, in Henry P. Walker, “Colonel Bonneville’s Report,” *Arizona and the West* Vol. 22 (Winter 1980), 359.

By the time they reached the age of five years, Apache children (male and female alike) had learned all they needed to know to fight and survive in their harsh desert environment.<sup>6</sup> Well-trained by their elders in the arts of warfare, Apache warriors could be counted among the most cunning and fierce enemies the army ever faced in the west. Under every circumstance in which the average white man would have succumbed to the elements, the Apache could find a way to survive. Constantly on the move, they rarely remained in one location for more than a few days. An Apache could walk or ride with little or no rest for days at a time; countless tales of incredible Apache endurance can be found in nearly every account written about them.

Despite their remarkable survival techniques, the torrents of white settlers that filtered into Apache country in the years following the Mexican War proved to be overwhelming. The whites numbered in the millions, and the Apaches in the thousands. As more settlers came to the territory, especially in the years during and after the Civil War, it became exceedingly difficult for them to raid the Rio Grande settlements. Prior to the Civil War, however, with the territory's population still remaining relatively small, raiding the Rio Grande settlements provided the tribe's principal means of subsistence. Between 1846 and 1850, John Russell Bartlett claimed that New Mexico's Indians (including Navajos, Utes and Apaches) had stolen 12,887 mules, 7,050 horses, 31,581 cattle, and

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<sup>6</sup> Angie Debo, *Geronimo: The Man, His Time, His Place* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1976), 18.

453,293 sheep.<sup>7</sup> These figures, astounding as they are, likely still fall short of the actual amount.

Raiding the Mexican villages along the Rio Grande and in northern Mexico (Chihuahua and Sonora) was a practice in which the various Apache bands had indulged for generations, becoming dependent upon these raids for survival when other food sources became scarce. To ensure success, most raiding parties consisted of only five to fifteen warriors, as they could travel more stealthily in small groups.<sup>8</sup> With each passing raid, the hatred grew between the Apaches and the Mexicans. Dr. Michael Steck, the Apache agent at Fort Thorn beginning in 1854, attested to this traditional cultural animosity. “It has from time immemorial been the custom of the Indians to steal from the New Mexicans and then the Mexicans to steal from them,” he wrote. “This system of thievery and retaliation has been kept up, and under the Mexican rule organized parties were permitted to make campaigns for the avowed purpose of stealing Indian stock.”<sup>9</sup>

The Mexican State of Sonora passed legislation in 1835 encouraging its citizens to take Apache scalps, offering to pay bounty-hunters 100 pesos for every warrior scalp taken. The neighboring State of Chihuahua quickly followed suit,

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<sup>7</sup> Bartlett, *Personal Narrative II*, 386.

<sup>8</sup> Goodwin, *Western Apache Raiding and Warfare*, 16-17.

<sup>9</sup> Inventory of the Michael Steck Papers, *Series 1, 1839-1853*, E93, Reel 1.

passing a similar law in 1837.<sup>10</sup> By the time American troops arrived in 1846, the contemptuous relations between the Mexicans and Apaches had reached unprecedented levels. “They live mainly by plundering and robbing both Old and New Mexicans . . . they generally extend their peregrinations into the Mexican States of Coahuila, Chihuahua, [Sonora] and Durango, from which States they drive off much stock, and take their captives,” Apache agent Edmund A. Graves explained in 1854.<sup>11</sup> Between the years 1851 and 1853, the Apaches were blamed for more than 500 Mexican deaths in Sonora alone. The Mexicans doubtless inflicted heavy casualties upon the Apache bands during that time as well, although no written records exist to reflect the precise number. Apache beliefs regarding the state of a deceased person in the afterlife meant that they almost always carried their dead and wounded from the battlefield. Therefore reports of Apache casualties during combative encounters often represented mere guesswork by army commanders and eye witnesses. Many army officers, Mexican and American alike, often exaggerated Apache casualties in order to create a false appearance of victory in their reports.

Indeed the nature of combat in encounters between the Apaches and the Americans differed drastically from the traditional military tactics of that era. While American military officers still clung to the strategy of pitched battles in wide-open spaces, the Apaches adopted a more practical military strategy, one of

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<sup>10</sup> Debo, *Geronimo*, 28.

<sup>11</sup> Edmund Graves to George Manypenny, June 8, 1854, in *1854 Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs*, 180.

guerrilla warfare, which almost invariably gave them the advantage in any fight. Apaches engaged an enemy only when they held a major advantage, either numerically or strategically. Ambushes at vulnerable locations, usually from behind large boulders at elevated positions, represented the Apache mode of warfare. In these situations, American troops trained in traditional warfare techniques had to adapt quickly in order to avoid catastrophic losses at the hands of their more strategically practical Apache opponents. Guerrilla warfare on the Apaches' terms became a defining characteristic of hostile military engagements in southwestern New Mexico, often resulting in minimal Apache casualties; in many skirmishes, a clear victor did not emerge. The Apaches had applied their strategies against the Mexicans for decades and therefore posed a truly formidable foe for American military forces.

In their earlier wars with the Mexicans, despite their thoughtful military tactics, the Apaches did not always emerge victorious. Ultimately, casualties sustained during skirmishes with the Mexicans had an effect on the tribe, resulting in a decreasing population and a corresponding reduction in fighting strength. Writing in the mid-1850s, agent Steck noted that, "there is a great disposition between the number of [Apache] men and women. This situation may be accounted for from the fact that for at least the last 100 years the tribe has either been at war with Old or New Mexico, sometimes both, and with neighboring tribes, and the men being killed in numerous battles . . . they cannot bring into the

field over half the number of warriors that they could have done 20 years ago.”<sup>12</sup> Perpetual warfare with both the Mexicans and the Anglo-Americans continued to weaken the several Apache bands.

The silver lining in this for New Mexico rested in the fact that the ongoing Apache conflict with Chihuahua and Sonora shifted focus away from the American settlements along the Rio Grande. “The facility and impunity with which [Mexico] is plundered and robbed, has measurably saved our own people from like visitations during the last and present years,” Governor David Meriwether observed in 1853.<sup>13</sup> This animosity endured for generations, even after the Apaches had been removed from New Mexico. The famed Apache warrior Geronimo, well advanced in years and living at the Apache reservation near Fort Sill, Indian Territory in the early 1900s, proclaimed, “I am old now and shall never go on the warpath again, but if I were young, and followed the warpath, it would lead into Old Mexico.”<sup>14</sup>

Many Americans living in the east had no accurate conception of the unique lifestyle of New Mexico’s Indians. Although Manifest Destiny had taken the nation by storm, many Americans did not, in the 1850s, entertain an annihilation ideology in regards to the native inhabitants of the continent.

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<sup>12</sup> Michael Steck to David Meriwether, July 30, 1855, Steck Papers, Series 2, Roll 1.

<sup>13</sup> Meriwether to George Manypenny, September 1, 1854, in *1854 Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs*, 171.

<sup>14</sup> S.M. Barrett, *Geronimo: His Own Story* (New York: Duffield & Co., 1906), 110.

Unfortunately for Native Americans, not only in New Mexico but all across the western United States, more Americans would come to embrace that previously unthinkable ideology in the years to come. Because Americans failed to distinguish between Indian tribes, and especially between individual bands within tribes, news of such events as Custer's defeat at the Little Bighorn in 1876 served as catalysts for the downfall of many western tribes in the following years.

As countless military officers and government agents came to discover, the Apaches were traditionally a nomadic people. Government officials with no knowledge or concern for this continued to advocate for the Apaches being permanently settled in built homes or on reservations, but these efforts seldom proved successful. Of all those concerned with Apache affairs throughout the 1850s, agent Michael Steck no doubt understood the Indians the best. He warned his superiors that the Apaches would never be willing to live in permanent houses because of their superstitious nature. Writing to the Indian Department, Steck explained that, "Their prejudice against houses is founded upon a tradition which is universally believed among them, that they are the descendents of Montezuma, and at the time of his death they were directed by their wise maker, to show their grief by destroying their houses, breaking their crockery, and flying to the mountains to live as they do now . . . in miserable little huts built of willows bent and tied together, and covered with branches and shrubbery."<sup>15</sup> He accurately predicted that any attempt to persuade them to construct and live in permanent

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<sup>15</sup> Steck to Manypenny, August 27, 1856, Steck Papers, Series 2, Roll 2.



dwellings would result in failure. This component of Apache culture made it difficult to place them on a reservation where they would be willing to remain for any extended period of time. Although several government officials attempted to do so throughout the 1850s, it would not be until many years later that the first Apache reservations were established.

Communication presented another barrier. Three languages were spoken in southern New Mexico: English, Spanish and Apache (Athabaskan). For the most part, the Apache's native dialect could be understood only by them and was seldom used when communicating with the whites. Fortunately many of the Apaches learned a considerable amount of Spanish during the course of their continuing hostilities with the Mexicans, coupled with their proclivity to adopt young Mexican children taken captive into the tribe. Most communication between the Indians and the whites therefore took place in Spanish and required an interpreter; consequently, individuals speaking dual languages were highly sought after in New Mexico and became some of the highest-paid men on the frontier, making on average forty-five dollars per month in 1858.<sup>16</sup>

The federal government's most frequent "solution" to Indian problems in New Mexico occurred in the form of the peace treaty. Government officials negotiated hundreds of treaties with Indian tribes over the years, with varying degrees of success. A treaty would generally be broken by both sides before it ever reached Congress for ratification. Apache treaties were no exception.

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<sup>16</sup> Frazer, *Forts and Supplies*, 98.

Writing about this dilemma, agent John Ward noted that, “ten minutes after an Indian makes his mark upon the paper containing a treaty which he has made with you, he is ready to break it, and it cannot be otherwise.”<sup>17</sup> Ward failed to mention, however, that the Americans oftentimes deserved an equal portion of the blame for breaking treaty provisions. Both branches of government held responsibility for this. The civil government rarely held its end of the bargain pertaining to rations and supplies being issued to the Indians, while the military department violated treaty provisions by ordering attacks against innocent bands living peaceably near their agencies.

The army would eventually learn that the only consistent means of catching an Apache was to employ other Apaches as scouts. They possessed an unsurpassed knowledge of their vast homelands, an area covering thousands of square miles across most of southern New Mexico and Arizona as well as northern Mexico. Their hiding places, located in the most mountainous and non-traversable terrain imaginable, numbered in the thousands. Were it not for the advent of the Apache scouts in the 1870s, the last Apache “renegades” may have never been caught. However in the 1850s, the army had no Apache scouts; instead, the military department frequently employed the services of Mexicans as guides, but often to little avail.

Unfortunately the Apaches kept no written records. The only extant primary-source Apache records come in the form of memory, tradition, and oral

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<sup>17</sup> Quoted by William A. Keleher, *Turmoil in New Mexico: 1846-1868* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1952), 474.

histories that the people passed down from one generation to the next. As those Apaches living during the mid-1800s died over the passage of many years, so too did much of their side of the story become lost. All surviving contemporary accounts of relations between the Indians and the Anglos in the 1850s emanated from the soldiers, military officers and government officials who served in New Mexico. Consequently many of the accounts are biased in favor of the Americans and represent the anti-Indian sentiment common to that era. Americans embellished many of their reports in order to portray a negative image of the Indians that aligned with mid-1800s Anglo-American ethnocentric ideologies. Had the Apaches kept written records, they would reveal a startlingly different tale than those of the whites upon which historians must rely. There are in fact written accounts and interviews from several Apaches who fought alongside Geronimo and Victorio, but those tales fall some twenty years beyond the scope of this work, in the 1870s and 1880s. Because of the written accounts, the story of Anglo-Apache conflict in antebellum New Mexico can unfortunately only be told as seen through the eyes of the Anglo-Americans.

Two opposing sides were thus pitted against one another in an Indian war that would last for the better part of four decades, commencing in the late 1840s and not ending until the surrender of Geronimo and his followers in September, 1886. In order to more fully understand the events and circumstances of that later era, it is important to analyze the roots of the Anglo-Apache struggle in New Mexico. These roots can be traced back to the earliest years of American occupation, the period spanning 1846 to 1861.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE EARLY YEARS OF MILITARY OCCUPATION

The permanent placement of United States troops in New Mexico following the American occupation in 1846 inevitably caused controversy and disagreement over countless matters, not the least of which being the policy that the government should pursue regarding the management of the territory's several Indian tribes. As one might expect, most Native Americans throughout New Mexico did not welcome the presence of U.S. military posts within what they considered to be their homelands. From the Indians' perspective, this represented a gesture of open hostility by the Americans. In the upcoming years, the policies pursued in response to the "Indian problem" would be the responsibility of both the civil and military officials in the territory.

Following the end of the Mexican War in 1848, the Territory of New Mexico consisted of a vast expanse of barren deserts and nearly impassable mountain ranges, interrupted only by the occasional fertile valley. Many easterners considered New Mexico to be a worthless tract of land, save for its occasional pockets of untapped natural resources, the extent of which would not be fully realized until several decades later. The territory consisted of all of present-day Arizona and New Mexico, as well as a portion of southern Colorado. Upon its organization, the military district of New Mexico was named the "Ninth

Military Department,” one of eleven such districts that comprised the entirety of the United States in 1848.<sup>1</sup>

The signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo on February 2, 1848 and subsequent ratification put an official end to the Mexican War. The treaty proved to be a contentious diplomatic document from the beginning, with severe tension resulting from the various stipulations negotiated between the two nations. Many articles of that treaty became an object of international debate, especially the delineation of the boundary separating the two nations. It would take years to satisfactorily sort out the treaty’s ambiguities. The widespread controversy created by the document exemplified the tense diplomatic relationship between Mexico and the United States during that time.

One portion of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo that directly affected Indian affairs in New Mexico emanated from the treaty’s 11<sup>th</sup> article. According to the provisions of that article, it would be the duty of the U.S. Army to return Mexican captives taken by the Indians during their raids.<sup>2</sup> Apaches had always made it a frequent practice to raid the towns and villages in Mexico, taking women and children as captives in the process. Sometimes captive Mexican women became the wives of Apache warriors, who adopted Mexican children into the tribe as well. These captivities made it difficult for the U.S. Army to uphold

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<sup>1</sup> Frazer, *New Mexico in 1850*, 34. In 1853, the name was officially changed to the “Department of New Mexico.”

<sup>2</sup> Hunter Miller, ed., *Treaties and Other International Acts of the United States of America* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1931-1948), Vol. 5, 219-22.

the 11<sup>th</sup> article, as it oftentimes proved impossible to convince the Apaches to surrender their captives. Army and government officials recognized that this placed them in a dilemma, and when Congress ratified the Gadsden Purchase in June, 1854, they included a clause nullifying that article of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo.<sup>3</sup>

President Millard Fillmore, in an 1851 speech to Congress, specifically mentioned this portion of the treaty. “By the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo we are bound to protect the territory of Mexico against the incursions of the savage tribes within our border with equal diligence and energy as if the same were made within our territory or against our citizens . . . ,” Fillmore explained. “Instructions have also been given to the Indian commissioners and agents among these tribes in all treaties to make the clauses designed for the protection of our own citizens apply also to those of Mexico.”<sup>4</sup>

Perhaps exacerbating the soldiers’ already difficult tasks, President Fillmore clearly stated that the protection of Mexican citizens from Apache raiding must be among the military’s lengthy list of duties. The obligation to return Mexican captives resulted in considerable controversy among military officers stationed throughout New Mexico, as it detracted from their ability to perform other duties in and around their respective posts. On many occasions it

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<sup>3</sup> Article II of the Gadsden Treaty stated: “The government of Mexico hereby releases the United States from all liability on account of the obligations contained in the eleventh article of the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo.” Miller, *Treaties and Other International Acts*, Vol. 6, 296.

<sup>4</sup> Keleher, *Turmoil in New Mexico*, 64-65.

caused an escalation in the severity of the conflict, as any negotiations with the Apaches seeking the return of Mexican captives invariably proved unsuccessful. Because the Apaches adopted these captives into their own families, American laws mandating their return essentially required the Indians to surrender family members, not captives. Government authorities overlooked this complex cultural dynamic, giving rise to increased tension between the two races. The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo thus provided the impetus for the first point of contention between the U.S. government and the various bands comprising the Apache tribe.

In 1848, with the military department under the command of Major John M. Washington, 885 troops from infantry, dragoon, and mounted rifles regiments garrisoned New Mexico's nine posts. This number comprised almost ten percent of the total U.S. standing army at that time, which numbered approximately 10,000.<sup>5</sup> In the summer of 1849 large numbers of reinforcements arrived in the territory, including one company of Second Dragoons under Captain Croghan Ker, four companies of Third Infantry under Brevet Lieutenant Colonel Edmund B. Alexander, and two companies of the Second Artillery.<sup>6</sup> Six additional companies of the Third Infantry, consisting of 257 men under the command of Major Jefferson Van Horne, arrived at El Paso on September 28, 1849, making

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<sup>5</sup> Averam Bender, "Frontier Defense in the Territory of New Mexico, 1848-1853" *New Mexico Historical Review*, Vol. 9 (October 1934): 258.

<sup>6</sup> Frank McNitt, *Navajo Wars: Military Campaigns, Slave Raids and Reprisals* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1972), 136.

that the strongest post in the department.<sup>7</sup> With the arrival of these troops, nineteen companies garrisoned the territory's posts, a substantial show of force.<sup>8</sup>

In the early years of military occupation, the troops did not occupy forts or permanent encampments; rather, they lived in rented quarters in New Mexico's civilian settlements. The effectiveness of locating the troops within the confines of these towns became an object of intense debate. Without a doubt, the citizens desperately needed the support of the army in preventing the Indians from plundering at will, a protection that had not been previously afforded to the people under the rule of the Mexican government.

While locating the soldiers within the towns served as a deterrent for Apache raiding, it did not stop the practice altogether. Many Apaches practiced raiding as a way of life, depending upon plundered livestock for sustenance. In most cases, an increased number of troops proved to be nothing more than a minor setback for the Indians. Apache raiding parties could easily shift their raids to more remote locations in order to avoid the troops. The entirety of the Rio Grande valley south of Albuquerque, with farms and ranches spread only a few miles apart, was settled by Mexicans who relied upon the region as the lifeblood for their sheep and cattle herds. Accordingly, stationing soldiers at the larger settlements placed only minimal strain on the raiding efforts of the Indians.

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<sup>7</sup> Frazer, *New Mexico in 1850*, 36.

<sup>8</sup> Frazer, *Forts and Supplies*, 39.



The town of Socorro, long a target of Apache raiding, would be among the first in the territory to enjoy the protection of a garrison of United States troops. In October, 1848 Companies D and E of the Second Dragoons replaced the battalion of mounted volunteers that formerly garrisoned the town. In addition to Socorro, other New Mexico towns chosen for military garrisons included Taos, Santa Fe, Abiquiu, Galisteo, Las Vegas, Albuquerque, Los Lunas, and Doña Ana.<sup>9</sup> Three of these towns, Los Lunas, Socorro, and Doña Ana, existed within the boundaries of Apache country; consequently, the posts at these three locations would be the busiest in the territory.

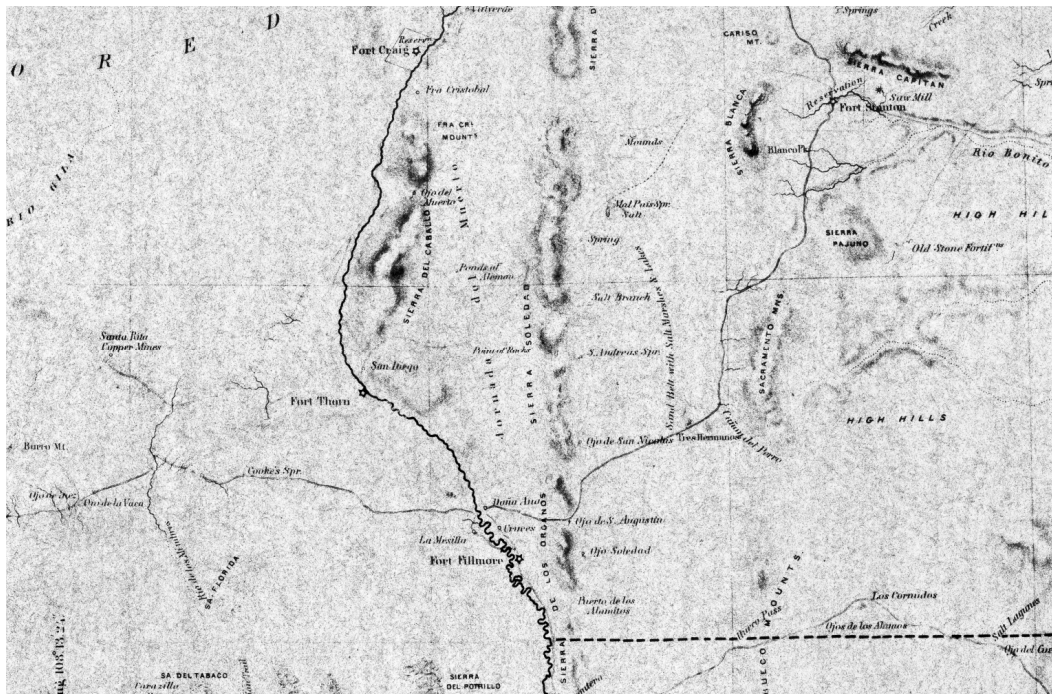


Figure 2. The Rio Grande Valley and surrounding regions of Southern New Mexico, 1857. (Courtesy: New Mexico State University Archives and Special Collections)

<sup>9</sup> Frazer, *Forts and Supplies*, 55.

In 1848 the military also arrived for the first time at the small town of Doña Ana, located in the Mesilla Valley a few miles north of present-day Las Cruces.<sup>10</sup> In 1843 Doña Ana became the first Spanish town to be established in the area, followed shortly afterwards by the nearby settlements of Mesilla and Las Cruces, both of which had sprung up by 1850. Companies D, F and H of the First Dragoons, as well as Company B, Third Infantry, called Doña Ana home at various times throughout the duration of its use as a military post. Company H, First Dragoons, under the command of Lieutenant Delos B. Sackett, arrived there first, taking station in rented adobe quarters in the latter months of 1848.<sup>11</sup> Lieutenant Sackett, who surveyed and plotted the Las Cruces town site in 1849, served as the temporary post commander until the arrival of Major Enoch Steen in July of that year.<sup>12</sup> Steen, a prominent military figure in New Mexico throughout

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<sup>10</sup> Robert Julyan, *The Place Names of New Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996), 112.

<sup>11</sup> Delos Bennett Sackett was born on April 14, 1822 in Cape Vincent, New York, and graduated from the United States Military Academy in 1840. In December 1850, he left New Mexico and returned to West Point, where he served as assistant instructor of cavalry tactics. During the Civil War, he was given command of the Inspector General's Office in Washington, D.C. He died in Washington on March 8, 1885. Heitman, *Historical Register*, 856.

