

INVADED! "THE CIVIL WAR IN NEW MEXICO"

By Laura L. Carlson

Brigadier General Henry Hopkins Sibley liked hard liquor. His contemporaries even called him a "walking whiskey keg." Perhaps that's why he had Texas-sized dreams of conquering most of the Southwest for the Confederacy. After all, there were the gold fields in Colorado, a nice port in San Diego, and the transcontinental railroad in Utah. The only thing in the way was New Mexico Territory (present-day New Mexico, Arizona, and part of Nevada), a vast land that was lightly defended.

The dream started when Texas seceded from the Union on February 2, 1861. By the end of March, Confederate forces had seized all the Federal forts in the state and started looking across the border into New Mexico.

Many thanks to John M. Taylor, author of *Bloody Valverde: A Civil War Battle on the Rio Grande, February 21, 1862*, and co-author of *The Battle of Glorieta: The Gettysburg of the West, March 26-28, 1862*, and for use of the black and white portraits.

Bottom left: Sibley portrait
Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

Horse Training at Fort Bayard,
Courtesy of the National Archives

Upper Right Clockwise:

John Slough led the Union force at Glorieta,

Edward Richard Canby as a major general (Main Union commander),
Both courtesy of the National Archives

John Chivington (Saved the day at Glorieta)
Courtesy of the Colorado Historical Society.

Santiago Hubbell
Courtesy of the Museum of New Mexico

outposts, and kept the vital road open. The Federals didn't want to lose it.

News of the invasion spread quickly. Nine-hundred fifty "Pike's Peakers," Federal reinforcements from Colorado, made their way to Fort Union. Their leader was Colonel John P.

At Fort Bliss near present-day El Paso, Lieutenant Colonel John Baylor decided to take the offensive and marched into Mesilla, New Mexico, with only 250 troops, intending to take the town and nearby Fort Fillmore. Even though the Yanks outnumbered Baylor's men three to one, the Union commander panicked and abandoned the fort, taking off toward Fort Stanton to the northeast. The disorganized retreat left men straggling for miles, making them easy for Baylor's troops to catch.

The troops at Fort Stanton heard the news, also abandoned their fort, and headed to Santa Fe.

Baylor took possession of the Mesilla area and declared himself governor of the southern half of the territory, which was renamed "Arizona."

Sibley watched this foothold and took his invasion plan to Confederate President Jefferson Davis. It didn't take Davis long to approve, and he gave Sibley command of Fort Bliss and Baylor's soldiers. The invasion army left the fort on January 3, 1862, and took possession of the recently vacated Fort Thorn, near Hatch. Sibley then took 2,515 of his men, mostly Texans, and began marching north along the Rio Grande.

He knew there'd be trouble at Fort Craig, further up the river by Socorro. Sibley's old West Point classmate, Colonel Edward Richard Sprigg Canby, had 3,810 men there. They consisted of army regulars, militiamen, and volunteers—including the 1st New Mexico Volunteer Regiment, commanded by the already-famous scout, Christopher "Kit" Carson. Fort Craig itself was a fortress built of adobe and rock, and was difficult to attack.

So Sibley went around it instead.

Canby couldn't just let Sibley pass by, so he gave chase and engaged his forces on February 21, at nearby Valverde. A fierce day of fighting, artillery fire, bayonet and lance charges, regrouping and fording the river left a combined total of more than a hundred dead and over three hundred wounded or missing. The victorious Confederates continued their march northward, leaving the Yanks to lick their wounds.

Canby, a quiet and steady man who had earned many citations for battlefield gallantry, decided to remain at Fort Craig for the time being and cut off Sibley's supplies from the south.

Like dominos, towns and forts in the path of the advancing Confederates fell or were abandoned: Socorro, Albuquerque, Santa Fe. The defenders fled to Fort Union, 85 miles to the northeast, and the government went to Las Vegas. It was clear that the Rebels' next objective would be Fort Union itself.

Fort Union sat at an intersection of two branches of the Santa Fe Trail. Troops from the fort patrolled the Trail and escorted mail stages, stocked and distributed goods to

Slough, a Denver lawyer who relentlessly marched the group 400 miles in only 13 days. Slough, an abrasive and unpopular man, claimed seniority and took command of Fort Union as soon as he arrived. He had an Eastern aristocratic attitude that didn't fit well with the frontier soldiers. They hated him, in fact.

Canby, controlling the Union side of the war from Fort Craig, told Slough to stay put. Slough, however, decided to go on the offensive. Soon he had a force of 1,342 marching on the Santa Fe Trail, the same road his enemy was on.

The Union's vanguard commander, Major John M. Chivington, a blustery Methodist preacher also from Denver, was the first to meet up with the Texans at Apache Canyon. It was March 26, 1862. His men scrambled up hillsides, fought behind boulders and trees, and shot from high vantage points. After a daring cavalry charge, they were able to claim victory. The two sides then camped at ranches, each on different sides of Glorieta Pass, and waited a day for reinforcements.

Slough hit upon an idea: he would send a third of his men with Chivington to circle around the enemy and attack them from the rear.

As the Confederates engaged him in battle the next day, however, Slough began to wonder where Chivington was. Lines





formed, artillery rained, and the Texans screeched their Rebel yells. Although

outnumbered, Slough managed to hold his position and beat back the Confederate force, but he was losing. It'd been a bad day for the reviled Union commander: Some of his own troops aimed a volley his way, an obvious assassination attempt. He retreated back to the Union ranch, leaving the Texans in charge of the battlefield.

Colonel William R. Scurry had led the boys in gray—rumor had it that Sibley was back in Albuquerque, inebriated.

