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What to Do about Texas?
TEXAS AND THE DEPARTMENT OF NEW MEXICO IN THE CIVIL WAR

Glen Sample Ely

What to do about Texas? For more than 150 years now, this question has vexed New Mexicans. Relations between Texas and New Mexico have sometimes proved problematic. Some examples of tension include water disputes, such as the Pecos River Compact of 1948; boundary disagreements, like the Compromise of 1850 and the U.S. Supreme Court case, *New Mexico v. Texas* (1927–1928); and Texan incursions into New Mexico, such as the Santa Fe Expedition of 1841 and the Baylor-Sibley expeditions (1861–1862). This article considers the Texas question in the Department of New Mexico during the Civil War.¹

A number of older works have discussed events in the Southwest during the Civil War. Some authors have analyzed Confederate campaigns in Arizona and New Mexico. Others have studied the career of Union brigadier general James H. Carleton, commander of the Department of New Mexico. In their discussion of the Civil War, most Texas history books neglect to mention that the Union army occupied the Lone Star State west of the Pecos River from August 1862 until June 1865. Instead, the standard account presented in these studies maintains that Texas, unlike other Confederate states such as Louisiana or Virginia, successfully repelled all Union attempts to invade and occupy the state.

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Several recent scholarly works claim that the only Union occupation to occur in Texas was along the Gulf Coast and in the Lower Rio Grande region, and that by mid-1864, Texans had driven all federal troops from their soil. The actual events that unfolded west of the Pecos run directly counter to this traditional Civil War narrative of Lone Star exceptionalism. During the last three years of the sectional conflict, Union troops commanded by Carleton administered the Texas Trans-Pecos under martial law. Federal responsibilities in the region included dealing with raiding Indians and invading Confederates, as well as overseeing day-to-day civilian life. Throughout this turbulent period, the Department of New Mexico frequently grappled with the thorny issue of what to do about Texas.  

Signs that difficulties lay ahead were evident in the pre–Civil War era. Texas officials naively assumed that local New Mexicans shared their same beliefs and would enthusiastically welcome Texans as liberating heroes on their incursions into New Mexico. During the Santa Fe Expedition in 1841, however, Texans “did not find nine-tenths of New Mexico’s population ready to ‘shake off the tiresome yoke of their [Mexican] task-masters,’ . . . instead they discovered a fully mobilized Mexican citizenry, virulently anti-Texan.” Mexican forces captured the expedition and imprisoned its participants.  

Over the next twenty years, Texans apparently forgot this painful lesson, and in 1861, invaded New Mexico again. After initial advances, first by Col. John Baylor, and then by Gen. Henry H. Sibley, the Confederate offensive fizzled out in late March 1862 when Union major John M. Chivington destroyed their supply train at Apache Canyon. A postmortem on the military campaign by officers of the Fifth Regiment, Texas Mounted Volunteers, noted, “It had been erroneously supposed . . . that the citizens of New Mexico would greet us as benefactors and flock to our standard upon our approach.” The Texan
officers instead discovered “that there was not a friend to our cause in the
[New Mexico] territory, with a very few honorable exceptions.”

Forced to abandon New Mexico and retreat to San Antonio, Texas, in
June and July 1862, Lone Star troops encountered a local populace that was
not only hostile to the Southern cause but also increasingly violent. Lacking
adequate transportation and supplies for their long trek home, the Texans
attempted to purchase the needed items from Mexican Americans in the
area. Confederate colonel William Steele wrote, “The Mexican population,
justly thinking our tenure [in the region] very frail and uncertain, showed
great unwillingness to sell property of any sort for Confederate paper, which
would of course be valueless to them.” As a result, Steele “was obliged to seize
upon such supplies as were required,” which “occasioned much ill-feeling
on the part of the Mexicans.” According to Steele, the locals were upset by
the behavior of the Texans and offered “armed resistance” to their presence.

From Mesilla, New Mexico, south to Socorro, Texas, a new and different
kind of civil war erupted as depredating Confederate troops seized the belong­
ings of Mexican American residents. As starving rebel soldiers passed through
communities, they attacked local inhabitants. Residents became “enraged
against them on account of their rude treatment.” These tensions between
Texan troops and local residents resulted in several bloody and intense clashes
in the Mesilla area that claimed up to fifty lives. Violent firefights between
the retreating soldiers and two to three hundred Tejanos and Pueblo Indians
in Socorro left another twenty to fifty people dead and the town’s church
in ruins. A Texas newspaper, the Houston Tri-Weekly Telegraph, lamented,
“Instead of fighting the Yankees . . . we have to fight the Mexicans.” Many
Hispanics were relieved to see Colonel Steele’s raiding rebels finally straggle
out of the Rio Grande valley toward San Antonio.