<sup>12</sup> Born in Harrodsburg, Kentucky on February 22, 1800, Major Enoch Steen joined the First Regiment of United States Dragoons in 1833 and served thirty-four years as an officer with that regiment. He fought in the Mexican War and was brevetted Major on February 23, 1847 for meritorious conduct at the Battle of Buena Vista. On August 16, 1849, while in command at Doña Ana, he was wounded in a skirmish with the Mimbres Apaches near Santa Rita del Cobre. In 1856 he established a new post, Fort Buchanan, near Tucson. He left Arizona in 1858 and by 1860 had been reassigned to the Oregon Territory. Steen retired as a lieutenant colonel in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Cavalry on September 23, 1863. He lived the

the early 1850s, was described by a contemporary as “a man of splendid physique, of the most temperate habits, and he had the endurance of old Daniel Boone himself.”<sup>13</sup> Steen served at Doña Ana intermittently from 1849 until the time of its permanent abandonment by the military in 1851.

Doña Ana immediately became an important location for Apache relations and continued in that stead for over two years. During that time, several military campaigns against the Apaches emanated from Doña Ana, and any members of that tribe wishing to discuss peace or negotiate a treaty had to travel there to do so. Throughout his first year at Doña Ana, Major Steen experienced multiple problems with the Apaches. He witnessed numerous Apache raids, and each time his troops left in pursuit they returned to the post unsuccessful in overtaking the Indians.

In a written communication with headquarters in August, 1849, Steen suggested a large-scale Apache campaign, something which he believed to be absolutely necessary. “In my opinion,” Steen wrote, “nothing short of a good whipping will do any good. The [Apaches] will break treaty faster than [we] can make them . . . 200 mounted men can leave Secora [sic] and in five days be in the heart of their country just about the copper mines; there is a good wagon road all the way . . . [after] 4-5 weeks in their country with a good force they will be glad to make a peace treaty.” He suggested that the expedition be led by Colonel

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remainder of his civilian life in Missouri until his death on January 22, 1880. Heitman, *Historical Register*, 919.

<sup>13</sup> Original quote cited in Ibid.

Charles A. May from the Socorro post. According to Steen, the campaign should last for at least four to six weeks, during which time “all their women, children and horses may be taken [and their warriors killed].”<sup>14</sup> Steen’s suggestion represents the beginnings of the army’s total warfare strategy in southern New Mexico, one that his contemporaries would likewise advocate for in upcoming years.

In December 1849, four months after Steen recommended the large campaign, the Apaches struck again, this time committing depredations along the Jornada del Muerto (“Journey of the Dead”), a wagon road connecting northern and southern New Mexico. Travelers feared this perilous route because of the absence of water and the frequent Apache raids to which it rendered them vulnerable.<sup>15</sup> Learning of the recent depredations on the Jornada, Steen left Doña Ana with Company H, First Dragoons and proceeded to the site where the attacks occurred. Steen then divided his command, with half of the men remaining on the Jornada and the other half proceeding westward until striking the Rio Grande near San Diego crossing. By the time news of the raids had reached Doña Ana, the Indians already had a one-day head-start on the soldiers. Both of the dragoon

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<sup>14</sup> Enoch Steen to Lafayette McLaws, August 10, 1849, RG393, M1102, LR, DNM, Roll 1.

<sup>15</sup> See Max Moorhead, *New Mexico’s Royal Road: Trade and Travel on the Chihuahua Trail* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995), 111-12 for a description of the Jornada del Muerto.

columns traveled over sixty miles in different directions without encountering the Indians' trail.

Emboldened by the success of their recent depredations on the Jornada, the Apaches raided even closer to Doña Ana on February 2, 1850. This time, they drove off one of the town's livestock herds, wounding four Mexican herders and taking one Mexican boy captive in the process. Steen immediately left in pursuit, accompanied by Second Lieutenant Laurence W. O'Bannon and a detachment of Company B, Third Infantry. About fifteen miles into the chase, Steen dispatched O'Bannon with an advance party consisting of twenty-five of his best mounted dragoons. O'Bannon followed the Apache trail while the larger body of troops, remaining with Steen, attempted to intercept the Indians' retreat route into the mountains. Once again, Steen underestimated the Apaches' ability to elude capture; after a chase exceeding forty miles, the dragoons' horses broke down and could pursue no further.<sup>16</sup>

O'Bannon's twenty-five-man detachment had more luck than that of Steen. After overtaking the Indians, one of the dragoons, Private Teagarden, wounded one in a brief skirmish. The Apaches responded by charging directly towards the soldiers with their lances, although failing to inflict any harm. "I must take this opportunity," Steen subsequently reported, "to urge upon the commanding officer of the department the necessity of arming Company H with

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<sup>16</sup> Steen to McLaws, February 5, 1850, RG393, M1102, LR, DNM, Roll 2.

Colt revolvers; had this man [Teagarden] had one of these weapons he would probably have killed several of these Indians.”

An unpleasant surprise awaited Steen when he arrived back at Doña Ana. When he left he had taken his entire available military force, leaving the town unprotected, a move that the Apaches anticipated. No sooner had the soldiers left than another Apache raiding party descended upon the town, stealing mules and horses without opposition. The first raid had merely been a decoy to draw the troops away from the town, ensuring the success of an even larger raid. If Major Steen had been frustrated by his lack of success in the field before these raids, he must now have been infuriated. He once again wrote to headquarters in Santa Fe requesting permission to lead a campaign against the Gila Apaches:

I [urge] upon the commanding officer of the department the necessity of a campaign against these Indians, especially when Indians become so bold [they] will come in broad daylight within a mile of a U.S. garrison where dragoons are stationed and drive off stock and murder the defenseless herders . . . I think it becomes necessary to chastise them and this can only be done by a regular organized campaign against them . . . when these Indians start on a marauding expedition they come mounted on their best horses . . . and at the same time have relays waiting for them at 25 or 30 miles distant . . . and thus are mounted on fresh animals and can snap their fingers at us whose animals are broken down by the long chase; thus it is nearly impossible for any dragoons to overtake them and for this I urge the necessity of an expedition against them . . . I would suggest that a depot be selected at or near the copper mines and that it be established as the base of operations.<sup>17</sup>

On March 6, Steen departed Doña Ana to scout the area surrounding the Santa Rita copper mines, hoping to ascertain the most economical means by

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

which to conduct a large-scale expedition through that country. Following his scout of the area, Steen recommended that a force of no less than 150 troops advance on the upper Gila River region from the north. Such an action would prevent the Apaches from utilizing a northerly escape route into the impregnable Mogollon Mountains. This column of troops would then continue sweeping southward towards the copper mines, where they would meet up with the southern column from Doña Ana, to be led by Steen himself. Steen met with disappointment, however, when the commanding officer responded to the effect that the department lacked the resources necessary for such a campaign, and troops could not be spared from either the Albuquerque or Socorro posts.

According to Steen, if the department would permanently station his company of dragoons in the copper mine region, such an expedition might not be necessary. Placing a large garrison of troops in the heart of the Apache country would have been a bold act by the government, hindering the Apaches' ability to emerge unscathed from their raids. This was the first time an army officer suggested building a military post in the Apaches' homelands rather than stationing the troops in the civilian settlements. In advancing this strategy, Steen prophesied the future military framework in New Mexico that would be implemented upon the arrival of a new department commander in 1851. Major Steen can therefore be viewed as a visionary, in a military sense, inasmuch as he emerged as one of the first army officers to suggest both the total warfare strategy and the placement of troops within the Apaches homelands.

The morale of his troops, Steen further contended, could be significantly improved by transferring them to the more healthful mountainous region surrounding Santa Rita del Cobre. Living amongst the Mexican population at Doña Ana placed a tremendous strain upon the American soldiers; according to Steen's reports, his troops quarreled with the townspeople on an almost daily basis.

Two more years passed before Steen's recommendation for a military post at the copper mines would be acted upon by department headquarters. An almost nonexistent civil government in the newly-created territory further exacerbated the lack of cooperation among military officials. Indeed for the first three years of American control in New Mexico, the military department commander served in the dual role of civil governor, making the leading army officer the *de facto* ruler of all aspects of New Mexico's government. Not until 1850 would the offices of military commander and civil governor be divided among two separate individuals.

While policy initiatives and treaty negotiations would fall to civil officials within the Indian Department, the military department bore the responsibility for actually enforcing those policies. New Mexico boasted a military force of 1,188 troops in 1850, comprising twelve percent of the approximately 10,000-man U.S. standing army. In the first five years of the territory's existence, from 1848 to 1853, the U.S. government spent in excess of \$12 million solely on defending the inhabitants from marauding Indian tribes; much of this expense came from the



War Department in order to maintain the forts and equip the soldiers.<sup>18</sup> Cost-conscious politicians at both the local and national levels invariably took this into consideration when making policy decisions. In many instances, they contended that it would be cheaper to negotiate treaties and distribute rations to the Indians rather than pay the high expenses incurred by equipping military expeditions and paying troop salaries.

While the military provided a pronounced presence in New Mexico from 1846 onward, the civil government proved to be much slower in developing. Many of the shortcomings experienced by army officers throughout the 1846-1850 period arose as a direct result of an absence of strong leadership in the territory's civil government. Because New Mexico had yet to achieve official recognition as a United States territory, a civil governor and superintendent of Indian affairs had yet to be named. Not until James S. Calhoun arrived in mid-1849 did New Mexico's civil government reach a relative state of stability.

By mid-1850 the United States had been attempting to govern Indian affairs in New Mexico for over four years, and little had been achieved. The first step towards progress came with the appointment of James S. Calhoun as New Mexico's first territorial governor and superintendent of Indian affairs. Initially appointed as an Indian agent by Commissioner of Indian Affairs William Medill, Calhoun would play a critical role in the development and implementation of

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<sup>18</sup> Frazer, *New Mexico in 1850*, 166.

Indian policy throughout the territory.<sup>19</sup> He stepped into a position that brought with it extreme hardships and headaches.

Calhoun arrived in New Mexico on July 22, 1849 to assume the office of Indian agent; less than a year later, on March 3, 1850, President Zachary Taylor appointed him governor and he served thereafter in both roles. He entered into a difficult situation: “So little is known here [in Washington] of the condition and situation of the Indians of that region [New Mexico] that no specific instructions relative to them can be given at present,” Commissioner Medill ominously informed Calhoun. The governor immediately recognized that his primary undertaking would be that of controlling the territory’s Indian tribes, who had previously roamed freely about their traditional homelands. “The Indians generally are in a bad temper,” he wrote, “[and] the number of troops is not sufficient here to keep upon them a proper check; infantry are useful only to protect posts, stations, and property. Mounted troops are the only arm of this

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<sup>19</sup> James S. Calhoun was born sometime between 1800 and 1806 in South Carolina, and participated in Georgia politics from 1828 until 1840. He owned large amounts of land in both Georgia and Florida, and was already a wealthy man by the time he arrived in New Mexico. Though brief, the most complete biography of Calhoun is contained in Annie Heloise Abel, *The Official Correspondence of James S. Calhoun while Indian Agent at Santa Fe and Superintendent of Indian Affairs in New Mexico, 1849-1852* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1915), xi-xiv.

Shortly after taking office, he found himself in an unenviable situation: “Without a dollar in our territorial treasury, without munitions of war, without authority to call out our militia, without the cooperation of the military authorities of this territory, and with numberless complaints and calls for protection, do you not perceive I must be sadly embarrassed and disquieted?” Original quote cited in Ralph Emerson Twitchell, *The Leading Facts of New Mexican History* (Cedar Rapids: The Torch Press, 1912), 284.

country that can be effectively used against the Indian tribes of this remote region.”<sup>20</sup>

A nearly bankrupt territorial treasury and a woefully insufficient line of communication between Santa Fe and Washington, D.C. severely inhibited the new territorial governor’s ability to act effectively. Correspondence between New Mexico and Washington took months to reach its intended destination. “I am yet without the slightest intelligence from the States,” Calhoun wrote after taking office, “and I must repeat, the mail facilities are not such as we are entitled to, and that it is, infinitely, of more importance to the Government at Washington than to us – the controlling powers should be advised more promptly in reference to the various sinuosities daily perpetrated in this far off region.”<sup>21</sup>

By continuously failing to send the supplies and ammunition necessary to carry on an effective Indian campaign, the federal government further undermined Calhoun’s efforts. Writing to Secretary of War William L. Marcy, Calhoun pleaded his case and requested permission to raise a militia to augment the regular army forces already stationed in the territory. “A Mounted Regiment of Dragoons will be required, at no distant day, for service in New Mexico . . . this is to repeat, what I have said to you, and to others, that in sixty days, if not in *less* time, I can raise a regiment, one thousand strong . . . if it can be so organized, we are ready to

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<sup>20</sup> James Calhoun to William Medill, August 16, 1849, in *1850 Annual Report of Commissioner of Indian Affairs*.

<sup>21</sup> Calhoun to Medill, October 27, 1849, Quoted in Abel, *Official Correspondence*, 62.

enlist for two, three, four, or five years,” Calhoun wrote.<sup>22</sup> Marcy succinctly replied that, “I have the honor to state that the Executive has no authority to accept the services of the regiment which you offer to raise.”<sup>23</sup>

With his hands tied, Calhoun appealed to the civilians to take matters into their own hands, encouraging “all able-bodied male citizens of the Territory, capable of bearing arms, [to form] volunteer corps to protect their families, property, and homes.”<sup>24</sup> A safe and prosperous territory would require the help of the people themselves; the approximately 1,000 soldiers stationed in the department simply could not discourage Indian raiding on their own. Calhoun’s plans for an armed citizenry went unrealized; both Colonel John Munroe, commanding the military department, and President Millard Fillmore refused to provide arms or ammunition for civilians. A bankrupt territorial treasury further rendered Calhoun helpless to arm the citizenry, and the task of chastising the Indians remained the responsibility of the soldiers.<sup>25</sup>

A frustrated Calhoun, acting not only in the role of territorial governor but also as superintendent of Indian affairs, remarked thusly concerning the Native Americans in the territory:

The Indians, presuming upon their knowledge of safe retreats in the mountains, and our entire ignorance of all avenues, except

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<sup>22</sup> Calhoun to William Marcy, November 25, 1848, *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>23</sup> Marcy to Calhoun, December 7, 1848, *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> Original quote cited in Calvin Horn, *New Mexico’s Troubled Years: The Story of the Early Territorial Governors* (Albuquerque: Horn & Wallace, 1963), 25.

<sup>25</sup> McNitt, *Navajo Wars*, 174-5.

established military roads and well known trails, are not to be subjected to just restraints until they are properly chastised. When they shall feel themselves so chastised, they will sue for peace. . . the very gravest subject connected with our Indian affairs in New Mexico relates to the wandering tribes, who have never cultivated the soil, and have supported themselves by depredations alone. This is the only labor known to them. The thought of annihilating these Indians cannot be entertained by an American public - nor can the Indians abandon their predatory incursions . . . this subject, I humbly conceive, should engage the earnest attention and early consideration of the Congress of the United States . . . for no earthly power can prevent robberies and murders, unless the hungry wants of these people are provided for, both physically and mentally.<sup>26</sup>

Calhoun viewed the Indian situation in New Mexico differently than many of his colleagues. He realized that the Indians conducted their raids not so much for pleasure or to inflict heartache upon their victims. Rather, the majority of depredations resulted from sheer necessity; one could not expect them to cease this practice as long as they remained starving and desperate. Calhoun also came to the accurate conclusion that constant warfare with the Indians would be ineffectual. Although he did not favor a policy of annihilation, many of his counterparts did, giving rise to a major point of contention between the two respective bureaucracies.

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<sup>26</sup> Abel, *Official Correspondence*, 19.

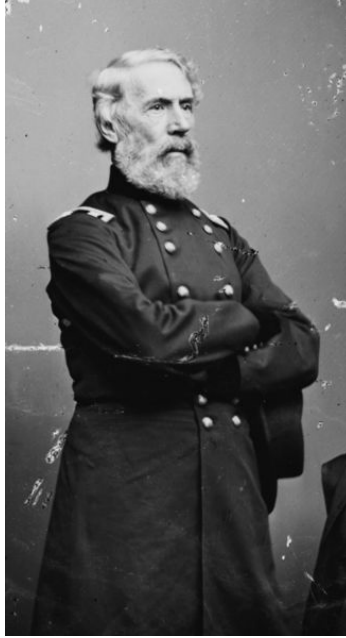


Figure 3. Colonel Edwin Vose Sumner, Commander of the Ninth Military Department. He appears in this photo as a Union General in the Civil War. (National Archives).



Figure 4. James S. Calhoun, Territorial Governor and Superintendent of Indian Affairs.

In 1850 Calhoun wrote to Commissioner of Indian Affairs Orlando Brown suggesting that New Mexico be divided into four separate districts, one for each major tribe whose homelands fell within the boundaries of the territory. He recommended selecting “four districts of country, the districts not to be within one hundred miles of each other, defining and marking distinctly, the boundaries of each district; and into these limits, the Apaches, Comanches, Navajoes, and Utahs, with their straggling bands . . . should be forced to enter and remain, under penalties that would secure submission.”<sup>27</sup> Clearly frustrated by the difficulties of controlling four hostile Indian tribes in the territory, Calhoun sought to solve all of these problems with one stroke of Commissioner Brown’s pen. Such did not come to pass, and Calhoun would be forced to carry on with what few resources he had available.

Calhoun’s remarks concerning the native tribes showed signs of a differing point of view from that of other 1850s officials. Colonel John Munroe, who commanded the military department from October, 1849 until July, 1851, remained mostly indifferent towards New Mexico and the Indians living there. One observer wrote that Munroe, a Scotsman by birth, “would brew his pitcher of toddy at night, and take the first drink of it at noon the next day, after which hour he would not attend to any official business.”<sup>28</sup> Indeed the unpopular Munroe achieved little during his time as department commander. Ineffective though

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<sup>27</sup> Calhoun to Orlando Brown, February 3, 1850, *Ibid.*, 141.

<sup>28</sup> Manuel Espinosa, “Memoir of a Kentuckian in New Mexico” *New Mexico Historical Review*, Vol. 13 (January 1938): 7.

Munroe proved to be, he at least did not foster contentious relations with his civil government counterparts. In contrast Munroe's successor would prove much less amenable to civil authority in New Mexico.

Not long after Calhoun took office as governor, Colonel Edwin Vose Sumner<sup>29</sup> replaced Munroe as department commander. A staunch, authoritative figure with a grizzled gray beard, the fifty-four year old Sumner would be the root of controversy throughout his time in New Mexico. He remains best known for his complete reorganization of the military department, undertaken with a direct view towards Indian affairs. Despite the changes Sumner implemented, his own sentiments towards the indigenous tribes remained fundamentally different from those of his counterpart Calhoun, resulting in multiple points of contention between New Mexico's civil and military leadership.

When he took office as commander of the Ninth Military Department, Colonel Sumner received explicit orders from the adjutant general of the army, Colonel Roger Jones, pertaining to the redistribution of New Mexico's military forces. "There is reason to believe," Jones wrote, "that the stations occupied by the troops in the Ninth Department are not the best for the protection of the frontier against the inroads of the Indians. Accordingly . . . you will use sound discretion in making such changes . . . you may deem necessary and proper."

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<sup>29</sup> Edwin Vose Sumner was born in Boston, Massachusetts on June 30, 1797. He entered the United States Army in 1819, served on Kearny's staff during the occupation of New Mexico, and later served as the commander of the Department of the Pacific in 1861. He died at the Battle of Fair Oaks, Virginia with the rank of major general on March 21, 1863. Heitman, *Historical Register*, 936.



Secretary of War Charles M. Conrad shared this sentiment, stating that, “the Department is induced to believe, that both economy and efficiency of the service would be promoted by removing the troops out of the towns where they are now stationed, and stationing them more towards the frontier and nearer to the Indians.”<sup>30</sup>

Inspector George A. McCall, while conducting thorough overviews of each post in 1850, also recognized this. “The only way in which a military force can be advantageously and effectively employed to put an end to Indian spoliations in New Mexico,” McCall observed, “is to post them, not in our settlements or on our borders but in the heart of the Indians, to punish them in their strongholds for the offences they commit beyond their own boundaries.”<sup>31</sup> In this opinion, both Conrad and McCall echoed the recommendations made by Major Enoch Steen more than a year earlier when he requested that his garrison at Doña Ana be transferred to the copper mine region within the Gila Apache homelands.

Pursuant to orders from superior officers, upon assuming command of the military department Colonel Sumner immediately relocated most of New

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<sup>30</sup> Charles Conrad to Edwin V. Sumner, April 1, 1851, Quoted in Abel, *Official Correspondence*, 383. Conrad further instructed Sumner: “In the selection of posts, you will be governed mainly by the following considerations, viz., 1<sup>st</sup> The protection of New Mexico. 2<sup>nd</sup> The defense of the Mexican Territory, which we are bound to protect against the Indians within our borders, 3<sup>rd</sup> Economy and facility in supporting the troops, particularly in regard to forage, fuel and adaptation of the surrounding country to cultivation,” Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Frazer, *New Mexico in 1850*, 182.

Mexico's military posts. In the months that followed, Sumner laid out a design for an entirely different military framework in New Mexico, one that would remain mostly unchanged for years to come. This action proved to be an object of controversy among the people, who feared that the removal of the troops from the settlements would directly compromise their safety and well being.

At Doña Ana, the citizens became particularly upset upon learning of Sumner's intent to remove the troops from their town. They quickly drew up a petition and sent it to Governor Calhoun who, although sympathizing with them, lacked the authority as a civil official to reverse any military decisions made by Colonel Sumner. The petition read, in part:

[We] have heard from good and trustworthy sources from persons in this circuit that there is rumor that the Cavalry and Infantry, now attached to this colony will be removed in a few months, and, knowing and realizing that the execution of such a movement would bring imminent peril to us, to the extent that our lives and families might be sacrificed and the little we have to live upon will be exposed to the fury of the bloody hands of the Apaches, just as we have been in past years.<sup>32</sup>

Although the residents of Doña Ana emerged as the only ones to directly challenge the military's authority in this matter, their petition no doubt reflected the sentiments of people throughout the territory, many of whom depended upon the presence of troops for both protection and economic prosperity. Sumner, being a staunch authoritarian, did not budge on his intentions of removing the

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<sup>32</sup> Citizens of Doña Ana to James Calhoun, August 8, 1851, Quoted in Abel, *Official Correspondence*, pp. 402-03.

troops. Within months several new forts would be constructed and the troops permanently removed to those new locations.