Chivington, meanwhile, had not been idle. Led by Lieutenant Colonel Manuel Chaves' Hispanic scouts, his small group traversed 16 miles of mountainous terrain. They arrived at a bluff overlooking the entire Confederate supply train—about eighty wagons—and easily took the small force guarding it. They then destroyed food, clothing, ammunition, and extra cavalry horses and mules—everything the Confederates needed to survive.

Unable to wage war without supplies, Sibley's group sent a white flag, asking to collect the dead and wounded. Then, secretly, they began a quick retreat, hoping to go back to Fort Bliss. They even left their wounded behind.

Canby's adjutant, unaware of the battle's outcome, arrived and chastised Slough for disobeying orders by leaving Fort Union. Slough, tired of the problems with his men and concerned about a possible court-martial, resigned his command and left for Denver.

After receiving word of the retreat, Canby decided it was time to chase Sibley out of New Mexico. He gathered forces at the village of Tijeras, but Sibley got to Albuquerque and left before the Union army could engage him. Even with what provisions he was able to gather there, Sibley didn't have enough ammunition for even one day's fight.

Sibley hoped to overwhelm Colonel Carson, who was left guarding Fort Craig, and take the supplies there, but Canby's army surprised him at Peralta and a skirmish ensued. A blinding sandstorm stopped the gunfire. The Confederates retreated to the west side of the Rio Grande, and Canby's troops chased them on the east side. To escape, Sibley then took an ill-fated detour through the desert, a death-march for many of his troops.

Union reinforcements from California repelled advance groups in what is now Arizona and retook Fort Bliss, driving Sibley all the way back to San Antonio. Several things had gone wrong for the hard-drinking commander: he'd thought there'd be more Southern sympathizers; he'd thought they could live off the land, not realizing that it barely supported those already there; he'd underestimated his enemy's abilities; and in addition to his alcoholism, he was seriously ill.

Sibley, disgusted and beaten, had lost more than 1,000 men and most of his supply wagons and artillery. He wrote: "The Territory of New Mexico is not worth a quarter of the blood and treasure expended in its conquest." Another soldier called the territory "utterly worthless. It never will be the abode of civilized man." For them, the campaign proved to be a fruitless sacrifice.

For the Federals, though, the repulsion of the Confederates had been a turning point. The little-known battle at Glorieta, later called the "Gettysburg of the West," proved to save the entire Southwest for the Union.



Our Vanishing Legacy

Not all of the forts and depots that played a part in New Mexico's Civil War battles are still around. Fort Thorn, near Hatch, is completely gone. Fort Fillmore, with no visible remains, is now a privately-owned pecan orchard. A Walgreens occupies the place where the Albuquerque depot once stood (near Old Town).

Fort Craig's remaining walls, however, were designated a National Historical Site, and there is a self-guided tour there, along with a picnic area and restroom. Exit I-25 at San Marcial, about 35 miles south of Socorro, then take Old Highway 1 south for 11 miles. The battlefield of Valverde is nearby, but isn't maintained, and some of it is on private property. Best-preserved are Fort Stanton, between the towns of Capitan and Lincoln on Route 220, and Fort Union, a few miles off I-25's Watrous exit. Fort Stanton is a new State Monument, while Fort Union, which served the country until 1883, is a National Monument. A highway cuts through the battlefield of the Glorieta Pass (NM 50) and the area isn't open to the public, but guided tours can be arranged through Pecos National Historical Park, exit 299 off I-25, then south on Highway 63. Apache Canyon is located at mile marker 296 on I-25, and was also the site of a battle in the Mexican-American War.

Tenting Today on the Old Campground: Civil War Re-enactments

New Mexico's Civil War history isn't just found in stone, mortar and abandoned battlefields. More than 150 re-enactors from New Mexico and other states gather annually to camp out and relive the events surrounding the Apache Canyon and Glorieta Pass battles. Since the actual battlefield isn't open to the public, the living history museum El Rancho de las Golondrinas, fifteen miles south of Santa Fe, hosts an event. This year's battle will be May 3-4, 2008, from 10:00 am-4:00 pm.

One of the local re-enactment groups portray Kit Carson's 1st New Mexico Volunteer Infantry, Company A, (photos bottom of page) and has about 30 members who do impressions of infantry, ordnance, quartermaster, US Sanitary Commission, The First New Mexico Field Music, La Sociedad de la Entrada, Lancers of del Presidio, medical, and an ordained minister of the period. Donald C. Shoemaker, who portrays a captain, said his group will be involved with the Glorieta re-enactment (May 3-4 at La Cienega) and one at Fort Stanton, August 9-10. They also participated in the Valverde re-enactment (Feb. 29, Mar. 1-2) in Socorro. His group is always looking for more interested people—you can contact him at donald.c.shoemaker@intel.com.

If you go, perhaps you'll see Ken Dusenberry, Ward Yarbrough, or Chuck Swanberg, Civil War aficionados and living historians. They recently gave a well-researched presentation for the Albuquerque Museum docents that told about the daily life of typical soldiers of the era.

Boredom was a common problem. When not chasing the various hostile Indians or local marauders, the soldiers drilled, shined their buttons for inspections, took care of horses and moved supplies around. They drank and played cards, which wasn't officially allowed, or tried a new game called "baseball." Once in a while, they got paid. The pay scale ran from \$13.00-18.00 per month, depending on rank, and \$2.00 of it went for their clothing allowance.

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Photos: sleeping quarters for the Socorro re-enactments. Ward Yarbrough, US Infantry, Chuck Swanberg with bugle, US Cavalry. Townspeople and soldiers from Socorro re-enactment. www.1stnmvi.com