After the Confederacy abandoned Texas west of the Pecos River in the
summer of 1862, California volunteers, under the Department of New Mexico
and the leadership of Carleton, moved into the region. Carleton assumed
command of the department on 18 September 1862. Besides overseeing
operations in New Mexico Territory, the Department of New Mexico also
controlled the District of Arizona, which included the Texas Trans-Pecos and
the area south of Fort Thorn (present-day Hatch, New Mexico).

Col. Joseph R. West, a subordinate to Carleton, commanded the District
of Arizona. West, later promoted to brigadier general, administered the dis­
trict from September 1862 until February 1864, when Col. George W. Bowie
replaced him. In an ironic twist, troops from New Mexico had occupied part
of the Lone Star State and were now issuing orders to Texans.

Carleton referred to the Union-controlled portion of the state as “North­
western Texas.” Departmental guidelines delineated the District of Arizona’s
eastern boundary at Fort Quitman, Texas, on the Rio Grande. In reality events forced the federal government to maintain a military presence farther east to the Pecos River and up into the Texas Panhandle. Union general-in-chief Henry W. Halleck granted Carleton much latitude regarding Department of New Mexico operations in the Lone Star State. "You will operate without regard to departmental lines," ordered Halleck, "and any portion of Texas which may be occupied by you will be considered as in your military department."
Confederates, Kiowas, Comanches, and Apaches were the main threats to the eastern portion of the Department of New Mexico. Although the rebels had abandoned the Texas Trans-Pecos in July 1862, they fully expected to return someday and recapture the region. If and when the Confederacy attacked, the ensuing fight would be over one of three routes: along the Canadian River, via the Fort Smith–Santa Fe Trail; up the Pecos River from Fort Lancaster and Horsehead Crossing; or via the Lower Road from San Antonio to El Paso.

To guard against a possible battle over the route along the Canadian River, the Department of New Mexico established Camp Easton in the fall of 1862. The camp was fifteen miles above the junction of the Canadian River and Utah Creek. The following year, this camp became a permanent outpost named Fort Bascom, located eight miles north of present-day Tucumcari, New Mexico, and forty miles west of the Texas state line. Aside from defending against advancing Confederates, Fort Bascom also served as an eastern buffer against Comanches and Kiowas raiding into the Department of New Mexico's jurisdiction from their strongholds in the Llano Estacado and Texas Panhandle. On a number of occasions during the Civil War, depredating Indians proved a more lethal threat to departmental operations than did invading Texans. Additionally, Fort Bascom provided flanking protection for Carleton's headquarters at Fort Marcy in Santa Fe, and for Fort Union, the department's main supply depot situated northeast of Las Vegas, New Mexico.

Freighters hauling military supplies from Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, and St. Louis, Missouri, to Fort Union typically used either the Raton or Cimarron routes. Both of these trails entered New Mexico from the northeastern corner of the territory. Carleton's primary concern remained keeping these transportation arteries open. If raiding Indians or Texans severed these lifelines, the consequences would be devastating. As Maj. John C. McFerran of the Quartermaster Department noted, the entire department depended on Fort Union, which "received and stored [supplies], and from thence distributed as required, by wagon transportation, to the various posts and commands."

Fort Sumner, New Mexico, and Fort Stanton, New Mexico, protected the department's eastern boundary along the Llano Estacado and Texas Panhandle. Fort Sumner, on the Pecos River, also guarded the approach to an overland road leading southeast to the Texas settlements. During the Civil War, this Pecos outpost included the Bosque Redondo Indian Reservation for Navajo and Apache tribes. South of Fort Sumner, the next federal outpost was at Fort Stanton, situated on the Rio Bonito, which is a tributary of the Hondo River. Beginning in September 1862, General Carleton ordered Col. Christopher "Kit" Carson to keep a company of men at the junction of the
Hondo and Pecos rivers “to guard us against being surprised by a [Texan] force coming up the Pecos from Fort Lancaster.”