As a result of Sumner's reorganization of the military department, Fort Conrad was established on September 8, 1851 at a location approximately twenty-four miles south of Socorro. The garrison at nearby Socorro, under the command of Major Marshall S. Howe, immediately transferred to the newly selected site and construction of the fort began.<sup>33</sup> Fort Conrad remained in service from 1851 until its abandonment in 1854. During these three years, an array of different companies garrisoned the post, including Company I, First Dragoons and Companies D, E, and K, Second Dragoons.<sup>34</sup>

Continuing his reorganization, Sumner ordered the construction of Fort Fillmore midway between Doña Ana and El Paso on the eastern bank of the Rio Grande. The garrison from Doña Ana, under the command of Lieutenant Abraham Buford, arrived at the selected site on September 15, 1851. Colonel Dixon S. Miles of Company K, Third Infantry arrived shortly thereafter to assume the role of post commander and the garrisons from Doña Ana, El Paso and San Elizario, Texas subsequently removed to the new site. Miles, who played an important role in southern New Mexico Indian affairs throughout the decade, was described by one contemporary as being "surprisingly vigorous in action. With grizzled hair and beard he displayed the social habits of a man of forty. He was a

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<sup>33</sup> Grinstead, *Life and Times of a Frontier Fort*, 3.

<sup>34</sup> S.C. Agnew, *Garrisons of the Regular U.S. Army, New Mexico, 1846-1899* (Santa Fe: The Press of the Territorian, 1971), 19; 31-3.

great talker and sometimes gave his vivid imagination a loose rein.”<sup>35</sup> By October 1853, eight officers and 269 troops called Fort Fillmore home. When Colonel Mansfield arrived in October, 1853 to inspect the post, he reported the quarters there to be the best in the territory.<sup>36</sup>

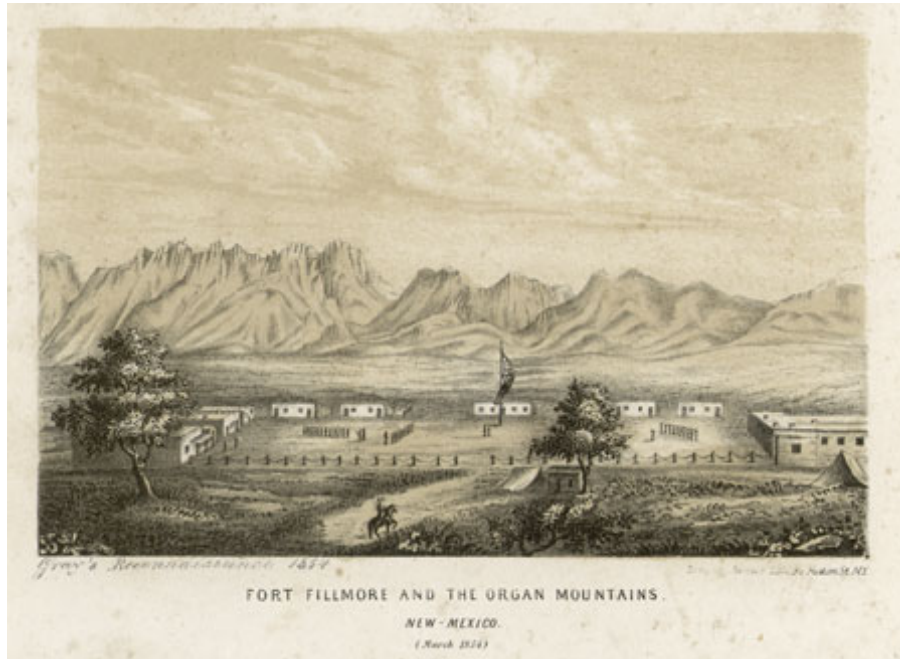


Figure 5. Fort Fillmore, looking east, as it appeared in 1854. The Organ Mountains are seen in the background. (New Mexico State University Library, Archives and Special Collections).

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<sup>35</sup> Averell, *Ten Years in the Saddle*, 171.

<sup>36</sup> Frazer, *Mansfield on the Condition of Western Forts*, 56.



Figure 6. Fort Fillmore, looking east, as it appears today. Nothing remains but a few scattered adobe bricks. This view roughly corresponds to the original 1854 drawing. The Organ Mountains, not visible here, are directly behind the trees in the background. The original parade ground was located behind the flagpoles and the metal building. (Courtesy: The Author).

The troops at Forts Conrad and Fillmore immediately saw action against the Apaches. On November 13, 1851, Lieutenant Buford left Fort Fillmore with fifty-eight men of Company H, First Dragoons in response to reports of an Indian raiding party in the Robledo Mountains northwest of Doña Ana. Arriving at the scene, the dragoons came upon the corpse of a Mexican herder who had been scalped by the Indians. Following the trail southward, the troops finally gave up the chase after arriving at the Mexican border. Lieutenant Buford and his company had witnessed a favorite strategy of Apache raiding parties, that of crossing the international boundary line into Mexico when being chased by American troops. Following the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, the Indians

were quick to realize that the Americans could not chase them into Old Mexico. The Apaches recognized this opportunity as a convenient means for escape and frequently used it to their advantage, further frustrating the army's efforts.

Continued depredations in southern New Mexico led to the establishment of another military post, the first to be constructed in the heart of the Apaches' homelands. On December 28, 1851, Brevet Major Israel B. Richardson<sup>37</sup> led sixty-seven men of Company K, Third Infantry with orders to march to Cantonment Dawson at the old Spanish copper mines, some eighty miles northwest of Fort Fillmore. Here he established Fort Webster (named for Secretary of State Daniel Webster) on January 23, 1852.<sup>38</sup> Fort Webster, along with Forts Conrad and Fillmore, would serve as the backbone of military presence in southern New Mexico in the early 1850s. Though no definitive results had yet been achieved, Colonel Sumner remained optimistic that moving the troops to the new forts had been the correct course of action. "The new posts in the Indian

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<sup>37</sup> Israel Bush Richardson was born on December 26, 1815 in Fairfax, Vermont. He graduated from the United States Military Academy in 1841, and served as a Second Lieutenant in the Second Seminole War in Florida. During the Mexican War, he served under General Winfield Scott at Contreras, Churubusco and Chapultepec. He resigned his commission in 1855, but rejoined during the Civil War, enlisting as a colonel in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Michigan Infantry. He was severely wounded on September 17, 1862 at the Battle of Antietam, and died two months later on November 3, 1862. Heitman, *Historical Register*, 828.

<sup>38</sup> Abraham Buford to John McFerran, December 19, 1851, RG393, M1102, LR, DNM, Roll 4.

country [will have] the happiest effect,” he pointed out. “Indeed it is plain that this is the only certain way of controlling the Indians.”<sup>39</sup>

Major Richardson and his company of Infantry troops would remain stationed at Fort Webster for almost a year. Conflict arose between Richardson’s troops and the Gila Apaches before construction of the post had even been completed. A small contingent of that band approached the post one afternoon, displaying no signs of hostility. A skirmish ensued, provoked by the infantrymen, who fired indiscriminately at the Indians as they approached. Several Apaches were wounded in the initial volley, and those who remained uninjured fled into the hills. Even the formidable Apaches could not stand up to the heavily fortified positions held by the troops, who enjoyed the protection of the fort’s thick adobe walls.

This act on the part of the U.S. soldiers would not go unchecked; rarely did the Apaches allow such an outrage to pass without seeking retribution. Only two days later, on January 26, some two hundred Apache warriors descended upon Fort Webster. In the fight that followed, three soldiers were killed: Sergeant Bernard O’Daugherty, Sergeant Nicholas Wade, and Private John Croy. Sergeant Wade’s body was later discovered some distance from the post. He had been captured, tortured, and his body mutilated. Another soldier involved in the fight, Private Matson, vividly recalled the scene: “A funeral at a lonely frontier fort, after a skirmish in which the comrades who are buried have been killed and

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<sup>39</sup> Edwin V. Sumner to Adjutant General, September 24, 1852, 32<sup>nd</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, Senate Exec. Doc. No. 1.

one tortured by savages, is a sorrowful affair.”<sup>40</sup> As a consequence of the previous hostile actions taken by themselves and their fellow soldiers, the three men had paid the ultimate price.

While these events unfolded at the newly established Fort Webster, a detachment of troops from Fort Conrad also found themselves exposed to Apache hostilities. On January 25, 1852, a mail escort out of that post, consisting of ten privates and one non-commissioned officer, came under attack at Laguna on the northern end of the Jornada del Muerto. Three soldiers were killed and another wounded; the Indians suffered two of their number killed and one wounded. Upon receiving word of the engagement, Major Marshall S. Howe, commanding at Fort Conrad, dispatched companies D and H, Second Dragoons under the command of Lieutenant Evans. They managed to locate the Indians’ trail, but arrived too late to have any hope of catching them.

Major Howe entertained a belief common among many military men of his day (including his commanding officer, Colonel Sumner), that all Apaches should be punished, whether guilty of any crime or not. This ideology inevitably resulted in numerous engagements in which the military knowingly attacked innocent Indians simply for the sake of achieving some type of results that could be reported to higher authority. Major Howe, riled by the incident on the Jornada and anxious to leave Fort Conrad on an expedition into the Apache country,

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<sup>40</sup> Jerry D. Thompson, “With the Regulars in New Mexico, 1851-1853: The Lost Diary of Sylvester M. Matson” *Journal of Arizona History* Vol. 31 (Winter 1990): 362.



informed headquarters that, “I learn unofficially that at a distance of some 80 to 100 miles west of this [Fort Conrad] is a large camp of Indians, which if troops could be spared [from other posts] for the purpose, it might be well to make them a visit.”<sup>41</sup>

On February 3, a mere one week after the attack on the mail escort, Colonel Sumner issued orders for a one-month, full-scale campaign into Apache country. The total force would consist of 300 troops, with Major Howe of the Second Dragoons in overall command of the expedition. When Howe left Fort Conrad, however, his actual command consisted of only 175 men, slightly over half the originally intended number. Nevertheless it represented the largest military force that had yet been mustered for the purpose of fighting the Apaches; it would be the first of many campaigns to come.

Several weeks passed before the campaign took the field. On February 12, Major George A.H. Blake of the First Dragoons arrived at Fort Conrad with fifty-two men of Company I and twenty men of Company F. Their horses numbered fifty-nine, leaving thirteen of the dragoons without mounts. The two officers, Howe and Blake, awaited the arrival of Captain Richard S. Ewell from Los Lunas with Company G, First Dragoons; once Ewell arrived, the expedition finally departed. Two guides accompanied the expedition, including a Mexican who had escaped Apache captivity after almost twenty years.

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

Only five days into their journey, a small band of Apaches ambushed the advance scouting party, wounding one of the guides through the hip. Reports indicated that the attackers numbered only about fifteen; nevertheless, Major Howe opted not to pursue, rationalizing that it might have merely been a decoy to lead the soldiers into a larger ambush. Still the incident proved sufficient to scare the officers into a frenzy. They camped that night along the Mimbres River, the officers completely mortified of another possible attack. “We were all, every man, to be on post during the night. Only think of it! [175] men to watch and guard [a few] officers! Oh, that our government only knew the courage of some of her officers!” wrote Private James Bennett in his diary.<sup>42</sup>

On February 27, Howe and his command arrived at Fort Webster. Only a month having elapsed since the unfortunate incident at that post in which three soldiers died, the men there remained wary of another Apache attack. Bennett, a private accompanying the expedition, wrote of Fort Webster that, “There are 50 men here, all frightened out of their wits. They have old wagons, logs, barrels, rocks, and other articles too numerous to mention, piled around their fort, making it almost impossible to get to it . . . they expect momentarily to be attacked by the Indians.”<sup>43</sup> The troops at Fort Webster must therefore have been relieved at the sight of Howe’s large command.

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<sup>42</sup> Bennett, *Forts and Forays*, 34.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

On March 1, Howe left Fort Webster with his entire command and marched northwest towards the Gila River. Less than a day after leaving the fort, he encountered recent signs of Indians, and, for reasons never fully understood by his men, sent back to the fort requesting reinforcements. The 175-man force Howe commanded was more than sufficient to discourage any hostile engagement that might have been planned by the Indians. At any rate Major Richardson and thirty-one men of Company K, Third Infantry joined Howe, leaving only twenty-five men to garrison Fort Webster. One disgruntled officer wrote of the campaign, “[Howe’s] expedition thus far has been a total failure. I am well informed that he did not go over twenty or twenty-five miles from [Fort Webster], and never saw an Indian during the period he was absent. He cannot however state that there are none in the country, for on his march to this place his command was fired upon by the Indians and his guide severely wounded.”<sup>44</sup>

Major Howe’s deliberate avoidance of the Apaches is further alluded to in a journal entry by one of the dragoons under his command. According to Private Bennett, while marching back in the direction of Fort Webster, they spotted rising smoke and grazing cattle, both certain signs of an Indian camp nearby:

After a moment’s consideration, [Howe] turned and gave the command, ‘Countermarch!’ Oh! What feelings arose within the breast of each soldier that had a spark of courage in him! To endure a long journey, get in sight of the Indians, have a spirited action in anticipation, and then our cowardly old Major from mere personal fear orders a ‘countermarch!’ The shouts of the men should have caused his cheek to have flushed with shame . . .

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<sup>44</sup> Gouverneur Morris to John McFerran, March 16, 1852, RG393, M1102, LR, DNM, Roll 5.

shame on him who boasts of being an American and an officer in the army and is guilty of such cowardice.<sup>45</sup>

Having traveled so far, an Indian pursuit might have provided a welcome break from the monotony to which the troops had fallen victim. On their march to and from the Gila River, the campaign traversed such rough terrain that by the time the weary men of the Third Infantry finally returned to Fort Webster, they did so with completely worn-out shoes; some were even barefoot. One soldier called the expedition, “the greatest piece of humbuggery I have encountered since I joined the Army.”<sup>46</sup>

By March 23, the campaign had returned to Fort Conrad, having encountered no other Indians than those that ambushed their advance scouting party. Perhaps a fitting end to the campaign occurred on March 22, the night before they returned to the fort. A grass fire broke out in the camp and destroyed almost all of the property belonging to Company K, Second Dragoons. Bennett later recalled that, “It was an exciting time. 300 guns and several pistols, lying promiscuously on the ground, discharged their deadly contents in all directions... the Major didn’t seem to enjoy it.”<sup>47</sup> With this culminating event, Major Howe’s Apache campaign had proven to be a calamity in almost every sense. The wide

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<sup>45</sup> Bennett, *Forts and Forays*, 36.

<sup>46</sup> Thompson, “With the Regulars in New Mexico,” 366-68.

<sup>47</sup> Bennett, *Forts and Forays*, 37.

range of hardships experienced by Howe during this campaign illustrated the extreme difficulty of locating the Apaches and operating in the treacherous terrain of their homelands with only minimal equipment and rations. Large campaigns proved difficult to equip and maneuver once in the field, making it tactically challenging for these early military campaigns to operate against the more mobile Apaches.

While these various military campaigns played out in the field, a rift continued to develop between Governor Calhoun and Colonel Sumner. Being the most prominent leaders in the territory, both men enjoyed a substantial amount of power and influence in controlling their respective branches of government. In following their own personal convictions regarding Indian policy, each traversed an almost opposite path. These fundamental differences at the highest level of territorial government trickled down and ultimately had a negative effect on the government's overall ability to enforce Indian policy.

The initial disagreement between Calhoun and Sumner arose from an order passed down by Washington officials stating that Indian agents, who worked under the Interior Department as civil officials, must be allowed to accompany military expeditions. Governor Calhoun first received word of this in a communication from Commissioner of Indian Affairs Luke Lea in April, 1851. "I have been informed," Lea wrote, "that it is contemplated to increase the military force of New Mexico, with a view to the prosecution of hostilities against the Indians. In that event it will be necessary that one or more of the officers of

this department shall accompany each detachment of troops sent against the Indians, so as to be in readiness to act in that capacity as occasion may require.”<sup>48</sup>

The instructions Colonel Sumner received from Secretary of War Charles M. Conrad differed little: “In all negotiations and pacific arrangements with the Indians you will act in concert with the superintendent of Indian Affairs in New Mexico, whom you will allow to accompany you in the expeditions into the Indian Territory, if he should deem it proper to do so, and to whom you [will] afford every facility for the discharge of his duties.”<sup>49</sup> Sumner ardently opposed the direct involvement of civil officials in any military action in New Mexico. Although Sumner could do little to countermand the orders of his superiors in Washington, he effectively circumvented this mandate by refusing to provide the necessary escorts and traveling amenities for agents accompanying expeditions. On other occasions, the troops would hurriedly take the field before an Indian agent could arrive to accompany them.

In October, 1851 Indian agent John Greiner outlined the dire circumstances in the territory, specifically pointing out the severe Indian problems and the lack of harmony among territorial officials:

Between the savage Indians, the treacherous Mexicans and the outlawed Americans, a man has to run the gauntlet in this country. Three governors within twelve years have lost their heads and there are men here at present who talk as flippantly of taking

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<sup>48</sup> Luke Lea to Calhoun, April 12, 1851, in *1851 Annual Report of Commissioner of Indian Affairs*, 447.

<sup>49</sup> Charles Conrad to Edwin V. Sumner, April 1, 1851, RG393, M1102, LR, DNM, Roll 5.

Governor Calhoun's head as though it were of no consequence whatsoever . . . . In the first place the civil and military authorities are at war. Colonel Sumner refuses to acknowledge the right of the Governor to send Indian agents with him to the Indian country - and will not afford the proper facilities for them to go - and the governor [therefore] refuses to send them . . . . The American troops are at war with the Indians, and if they could only catch them would give them fits, but Colonel Sumner is on his way back from their country without even seeing one of them.<sup>50</sup>

Sumner remained unwilling to allow Indian agents to accompany military expeditions, and Calhoun remained reluctant to force the issue. Indeed by this time the governor had become highly exasperated in his attempted corroborations with military authority, which ultimately undermined the enforcement of Indian policy.

In addition to advocating peace treaties as a preferable alternative to hostilities, Calhoun continued to advance other policy objectives as well. He emerged as the first territorial leader to propose the creation of an Apache reservation, something which would not become a reality until long after his death. In 1852, he wrote:

Every Indian difficulty in this territory should be settled, and fixed, during the ensuing twelve months, and I say, after due reflection, if the present course of policy or management is to be continued, our troubles and difficulties with these Indians will not end in twelve years. Posts must be established; the country must be thoroughly scoured and explored; commerce with the Indians must be restricted; and they should be required to remain within certain fixed and well defined limits, under pain and penalties, that would secure the end, or prevent its repetition.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> John Greiner, "Private Letters of a Government Official in the Southwest," *Journal of American History*, Vol. 3 (October 1909), 546.

<sup>51</sup> Abel, *Official Correspondence*, 43.

Had Calhoun's immediate successors shared some of these thoughts in regards to New Mexico's Indians, especially concerning the establishment of reservations within their traditional homelands, many bloody encounters might have been averted. This dilemma, coupled with the issuance of rations at regular intervals, would have led to a pronounced decrease in depredations. Indeed the Apaches typically raided not as a declaration of hostility but as a form of economic subsistence. Although perhaps inadvertently, future New Mexico government and military leaders condemned countless Indians, American soldiers, and civilians to an early grave because of their failure to reach an agreement on Indian policy issues.

James S. Calhoun died in the summer of 1852. He had conceived many of New Mexico's first Indian policies in the American era, and had endeavored to see them carried out to the best of his ability. Conflict and contention within his own government circles continuously undermined Calhoun's efforts. In Colonel Sumner he found a colleague with whom he could seldom cooperate (and vice versa), resulting in confusion and mayhem throughout the territory. Calhoun's successor, William Carr Lane, arrived in September and would continue to implement many of Calhoun's policies. However, as with Calhoun, Lane would find it difficult to work harmoniously with military department personnel.

The rift that developed between New Mexico's civil and military branches during Calhoun's incumbency was destined to continue, and the greatest loser through it all would be the Indians. What began as differences in opinion



regarding policy matters quickly expanded into a competition of egos between Calhoun and Sumner. Neither official wanted to sway from their intended path, and both stubbornly refused to compromise in order to arrive at a coalescence of Indian policy objectives. Calhoun steadfastly supported the negotiation of peace treaties and advocated the establishment of permanent reservations within the Indians' traditional homelands rather than removal to alternate locations. Meanwhile, Sumner adhered to his vision of quick, decisive military force to quell Indian raiding, despite the fact that these campaigns typically punished only innocent bands within the larger Apache tribe. Military campaigns as an antecedent to treaty negotiations also had the effect of encouraging violent reciprocity, exacerbating the human toll inflicted by the Apaches on their subsistence raids.

A more practical course for these two commanders to take would have been to set egos aside and cooperate with one another, mixing Indian Department diplomacy with Military Department force. A proper, thoughtfully devised plan would have taken cultural differences, tribal structure, economic objectives, and other vital components of the larger picture into account. Certain components of both Calhoun and Sumner's policy objectives proved beneficial; however, those components needed to be meshed together in order to form an effective, long-lasting policy that avoided unnecessary bloodshed and heartache. This did not occur during Calhoun's tenure at the helm of New Mexico's civil government, and this rift was destined to continue upon the arrival of Calhoun's successor.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE WOES CONTINUE

Governor James S. Calhoun passed away in May, 1852, leaving the offices of governor and superintendent of Indian affairs vacant. Following his death, these responsibilities shifted to a new individual, Dr. William Carr Lane, who would remain prominent in Indian affairs during his short stay in New Mexico.<sup>1</sup>

The following years involved not only a continuance in Calhoun's former Indian policies, but a markedly increased amount of tension between the civil and military branches of government in New Mexico. The new governor and superintendent of Indian affairs proved equally stubborn in cooperating with military officials, and in fact acted to further exacerbate the rift between the two departments created by Calhoun and Sumner. Ironically despite the immense egotism and staunch intra-governmental opposition that defined the Lane-Sumner relationship, some good did emerge from that era in the form of Lane's appointment of Michael Steck as Apache Indian agent. Lane and Sumner found themselves at odds with one another not only over Indian policy, but on international policy as well (regarding the boundary between Mexico and the

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. William Carr Lane was born in Fayette County, Virginia on December 1, 1789. In 1816, he was appointed post surgeon at Fort Harrison, but resigned from the army three years later. After serving as governor of New Mexico, Lane returned to St. Louis and practiced medicine until his death on January 6, 1863. Horn, *New Mexico's Troubled Years*, 37-49.

United States), a disagreement that spilled over into Indian affairs and negatively impacted relations between the Americans and the Apaches. Controversy arising from those incidents led to both Lane and Sumner being ousted from their positions and new civil and military officials being appointed in their place.

Appointed territorial governor on July 17, 1852, Lane would become an important figure in early New Mexico Indian affairs. A well-educated physician from Missouri, Lane married into a prominent family at the age of twenty-nine and had three children. At the time of his appointment to New Mexico, he already had considerable political experience, having previously served numerous terms as mayor of St. Louis. A renowned surgeon who once declined an opportunity to become a United States senator, Lane reluctantly accepted the appointment as New Mexico's governor, a position that would place him in the center of Indian policy debates.