Carleton established the command center for the department’s sub-district, the District of Arizona, in Mesilla. Military life in Mesilla was challenging. Periodic flooding occasionally left stagnant pools of water and clouds of mosquitoes around town, which resulted in a high rate of malarial fever among residents. By February 1863, district commander West ordered his chief medical officer, Dr. O. M. Bryan, to assess whether Mesilla or a more southern location in Franklin (now El Paso), Texas, offered a healthier locale for district headquarters. Bryan determined that from a sanitary and hygienic point of view, Franklin was the superior location. Better drainage generally prevented flooding in Franklin, and rates of scurvy were far lower than in Mesilla. The doctor found that residents in Mesilla paid “little attention to the raising of vegetables,” which resulted in high produce prices. The doctor noted that fruits and vegetables were “generally in abundance and prices reasonable” in Franklin.

Bryan’s most serious health complaint about Mesilla concerned the numerous “grog shops” and prostitutes that plagued the town. He lamented, “The most visible means of support among the male inhabitants . . . is the retail of whisky.” The doctor described many of the women in Mesilla as having “no other means of obtaining a living than the retail of venereal disease in its various forms; the market is glutted and prices reduced.” Bryan concluded that with so many temptations at hand, it was “very difficult to prevent (by way of discipline) . . . disease and demoralization” among the troops. Franklin, in
comparison, had few prostitutes and little whiskey available. As a result, the
doctor noted, he seldom saw “a case of syphilis or debauch.”

After receiving Bryan’s report, West recommended that Carleton move
the district’s garrison, depot, and headquarters to Hart’s Mill, Texas, two
miles north of Franklin. Carleton approved the request. The following year,
in 1864, the District of Arizona shifted its operational center once again, this
time to Franklin. As the commanding officers soon discovered, moving the
garrison and headquarters did not prevent corrupting influences from also
relocating. A military inspection of Franklin in early 1864 found that “lewd
women” were living in public quarters on the army post and recommended
action “to correct this demoralizing practice.”

In addition to cracking down on military vices, West’s responsibilities also
included enforcing martial law in Union-occupied Texas and appointing
administrators for local communities. All appointed officials, West stated,
“shall hold office at the pleasure of the said commanding officer or his suc­
c essor, during good behavior and until such time as the civil shall replace
the military authorities in said county of El Paso, Texas.” In April 1863, the
District of Arizona commander selected Miguel Saenz to serve as the alcalde,
or chief executive, of Franklin. As part of his duties, Saenz appointed con­
stables and acted as major-domo of the acequias, or irrigation canals. West
gave the alcalde the power to arrest, to imprison, and to levy fines. Saenz
also served as prosecutor at all military tribunals charged with hearing crimes
and rendering verdicts in El Paso County, Texas. In his capacity as alcalde,
Saenz was to govern according to established Texas civil code.

As late as 1866, the commanding officer at Franklin still appointed civil
officials under martial law. Civil officers were to ensure “that justice is done
to every person under your control.” In early 1865, the commander appointed
Mr. Martin as alcalde and justice of the peace for Socorro, Texas. He also
tapped Gregorio Garcia to serve as justice of the peace in neighboring San
Elizario, Texas, empowering Garcia to arrest and confine those who refused
to work on public works projects such as the acequias. Under traditional
Spanish and Mexican law, residents who took water from the irrigation canals
were required to help repair and maintain the water system. Some citizens of
San Elizario appeared to shirk mandatory public service; so the commanding
officer ordered Garcia to jail these malingerers.

Martial law also extended to travelers. During the last two years of the war,
a wave of Texan refugees flooded the Trans-Pecos. Many of these refugees,
tired of conflict and the Confederacy, headed west for a fresh start. Some of
them, however, were rebel spies. Aware of this fact, Carleton ordered his men
to interrogate all refugees and hold any suspicious persons for examination by
a military tribunal. In addition new regulations required that anyone traveling within the Department of New Mexico's jurisdiction carry a signed passport with an attached certificate attesting that the bearer took an oath of loyalty to the United States. The only exceptions to this order were “Mexicans passing from one town or place to another.”

One benefit of martial law in northwest Texas was that the Department of New Mexico saved money. For example the army paid rent for property they used in Mesilla instead of constructing new buildings. In Franklin many of the finest buildings remained vacant after Confederate sympathizers abandoned their holdings in the summer of 1862. West and his men moved into several of these choice secessionist properties after federal authorities confiscated them. The District of Arizona commander noted, “The free occupancy of all these premises is not likely to be disturbed until the Federal courts shall be reorganized in Texas.”

The issue of confiscating rebel real estate sparked considerable controversy. In the fall of 1862, U.S. Marshal Abraham Cutler, with approval from the District Court for the Territory of New Mexico, began seizing lands belonging to “treasonous” rebels in Union-occupied El Paso County. Some of the secessionists' abandoned properties were highly prized and the Department of New Mexico utilized a number of these buildings. The military rented out the properties that it did not use. One notable lease was with businessmen Nathan Webb and Henry J. Cuniffe, who rented Hart's Mill, ranked among the county's most valuable parcels. In June 1863, Carleton ordered his subordinates to take possession of Concordia Ranch, another choice location owned by Southern sympathizer Hugh Stephenson. The military later leased the valuable property.

While Carleton sanctioned the temporary seizure of secessionists' lands, he objected when Cutler sold the confiscated property. Carleton believed such sales were illegal and argued that New Mexico's District Court had no jurisdiction in Texas. Subsequent developments proved Carleton correct. In March 1868, the U.S. Supreme Court nullified Cutler's sales of confiscated rebel property in Texas.

Despite West’s optimistic expectations of enjoying free occupancy in Franklin, the Union army eventually ended up paying rent on a number of buildings in El Paso County. For example, the Department of New Mexico leased ten dwellings in Franklin in December 1864 for nine officers, a priest, the quartermaster, commissary storehouses, and the adjutant general's office. Of these ten homes, local resident W. W. Mills collected rent on six of them.

Mills, a steadfast Unionist from Indiana, fully grasped the potential impact of government expenditures upon the local wartime economy. In 1862, he
secured an appointment from Pres. Abraham Lincoln as customs collector for El Paso County. Following the federal occupation of northwest Texas, Mills positioned himself to maximize his financial opportunities by currying favor with newly arrived Union officers.24

After the Confederates' failed incursion into New Mexico and their subsequent retreat to San Antonio, the Department of New Mexico temporarily prohibited all travel southward into Texas, except by “loyal citizens and then only on legitimate business.” Mills’s position as federal customs collector ensured that he was one of the first people allowed into Union-occupied El Paso County. Before traveling south to Franklin, Mills ingratiated himself with department officials as the person to consult regarding regional matters. He also stopped by Fort Craig, New Mexico, in early August 1862 and visited with Union colonel Marshall S. Howe. Howe solicited Mills’s assessment of “the state of affairs in Las Cruces, Mesilla, and Franklin,” since the customs collector had “resided a long time below” and was “well acquainted with all the people.”25

Mills secured a number of lucrative federal contracts and leases throughout the remainder of the war. In early 1863, he started renting properties to the Department of New Mexico. Other than his real estate investments, Mills also bid on military supply contracts. He made a tidy profit in the spring of 1863 on an agreement to supply vinegar to the Union post at Franklin. In September of that year, Mills joined forces with Webb, the post sutler at Franklin, for a considerably larger deal, totaling $9,350 ($243,100 today), to supply the army with 5,500 gallons of vinegar. Mills bragged to his father that the profits from this new arrangement “will set me on my pegs.” By March 1865, Mills continued his business ventures with the military and supplied tallow to the federal post at Franklin.26

Other El Paso County residents capitalized on the department’s wartime economy. Price Cooper, Eugene Von Patten, and A. B. Rohman supplied corn to the post at Franklin. Mills’s vinegar associate, Webb, entered into a partnership with Cuniffe to supply flour and bran to the military. Webb and Cuniffe ground their grain at Hart’s Mill, the gristmill formerly operated by Simeon Hart, a rabid secessionist and at one time the richest man in El Paso County. Like Mills and Webb, Cuniffe held several jobs at once, maximizing his revenue from the federal government. In addition to supplying grain to the army, Cuniffe also served as the U.S. Consul in El Paso del Norte (renamed Ciudad Juárez), Mexico.27

The competition for these military contracts in the Department of New Mexico occasionally turned vicious. Some rivals attempted to gain an advantage by besmirching the reputations of their competitors and questioning their patriotism. General Orders No. 4, issued in 1863, proclaimed: “All persons
who desire to furnish supplies to troops in [the Department of] New Mexico shall give unequivocal evidence of their loyalty to the U.S. government.” Anyone who was suspected of being a secessionist or providing aid to the rebels could not do business with the army.28