Figure 7. Territorial Governor William Carr Lane (Palace of the Governors, Negative #9999).

Lane did not arrive in Santa Fe for his inauguration until September, leaving a significant time frame during which the territory had no officially appointed governor. Colonel Edwin V. Sumner, still in command of the military department, immediately seized upon the opportunity and declared himself the acting governor until Lane made his appearance.<sup>2</sup> For the brief period of three months, Sumner acted as the supreme commander of the territory, controlling both military and civil affairs.

During his brief time at the helm of New Mexico's civil government, Colonel Sumner, along with Indian agent John Greiner, traveled to Acoma Pueblo on July 11, 1852 to negotiate the first officially recognized treaty between the United States and the Chiricahua Apache tribe. The selection of Acoma as the meeting place seemed odd, it being located near Navajo country in northwestern New Mexico, a considerable distance from traditional Apache homelands. Sumner likely chose this location because of its proximity to his headquarters in Santa Fe, therefore lessening the distance he had to travel to meet the Indians.

Even before departing Santa Fe, tensions arose between these two representatives of the civil and military branches of government. In his diary

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<sup>2</sup> In a letter to Secretary of State Daniel Webster, Sumner wrote, "I have the honor to inform you that Governor Calhoun left this [territory] for the United States day before yesterday, and the Secretary, Mr. Allen, having previously gone in, this civil government is left without a head. Under these circumstances . . . I have felt it to be my duty, in which Governor Calhoun fully concurred with me, to assume the duties of the executive office so far as to insure the maintenance of law and order. I have established a strong military police in this city to act in support of the civil authorities." Edwin V. Sumner to Daniel Webster, May 8, 1852, RG393, M1102, LR, DNM, Roll 5.

Greiner complained that “Col. Sumner assumes to be the head of the department, claims that [he] is governor by virtue of necessity and by virtue of his office of governor is [also] supt. of Ind. Affs. I did not know before that he assumed such power and questioned his right very strongly . . . . I offered to leave the question for the judiciary to decide; he objected . . . saying he should act on his own responsibility.”<sup>3</sup> Indeed many persons (in addition to Greiner) questioned the legitimacy of Sumner’s authority over civil government officials.

Clearly disenchanted with the military commander’s actions in the absence of a lawfully appointed territorial governor, Greiner questioned Sumner about the number of troops that would serve as an escort to Acoma. Writing on July 3, Greiner cited the fact that “a large body of Indians is expected to be in attendance,” and asked Sumner to provide the agents attached to the Indian Department with “such a force as you may deem necessary for the protection of councilors and for the benefit of the public service.”<sup>4</sup> Sumner, true to form, responded in a terse but succinct manner. He stated, “I have to inform you, that I am going myself to meet and treat with the Gila Apaches at Acoma on the 11<sup>th</sup> inst. in conjunction . . . with the senior Indian agent in this territory. I shall take such military force as I may deem necessary.”<sup>5</sup> In other words, a military escort for Greiner would not be forthcoming unless he intended to travel with Sumner,

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<sup>3</sup> Annie Heloise Abel, ed., “The Journal of John Greiner,” *Old Santa Fe*, Vol. 3, No. 11 (July 1916): 220.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 221-22.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 222.

which he did not. Greiner departed Santa Fe en route to Acoma on July 6; Sumner did likewise a day later, effectively avoiding Greiner during the journey.

Despite these initial shortcomings, treaty negotiations went forward as planned. The all-encompassing treaty promulgated numerous restrictions upon the Apaches. Mangas Coloradas, the most influential Apache chief of his time, traveled to Acoma and made his mark upon the treaty -- the first and only treaty he ever signed. Greiner noted the importance of the chief's presence at the event, writing in his journal that, "Mangas is . . . their chief captain and councilor and can speak for all his people, [and] promises fair for them . . . ." <sup>6</sup> Without Mangas's approval, the treaty would have been meaningless to most Apaches.

Article V became the most controversial and unenforceable aspect of the Acoma Treaty. The article stated that the Apaches must thereafter "desist and refrain from making any incursions within the territory of Mexico of a hostile or predatory character . . . and refrain from taking and carrying into captivity any of the people or citizens of Mexico . . . [and] surrender to their agent all captives now in their possession." <sup>7</sup> This stipulation directly resulted from the eleventh article of the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which held the United States government responsible for thwarting all Indian raids in northern Mexico. Not surprisingly, this provision went widely ignored in the years to come; it proved impractical, if not impossible, for the military to enforce it. Agent Greiner

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<sup>6</sup> Abel, "The Journal of John Greiner," 228.

<sup>7</sup> Steck Papers, *Series 1: 1839-1853*, E93, Roll 1.

immediately realized the futility of the requirement. He stated, “It will be extremely difficult to keep these Indians at peace with the people of Old Mexico . . . the people of Sonora & Chihuahua have treated these Indians very badly . . . and I fear it will be almost impossible to prevent hostilities between them.” In a letter to Governor Lane after his arrival in New Mexico, Greiner further reiterated his feelings of antipathy towards the people of Old Mexico, writing that, “[The Apaches] complain bitterly of the bad faith & treachery of the people of Sonora & Chihuahua, and if half their statements are true, the Indians would be justified in seeking revenge.”<sup>8</sup>

In a report to Congress, Greiner afterwards recalled the conversation between Mangas Coloradas and the American authorities regarding this issue. “I asked him the cause of the difficulties, with the people in Chihuahua and Sonora,” Greiner explained. Mangas replied that, “Some time ago my people were invited to a feast; aguardiente or whiskey was there; my people drank and became intoxicated, and were lying asleep, when a party of Mexicans came in and beat out their brains with clubs.” The chief then described another incident in which “a trader was sent among us from Chihuahua. While innocently engaged in trading . . . a cannon concealed behind the goods was fired upon my people and quite a number were killed.” Also at that time, Chihuahua offered a bounty of one hundred fifty dollars each for Apache scalps, “and we have been hunted down ever since,” Mangas lamented. The chief concluded by asking Greiner a

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<sup>8</sup> John Greiner to William Carr Lane, September 30, 1852, RG75, OIA, LR, NMS, Microfilm T-21, Roll 546.

rhetorical but highly valid question: “How can we make peace with such a people?”<sup>9</sup>

Article VIII of the treaty decreed that the Indians must allow the military to construct forts at locations of their choosing, regardless of the proximity to Apache homelands. In a consequence perhaps unforeseen by the Indians, numerous posts soon appeared within what the Apaches considered the heart of their country. Mangas Coloradas likely did not initially realize the tremendous impact this article would have on his people; it essentially allowed Anglo-American encroachment onto traditional Apache lands and opened up the floodgates for future settlement.

In March 1853 Congress ratified the treaty and President Franklin Pierce signed it into law. Mangas Coloradas likely agreed to the terms and conditions of the treaty only because he realized the utter futility of resistance. The chief and his immediate followers did their best to keep the terms; ultimately, however, he could not control smaller groups of renegades within his own tribe who did not recognize his authority, and conflicts ensued each time they broke the provisions of the treaty. Unfortunately innocent Apache bands typically received the brunt of the military’s wrath while the hostile tribal miscreants emerged unscathed.

A frequent oversight of many treaties, including the Acoma Treaty, emerged from the difficulty Anglo-Americans had in distinguishing between guilty and innocent bands within the larger tribe. The Apaches, like most other

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<sup>9</sup> Testimony of John Greiner, July 3, 1865, in “Report on the Condition of the Indian Tribes,” 39<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> Sess., Senate Report 156, 328.



Indian tribes, lived and operated within their own smaller cliques. Each subgroup usually acted entirely independently of the others, converging only for the seasonal mescal harvests or for large annual raids in Chihuahua and Sonora. The complex structure of the Apache tribe as a whole made it difficult for the army to distinguish one from the other; oftentimes it remained unclear which bands directly or indirectly participated in the negotiation of a specific treaty. This misunderstanding of Apache tribal structure created intense and sometimes irreconcilable strife between the military and the Indians.

The negotiation of the Acoma Treaty represented the high point of Sumner's time as territorial governor, inasmuch as Indian affairs were concerned. Sumner became embittered in September, 1852 when it came time to turn the governorship and office of superintendent of Indian affairs over to Lane. "As soon as the Secretary [William Carr Lane] takes his post, Sumner says he will remove the troops from [Santa Fe], for no other reason than to embarrass the civil authorities and to make it apparent that the civil authorities cannot govern . . .," wrote agent Greiner.<sup>10</sup> Before the new governor even reached the territory, Sumner transferred his military headquarters from Santa Fe to Albuquerque, purposely distancing himself from Lane -- and from all civil authority for that matter. The absence of harmony between the two leading officials played negatively against the interests of Indian tribes throughout the territory. With

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<sup>10</sup> Letter from John Greiner, July 31, 1852, in Greiner, "Private Letters of a Government Official in the Southwest," 550.

such intense friction between Lane and Sumner, little would be accomplished as long as they both remained in office.

Colonel Sumner, a lifelong military man, staunchly advocated the use of force to subdue the various depredating bands of Indians throughout the territory. Sumner's concept of an effective Indian policy could appropriately be termed a total warfare approach. In contrast William Carr Lane continued in the path of his predecessor Calhoun, advocating the more humanitarian approach of negotiating peace treaties. Lane would dedicate his efforts towards that end throughout his time as governor and superintendent of Indian affairs. As New Mexico's leading civil official, Lane continually advocated for and implemented many of Calhoun's previous Indian policy objectives. Lane also took on the additional task of appointing new Indian agents and establishing new sub-agencies throughout New Mexico. Many of these Indian agencies would be located in the vicinity of military posts, in order that the troops might afford protection to the individual agents.

The provisions of the Acoma Treaty calling for the issuance of rations to the Mimbres Apaches resulted in the construction of a new military post, the second Fort Webster. Established in January, 1853 as the successor to the original Fort Webster at the Santa Rita copper mines, the new fort sat atop a high bluff overlooking the Mimbres River in the Gila Wilderness of southwestern New Mexico. Governor Lane immediately established an Indian agency there to serve

as headquarters for a newly appointed agent, Edward H. Wingfield.<sup>11</sup> In his first report, Wingfield noted that many of the soldiers lived in tents because only a portion of the buildings had been completed. Furthermore the exceedingly poor and destitute condition of the Indians led Wingfield to believe that they had little choice but to steal or starve. Thus the Apache situation at Fort Webster in 1853 presented an immediate concern to the department.<sup>12</sup>

The office of Indian agent at a frontier military post was a thankless endeavor, and very few men held the position for any considerable period of time. Controversy seemed to go hand-in-hand with the job; many actions taken by the agents met with immediate objection by some and yet received the wholehearted endorsement of others. Political, ideological and moral preferences played no small role in the entire situation. Numerous agents passed through the doors of Fort Webster during its short one-year existence on the banks of the Mimbres River; many of them departed with great bitterness towards both the army and the civil government. The typical 1850s Indian agent typically became caught in the middle of a bureaucratic nightmare and served as a scapegoat for their superiors. Whenever a major Indian raid or uprising occurred, blame frequently shifted to the local agents for not taking preventative measures, or for not ensuring that the Indians remained content with their present situation. Similarly during periods of tranquility, leading military and civil officials often took credit and marginalized

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<sup>11</sup> Thrapp, *Victorio and the Mimbres Apaches*, 29.

<sup>12</sup> Sweeney, *Mangas Coloradas*, 268-9.

the efforts of the agents in the field. When hostilities arose, the fault oftentimes lay not with the Indian agents, but rather with military officers who indiscriminately attacked women and children at Indian camps, thus provoking reciprocation.

The first major Indian uprising at the second Fort Webster occurred early in 1853 after Captain William Steele and a detachment of dragoons attacked Chief Ponce's camp along the Mimbres River. Several Apaches from Ponce's band had stolen livestock along the Rio Grande, after which Captain Steele trailed them to the camp. In the fight that followed one Indian was killed and two others wounded, including Ponce himself. Revenge came swiftly. A few days later, the Apaches attacked the mail escort en route to Fort Webster, killing two soldiers and stealing their horses.<sup>13</sup>

The increasing hostility of the Apaches in the Fort Webster region quickly caught the attention of Governor Lane. "Against the miserable, starving, thieving Apaches, complaints are made in every direction," the frustrated governor wrote following one of the skirmishes with U.S. troops.<sup>14</sup> Due to the continuance of Apache troubles, Lane planned a trip to Fort Webster in early 1853. Leaving Santa Fe on February 28, he proceeded south to Fort Conrad, in the Rio Grande

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<sup>13</sup> William Steele to Marshall S. Howe, February 1, 1853, RG393, M1102, LR, DNM, Roll 6.

<sup>14</sup> Lane to Luke Lea, December 31, 1852, RG75, OIA, LR, NMS, Microfilm T21, Roll 546.

valley of south-central New Mexico, where a thirty-man dragoon escort joined him for the trip.

After a brief stop at Fort Fillmore in the Mesilla Valley, Lane arrived at Fort Webster on April 2, where he held talks with several Apache chiefs of the Mimbres and Gila bands.<sup>15</sup> Following the attack on the Fort Webster mail escort, these chiefs came into the fort regularly and expressed their desire for peaceful relations. Several of them signed a preliminary compact with the governor on April 7, agreeing to locate themselves in permanent camps near the fort, build permanent dwellings, and commence cultivating the land.

As with Sumner's 1852 Acoma Treaty, the negotiations hinged upon several false assumptions about Apache culture. These presumptions arose from fundamental cultural misunderstandings, ultimately resulting in a treaty destined to be broken repeatedly by both sides. The most glaring misconception surrounded the religious convictions of the Apaches, which strictly forbade them to live in permanent dwellings, and no treaty devised by Lane would ever induce them to take up such a practice.<sup>16</sup>

Similar nonsensical provisions could be found in nearly every article of the treaty. In addition to locating themselves in permanent dwellings, the Mimbres and Gila bands would also be expected to enact laws similar to those of the whites (the Apaches had their own set of rules which, they rightfully believed,

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<sup>15</sup> Thrapp, *Victorio and the Mimbres Apaches*, 29.

<sup>16</sup> William G.B. Carson, "William Carr Lane Diary," *New Mexico Historical Review*, Vol. 39 (October 1964): 218-23.

served them just fine). According to the treaty, these laws aimed to “prevent their people from doing any manner of evil.” Furthermore the Apaches would “promise hereafter, never to resort to the ancient custom of retaliation.” The treaty went on to prohibit them from using certain trails used by Anglo travelers, under the penalty of death if caught doing so, under which circumstances “[The Indian] shall suffer death, at the hands of the Indians themselves . . . .”<sup>17</sup>

The United States, in turn, agreed to supply the Mimbres and Gila bands with rations through the end of 1854, and would hire somebody to teach them how to farm. The army also pledged to defend all Indians who faithfully complied with the terms of the treaty. Neither side remained faithful to their end of the deal for any significant period of time. The government, for its part, failed to protect the Indians who did abide by the terms of the treaty, and would likewise fail to provide adequate food provisions to them. Once again, because of dissent among the civil government and the military in carrying out the terms of the treaty, it would be unenforceable.

Adding to the absurdity of the treaty, the one chief with the most influence, Mangas Coloradas, had not been present to make his mark upon it. Major Enoch Steen, commanding officer at Fort Webster, clearly understood and appreciated the importance of the chief, remarking that, “Mangas has more sense

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<sup>17</sup> Provisional Compact, Governor Lane at Fort Webster, April 7, 1853, RG393, M1102, LR, DNM, Roll 6.

than all the rest of them put together.”<sup>18</sup> Mangas did, however, come to Fort Webster a month later, on May 18, whereupon Steen explained the provisions of the treaty and Mangas gave his verbal approval.<sup>19</sup> By approving Governor Lane’s treaty, Mangas actually agreed to nothing new; the provisions bore similarities in almost every particular to the Acoma Treaty of 1852.

The detrimental effects of Lane’s treaty quickly became noticeable. Within weeks, other Chiricahua Apache bands, most notably the Coyotereros and Mogollons (both lived far to the north and west of Fort Webster and had no involvement in the treaty), began coming to the fort expecting to be issued rations. The Coyotero and Mogollon bands, both of which remained hostile, assumed that the army would provide for them in the same manner that it provided for the peaceful followers of Mangas Coloradas. The fact that agent Wingfield actually issued rations to the hostile Coyotero and Mogollon bands infuriated Governor Lane, who wrote to Apache agent Michael Steck on July 11:

It was never intended, from the first, to feed any Indian, but those who were employed in raising a crop. Upon what pretense agent Wingfield has collected so many of the wandering Apaches at his agency, and issued food to them, I cannot comprehend. His mismanagement will cause great embarrassment, not only to me, but to you also, and to my successor, by creating expectations amongst the Indians, which must be disappointed, and by exhausting the appropriations for Ind. Affairs in N. Mex. for the current year . . . why did Agent Wingfield encourage Mangas to

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<sup>18</sup> Enoch Steen to Lane, May 20, 1852, *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> Sweeney, *Mangas Coloradas*, 280.

bring his own and other bands, from their homes on the Hela [sic], to the Mimbres? Has the agent been insane . . . ? I am fully aware of the evils that will result from ceasing to feed starving barbarians.<sup>20</sup>

The rapid influx of unwanted Apaches at the Fort Webster agency caused much alarm among the troops there, and Major Steen wrote to Santa Fe requesting that reinforcements be sent as soon as possible. If they continued to turn away the Coyotero and Mogollon bands, violent uprisings would inevitably occur. “It was not considered safe for a man to go over 200 yards from the post,” Wingfield wrote in reference to Fort Webster, “without being armed to the teeth.”<sup>21</sup> The garrison at the fort, consisting of only thirty-five troops, would not have been sufficient to quell an uprising if indeed one did occur.<sup>22</sup>

Despite the strenuous circumstances arising as a direct result of the treaty negotiations, Governor Lane continued his circuit of the territory in pursuit of additional objectives. Having completed his peace negotiations at Fort Webster (which Congress never ratified), Lane embarked upon an exploration of the Gila River and Santa Lucia Spring regions of west-central New Mexico, taking with him a small escort of sixteen dragoons.<sup>23</sup> He considered allotting a portion of that area as a permanent reservation for the Gila Apaches, an idea that originated with

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<sup>20</sup> Lane to Michael Steck, July 11, 1853, Steck Papers, *Series 1, 1839-1853*, E93.

<sup>21</sup> Edward Wingfield to Lane, May 28, 1853, RG393, M1102 LR, DNM, Roll 6.

<sup>22</sup> Steen to Dixon S. Miles, June 1, 1853, *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> Sweeney, *Mangas Coloradas*, 273.



Governor Calhoun in 1851. “My visit to the Gila,” Lane wrote, “was for the purpose of ascertaining its fitness for a future location for the Apaches. It will do well for that purpose.”<sup>24</sup> However, federal officials in Washington still frowned upon the idea of a permanent reservation in New Mexico, and it would be years before any such reserve would be created. Nevertheless the idea served as a hint of thoughtful foresight on the part of Lane, who considered the Indians’ best interests while pondering such policy objectives.

Had his plans for a reservation along the Gila River been carried out, many future problems with the Indians might have been averted. The region comprised the heart of the Chiricahua Apache homeland. Each year, Mangas Coloradas and his band returned there after their traditional raids into Sonora and Chihuahua. As one of their favorite haunts, the entirety of the tribe might have been willing to stay and live peacefully there for an extended period of time.<sup>25</sup> Unfortunately for both sides, Lane’s proposed Gila River reservation did not meet with approval by the commissioner of Indian affairs in Washington, who remained unwilling to establish a permanent reservation in New Mexico. To justify this decision, federal officials cited the fact that the potential mineral wealth of the land had yet to be determined, perceiving it as folly to place the Apaches upon land that might be rich in gold or silver. Lane returned to Santa Fe,

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<sup>24</sup> Carson, “William Carr Lane Diary,” 222-3.

<sup>25</sup> Julyan, *Place Names of New Mexico*, 219.

unaware that his superiors at the federal level would disapprove his treaty and reservation proposal.

As perhaps his most important act as governor, William Carr Lane appointed Dr. Michael Steck as Apache agent at Fort Webster in 1853.<sup>26</sup> While it might have seemed like another insignificant appointment at the time, the selection of Steck turned out to be among the defining events in the history of antebellum New Mexico Indian policy. The office of Indian agent had traditionally been a controversial one, and civil leaders in New Mexico struggled to find able and willing men to fill the position. In the first five years of the territory's existence as a U.S. entity, several Indian agents had come and gone, and the position desperately needed to be filled by a reliable individual.

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<sup>26</sup> Dr. Michael Steck was born in Hughesville, Pennsylvania in 1818. In 1842, he graduated from Jefferson Medical College in Philadelphia. He came across the Santa Fe Trail to New Mexico in 1849, and was appointed an Indian agent in New Mexico for the term of four years by President Millard Fillmore on September 1, 1852 at an annual salary of \$1,550. He was eventually appointed Superintendent of Indian Affairs in New Mexico by President Abraham Lincoln. Steck later returned to Pennsylvania, where he lived on his farm until his death in 1880. See Steck Papers, *Series 1, 1839-1853*, E93, Reel 1.

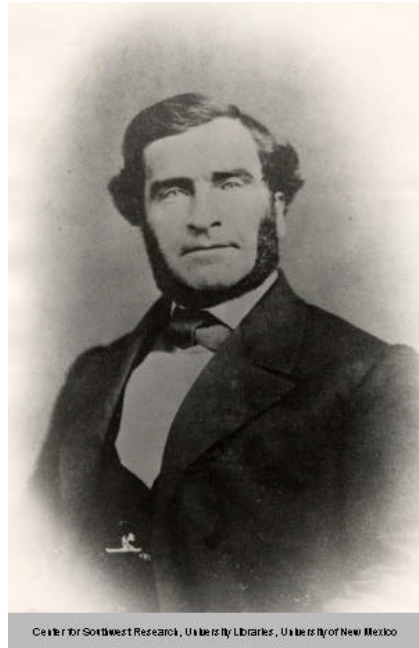


Figure 8. Apache Indian Agent Dr. Michael Steck (Center for Southwest Research, University Libraries, University of New Mexico).

Steck would prove equal to the monumental task for which he had been appointed. In a world where the Apaches could trust almost nobody, they found a friend in Michael Steck. Throughout his several years of service, Steck remained steadfastly dedicated to the unpopular ideology of fair, equitable treatment for the Indians. Gradually, through his benevolent acts, he gained the trust of nearly every Apache chief. Acquiring the Apaches' trust became a building block for peaceful relations, and Steck emerged as the department's most indispensable resource in the successful implementation of Indian policies.