In November 1863, Ernest Angerstein of El Paso del Norte, Mexico, signed a contract to supply 6,000 fanegas (9,600 bushels) of corn to the Department of New Mexico for $6.75 per fanega (1.6 bushels), totaling $40,500 ($1,053,000 today). The agreement infuriated a number of competing merchants, who immediately informed Carleton that the army had paid too much for the corn. Next, these competitors began sullying Angerstein’s reputation, calling him a foreigner, traitor, and rebel collaborator. Upon receiving these reports, the army annulled the contract and solicited new proposals. The new corn bids were even higher, ranging from $7.00 to $8.00 per fanega. Ultimately, the department rejected these later offers.29

A military investigation of the Angerstein contract found that “self interest, prejudice, envy and jealousy appear to be the source of many reports, exaggerations and accusations.” Quartermaster officers discovered that a number of merchants were speculating on local commodity markets, purchasing crops months in advance from farmers, and creating deliberate shortages in order to drive up prices. By April 1865, corn deliveries to the post at Franklin had skyrocketed to $15.00 per fanega. The poorer Tejanos in neighboring San Elizario and Ysleta, Texas, could not afford the high grain costs and resorted to scouring the surrounding hillsides for wild potatoes to survive. Webb, the miller at Hart’s Mill, donated a supply of cornmeal to Ysleta to help keep residents there “from actual starvation.” In summation the investigation into the Angerstein contract concluded, “Patriotism and loyalty to a great extent... seem to be measured very much in this district, by the bestowal of Govt. patronage, favors and indulgences.”30

Patronage aside, the federal government’s economic engine sustained El Paso County during the turbulent sectional crisis. Union military contracts provided jobs and business opportunities for many locals. Despite the boon, the region’s wartime population remained small and wartime loyalties were mixed. A survey in February 1863 estimated that 2,360 people resided in the area, with 100 people living in Franklin, 500 in Socorro, 560 in Ysleta, and 1,200 in San Elizario. By comparison an El Paso County census in 1860 counted nearly twice as many inhabitants, with 4,000 residents in the region. In 1863, as in 1860, more than 90 percent of the inhabitants were Mexican American.31

The Civil War and mixed loyalties became catalysts for a series of intriguing population shifts among residents of the Trans-Pecos. When Texas joined
the Confederacy in 1861, a number of secession opponents, including Cu­
niffe, Vincent St. Vrain, and Mills, sought refuge in neutral Mexico. Living
across the Rio Grande, however, did not guarantee one's safety. On several
occasions during the war, troops from both the North and South crossed the
border, violating Mexican sovereignty. Mills recalled that in July 1861, five
Confederate soldiers seized him in El Paso del Norte, and carried him across
the river to Fort Bliss, where they imprisoned him in the guardhouse. Mills
stated, "The only reason the Confederates gave for my arrest was loyalty to
the United States Government."

By August 1862, with the Stars and Stripes fluttering over the Rio Grande
valley once more, El Paso County's wartime émigrés began returning home.
While the Union occupation enabled some residents to reoccupy their resi­
dences, it forced others to flee. Twenty secessionists, among them Stephenson,
John Gillett, and Benjamin Dowell, led a new Texan exodus across the river
into Chihuahua. The refugees were living in El Paso del Norte by October
1862. A Union officer reported that the group served as "an outpost of the
enemy," endeavoring "to learn the strength, position, and movements of our
troops, and to communicate the same to the rebel commanders in Texas."

The secessionist exiles in Mexico, like their brethren in the South, fervently
believed that their troops would recapture the Southwest. They maintained
that the Confederacy would one day stretch to the Pacific Ocean. To help
plan for this anticipated invasion, rebel military authorities needed a profes­
sonal intelligence network west of the Pecos River, an operation far beyond
the exiles' capabilities. In addition the mission required a shrewd spymaster
to run the regional network. Confederate authorities believed that Henry
Skillman was the person best suited to command such a spy company.