While the negotiation of peace treaties remained a primary concern of the governor, there existed other, more immediate concerns. These events, mostly unrelated to Indian affairs, would eventually lead to new officials being appointed in both the civil and military governments in New Mexico. The international

boundary dispute with Mexico of 1850-53 would have a significant impact on military and civil actions in the territory during the months immediately following Lane's Apache treaty. The controversy arose as a result of Lane's overzealous actions towards Mexico and ultimately led to his resignation as territorial governor. William Carr Lane's tenure as governor ended abruptly and unceremoniously.

While Lane worked towards negotiating treaties with various tribes, Colonel Sumner had achieved an almost complete reorganization of the Ninth Military Department in less than one year.<sup>27</sup> The department forever changed under Sumner's leadership, although the effects were not necessarily benevolent in all respects. The negative components of Sumner's reorganization would be a serious burden for his successor.

A simultaneous change in command in the offices of both the governor and the military commander occurred in August, 1853. William Carr Lane's term as territorial governor ended in scandal, and Colonel Sumner transferred to another department as a result of internal tensions within the military chain of command. David Meriwether succeeded Lane as governor and superintendent of Indian affairs, while Brevet Brigadier General John Garland replaced Sumner as military commander. Together, Meriwether, Garland, and Steck would work together much more harmoniously than their predecessors. In the following years new ideologies emerged, resulting in the implementation of new policies.

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<sup>27</sup> Frazer, *Forts and Supplies*, 69.

David Meriwether, a fifty-two year old native of Kentucky, assumed the governorship on August 8, 1853. In contrast to Lane, who as a physician and mayor spent much of his life indoors, Meriwether's hardened physique and stern complexion reflected a lifetime of experience on the frontier. Meriwether boasted an impressive political background and, significantly, had already become acquainted with New Mexico some thirty-five years earlier. In 1819, Spanish officials in New Mexico captured the eighteen-year-old Meriwether and held him in confinement at the Palace of the Governors in Santa Fe, accusing him of being an American spy.<sup>28</sup> Indeed his selection as Lane's successor owed primarily to his previous knowledge and familiarity with the territory, as few eastern politicians could claim a better understanding of New Mexico's complexities than David Meriwether.

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<sup>28</sup> Horn, *New Mexico's Troubled Years*, 53. David Meriwether was born on October 30, 1800 in Virginia, and was raised in Kentucky. He served thirteen nonconsecutive terms in the Kentucky state legislature between the years 1832-1883. He served in the United States Senate from July 15 to December 20, 1852, temporarily replacing the deceased Henry Clay.

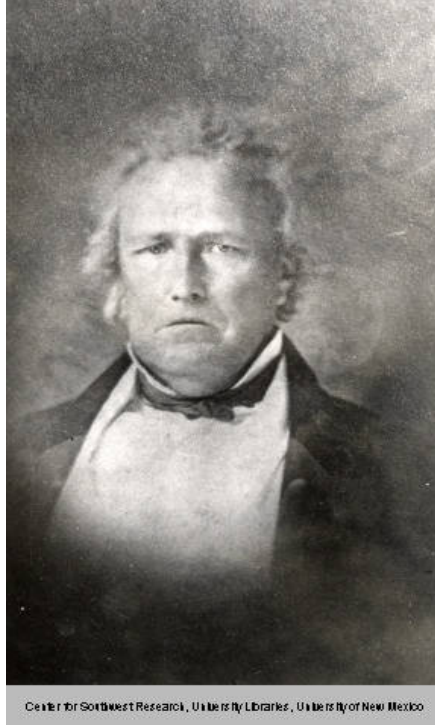


Figure 9. Territorial Governor David Meriwether (Center for Southwest Research, University Libraries, University of New Mexico).

As governor, Meriwether inherited a territory in which the administration of Indian policies by prior officials had been in many cases nonsensical. Many things had deteriorated under the leadership of William Carr Lane, whose several highly redundant treaties never achieved Congressional ratification. In his first annual report to the commissioner of Indian affairs, dated September 1, 1854, Meriwether lambasted his predecessor's Indian policies. "I entered upon the discharge of the duties of this office . . . and soon found that my predecessor had made a compact with several bands of the Apache tribe . . . which has caused much embarrassment and difficulty," Meriwether wrote.<sup>29</sup> He made this comment

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<sup>29</sup> David Meriwether to George Manypenny, September 1, 1854, in *1854 Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs*, 166.

in reference to the treaty negotiated in 1853 at Fort Webster which, although never ratified, caused considerable provisions and rations to be issued to hostile Apache bands (the Coyoteros and Mogollons) and gave rise to the new governor's primary point of contention with Lane's Indian policies.

Nor did Meriwether inherit a territory that could be considered financially solvent. Upon his arrival in Santa Fe, he noted that "the entire amount of money appropriated for contingent expenses of Indian affairs in New Mexico had been expended, except about three thousand dollars, and there were also outstanding claims pending against this [Indian] office amounting to about ten thousand dollars." Additionally, "provisions had been issued [by Lane] to from five hundred to one thousand Indians, at a cost to the government of between fifteen and twenty thousand dollars." As a result Meriwether informed the Apaches, through their agents, "of the disapproval of [Lane's] compact," and ordered a moratorium on the issuance of rations. The end result, as Meriwether acknowledged, came in the form of "their resorting to theft and robbery upon the citizens of this Territory for a subsistence . . . ." <sup>30</sup> The efforts of Lane towards peace negotiations with the Apaches thus came to an abrupt end at the hands of new leadership in Santa Fe.

Exacerbating these localized problems was the fact that the Interior Department habitually failed to provide New Mexico with ample manpower or provisions to maintain such a geographically large and ethnically diverse territory.

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 166-67.

“The entire Indian population of this Territory I would estimate at from forty to fifty thousand souls, scattered over a surface of more than two hundred thousand square miles,” Meriwether informed the commissioner of Indian affairs in August 1853, “and hence I would suggest that four agents are insufficient for their proper management. Take the Apaches, and the two most remote bands are more than three hundred miles distant from each other . . . .”<sup>31</sup> These “remote bands” to which Meriwether referred had but one agent between the two of them, Michael Steck.

Meriwether summarized his views towards the Indians in a statement he made shortly after becoming governor. He observed that federal Indian policy invariably took two forms, those being either to “feed them or whip them . . . the former has been the policy of my predecessors, the latter has not been effectually tried.”<sup>32</sup> Thus Meriwether intended to implement a policy almost opposite the conciliatory one adopted by Calhoun and Lane. Meriwether’s ideology manifested itself clearly in his immediate renunciation of Lane’s aforementioned 1853 treaty.

Edmund Graves, who served during this time as an agent for the Apaches, reluctantly favored Meriwether’s militaristic stance on Indian policy. “The question arises,” Graves wrote in a letter to the commissioner of Indian affairs, “what line of policy is best calculated for the management of these Indians? It is

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<sup>31</sup> Meriwether to Manypenny, August 31, 1853, in *1853 Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs*, 429-33.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*



a question not easily answered, but is pregnant with embarrassment and fraught with difficulty.” Even so Graves recognized the futility of the situation and believed that no course of action, besides that of “whipping them,” could ultimately ensure a permanent peace:

These Indians must live, and when the mountains and forest cease to supply them with food, they will doubtless seek it from those who have it, and if not to be had peaceably, they will attempt to obtain it by force. No creature, whether civilized or not, will perish for the want of food when the means of subsistence is within his reach . . . . To feed and clothe these Indians . . . is an expensive operation . . . it is a policy that promises no results beyond the simple fact of keeping them quiet for the time being. As long as this policy is continued, their peace can doubtless be purchased, and they will be kept quiet, but it only postpones the evil day.<sup>33</sup>

With many leading government officials entertaining ideologies similar to that of Graves and Meriwether, it appeared as though rougher times awaited the Apaches. Their only saving grace in the upcoming years would be their agent, Michael Steck. Despite fundamental differences in their desired approach to dealing with the Indians, Meriwether and Steck collaborated closely in the implementation of Indian policy. This working relationship received further support with the arrival General John Garland as commander of the military

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<sup>33</sup> Graves to Manypenny, June 8, 1854, in *1854 Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs*, 181. In the same letter, Graves noted: “To exterminate the aborigines . . . is a policy that no enlightened citizen or statesman will propose or advocate. That this race, the aborigines of America, are destined to a speedy and final extinction, according to the laws now in force, either civil or divine, or both, seems to admit of no doubt . . . all that can be expected from an enlightened and Christian government, such as ours is, is to graduate and smooth the pass-way of their final exit from the stage of human existence.”

department, who proved much more amenable to cooperating with civil officials than his predecessor Sumner.

By the time he took command of New Mexico's military department in 1853, Garland possessed an impressive military résumé.<sup>34</sup> A decorated veteran of the War of 1812 and the Mexican War, Garland would advocate a militaristic Indian policy similar to that of his colleague, Governor Meriwether. In regards to his responsibilities as a military officer, Garland carried out most of his duties with a higher level of success than Colonel Sumner. He would remain in command of the department from the time of his appointment in July 1853, until his departure from New Mexico in September 1858, making him the longest-serving department commander up to that point.

Garland took command of an unenviable situation with the territory's military department. Colonel Sumner left many things unfinished, creating numerous problems. In October, 1853, only a few months after taking charge in New Mexico, Garland openly criticized Sumner:

My predecessor [Sumner] is an old friend and acknowledged throughout the army to be one of our most efficient and gallant officers in the field . . . but his energies have been misapplied, and he has left the department in an impoverished and crippled condition . . . his great, and sole aim appears to have been to win

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<sup>34</sup> John Garland was born in Virginia and joined the U.S. Army as a first lieutenant during the War of 1812. During the Mexican War, as a colonel, Garland fought under Zachary Taylor at the Battle of Palo Alto, and also took part in the fighting at Monterrey and Vera Cruz. He was severely wounded in Mexico City at the end of the war and received a brevet brigadier general rank for meritorious service in that war. In 1848, his daughter married James Longstreet, who would later become a famous Confederate General during the Civil War. Heitman, *Historical Register*, 447.

reputation from an economical administration of his Department; in this, he will be found to have signally failed, if all his acts are closely looked into.<sup>35</sup>

The implementation of Sumner's fiscally conservative policies, while they appeared great on paper, had in actuality taken a toll on the well being and effectiveness of the soldiers stationed in New Mexico, who oftentimes lacked the supplies and provisions necessary to carry out successful campaigns. The confused state of Indian affairs throughout the territory exacerbated this dilemma, with agents having been appointed and then abruptly removed just prior to the arrival of Garland and Meriwether. The only Indian agency in the territory that remained little changed during this period of transition was that of Michael Steck, whose Apache agency at Fort Webster would be his permanent headquarters until the abandonment of the fort on December 20, 1853. Much like it had been while agent Wingfield resided there in 1852, the fort remained in a woebegone, dilapidated condition. In October, 1853, army inspector Joseph K.F. Mansfield visited there and commented:

Fort Webster . . . was commenced in October 1852, under the command of Major G. Morris of the Third Infantry, but in November, Brevet Major E. Steen of the First Dragoons was in command . . . it is among the Apache Indians . . . and dependent for supplies on Fort Fillmore, 135 miles [distant], and Fort Conrad, 150 miles [distant] . . . . The buildings of this post are made of logs and mud and quite indifferent and not sufficient for the command.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> John Garland to Cooper, October 28, 1853, RG393, M1102, LR, DNM, Roll 7.

<sup>36</sup> Frazer, *Mansfield on the Condition of the Western Forts*, 25-6.

Mansfield believed Fort Webster to be improperly situated and suggested that it be moved northwest to a location on the Gila River, closer to the Apaches' homelands. After being relocated, the existing buildings could be used as an agency for Steck, where he could oversee Apache farming operations and issue "presents" to the Indians from the Interior Department. Furthermore it might prove beneficial to station the troops at some distance from the Apache agency, in order to avoid tension between the army and the Indians. By this time Steck had proven his ability to work harmoniously with the Indians without the presence of troops for protection.

Mansfield's astute suggestions only received partial consideration. General Garland agreed that the post continued to deteriorate, notifying the assistant adjutant general in October that Fort Webster "is not in position for any useful purpose, and very difficult as well as expensive to maintain."<sup>37</sup> Pursuant to Garland's orders, Fort Webster would indeed be moved to a new location only two months after Mansfield visited there. The new fort, however, would be built nowhere near the suggested Gila River site.

On November 7, 1853 Garland issued the order mandating the abandonment of Fort Webster, which had served as the Apache agency for over two years. The post replacing it, to be constructed on the west bank of the Rio Grande some sixty miles east of Fort Webster, would be named Fort Thorn. As the dragoons trailed off into the distance, they looked back and saw Fort Webster

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<sup>37</sup> George Ruhlen, "Fort Thorn: An Historical Vignette," *Pass-Word*, Vol. 5 (October 1960): 127.

ablaze; no sooner had the last soldier left than the Apaches descended upon it and burned it to the ground. The Indians seemed not the least bit remorseful to see the American troops depart.

Fort Thorn, described in 1857 as being built entirely of adobe and “enclosed in a substantial adobe wall,” became the new base of Indian operations in southern New Mexico for both the army and Dr. Steck.<sup>38</sup> On May 9, 1854, President Franklin Pierce notified Steck that he had been reappointed to serve as Apache agent, a testament to his effectiveness in that position. Pierce ordered him to reestablish his headquarters near Fort Thorn at the earliest possible convenience.

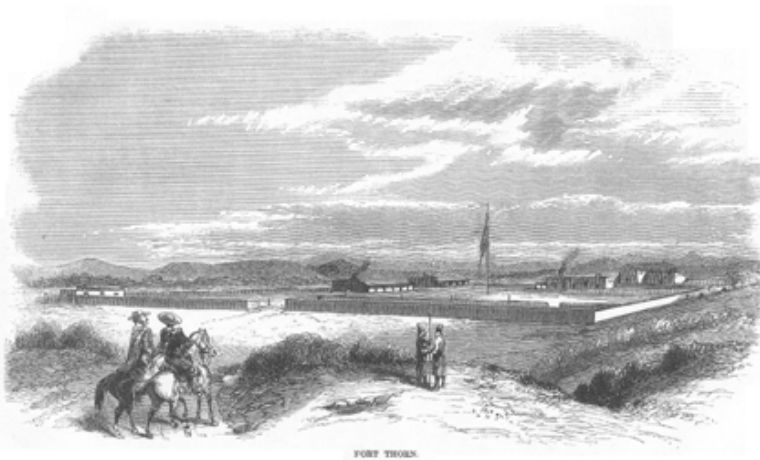


Figure 10. Fort Thorn, New Mexico looking eastward. This drawing appeared in W.W.H. Davis’ *El Gringo*, first published in 1856. This sketch was likely drawn by Colonel Joseph H. Eaton, commanding officer at Fort Thorn, who made several drawings for Davis’ book. From this view, the Rio Grande would be directly behind the fort.

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<sup>38</sup> John C. Reid, *Reid’s Tramp*, 171.

Not long after transferring his headquarters to Fort Thorn, Steck wrote to the governor about future Apache relations. He asked for authorization to issue one thousand five hundred dollars worth of presents to the Mimbres band, in which case, he insisted, “we need have no fears of further depredations; on the contrary, if not furnished . . . they will be again reduced to the extremity of choosing between stealing or starvation.” Steck then suggested that Meriwether travel to Fort Thorn and issue these presents himself as a display of good faith towards the Apaches. Such an action on the part of the governor would, in Steck’s estimation, be “a means of establishing confidence.”<sup>39</sup> By that time, the condition of the Apaches had worsened significantly and the civil authorities needed to establish as much confidence as possible.

By the mid-1850s many Apaches had become almost entirely dependent upon the rations being issued to them. This dependence provided both Steck and the military with an important bargaining chip: whenever Apaches committed depredations, their rations could be withheld until they returned the stolen property. Because the Indians became so heavily dependent on government rations for their survival, particularly during the cold winter months when other food sources became scarce, this became an efficient means by which to regain stolen livestock. With the Apaches in a state of desperation, conditions seemed optimal for the negotiation of a new treaty, the first one Meriwether attempted as territorial governor.

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<sup>39</sup> Steck to Meriwether, October, 1854, Steck Papers, Series 2.

In April 1855, Governor Meriwether notified Steck that he had received Congressional approval to negotiate a treaty with the Apaches. Steck immediately began making preparations for the governor's planned visit later that summer, informing the several Apache bands that frequented his agency. The treaty--the first and only one to involve both the Mescalero and Chiricahua Apaches in the same set of stipulations--would be difficult to enforce because those two tribes traditionally lived far apart from one another and seldom commingled.<sup>40</sup> In May, Steck received word from an Apache messenger that Chief Mangas Coloradas would not be able to attend due to illness. This situation, coupled with the intense dissatisfaction of the Mescaleros after hearing of the military's plans to construct a new fort in their homelands, darkened the skies on what Steck and Meriwether hoped would be the dawn of a new era in relations with the Apaches.<sup>41</sup>

On June 9, 1855, Meriwether arrived at Fort Thorn for the signing of the highly anticipated treaty.<sup>42</sup> "Peace, friendship and amity shall forever hereafter exist between the United States of America and the Mimbres & Gila bands of the Apache tribe," the treaty eloquently began. The Gila Apaches relinquished claim to all of their lands in the territory, "except so much as is hereafter reserved to them." They agreed to vacate the remainder of their lands within nine months and

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<sup>40</sup> Meriwether to Steck, April 28, 1855, *Steck Papers*, Series 2.

<sup>41</sup> Meriwether to Steck, May 15, 1855, *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> Sweeney, *Mangas Coloradas*, 311-12.

move onto the reserved area, although the precise boundaries remained to be determined. The government planned to establish their reservation on or near the Mimbres River, not far from the abandoned site of Fort Webster, making this the first treaty calling for the cession of a portion of the Apaches' homelands.<sup>43</sup> In hindsight this treaty commenced a domino effect that lasted for thirty years. Gradually the land that the Apaches once called their own diminished and fell into the permanent possession of the white men, with the Apaches themselves being relegated to small reservations comprising only a fraction of their original homeland.

An additional provision of the treaty allowed the President, at his own discretion, to grant twenty-acre parcels within the proposed reservation to each family head over the age of twenty-one. The government would pay the Gila Apache band six thousand dollars per year from 1856-58, four thousand dollars per year from 1859-61, and two thousand dollars annually beginning in 1862 and lasting for twenty years thereafter. The President would decide whether this money would be paid directly to the Indians to be used as they wished, or if it would be spent on provisions and supplies to be distributed by their agents. None of the funds would be given directly to the chiefs. In the end, all of this would prove inconsequential. As often happened with Indian treaties it never achieved ratification, a trend that owed primarily to the fact that Congress "felt the

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<sup>43</sup> Thrapp, *Victorio and the Mimbres Apaches*, 43.



government should not have to pay the Indians for land lawfully acquired from Mexico, at least by white man's logic and law."<sup>44</sup>

Another reason why many treaties involving the establishment of reservations failed is revealed in a communication between Steck and Surveyor General William Pelham. In October, before Congress rejected the treaty, the stipulations of the document caught Pelham's attention. He became curious about the possible presence of mineral wealth on lands set aside as a potential reservation for the Gila and Mescalero tribes, specifically at the old Santa Rita del Cobre copper mines.<sup>45</sup> Steck informed the surveyor that the mines had been worked as late as 1838 or 1839, admitting that, "South and West of the copper mines, and also within the limits of the contemplated Mimbres reserve, there are gold mines, which, while the copper mines were being worked and the Mexican government had troops stationed there for their protection, were extensively worked."<sup>46</sup> Steck and Pelham agreed that the governor's choice for the

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<sup>44</sup> Sweeney, *Mangas Coloradas*, 314.

<sup>45</sup> William Pelham to Steck, October 3, 1855, *Steck Papers, Series 2*.

<sup>46</sup> Steck to Pelham, October, 1855, *Ibid*. This is the first mention Steck made of establishing an Apache reservation on the Gila River. In 1860, Steck actually received approval for the reserve on the Gila River, and the plan might have become a reality at that time had it not been for the onset of the Civil War.

Earlier that year, Indian agent Edmund A. Graves likewise mentioned the possibility of creating a reservation for the Apaches, noting that tribes should not be mixed together. Writing to the commissioner of Indian affairs, Graves explained: "The attempt should be made, at as early a day as practicable, of inducing them to till and cultivate the soil . . . . In order to bring about a consummation of this policy it will be necessary to concentrate and to bring together the several tribes (that is, the members of each tribe should be drawn together, and not the tribes, because the different tribes would not harmonize,

reservation could have been better, specifically citing the Gila River as a more plausible location. The Senate's rejection of this treaty can thus be linked to that era's fundamental prevailing American ideology of expansionism and Manifest Destiny; had the proposed reservation been located on a less valuable tract of land, where mineral wealth in the form of copper and gold did not exist, the treaty might have been ratified and the reservation established.

The failure of Meriwether's treaty could not have been more unfortunate. The Apaches remained in a desperate state, almost completely reliant upon government-issued rations. The treaty would have placed them on a permanent reservation in their homelands and allowed not only for an increased allotment of rations, but also for the payment of indemnities to the tribe which could have been used to better their economic situation. As it were, their starving condition worsened throughout 1855, eventually resulting in armed violence and a marked increase in subsistence raiding.

In November, despite the continued issuance of rations at Fort Thorn, troops caught several Apaches stealing from civilian-owned cornfields a mile and a half north of the fort. A Mexican laborer shot and killed one of the Indians, but the remainder of them managed to escape. Captain Joseph H. Eaton, commanding at Fort Thorn, reported a week later that there had been no apparent signs of retaliation on the part of the Indians for this death. Unfortunately Eaton spoke prematurely; later that month, a band of Gila Apaches attacked Mesilla,

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whilst individuals of the same tribe would) into a smaller area . . . ." Graves to Manypenny, June 8, 1854, in *1854 Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs*, 182.

killing two Mexicans and stealing several head of beef cattle before retreating westward.

While these events played out, Steck began assembling several influential chiefs at his agency in hopes of procuring an agreement that they would refrain from any further retaliatory measures. Often more effective than official treaty negotiations with leading civil officials, Steck's individual meetings with Apache leaders became a trademark of his years of service as an Indian Department official. While Steck persisted in his attempts to promulgate a tranquil state of affairs, military leaders continued to act in a manner which contradicted the Indian agent. In defiance of Steck's exertions, Captain Eaton told headquarters that, "war with the whole Apache race west of the river should be declared, and they should be made to understand that it will never end. A state of well understood hostility is better than flimsy treaties of peace, which only serve to lull the people of the territory into a false security."<sup>47</sup> These disagreements among government officials inadvertently sent a dual message to the Apaches, who were being attacked on one front while simultaneously being encouraged to seek peace negotiations on the other front. The resulting confusion resulted in a wholesale failure by both the military and the Indian Department. Eaton's military campaigning caused a heightened level of apprehension and distrust among Apache leaders, who responded by rejecting Steck's well-intentioned overtures of friendship.

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<sup>47</sup> Joseph H. Eaton to W.A. Nichols, November, 1855, RG393, M1120, LR, DNM, Roll 2.

Despite his continued efforts, Steck's patience would continually be put to the test. In early December, he finally gave the Gila Apaches an ultimatum: stop raiding the settlements and return all stolen livestock, or face a complete discontinuance of rations at his Fort Thorn agency.<sup>48</sup> Because many of the Apaches, especially women and children, had become reliant upon these rations for subsistence during the cold winter months, Steck's threat carried severe potential ramifications and had a greater effect than any military campaign could have. Steck ultimately showed his compassion and allowed them to continue receiving provisions from his agency, pending their good behavior.<sup>49</sup>

The government's efforts towards treaty making continued to be in vain. The Indians were not solely to blame for this; while they continued to commit depredations upon the Rio Grande settlements, American citizens committed a considerable number of similar outrages upon the Apaches. Retribution became the norm during this period, undermining all efforts at diplomacy. To be sure, the government frequently failed to uphold its end of the bargain as well. Attempted treaty negotiations occurring simultaneously with military campaigns sent a confusing, mixed message to the Indians and exacerbated the preexisting distrust between the two sides. Had it not been for the presence of Michael Steck at the southern Apache agency, relations would have deteriorated much more rapidly and the result would have been even more bloodshed.

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<sup>48</sup> Steck to Superintendent of Indian Affairs, December 22, 1855, *Steck Papers*, Series 2.

<sup>49</sup> Steck to Davis, January 9, 1856, *Ibid.*

Throughout the first half of the 1850s, civil government officials, including Indian agents, typically viewed Apache raiding as a form of subsistence necessary to the tribe's livelihood. While these officials did not condone livestock theft, they often acknowledged that the Indians did this more in advancement of a traditional tribal economic institution rather than an outright declaration of war. To this end Indian Department officials proposed placing the Apaches on a permanent reservation within their homelands and issuing adequate food provisions to ensure their continued subsistence. According to civil officials, feeding the Indians would eliminate their need to raid the settlements. However, Military Department officials maintained a viewpoint that starkly contrasted this notion. Army officers viewed Apache depredations as an open gesture of hostility and therefore sought to take the offensive against them, carrying the so-called war into their homelands and attacking them before they embarked on any raids. In this sense both the civil and military branches of government had viable reasons for advancing their respective policies. Unfortunately neither branch sought to include the other in their activities, and the military therefore often acted autonomously of the Indian agents.

By the end of 1855, the military department began gearing up for a new approach to Indian affairs, and this time the territory's civil government leaders joined the war department in advocating a militaristic policy towards the Apaches. Years of failed treaties and continued depredations convinced Governor and Superintendent of Indian Affairs David Meriwether, along with many of his subordinate Indian agents, that military action would have to precede any treaty-

making attempts. The year 1856 involved this new approach being implemented throughout southern New Mexico.

## CHAPTER 5

### THE MILITARY CAMPAIGNS OF 1856-1857

The year 1856 witnessed a drastic increase in military action in southern New Mexico, a shift away from the Indian Department's policies in the first half of the 1850s that attempted to incorporate peace treaties as antecedents to military action. Continuing Apache depredations in 1855 and 1856 had the result of reversing this tradition, making military action the antecedent to the treaty making process. For the first time, the heads of the military and civil government in New Mexico agreed upon a policy objective and took action to implement it. In corroboration with Governor David Meriwether and Indian agents throughout southern New Mexico, General John Garland ordered the first and largest campaign into the field in February 1856, which would prove to be a sign of things to come in New Mexican Indian affairs. Throughout the ensuing two years, large scale military campaigns would define Indian policy in southern New Mexico.

Apache raiding had reached monumental proportions during the previous months. Attempts by the Indian agents to issue rations and provisions to the Indians in order to discourage subsistence raids had failed. As a result of continued depredations, department commander General John Garland issued orders on February 24, 1856 for a two-pronged attack on the upper Gila River and Mogollon Mountain regions of southwestern New Mexico. In the process Garland made a poor choice of officers to lead the expedition. Unbeknownst at

the time, the unmeritorious actions of one of those officers during the campaign likely provoked members of the Mogollon Apache band to commit one of their most infamous murders of the 1850s, that of Navajo Indian agent Henry Dodge. The murder of agent Dodge would be among the leading causes for increased large scale military action against the Apaches in 1857, perpetuating the role of violent reciprocity in 1850s New Mexico Indian affairs.

Under orders from Garland, Lieutenant Colonel Daniel T. Chandler led one command of troops, which included some fifteen Mexicans hired to serve as guides and herders. The detachment marched from Fort Craig, in central New Mexico, westward to the Tularosa River, then south to the Mogollon Mountains. At this location Chandler would meet the second command, which departed the more southerly Fort Thorn under the command of Captain Alexander Early Steen.

By March 12, Captain Steen had encamped at the Santa Rita copper mines, still a considerable distance south of his intended destination in the Mogollon Mountains. The two columns finally met at a point north of the Gila River, where the scouts discovered a trail left by the Apaches. Following the trail, the troops eventually came upon the Indians' camp and Chandler ordered an attack. One Apache was killed and three more wounded; the troops recovered some 350 sheep as the remainder of the Indians fled into the surrounding hills. According to later testimony from Apaches who participated in the engagement, two of the fallen Indians later succumbed to their wounds, bringing the death toll to three.



On their return to Forts Craig and Thorn, the entire command camped along the Mimbres River. Chandler left the main body of troops at that location, placing Major Oliver L. Shepherd in command, and marched with one company of infantry and a small detachment of dragoons in search of another purported Apache camp nearby. Not long after leaving the Mimbres, the soldiers came upon the camp of chiefs Delgadito and Itán, both of whom remained on peaceful terms and regularly drew rations at Fort Thorn. As members of the Gila Apache band, neither of these chiefs, nor their followers, had been implicated in the recent influx of Apache raiding along the Rio Grande. Indeed the depredations had been attributed to the Mogollon band, with whom the Gila band was not on friendly terms at the time. Regardless of this important detail, Colonel Chandler immediately ordered an attack. Approximately sixty infantrymen and dragoons under the command of Chandler fired a volley into the camp; according to Steck, the troops continued to fire for some twenty minutes, as the startled Apaches fled in every direction.<sup>1</sup> One of the guides, realizing that the Indians belonged to one of the peaceful bands, convinced Chandler to order a cease-fire. When the smoke cleared, numerous Apaches lay dead or dying on the hillside, victims of the negligence of a U.S. army officer.

Ironically the entire incident could have easily been avoided. Steck had left the Fort Thorn agency and joined Captain Steen's command on the Mimbres River; when Chandler left the main body of troops, Steck made the fateful

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Steck to Jefferson Davis, April 6, 1856, RG75, OIA, LR, NMS, Microfilm T-21, Roll 550.

decision to stay behind, opting not to join Chandler on the scout. Had the agent been present at the time the soldiers discovered the Indian camp, Steck no doubt would have recognized it as that of Delgadito and Itán, both of whom he knew well as regular visitors at his agency.

Steck, furious upon learning of the incident, wrote a scathing report to department headquarters in Santa Fe accusing Chandler of misconduct. According to his report, “[Chandler] approached [the Indian camp] with his command, about 60 men, within musket range and fired into their camp without knowing or stopping to enquire who it was he was firing upon. The Indians . . . scattering in every direction into the mts. with the loss of one woman killed, another wounded, three children wounded and at this date one child still missing.” Steck went on to plead his case against Chandler, explaining that, “to manage an Indian he must have confidence in your kind intentions, and how can he confide in you, if when he had been promised a friendly salutation you greet him with musketry and the shrieks of dying women and children?”<sup>2</sup>

“The commander [Chandler] knew he was in the heart of peaceable territory,” Steck further lamented, demanding that the incident be brought to the attention of the proper authorities in Washington.<sup>3</sup> Not long afterwards, he wrote to Commissioner of Indian Affairs George Manypenny, informing him that, “a most wanton attack was made by U.S. troops upon friendly and unoffending

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<sup>2</sup> Steck to Jefferson Davis, April 6, 1856, Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

Indians.”<sup>4</sup> Steck had no intention of allowing the incident to pass without bringing some negative publicity to Chandler’s actions.

Chandler’s official report explained the incident from his point of view. Not surprisingly, Steck’s report, along with another written by an officer present during the attack, completely contradicted Chandler’s explanation. According to Chandler, while scouting in the hills near the Mimbres River, his guides discovered a horse bearing the same brand as one previously stolen by the Apaches, whereupon he sent out spies in several directions to determine the location of the camp. When Chandler received affirmative reports of an Indian camp in the distance, he ordered Lieutenant Moore and his detachment of First Dragoons to take a circuitous route around the camp in order to intercept their retreat.

Lieutenant Matthew L. Davis and his command of infantry troops then marched up the canyon directly towards the camp, where they fired the first volley at the Apaches as they fled into the hills. After several minutes of action, Chandler noticed an Indian frantically waving a white flag, “as if desirous of holding a talk,” at which point he ordered the troops to stop firing. Chandler allowed the Indian to approach, who proved to be Costales (sometimes spelled *Costelles*), a well-known sub-chief and interpreter who frequently communicated with Dr. Steck at Fort Thorn.<sup>5</sup> Costales managed to convince Chandler that he

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<sup>4</sup> Steck to Manypenny, April 10, 1856, *Steck Papers*, Series 2, Roll 2.

<sup>5</sup> “Costelles [sic] was a *Mexican*, then thirty years old, of medium size, had been stolen, when a child, from his parents whilst journeying in their country (Chihuahua), by a party of Indians, headed by Delgareta [Delgadito] . . . in due

had attacked a peaceful band of Apaches, whereupon Chandler dispatched a messenger to locate Lieutenant Moore and order him not to fire upon any Indians he might encounter while blocking off their retreat route. Based on Colonel Chandler's report, the entire incident appears to have been an accident.<sup>6</sup>

On May 26, Steck received a communication from Governor Meriwether pointing out substantial discrepancies in the various reports of the incident. The governor, however, agreed to send both Chandler's and Steck's reports to Washington for further review and possible action, pending an official investigation by the War Department.<sup>7</sup> Not surprisingly this served only to further agitate Steck, who realized that this incident seriously jeopardized his efforts of the past several years. "In reference to Colonel Chandler's report of the

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time [he] acquired a fondness for his captors and their mode of living; showed himself active and efficient in their forays . . . and by his deeds of daring and cunning became a "head man." John C. Reid, *Reid's Tramp, or a Journal of the Incidents of Ten Months Travel through Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, Sonora, and California* (Austin: The Steck Co., 1935), 175.

<sup>6</sup> Robert McClelland to Jefferson Davis, September 25, 1856, RG393, M1120, LR, DNM, Roll 4.

<sup>7</sup> In his annual report for 1856, Steck specifically mentioned this incident and the pending investigation. He wrote to Commissioner of Indian Affairs George Manypenny on October 18, 1856, concerning Garland's purported investigation. Steck had received no official word that an investigation ever occurred, but had heard from Governor Meriwether and Lieutenant Alexander E. Steen, then stationed at Fort Thorn, that Garland had in fact conducted his own private investigation. According to these two sources, Garland's conclusion found Chandler's report to be favorable, and he subsequently dismissed Steck's report as erroneous. If an investigation had indeed taken place, Steck claimed, then none of the officers involved in the incident had been questioned (he wrote to each of them to find out if Garland had inquired about it). Thus, it appears that the military department conducted a biased investigation and dismissed the incident based on those findings. See Steck to Manypenny, October 18, 1856, Steck Papers, Series 2.

Mimbres affair differing from mine, I have only to say that I stated facts, and in as mild a manner as it could be done - there was no circumstance to justify it," Steck fumed in his response to Meriwether. "We expected the friendly Indians to visit us the night before - smokes were made to notify them of our approach and Colonel Chandler directed the rear guard the night before to kill no more broken down animals, but leave them [for] the very Indians he attacked."<sup>8</sup>

Secretary of War Jefferson Davis investigated the incident but ultimately deemed Chandler's report to be satisfactory. Davis dismissed Steck's report as unreliable and biased because of his compassion for the Apaches, a feeling that General Garland likewise conveyed in his report to Secretary Davis.<sup>9</sup> Steck's credibility received much-needed support when Lieutenant Matthew Davis, who led the detachment of Third Infantry that fired the first volley, later admitted that he and the other officers, including Chandler, knew prior to the attack that peaceful Gila Apaches occupied the camp. In a letter written directly to Steck, the lieutenant explained that he had been in the rear guard when Chandler ordered the attack. He said that he knew at the time that the attack likely targeted the wrong band of Apaches.<sup>10</sup> If a junior officer in the rear guard knew this, then it stands to reason that the commanding officer would have known as well.

According to Lieutenant Davis, Chandler knew that the Indians in the camp had not committed the recent depredations, but he attacked anyway. Why?

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<sup>8</sup> Steck to Meriwether, June 16, 1856, *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> Thrapp, *Victorio and the Mimbres Apaches*, 51.

<sup>10</sup> Jefferson Davis to Steck, July 9, 1856, Steck Papers, Series 2.

One possible answer to this question can be found in an analysis of Colonel Chandler's morality. Clearly he exercised poor judgment in this instance, something not at all atypical of him. Chandler once killed one of his own soldiers while on a campaign; a dragoon private had been unable to keep up with the command due to thirst, at which point Chandler cut him down with his saber.<sup>11</sup> If an officer could murder one of his own troops, it requires no stretch of the imagination to envision that the same man might knowingly attack a peaceful Apache camp.

Not surprisingly the campaign had done little to quell the raiding habits of the Indians. If anything, the attack on the Mimbres camp did nothing but incite further animosity with the Apaches, and likely caused further hostilities. In March 1856, possibly as a result of Chandler's actions, the area between El Paso and Fort Fillmore saw an increase in depredations. In these instances the Gila Apaches became the suspects after an arrow bearing the marks of that tribe was pulled from one of the murdered Mexican herders. Colonel Dixon S. Miles, commanding at Fort Fillmore, also believed that the acts must have been perpetrated by the Gila Apaches, because the stolen livestock had been driven westward from the Rio Grande. At that time the river had reached such a high level that it could only be crossed in boats. Because the Mescaleros ranged only on the east side of the river, it would have been impossible for them to have stolen the animals west of the swollen river and driven them across to the east bank. Lieutenant Davis and a detachment of the First Dragoons left Fort Fillmore

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<sup>11</sup> Bennett, *Forts and Forays*, 80-81.

following the third Indian attack of the month, in which yet another Mexican herder had been killed by the Apaches. Davis lost the trail after several hours and returned to the fort.

Meanwhile the brother of the slain Mexican herder decided to take matters into his own hands. He went to Doña Ana, just north of present-day Las Cruces, where he killed a Mescalero woman selling wood there. This incident could have easily sparked an outbreak in Mescalero hostilities, which would have only exacerbated an already problematic state of affairs. Territorial officials attributed nearly all depredations occurring along the Rio Grande at that time to the Mogollon Apaches; bringing the Mescaleros into the conflict would have been disastrous, giving rise to hostilities in two geographic regions and forcing the military to direct their efforts in two separate directions.

Not long afterwards the man who killed the Mescalero woman at Doña Ana passed by Fort Thorn; Captain Eaton, in command at that post, recognized him and placed him under arrest, holding him in the guardhouse to await trial for the murder. This prudent action by Eaton, coupled with Steck's explanation to the Mescaleros, probably prevented a large-scale outbreak among that tribe. Steck's ability to communicate effectively with the Apaches once again prevented an imminent outbreak in hostilities.<sup>12</sup>

In May 1856, another band of friendly Gila Apaches, with their chief Cuchillo Negro, camped at a spring some five to seven miles west of Fort Thorn.

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<sup>12</sup> Dixon S. Miles to W.A. Nichols, March 1856, RG393, M1120, LR, DNM, Roll 5.

Rumors circulated that several renegade Mescaleros, guilty of committing depredations in the preceding months and sought by the military, had taken refuge with them in hopes of evading capture. Steck knew of these rumors, and although he believed the Mescaleros had indeed taken shelter in the camp, he also believed that they had done so against the will of Cuchillo Negro and his followers. Upon learning of this, Captain Eaton immediately dispatched a command of eighty men (forty infantry and forty dragoons) with Lieutenants Williamson, Steen and Pender in command.<sup>13</sup>

Eaton explicitly ordered the troops not to attempt to capture the Mescaleros, but rather to shoot them if at all possible; he further ordered that the remaining group of Gila Apaches be left alone. In the event of a skirmish, it would be extremely difficult to distinguish between the two different bands, especially while commingled with one another in camp. If a combat situation had occurred, many of the Gilas would have been harmed as well. Before any hostile action occurred, scouts from Cuchillo Negro's camp sighted the troops' advancement and gave warning; they abandoned the entire camp and fled before the soldiers arrived. When Cuchillo Negro came to Fort Thorn shortly afterwards to receive rations, Steck ordered him to either leave immediately or else be imprisoned for harboring the renegade Mescaleros.<sup>14</sup>

This incident represents a very rare circumstance in which members of the Mescalero and Gila Apaches came together for a common cause. Seldom did the

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<sup>13</sup> Joseph H. Eaton to William N. Grier, May 15, 1856, Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Eaton to Nichols, May 31, 1856, Ibid.



two tribes cooperate in such a manner; while they never acted violently towards one another, they likewise did not maintain friendly relations either. For the most part, each tribe avoided one another as much as possible to avoid being implicated in each others' wrongdoings.

Internal feuds among the Apaches seemed to typically involve the Mogollon band. Considered to be the most hostile of all bands, the Mogollons bore responsibility for the majority of depredations that occurred between Fort Thorn and Albuquerque, a distance of some 200 miles up and down the Rio Grande valley. Delgadito, a chief of the Mimbres band living in the vicinity of old Fort Webster, told Dr. Steck that the Mogollons frequently antagonized him and his followers by "taunt[ing] them as women for being in treaty and receiving rations."<sup>15</sup> The Mogollons appear to have been hostile by nature, more so than other Apache bands. All of this would come back to haunt them in the near future; a year later, in the summer of 1857, the Mogollons became the target of the largest military campaign ever to enter the Gila River region.

Modern-day southern Arizona, which remained a part of the territory of New Mexico throughout the 1850s, received its first official attention from the War Department on June 17, 1856 when several companies of troops marched westward from Fort Thorn to Tucson and established the first permanent post in that vicinity.

As a result of the Gadsden Purchase of 1854, the United States acquired the entirety of the geographic area south of the Gila River, comprising modern

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<sup>15</sup> Miles to Nichols, January 1857, RG393, M1120, LR, DNM, Roll 6.

southern Arizona. This acquisition necessitated a U.S. military presence in that region in order to provide protection for the inhabitants there. Accordingly, Commanding General of the Army Winfield Scott ordered four of the seven First Dragoon companies stationed in New Mexico to “take post at Tucson, under the command of Major Enoch Steen.”<sup>16</sup> Several months passed, however, before Steen carried out the order. Not until October 19, 1856 did he march from Fort Thorn with his command to establish a permanent post in the vicinity of Tucson, at which location the column arrived on November 14. These four companies, along with three others under the command of Major George A.H. Blake that had already departed the territory in September, represented a large-scale transfer of dragoon regiments out of New Mexico. To fill the void, the War Department reassigned several companies of the Regiment of Mounted Rifles previously stationed in Texas to replace them.

In March 1856, the garrison of Mexican troops that had been stationed at Tucson withdrew back to Mexico as a result of the Gadsden Purchase.<sup>17</sup> This withdrawal left the people of Tucson without military protection. Several bands of Apaches, most notably the Coyoteros, roamed in that vicinity; up to that point, these bands had scarcely come into contact with United States troops. With the arrival of Steen and his dragoons, contact between the two became an inevitability.

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<sup>16</sup> Benjamin Sacks, “The Origins of Fort Buchanan,” *Arizona and the West*, Vol. 7 (Autumn 1965): 210.

<sup>17</sup> Frazer, *Forts and Supplies*, 122.

Evidently Steen never entertained any intention of establishing his post at Tucson. He made only a short visit to the town before deeming it unfit for inhabitation by his troops. On November 27, 1856 Steen chose a site at the Calabasas Ranch, some nine miles north of the Mexican border (near present-day Nogales, Arizona) and sixty miles south of Tucson, for the location of a new post to be called Camp Moore.<sup>18</sup> However circumstances soon caused him to relocate once again, and Steen eventually located his troops at a site near the head of the Sonoita Valley, closer to Tucson than Calabasas, but still some forty miles distant. At this location he established Fort Buchanan, named for then-President of the United States James Buchanan.

Steen's choice for the site of the fort thoroughly displeased Tucson's inhabitants, who rightfully pointed out that the post's distance from the town would render it impossible for the troops to protect them from hostile Indians. The residents of Tucson made their feelings known in a petition to General Garland at Santa Fe: "If [Steen] was sent here to protect the lives and property of the citizens of the 'Gadsden Purchase,' then he has gone wide of the mark," they lamented. "Some protection it is sure he affords the state of Sonora, but none whatever to his countrymen."<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> David V. Alexander, *Arizona Frontier Military Place Names* (Las Cruces: Yucca Tree Press, 1998), 89.

<sup>19</sup> Undated petition from Tucson citizens to John Garland, RG393, M1120, LR, DNM, Roll 6. Sylvester Mowry submitted a report in 1857 to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs in which he outlined the Apache problems in Arizona at that time. Writing prior to the establishment of Fort Buchanan, Mowry told the commissioner: "A cavalry post in the vicinity of Tucson, one on the San Pedro [River], one in the vicinity of the Los Mimbres [River], and one on the Gila

While acting as commanding officer at Fort Buchanan, Major Steen saw considerable action in the field against the Indians of that region. The Coyotero Apaches, Steen noted, subsisted almost entirely by raiding the northern Mexican State of Sonora. For the most part American citizens in the area (mostly at Tucson and Tubac) experienced very few problems with the Coyotereros. According to Steen, these Apaches desired peace with the Americans and wanted to have their own Indian agent appointed to them in order that they might begin receiving rations and presents.

The first major incident involving the Coyotero Apaches and white settlers occurred on July 27, 1857. On that date, the Coyotereros ambushed a party of Texans en route to California near the Chiricahua Mountains of southern Arizona, killing two in the process.<sup>20</sup> Ironically on this exact same day some 800 troops under the shared command of Colonels Bonneville and Miles massacred a Coyotero ranchería on the Gila River near Mount Turnbull, Arizona.<sup>21</sup>

Also in the summer of 1857, a small party of twenty Mexican troops crossed into the United States near present-day Nogales and murdered four

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[River], above the Pimos [sic] villages, will command the passes by which the Apaches make their usual excursions in search of booty and plunder. These posts will, at the same time, afford protection to the parties engaged in making the wagon road from El Paso to Fort Yuma, and form an efficient protection of the great overland mail." Sylvester Mowry to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, in *1857 Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs*, 303.