Skillman, a New Jersey native born in 1814, settled in El Paso County after
the U.S.-Mexico War. From 1847 to 1849, the U.S. Army employed him as
a scout. Beginning in 1851 and ending in 1861, Skillman worked as an over­
seer and stage driver for a number of mail contractors in the Southwest. In
January 1862, Texas governor Francis Lubbock appointed Skillman to raise
a regiment of frontier troops for El Paso and Presidio counties. During the
first two months of that year, Skillman served as an army hay contractor for
the Confederate invasion of New Mexico, supplying 150 tons of hay to Fort
Fillmore, New Mexico, and Fort Bliss. In May 1862, Confederate general
Sibley employed Skillman on a number of occasions to carry the army's mail
from Fort Bliss to Fort Thorn, New Mexico, and Alamosa, New Mexico.

Sibley retreated to San Antonio in July 1862. In October 1862, Confederate
brigadier general Hamilton P. Bee dispatched Skillman and twelve men to
El Paso del Norte "to observe the condition and movements of the enemy
in that section.” Bee, the commander of Texas’ Lower Rio Grande District, selected Skillman to lead the expedition because he was “one, if not the best, frontiersman now in Western Texas, and is reliable in every way.” On 18 October 1862, Skillman’s spy company left San Antonio.35

After crossing the Pecos River, Skillman left the main road to El Paso and turned onto a secondary trail leading to the Rio Grande and Presidio del Norte (now Ojinaga), Mexico. The rebel spymaster knew that if Union troops from the Department of New Mexico patrolled the Trans-Pecos, they would likely stay on primary roads since they were unfamiliar with the region’s more obscure trails. Skillman knew the region well because he traveled these trails as a U.S. Army scout in 1849 and as a chain carrier on a number of Presidio County land surveys. In order to avoid detection by Union scouts, the Confederate agents reached the Rio Grande and crossed over to Presidio del Norte.36

The spy party proceeded up the Rio Grande after passing through Presidio del Norte. Arriving at the village of Aguas Calientes, Mexico, eleven of the men went into camp to wait, while Skillman and Joe Leaton continued upstream. On 2 December 1862, the pair arrived in El Paso del Norte, where they rendezvoused with the secessionist exiles.37

During his three-day stay in El Paso del Norte, Skillman consulted with six individuals about military operations in the Department of New Mexico. Two of the people, Guadalupe Miranda and James H. Lucas, were prosperous merchants in Mesilla when the war started. Other informants included Gillett, of Franklin, and Jose Flores and Stephenson, two of Skillman’s former neighbors from Concordia, Texas. Stephenson, one of the wealthiest men in El Paso County, owned the land upon which Fort Fillmore, New Mexico, was situated, as well as a lucrative mine in the Organ Mountains near Las Cruces, New Mexico. Reportedly, he used some of his personal fortune to bankroll exile operations in El Paso del Norte.38

In his report to his superiors, Skillman discussed his consultation with the individuals in El Paso del Norte and he vouched for his sources’ reliability: “All of whom I had known before, and believe to be men of high intelligence, good information and truthfulness.” In reality the spymaster’s informants provided intelligence of mixed quality. They correctly estimated that Carleton’s forces in the Department of New Mexico did not exceed three thousand men. Yet, they erroneously claimed that Carleton would soon evacuate El Paso County and Mesilla, and retreat westward.39

Skillman also spread misinformation while gathering intelligence during his visit to El Paso del Norte. The crafty agent planted several stories including one that claimed a Confederate expedition of four to six thousand troops
would soon be leaving San Antonio in a bid to recapture the Southwest. He also warned that “the gang of secessionists in El Paso” planned to attack the Union supply depot at Franklin. The rebel invasion stories alarmed not only the diminutive Union force in the Trans-Pecos but also local Tejanos, who vividly recalled the violent clashes with Confederate soldiers only five months earlier. Shortly after Skillman’s tales began making the rounds, Mexican Americans in Socorro, Ysleta, and San Elizario panicked and a general stampede resulted, with many families fleeing across the Rio Grande to safety in Mexico.

West, commanding the District of Arizona, ordered Maj. William McMullen and his men to reinforce the federal supply depot and calm Hispanic residents. “Let the people keep cool; try and instill them some sort of confidence,” West remarked, “it is really amusing to see how that one man Skillman has frightened them.” McMullen’s efforts produced the desired effect. “The appearance of our troops . . . has quieted the fears of the people to a great extent,” the major observed, and “few [Tejanos] are now willing to acknowledge that any alarm was felt although a heavy stampede has taken place.”