<sup>20</sup> Enoch Steen to Nichols, June 1857, RG393, M1120, LR, DNM, Roll 6.

<sup>21</sup> Some of the officers present on the so-called "Gila Campaign" of the summer of 1857 believed that this attack on the immigrant party was one reason for which the campaign had been so abruptly broken up and the troops sent back to Fort Buchanan.

Americans, purportedly attached to a filibustering party, about 1,000 yards inside the border at a store owned by Edward E. Dunbar.<sup>22</sup> Steen described the brutality of the murders to the secretary of war and asked that something be done to prevent such incidents from occurring in the future. Surprisingly the incident did not have any significant ramifications inasmuch as foreign relations with Mexico were concerned.<sup>23</sup>

Steen did not remain long at the helm of Fort Buchanan. In January, 1858 he requested sick leave, and left the post for the last time on April 12, less than two years after establishing the first U.S. military post in southern Arizona. Steen subsequently transferred to the Department of the Pacific, along with two companies of the First Dragoons.<sup>24</sup> His temporary replacement as commander at Fort Buchanan would be Brevet Major Edward H. Fitzgerald of Company D, First Dragoons.<sup>25</sup>

Fort Buchanan remained active as a military establishment for only four years before the army permanently abandoned it on July 23, 1861 because of the Civil War.<sup>26</sup> The troops at Fort Buchanan must have felt little remorse when abandoning the post. By all accounts it was among the worst in the department,

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<sup>22</sup> Benjamin Sacks, *Be It Enacted: The Creation of the Territory of Arizona* (Phoenix: Arizona Historical Foundation, 1964), 11.

<sup>23</sup> Steen to Nichols, June 4, 1857, RG393, M1120, LR, DNM, Roll 6.

<sup>24</sup> Frazer, *Forts and Supplies*, 138.

<sup>25</sup> Sacks, "The Origins of Fort Buchanan," 210; 225 n. 68.

<sup>26</sup> Alexander, *Arizona Frontier Military Place Names*, 21.

being haphazardly spread out over more than a half mile of terrain and therefore utterly indefensible. According to department commander Colonel Benjamin Bonneville, who toured the post in 1859, Fort Buchanan sat “entirely out of position, it being . . . from 80 to 120 miles from Tucson by the travelled road, and on the opposite side of the mountain. The post is built more like a village than a military post.” Bonneville further noted that the fort extended “down a slope of a low ridge even into the valley . . . there are no store houses except temporary sheds covered with tarpaulins. The men’s quarters are *jacals* built of upright poles daubed with mud . . . .”<sup>27</sup>

During its four years in existence, Fort Buchanan acted to discourage Coyotero and Chiricahua Apache depredations in the area south and east of Tucson, it protected travelers on the California road, and it served as a supply base for military expeditions passing through that vicinity. Fort Buchanan represented an important milestone in that it provided the first permanent American military presence in modern-day southern Arizona. Despite this symbolic component of the fort’s establishment, it would play a less prominent role in 1850s Apache affairs compared to southern New Mexico forts in the Rio Grande region.

Returning to affairs along the Rio Grande, a detachment of twenty dragoons under Lieutenant Randall left the village of Los Lunas on November 23, 1856 in pursuit of Apaches, presumably of the Mogollon band, who had

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<sup>27</sup> Benjamin Bonneville to Lorenzo Thomas, July 15, 1859, in Walker, “Colonel Bonneville’s Report,” 358.

ambushed a party of Mexicans nearby and carried off two women as captives. Lieutenant Colonel Benjamin S. Roberts, commanding the post at Los Lunas, received information that the Apache force numbered in excess of fifty warriors, a formidable opponent for any military command. The fact that the dragoons carried only three rounds of ammunition each added to the danger of the expedition; Roberts had made a requisition for more ammunition two months earlier, but it had not yet arrived at the time the detachment marched from the post. Fearing for the safety of the small party of dragoons, Roberts sent out an additional ten-man force to strengthen their numbers in the event of a skirmish with the Indians, but this detachment never caught up with Lieutenant Randall. They followed his trail for some seventy miles, until finally it became covered with snow, making it impossible to know which direction the troops had gone. They returned to Los Lunas, leaving Lieutenant Randall and his twenty-man force to fend for themselves.<sup>28</sup>

Lieutenant Randall lost the Apaches' trail on the first day due to heavy snow, but continued to press forward in the direction that he supposed the Indians might be traveling. On the third day, the dragoons stumbled upon the trail again by mere happenstance. That night the Indians surrounded the soldiers' camp and, according to Randall, "showed a strong disposition to take my little party by storm, but the prompt establishment of a strong picket and extinguishing camp fires sufficed to prevent it." The following day, Randall's advance guard reported

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<sup>28</sup> Benjamin S. Roberts to W.A. Nichols, November 29, 1856, RG393, M1120, LR, DNM, Roll 5.

seeing five Indian spies ahead of them, who fled to their camp once they became aware of the dragoons' approach.

The soldiers marched to within 300 yards of the camp, located on a thickly timbered and brushy mountainside near the Mogollon Mountains, about one day's march from the headwaters of the Gila River and 200 miles from Los Lunas. Just as had been presumed, the Indians numbered about fifty, nearly all of whom carried rifles. The Indians fired upon them as they approached, whereupon the dragoons instinctively returned fire on the camp. When the Apaches fled, one warrior lay dead on the hillside and the troops recovered thirty-one stolen animals.

Lieutenant Randall realized he had been fortunate to avoid a massacre, and thereafter chose a more cautious course of action. "Owing to the limited supply of ammunition, my men having scarcely two rounds each, and the smallness of my command, I was forced to make my way to the [Gila] river with as little delay as possible. Indeed had I penetrated further into their country, or remained longer, my command would have been wiped out," he wrote to headquarters. Outnumbered, short on provisions, and destitute of ammunition, the dragoons found themselves in a helpless situation. Owing to the circumstances, Randall countermarched towards Los Lunas as quickly as possible. His men had already been in the field for ten days, the entire time exposed to the harsh winter elements; only twice had they been able to camp at a location with water.

Frustrated by the entire incident, Lieutenant Randall placed a considerable amount of blame upon the Mexicans living along the Rio Grande. It was no



secret that these people encouraged many of the Indian depredations by providing them with contraband articles. "I cannot refrain from remarking upon the conduct of the Mexicans at Lemitar [New Mexico]," Randall fumed in his closing remarks. "I am well aware of the fact that they supply these hostile Indians with ammunition as well as other articles which necessarily enables them to carry out their plundering."<sup>29</sup> Randall had every right to be upset. He and his men had spent a miserable ten days in the field chasing a better armed and equipped enemy for the purpose of preventing depredations upon the very people, the Mexican citizens of the Rio Grande valley, who traded the guns and ammunition to the Apaches in the first place.

Randall's accusations did not represent an isolated incident; reports arose periodically throughout the 1850s of contraband being traded between Mexican civilians and the Apaches. As long as the Mexicans continued providing guns and ammunition to the Indians, it would be exceedingly difficult for the army to capture and punish them. This event also brings to question the utter hypocrisy of the Mexicans. In one breath they cursed the Apaches for stealing from them and pleaded with the military for assistance and protection, yet in the next breath they professed friendship towards the Indians and traded them the materials necessary to carry out their raids.

The final days of 1856 witnessed yet another unfortunate incident. On December 29, two Mexicans, Manuel Meztas and Dolores Sanches, stole sixteen

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<sup>29</sup> Lieutenant Randall to W.A. Nichols, December 4, 1856, RG393, M1120, LR, DNM, Roll 5.

horses from Delgadito's band of Gila Apaches near Fort Thorn.<sup>30</sup> Dr. Steck sent two prominent and trustworthy warriors from that tribe, Costales and Raton, to follow the trail in hopes of retrieving the animals. Although twelve of the sixteen horses would eventually be recovered, their retrieval came at a high price.

While encamped at San Diego Crossing, located on the Rio Grande several miles south of Fort Thorn, both Costales and Raton were gruesomely murdered, presumably by the same Mexican thieves they had been trailing. When Lieutenant Alexander E. Steen arrived there from Fort Thorn on December 31 to investigate, he encountered a grisly scene. "I commenced an examination [of the premises] which resulted in finding . . . a quantity of blood on the floor, and a butcher and table knife lying on the floor, perfectly filled with gore," Steen explained. "I concluded the person killed had been thrown into the river, and after searching probably an hour and a half, the body of Costales was fished up; he had evidently been killed while asleep; his head was split open with a blow from an axe, his throat cut and the entire scalp taken off."<sup>31</sup>

Trooper John C. Reid, present at Fort Thorn at the time these murders took place, further corroborated the incident. He noted that Costales, a Mexican by birth, was about thirty years old at the time of the murder. Costales "had been stolen, when a child, from his parents whilst journeying in [Chihuahua], by a party of Indians, headed by Delgareta [Delgadito]." Years later Costales became

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<sup>30</sup> Sweeney, *Mangas Coloradas*, 347.

<sup>31</sup> Alexander E. Steen to Thomas D. Claiborne, January 1, 1857, RG393, M1120, LR, DNM, Roll 5.

a prominent member of the tribe “by his deeds of daring and cunning.”<sup>32</sup> Costales exemplified the Apache custom of adopting Mexican children taken captive into tribal families, a process by which these captives underwent a complete change in identity and essentially “became” Apache through immersion in their culture. This traditional Apache custom had the effect of cultivating warriors from captives, many of whom eventually became indispensable defenders of their surrogate Apache families.

Reiterating the horrific sight Steen encountered at San Diego Crossing, Reid pointed out that, “the authorities in Chihuahua offered a handsome reward for the apprehension and delivery to them of Costelles [sic], or of his head.” During Reid’s stay at Fort Thorn, he recalled Costales coming into the fort and frantically telling the officers “that a number of his horses had been recently stolen by certain citizens (natives) of the town of Mesilla, and that he intended going after them.” Costales left the post in pursuit of the thieves, and, according to Reid, “two days succeeding this the ferryman at the San Diego crossing came to the fort, and announced, that the second night preceding, he had left the ferry in charge of two Mexicans, and on returning the next day . . . had discovered a quantity of gore in his house, and also in a line thence to the river . . . hereupon, Lieutenant Stein [sic] and a body of soldiers, repaired to the spot where the body

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<sup>32</sup> Reid, *Reid’s Tramp*, 175.

was supposed to have been thrown in the river, and soon drew therefrom the headless trunk of Costelles.”<sup>33</sup>

The troops never found Raton’s body, but everyone logically assumed that he suffered a similar fate; indeed, nobody saw or heard from him again.

Delgadito, the chief to whose band both Costales and Raton belonged, arrived at Fort Thorn shortly afterwards. As so often happened, Steck had to be the bearer of bad news. Despite these heinous acts perpetrated by the Mexicans, Delgadito remained dedicated to peaceful relations and promised Steck that he would attempt to prevent his followers from reciprocating.<sup>34</sup> Many officials, including Governor Meriwether, remained skeptical of the promise: “Although Delgadito and the head men of the Mimbres Indians said that no attempt would be made to avenge the death of Costales and his companion, I doubt the ability of the chiefs to restrain their people.”<sup>35</sup>

The murder of these two prominent Apaches was unfortunate in many respects. Both had been influential among their tribe and consistently aided military and civil authorities in curbing raiding practices among their fellow tribesmen. Regardless of Delgadito’s efforts, their murders became the impetus for numerous retaliatory attacks on the lower Rio Grande settlements. Costales,

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 175-6. Reid’s statement that the body of Costales was pulled from the river without a head contradicts the official report of Steen, who wrote that the head had been “split open.” Aside from this discrepancy, the two reports mostly corroborate one another.

<sup>34</sup> Steck to Meriwether, January 3, 1857, Steck Papers, Series 1, Roll 3.

<sup>35</sup> Meriwether to Steck, March 24, 1857, Ibid.

widely respected by both his fellow Apache companions as well as by army officers, had been the one to approach Colonel Chandler during the attack on the Mimbres Apache camp earlier in 1856, convincing him to cease firing on the Indians. The death of Costales, a levelheaded man capable of easing tensions whenever they arose, came as a loss for both sides.

During the month of February 1857, the Gila Apaches began to behave strangely. They did not come in to Fort Thorn to receive rations, nor had they been in communication with Dr. Steck. During that month, ten Gila Apaches attacked the small village of Los Amoles, twenty-five miles south of Fort Fillmore, driving off a herd of livestock and killing both of the Mexican herders. Twenty men of Company G, Regiment of Mounted Rifles left Fort Fillmore in pursuit, with Lieutenant Alfred Gibbs commanding. However the trail soon became obliterated by a heavy rainstorm and Gibbs backtracked to the post.<sup>36</sup>

Lieutenant Gibbs would have another opportunity in early March, when he departed Fort Fillmore with sixteen mounted riflemen in response to yet another Gila Apache raid. In this instance the Indians drove off stock belonging to Mr. Garretson, the deputy surveyor of New Mexico; Garretson would serve as a guide during the pursuit.<sup>37</sup> A few miles from Cooke's Spring, northeast of modern-day Deming, New Mexico, the detachment caught up with the Apaches, who numbered seven in all: four mounted and three on foot. The riflemen fired at

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<sup>36</sup> Alfred Gibbs to William D. Whipple, February 23, 1857, RG393, M1120, LR, DNM, Roll 6.

<sup>37</sup> Sweeney, *Mangas Coloradas*, 350.

them as they fled over a hill, wounding three in the process. In the ensuing chase, the Indian chief, already wounded several times, turned and confronted his pursuer, Lieutenant Gibbs. The chief, thought to be Itán, charged at the lieutenant on his horse and wounded him with his lance before being shot dead by another trooper. Upon later examination the troops found that ten musket balls had pierced the chief's body.

Gibbs, severely wounded by the lance, dismounted and offered his horse to Corporal Collins, whose horse had been shot from under him. Gibbs remained there, lying on the ground, while the remainder of his company continued the chase. Half an hour later, the soldiers returned and reported that six of the seven Indians were killed. The seventh warrior, wounded numerous times, had crawled behind a rock and the soldiers left him there to die. Gibbs' comrades immediately sent a rider to Fort Fillmore to bring the assistant surgeon to care for the lieutenant's wounds. The doctor arrived the next morning and tended to Gibbs, who bore the unfortunate distinction of being the only soldier wounded in the fight.<sup>38</sup>

Not long afterwards Delgadito's band, which had been on peaceful terms with the government for quite some time, was implicated in an ambush that occurred on March 28, 1857 in the Mimbres River valley. The report of the incident seems to be somewhat embellished by the commanding officer, who claimed that the attacking body of Indians consisted of over 100 warriors. Delgadito led one of the smaller Gila Apache bands and therefore could not likely

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<sup>38</sup> Gibbs to Whipple, March 11, 1857, RG393, M1120, LR, DNM, Roll 6.

have mustered such a large force. At any rate, Apaches ambushed twelve men of Company G, First Dragoons under Sergeant Morris as they followed the trail of livestock stolen near Cow Springs. When the soldiers returned fire on the attacking Indians, one warrior was killed and another wounded. That these Indians did in fact belong to Delgadito's band seemed doubtful for several reasons, not the least of which being that that band was thought to be in Mexico at the time. Regardless of the questionable identity of the attacking Indians, Delgadito and his followers became the primary suspects, victims of the military's continuing inability to distinguish between Apache bands.<sup>39</sup>

The post-1855 era in New Mexico saw a pronounced shift in Indian policy. Whereas previous officials, such as Governors James S. Calhoun and William Carr Lane, preferred negotiating treaties and feeding the Indians to discourage raiding, it now became standard practice to employ military action first. Years of continuous conflict resulted in numerous failed treaties, the end result being a newfound unwillingness among civil and military leaders to treat with the Apaches. By 1856 Governor Meriwether and General Garland agreed with one another that any peace negotiations must be preceded by strong military campaigns in order to force the Indians into submission. For once both the civil and military branches espoused a similar policy towards the Apaches.

In upcoming years this increased level of cooperation and collaboration between New Mexico's leading officials would have a stronger effect in discouraging Apache raiding. Conversely, although civil and military officials

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<sup>39</sup> Gouverneur Morris to W.A. Nichols, March 28, 1857, *Ibid.*

finally pursued similar policy objectives, they failed to take into account how their actions would impact the Apache tribe as a whole. As had been the case during previous administrations, both Garland and Meriwether generally neglected to distinguish between subgroups within the tribe and also did not take into account the traditional Apache life-ways that encouraged raiding not necessarily as an act of warfare but as the perpetuation of a form of economic and personal subsistence that varied greatly from the capitalistic system to which American officials had grown accustomed. The underlying cultural misunderstandings therefore contributed to the continuing conflict between the white men and the Apaches in this antebellum era.



## CHAPTER 6

### THE DRAGOONS' FINAL YEARS

During the final years of the 1850s, a decline in Apache activity throughout southern New Mexico became noticeable, due in large part to the continuous campaigns of military troops in the Indians' homelands. Another factor in the declining depredations pertained to the fact that the Civil War had become an inevitability by that time. By the turn of the decade, with Apache raids occurring less frequently, the army began directing its efforts towards thwarting an imminent Confederate invasion of New Mexico. Still, by sheer necessity the military department continued to engage in occasional hostilities with the Apaches, while civil officials continued in their never-ending quest to arrive at an effective permanent Indian policy. Despite changes in leadership at the civil and military levels of territorial government, these antebellum years would witness a continuance in cooperation between those two branches in perpetuating a policy whereby the implementation of military force encouraged the Apaches to desist from depredating upon the settlements. Several incidents occurring between 1857 and 1861 perpetuated this ideology while also representing a gradual transition away from Indian warfare, as preparations for the Civil War necessarily diverted the military's attention to alternate threats.

In May 1857, David Meriwether resigned from his position as governor after serving nearly four years, much longer than either of his two predecessors. Much to his credit, he had generally worked harmoniously with other civil

officials, as well as military commander General John Garland. To take Meriwether's place, President James Buchanan appointed Abraham Rencher, who would serve as territorial governor until 1861.<sup>1</sup> During Rencher's incumbency, the offices of governor and superintendent of Indian affairs became separate entities for the first time. Accordingly James L. Collins became New Mexico's first non-governor to be placed in charge of territorial Indian affairs.<sup>2</sup> Unlike his three predecessors, Rencher's term as governor would not so much be defined by his handling of Indian affairs, but rather by the preparations made to defend the territory from the expected Confederate invasion and the rampant paranoia emanating from it.

In spite of the looming Civil War, there remained Apache depredations to be defended against. On July 22, 1857, Sergeant Hugh McQuade left Fort Craig and followed a southbound Indian trail that led directly to a grisly scene. Indians attacked a camp of fifteen Mexican herders, killing and scalping every one of them in the process. Continuing on with increased resolve, McQuade and his detachment followed the trail westward into the Mogollon Mountains. With the soldiers now in hot pursuit, the Apaches began abandoning their stolen sheep along the way, whereupon the troops recovered some 700 of them. The Apaches, however, managed to escape. The fifteen Mexican victims represented one of the

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<sup>1</sup> Horn, *New Mexico's Troubled Years*, 73.

<sup>2</sup> Lamar, *The Far Southwest*, 86.

largest death tolls taken by the Apaches at one time since before the territory came under American control in 1846.<sup>3</sup>

An even more problematic set of circumstances unfolded during the summer of 1857. By August, the Fort Thorn guardhouse confined thirty-eight captive Apache women and children. Reports did not specify why they had been detained, nor is there any evidence of their being guilty of any wrongdoing. After just two weeks of captivity five of them had perished, probably victims of the prevalent malarial illnesses that plagued the area. Because of this condition, the commanding officer at Fort Thorn recommended that the remaining captives be transferred south to Fort Fillmore, hoping that their condition might improve. By the middle of August they had arrived at Fort Fillmore, but the change in location did not remedy their poor health and they continued to perish at an alarming rate.<sup>4</sup>

It came as little surprise to Colonel Miles when twenty-three of these Indians escaped from the post under cover of darkness, driven by their desperate condition. The following morning, when news spread that they had fled, Miles dispatched three search parties to follow their trails, all of which led eastward into the Organ Mountains. All of the Indians successfully escaped, except for one woman who the soldiers later discovered dead in the desert, apparently having succumbed to thirst and heat exhaustion. Miles blamed the escape on the negligence of the men guarding the Indians and acknowledged the possibility that

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<sup>3</sup> Hugh McQuade to Porter, July 25, 1857, RG393, M1120, LR, DNM, Roll 6.

<sup>4</sup> Dixon S. Miles to Nichols, August 16, 1857, Ibid.

the guardsmen purposely allowed them to escape. If true, then the Indians had been blessed by a rare instance in which humanity prevailed, as they all might have perished had they remained in confinement at the post.<sup>5</sup>

On December 11, 1857, the Fort Craig garrison again received reports of livestock thefts at a ranch three miles south of the post. Responding to the report, eleven men of Company F, Mounted Rifles, under the command of Lieutenant William Averell and Sergeant Hugh McQuade, arrived at the ranch and discovered the Indians still inside the house. The troops approached unnoticed, and almost immediately “a dozen Indians with their chief came rushing out of the doorway to be held up with the rifles and revolvers of my men who were formed in a semicircle in front of the entrance. We had the dead drop on them and they were silent and quiet.” This standoff did not last long. “We had not gone ten yards,” Averell continued, “when the chief gave a peculiar yell and the Indians, stooping down, flew out between our horses and scattered like a covey of partridges. I called to my men to fire and hunt them down, and fired at the chief myself, hitting him in the side and back . . . .”<sup>6</sup>

The reports of McQuade and Averell differ somewhat in the details of the event. McQuade states that the Indians, after being taken prisoner, attempted their escape while en route back to Fort Craig. Averell, however, implies that the escape took place almost immediately after the initial confrontation at the ranch house and prior to their arrest. Chaos immediately followed the initial volley; the

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<sup>5</sup> Miles to Nichols, August 24, 1857, Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Averell, *Ten Years in the Saddle*, 127.

Indians scattered in all directions, with individual soldiers chasing them to the best of their ability. In the opening shots, one Apache was killed and two others badly wounded. Three of the Indians attempted to cross the Rio Grande, during which attempt one drowned and was seen floating down the river.<sup>7</sup> Averell recalled being engaged in hand-to-hand combat with the chief whom he had previously shot. He vividly recounted the event:

The chief ran around the ranch by the north end and I by the south and met him on the river side when I fired again hitting him in the thigh. As I cocked my pistol the fourth time, the lever which revolved the chamber was broken by a protruding bullet preventing movement. Then I ran to the Indian to strike him with it upon the head. He met me aggressively and seized my uplifted right wrist with his left hand and my left elbow with his right and turned me around into the hollow of his left arm drawing my right arm under my left, all in one quick motion . . . we were about the same height, he the heavier. I was young and strong and had never been seriously injured. We tore up about a square rod of the ground in our struggle. I realized that if I ever lost hold of his right wrist my life would go . . . . I thought of a great many things: one was, if he was hit in the shooting, why didn't he weaken? He did not pause an instant for breath, as most wrestlers do, while my breath was giving out. He was native to this rarified air and I was unused to it. . . just then I heard Jackson's voice, "Steady Averell, I'm going to shoot . . .," a revolver was thrust under my right arm, there was a report and the Indian let go and sank to the ground.<sup>8</sup>

Even after this incredible struggle, the chief did not succumb to his wounds. Thinking him to be dead, Averell briefly turned his attention to the other fleeing Apaches. When he returned to collect the body, the chief had disappeared.

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<sup>7</sup> McQuade to Nichols, December 7, 1857, RG393, M1120, LR, DNM, Roll 7.

<sup>8</sup> Averell, *Ten Years in the Saddle*, 127-8.

The wounded chief hid in a small locked room in the ranch house, where the young lieutenant found him, took him prisoner and returned him to the guardhouse at Fort Craig.

By the latter months of 1858, it had become apparent across the department that the sickly Fort Thorn should be abandoned. Officers, doctors, and soldiers alike had been pleading for the abandonment of this post for years, and their complaints were finally heard. On January 6, 1859, Colonel Bonneville received word from the secretary of war that Fort Thorn's disbandment had been approved. The department commander promptly wrote to Major Gordon, then commanding at Fort Thorn, with orders that he prepare his troops for removal. All quartermaster stores would be freighted south to Fort Fillmore, and by January 18 only a detachment of twelve men and one officer remained.<sup>9</sup> By March 1859, the last occupants of Fort Thorn had departed, marking the end of a post that had played a critical role in Indian affairs for over five years.

The last major military action taken against the Gila Apaches prior to the Civil War took place in the summer of 1859. On June 27, Colonel Bonneville ordered a campaign into the Gila Apache country. Captain William H. Gordon of the Third Infantry and Lieutenant George W. Howland of Company C, Mounted Rifles, left Fort Fillmore with a force of 130 troops, including forty-eight dragoons, fifty-two infantrymen and thirty riflemen.<sup>10</sup> The command carried out

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<sup>9</sup> George Ruhlen, "Ft. Thorn: An Historical Vignette," 134.

<sup>10</sup> George Washington Howland was an 1848 West Point graduate. He was promoted to the rank of captain in 1861, and participated in the Battle of Valverde

orders to scout the Gila River valley, and on July 5 established their headquarters at Ojo de Lucero, southeast of the Burro Mountains. Gordon and Howland reported resources to be abundant at that location, and Howland went so far as to suggest that a permanent post be constructed there. Furthermore the camp at Ojo de Lucero was close enough to the copper mines at Santa Rita del Cobre that the soldiers could quickly respond to any threats the Apaches might make to the American miners living there. As an added benefit to building a post, the Ojo de Lucero site lay less than ten miles north of the Butterfield-Overland mail route. This would make a military installation there instrumental in preventing the Apache depredations that continually plagued civilian travelers and mail contractors traveling that route.

Bonneville also had a favorable impression of the site. “The valley of the Mimbres is beginning to be settled . . . ,” he wrote, “[and] a post located southeast of the Burro Mountains eight or ten miles north of the Overland Mail Station [at Cow Springs], overlooking the valley, would have a moral influence over the surrounding Indians, and would cover the country laid open by the abandonment of Fort Thorn . . . .”<sup>11</sup> The favorable attributes of Ojo de Lucero, nestled in a small valley cutting through a grassy prairie that rises gradually towards the mountains farther north, so deeply suited Lieutenant Howland’s fancy that he

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on February 21, 1862, where he was awarded the rank of major for bravery. He retired from the army on April 8, 1869 and died December 21, 1886. Heitman, *Historical Register*, 549.

<sup>11</sup> Walker, “Colonel Bonneville’s Report,” 359. Fort Thorn had been abandoned only a few months prior, in March 1859.

requested permission to begin immediate construction of barracks and officer's quarters. Howland enlisted the aid of his accompanying surgeon, who penned a letter to department headquarters outlining the benefits of the location from the perspective of a health professional. In Dr. Steck's 1859 annual report to the commissioner of Indian affairs, he too pointed out Ojo de Lucero as a viable location for a new fort. "The post would be within twenty-five miles of the Indian planting ground, and between them and the settlements, and within eight miles of the great overland mail route," he wrote. "This post, cooperating with two companies stationed upon the San Pedro [River], and two near Tucson, would induce the settlement of this country, and, in the event of war, would be a sufficient force to chastise the Indians."<sup>12</sup> But in the long run, Howland never received permission to build the post, and the troops never again occupied the site after their withdrawal later that summer.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Steck Annual Report of 1859, Steck Papers, Series 2.

<sup>13</sup> George W. Howland to Adjutant General, June 27, 1859, RG393, M1120, LR, DNM, Roll 9.





Figure 11. Ojo de Lucero, site of the proposed military post in 1859. The remains of the square stone corral, built by the Regiment of Mounted Rifles, are visible in the center of the photograph. The Burro Mountains are seen in the distance. (Courtesy: The Author)

During their two months at Ojo de Lucero, the troops did not remain inactive. A portion of the command, consisting of approximately fifty troops under Captain Gordon, left there on July 10 for an extensive scout of the Santa Lucia Springs region, a favorite camping place for several Apache bands and the same location that Governor William Carr Lane proposed for an Apache reservation during his treaty negotiations at Fort Webster in 1853. Dr. Steck awaited the troops' arrival there, intending to ascertain the success and extent of the crops recently planted by some 400 of Mangas' followers, as well as to search for a possible location for a future Apache reservation. For several weeks Steck

resided with the Apaches in their camps while “instructing them how to plant.”<sup>14</sup> According to Gordon, the Indians seemed very well disposed and engaged in planting corn, their fields “extending some three miles in length” down the canyon adjoining Santa Lucia Springs to the Gila River. Gordon further stated that Mangas took him on a personal tour of his cornfields, of which the aging chief seemed to be very proud.<sup>15</sup> The site had been chosen as one that would serve well as a reservation for Mangas Coloradas and his followers. Bonneville himself alluded to the high reverence in which the Apaches held their agent, noting that “the mass of them were desirous of being at peace, so much so that they would not allow him [Steck] to travel about for hunting or other purposes without sending two of their people with him for fear some accident might happen and suspicion be thrown upon them.”<sup>16</sup> Bonneville’s observation serves as a testimonial to the high regard in which the Apaches held Dr. Steck as their agent.

Despite the high hopes of the officers, the entire operation had been abandoned by September 19 and Colonel Bonneville ordered the troops to permanently withdraw from Ojo de Lucero. Howland, in a final plea to construct a post there, wrote to his superiors explaining that his men had almost completed construction of a stone corral, and had begun gathering building materials for barracks and storehouses. Once again Howland’s words fell upon deaf ears.

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<sup>14</sup> Walker, “Colonel Bonneville’s Report,” 358.

<sup>15</sup> William H. Gordon to John D. Wilkins, July 28, 1859, RG393, M1120, LR, DNM, Roll 9.

<sup>16</sup> Walker, “Colonel Bonneville’s Report,” 358.

Although they had come in close contact with the friendly followers of Mangas Coloradas, who, according to Lieutenant Howland, had visited the camp almost daily, no hostile Apaches had been encountered by any of the scouts sent out from the main encampment at Ojo de Lucero.<sup>17</sup> In this the commanding officers, Howland and Gordon, must be commended inasmuch as they properly identified the Apaches in their vicinity as being peaceful and therefore did not attack them. This view represents a stark contrast to the actions of other military officers throughout the 1850s. Perhaps the most noteworthy accomplishment of the entire ordeal stemmed from the increased military presence providing an opportunity for Steck to safely conduct his reconnaissance of the Santa Lucia Springs area.

Steck immediately began pressuring Congress to establish a permanent fifteen square-mile reservation at Santa Lucia Springs, the first recommendation for an Apache reservation since 1855 when Governor Meriwether suggested a site along the Mimbres River. Owing to the rapid influx of white settlers to the Mimbres River and Santa Rita del Cobre regions at the end of the 1850s, Steck's proposal for a reservation near secluded Santa Lucia Springs would have been beneficial and might have prevented some of the ensuing hostilities between the Indians and the newly arrived settlers and prospectors. The Santa Lucia region (today known as "Mangas Springs," for the chief who for so many years called the area his home) remains, to this day, more sparsely populated than the valley of

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<sup>17</sup> Howland to Adjutant General, August 16, 1859, Ibid.

the Mimbres River and the area surrounding the Santa Rita copper mines, where several large Anglo-American mining camps were established in the 1860s.

In May 1860, Steck traveled to Washington, D.C. to consult with Commissioner of Indian Affairs Alfred B. Greenwood regarding the establishment of a reservation at Santa Lucia Springs. Steck proposed removing all bands of the Chiricahua Apache tribe to this location. In a letter to Greenwood, the Apache agent stressed the importance of the situation. "These Indians complain very much about our permitting the people to settle in their country. They say they are occupying the best portions of it and fast running them out - and every word of their complaints are true," he wrote. Indeed by that time, "at least forty settlers [lived] on the Mimbres, most of them with their families, and not less than one thousand souls . . . at or near the Copper Mines." Steck concluded his plea by asking, "If some steps are not taken to set apart a portion of their country as a reserve they will have none worth having left . . . cannot something be done at the present session of Congress?"<sup>18</sup>

Although Commissioner Greenwood sympathized with Steck on the issue, other leading diplomats did not.<sup>19</sup> The government appropriated one thousand five hundred dollars for Steck to build an agency there and to erect markers denoting the boundary lines of the reservation; however, this represented only half of the three thousand dollars that Steck projected would be necessary to complete

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<sup>18</sup> Steck to Alfred Greenwood, May 11, 1860, RG75, OIA, LR, NMS, Microfilm T21, Roll 550.

<sup>19</sup> Steck to Greenwood, March 20, 1860, Steck Papers, Series 2, Roll 3.

the work.<sup>20</sup> The inadequate funding from Congress effectively undermined Steck's benign intentions. Despite this shortcoming, an optimistic Steck went ahead with his plans, partnering with a government surveyor in September, 1860 to demarcate the boundary lines of his proposed reserve. The surveying crew marked each corner of the reservation with "large stone monuments" and denoted the actual boundary lines with stone mounds at one-mile intervals.<sup>21</sup> Thus the reservation came extremely close to becoming a reality. Ultimately, however, Steck's Santa Lucia reservation, much like the Mimbres valley reservation proposed by Meriwether in 1855, fell into obscurity and became another failed effort of New Mexican Indian policy. Steck could not be blamed for this failure, for he exhibited tremendous zeal and determination in promulgating this policy objective. Rather, differing opinions among higher ranking officials coupled with the looming Civil War had the result of undermining Steck's proposal.

In the summer of 1861, southern New Mexico fell under the auspices of the Confederate States of America. Led by Colonel John R. Baylor and his regiment of Texas volunteers, the Rebel invasion succeeded in wresting the entirety of southern New Mexico from Union control. With this, southern New Mexico became the "Confederate Territory of Arizona." Despite any temporary changes in civil or military jurisdiction, however, the Apache threat remained omnipresent throughout the region. The Apaches recognized no distinction

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<sup>20</sup> Steck to Greenwood, May 10, 1860, Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Steck to Greenwood, October 1860, Ibid.

between Confederate and Union forces; to them, they all posed a threat to their traditional way of life by impinging upon their homelands.

The *Mesilla Times*, a staunchly pro-South (and short-lived) newspaper, succinctly addressed the Apache threat in July 1861, just days before the Confederates arrived. The newspaper's editor, Robert P. Kelley, observed that the problem of raids and thefts had worsened during the preceding months. Much of this owed to the fact that the Union soldiers had been preoccupied with the Confederate invasion and paid little attention to the activities of the Indians. With the Union troops having been withdrawn from the more secluded military posts in southern New Mexico (Forts Buchanan, Breckenridge, and McLane) and congregated at Forts Fillmore and Craig along the Rio Grande, the Apaches became bolder in their raids with each passing day. The newspaper painted a gloomy picture of the Indian situation as it existed just prior to the Confederate invasion:

The rumors of Apache depredations and of Apache murders come to us from all sides and quarters. They . . . have been allowed to go on unchecked for so long a space of time, they grow bolder and bolder at each successive stage. They think they have driven off the Overland Mail and compelled the United States troops to abandon their forts and leave the country. They have compelled the abandonment of mines and mining districts, of ranches and whole valleys, and nothing seems to limit their daring. They will soon get some understanding of the war movements now going on amid the whites, and when they once appreciate these difficulties their operations will be incessant and unrestrained, and a few weeks will wipe out the progress of civilization of years. The situation of Arizona is gloomy in the extreme.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> "Editorial," July 20, 1861, *Mesilla Times*, Mesilla, New Mexico. The Confederates were not successful in constraining Apache depredations during the brief time in which they held control of southern New Mexico. The *Mesilla*

Kelley's editorial exemplified the rapidly changing times in southern New Mexico. The occupying Confederate army had little sympathy for the Apaches; their leader, Colonel Baylor, despised the Indians more than any prior official in New Mexico. Baylor continually struggled with the problems arising from Apache depredations; his prior history as an Indian fighter from Texas and his predetermined personal hatred for all Indians, regardless of tribal affiliation, did not help matters. In an infamous letter written to one of his captains, Thomas Helm, Colonel Baylor advanced his genocidal ideology, which ultimately led to controversy for the commander of Confederate Arizona. Most who read Baylor's letter, even those who agreed with him in his general negative sentiment towards the Apaches, openly denounced him for it. Baylor ordered Helm, among other things, to "use all means to persuade the Apaches or any tribe to come in for the purpose of making peace, and when you get them together kill all the grown Indians and take the children prisoners and sell them to defray the cost of killing the Indians. Buy whiskey and such other goods as may be necessary for the Indians . . . and have a sufficient number of men around to allow no Indian to escape."<sup>23</sup>

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*Times* of October 3, 1861 lamented the Apaches' boldness: "To show the audacity of these Indians, we will add that the stock was stolen within five miles of a camp of 650 [Confederate] soldiers."

<sup>23</sup> John R. Baylor to Thomas Helm, March 20, 1862, *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, Series 1, 53 vols. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1880-1901), Series 1, Vol. 50, Part 1, 942. The letter eventually led to the disapproval of the Confederate government and the resignation of Colonel Baylor. In attempt to vindicate himself, Baylor wrote to Confederate President Jefferson Davis: "While

Clearly the Confederates cared little for the interests of the Apaches and other native tribes in New Mexico and Arizona. The same could be said for the majority of Union army officials in New Mexico throughout the Civil War era. Only one person, Michael Steck, seemed to hold the best interests of the Indians at heart. When speaking to Congress (and to the entire nation for that matter) in favor of “savage” Apaches, one man simply could not garner enough support. Public sentiment did not play into the favor of the Indians, and indeed it rarely, if ever, had.

As a result of the Civil War and the effect of the Confederate invasion on affairs throughout New Mexico, Apache relations reverted back to a more hostile nature that had not been seen since prior to 1856. While continued military campaigns in the latter half of the 1850s often discouraged large-scale Apache depredations, smaller raids occurred periodically throughout that era. For a brief period it appeared that relations might continue to improve, with Steck fostering beneficent feelings at his southern Apache agency. Many Chiricahua Apache bands refrained from hostilities and opted instead to draw rations at Fort Thorn and live peaceably in their homelands along the Gila and Mimbres Rivers.

The Civil War had the effect of reversing all progress that had been made. With United States troops pitted against one another in a chaotic series of battles

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I sincerely regret that it has been viewed in such an unfavorable light by His Excellency the President, as to induce him to deprive me of the command of the brave men . . . whom I was prepared to lead to battle . . . yet I cannot alter the convictions and feelings of a life time.” See John R. Baylor to John B. Magruder, December 29, 1862, *Official Records*, Series I, Vol. 15, 918.



along the Rio Grande, Apaches seized the opportunity and recommenced raiding practices on levels that had not been seen for several years. Most military posts located in the Apache country had been completely abandoned. The Indians, unaware of the larger conflict pitting the white men against one another, perceived this retreat as a complete surrender by the Americans. The absence of troops from southwestern New Mexico continued until 1863, by which time the Confederate threat to New Mexico had entirely dissipated. Accordingly the Apaches enjoyed almost three years of relative freedom from military persecution, allowing them to recommence raiding the small Mexican settlements without fear of being pursued by troops. This temporary autonomy brought about a new dynamic to Anglo-Apache relations, one that completely redefined the nature of the conflict in post-Civil War years when the military once again returned in full force to its outposts in the Apache homelands.

## CONCLUSION

Commencing with the arrival of the American army in August 1846, the responsibility of Indian affairs in New Mexico shifted from the previous Mexican government to that of the United States. This transition inevitably resulted in many changes in the conception and implementation of policy, both at the civil and military levels. Kearny's promise to the citizens in 1846 that his government would "keep off the Indians, [and] protect you in your persons and property," proved to be an impossible undertaking throughout the 1850s.<sup>1</sup>

Varying ideologies on the proper path to follow regarding Indian affairs led to turmoil on all fronts. The tradition of bad faith between the civil government, military government, and the Apaches themselves, would take decades to sort out. Competing egos among American officials only exacerbated these difficulties within the federal and territorial governments. In New Mexico, very few individuals remained in office long enough to see their policies firmly enacted and enforced. This held true at both the national and local levels of government, and proved especially true in regard to the Indian Department and War Department, respectively. Whether intentionally or not, these two government bureaucracies continually contradicted one another's objectives.

The rapid influx of settlers to the territory following the Mexican Cession of 1848 brought about inevitable conflict between Anglo-American and Native

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<sup>1</sup> Calvin, *Lieutenant Emory Reports*, 50.

American cultures, as the two found themselves vying for control of the same land and resources. As the territory became more populated, the Indians' struggle correspondingly became more difficult. For generations the Apaches had relied upon a traditional raiding economy supplemented by seasonal mescal harvests, necessitating a nomadic culture in which the people continually moved from one location to another. The surrounding desert environment further necessitated this continuous movement. The increasing presence of white men in southwestern New Mexico counteracted their mobility, as miners and explorers founded settlements at important, sometimes sacred locations within the Apaches' homelands. This widespread intrusion had the result of perpetuating a conflict that inevitably grew increasingly violent as years passed.

One Indian agent, writing to Governor Meriwether in 1854, commented forlornly on the futility of the struggle. "That the mountains and plains will, at no distant time, fail to supply [the Indians] with the necessary food, is as certain as that the sun gives light at noonday," he observed. "This being the case, what is to be done? That the Indians will steal, plunder, rob, and murder, in order to get food, admits of no doubt. If you make war upon and conquer them, the same question arises, what will you do with them? You will have to either take care of them or destroy them. The latter the government will not do, but will be forced to do the former."<sup>2</sup> Indeed this simple dilemma, whether to "take care of them or

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<sup>2</sup> Graves to Manypenny, June 8, 1854, in *1854 Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs*, 183.

destroy them,” would be the cause of disagreement among government officials for decades.

An example of the fundamental ideological differences and a general unwillingness to cooperate can be found in a proclamation issued by the commissioner of Indian affairs in 1852, mandating that Indian agents in New Mexico be allowed to accompany military expeditions into the Indian country. This order resulted from several disastrous incidents in which troops mistakenly attacked peaceful bands of Indians; thus the role of the Indian agent on such expeditions, according to the commissioner, would be to identify hostile and peaceful bands before the soldiers attacked. The department commander at the time, Colonel Sumner, absolutely refused to comply, believing that civil officials had no right to participate in military operations. For the remainder of Sumner’s incumbency, in order to circumvent this order, he dispatched military expeditions without informing the civil officials. By the time they learned that the troops had taken the field, it was often too late for any Indian agent to join them, the unfortunate result being customary attacks upon innocent bands of Indians.

In many ways, this single example exhibits the fundamental problems surrounding Indian policy in 1850s New Mexico. The Anglos themselves could seldom agree on an appropriate policy. How, then, could the Indians ever be expected to come to any lasting agreements with a group of officials who could not even agree amongst themselves?

Throughout the 1850s, the civil and military branches found themselves continually at odds with one another over the appropriate policy in dealing with

the Apaches. The first half of the decade witnessed two territorial governors who sought to negotiate peace treaties with the Indians in hopes of averting hostile military action. They believed that feeding the Indians would eliminate their need to raid the settlements and steal livestock for subsistence. The efforts of these early territorial officials failed, due in large part to the unwillingness of the military department to cooperate. With military officers leading troops into the field at their own leisure and purposely neglecting to include Indian Department officials in their operations, it proved difficult to sustain a long-lasting peace. Indeed, each time Governors Calhoun and Lane negotiated a treaty, Colonel Sumner acted autonomously in allowing his subordinate officers to take the field and attack these very same Indians with whom the government had arranged a truce. Misperceptions of Apache culture, especially their tribal structure and purposes for conducting their raids, led to a continuing attempt to implement policies that simply could never work.

Some measure of sustainability was achieved when Michael Steck received the appointment as Apache agent in 1853, but Steck frequently found himself acting alone in his benign efforts and seldom received the full-fledged support of his superiors in both the civil and military branches of government. The arrival of Governor Meriwether and General Garland resulted in a newfound harmony at the territory's highest level of government, although the actions of individual military officers who failed to distinguish between hostile and peaceful Apaches undermined all efforts at a permanent and effective Indian policy. Similarly, the policy objectives of Meriwether and Garland failed to take into

account traditional Apache culture, instead advancing upon the Indians a form of economic capitalism to which they had no prior exposure. Rather than perceive Apache raiding as a traditional form of tribal subsistence, officials viewed it as an open declaration of hostility and acted accordingly. Unfortunately, what little progress had been made in New Mexican Indian affairs in the latter half of the decade dissipated with the onset of the Civil War in 1861, at which time troops abandoned their posts in the Apache country in order to confront the immediate threat posed by the Confederacy.

Thus after more than a decade of almost continuous conflict in southern New Mexico, relations with the Apaches were no better in 1861 than they had been when the territory came under United States control fifteen years earlier. The Civil War served as a turning point in the way the government approached Apache Indian policy, and objectives materially changed course after the Confederate threat to New Mexico subsided in 1863. Advancing technology, enlistment of Apache scouts, increasing numbers of troops, and a drastic rise in the Anglo population all had a major impact on the way officials approached Apache relations after the Civil War, making the years from 1846 to 1861 a unique period in the history of Apache-Anglo interaction.

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176

176

176

176