Aside from soothing anxieties between Hispanics and Anglos, McMullen kept Skillman under surveillance. By 5 December 1862, Skillman concluded his interviews in El Paso del Norte. Before the spymaster and his men departed for San Antonio, he noted in his report that he left “having learned all I could hope for.” During their return trip, Skillman’s group stopped at Presidio del Norte, where they attempted “to capture and convey into Texas certain American citizens temporarily sojourning in that town.” Cross-border kidnapping had become common practice for both sides along the war-torn Rio Grande valley.

Back in Mexico, the Confederate exiles welcomed a new member, a Union deserter named Phelps. McMullen immediately issued an order for Phelps’s arrest. When Capt. E. B. Willis’s troops crossed the river and seized the deserter, a crowd of secessionist refugees quickly confronted them. Mexican officials, intimidated by the armed exiles, refused to surrender Phelps and the federal troops withdrew. Carleton discovered that he had little control over rebel Texans threatening his department from neutral Mexico.

The Department of New Mexico repeatedly requested that Mexican authorities take some action against Skillman and the Texan refugees in El Paso del Norte. Carleton instructed his subordinates to explore whether “some fair arrangement could at once be made between yourself and the authorities at El Paso to clear out that town of those who are a dread and a terror to the people and who are there to act as spies on our forces.” The Mexican authorities offered their assistance, but ultimately little changed.
Fed up, McMullen took matters into his own hands. In late December, he ordered his men into Mexico to apprehend several secessionists. The rebel agents, however, eluded capture and McMullen’s actions almost incited an international incident.

The major defended his actions and wrote to El Paso del Norte prefect Don José María Uranga. McMullen noted that Mexico permitted “the armed enemies of the United States Government to establish an outpost in the town of El Paso,” and allowed in enemies such as Skillman who endeavored “to overthrow the Government.” In addition the Confederates also conducted cross-border kidnappings. McMullen recalled the W. W. Mills incident in 1861, when officials in El Paso del Norte stood idle as rebel soldiers grabbed Mills and hauled him across the river to a prison in Texas.

In his reply to McMullen, Uranga denied that Mexican authorities had sanctioned Mills’s kidnapping. The prefect reminded McMullen that all Texan exiles had a right to asylum in Mexico, the same asylum “to which every citizen of the world is entitled to . . . whatever may be the party they belong to.” Uranga concluded by restating official Mexican policy toward the American Civil War: “In my judgment we must remain neutral in your present difficulties.” For Carleton the message was clear but of little help. He still had not resolved the question of how to handle Confederate Texans operating south of the border.

By early January 1863, Carleton developed a new, multifaceted strategy. First, he would cultivate stronger regional ties with Chihuahua governor Luis Terrazas. After initial discussions with Union emissary major David Fergusson, the governor pledged to curtail Confederate abuse of Mexican neutrality. Second, Carleton aimed to strengthen Union intelligence operations in Mexico. Fergusson enlisted Chihuahua businessman and Kentucky native Reuben W. Creel as “the confidential agent of the military authorities of the Department of New Mexico.” Creel, who would soon become the U.S. Consul in Chihuahua, reported on developments in Mexico and Texas.

Soon, a much-improved Union intelligence network began to take shape. M. M. Kimmey, Creel, and Cuniffe, the U.S. Consuls in Matamoras, Chihuahua, and El Paso del Norte respectively, worked in concert and shared intelligence. Area Unionists, including David R. Diffendorfer at El Paso del Norte, Milton Faver at Presidio del Norte, and William Hagelseib, a German at Presidio del Norte, assisted the consuls. Interestingly, other Union sources in the Presidio del Norte region included a band of friendly Apaches.

Carleton’s new strategy was imperative to the Union cause since Skillman returned to the Trans-Pecos for several weeks in late March 1863. While
Skillman kept an eye on the Union army, he continued to spread rumors of an imminent Confederate invasion. His spy company also boasted a new intelligence asset: a close friend and former stagecoaching associate named Thomas Rife. When Skillman requested Rife’s transfer to his group, he noted that he needed “not only good men, but good frontiersmen,” adding that Rife’s “perfect knowledge of the upper country [West Texas]” made his service invaluable to the Southern war effort. Indeed, the combination of Skillman and Rife’s considerable surveillance abilities posed an increased threat to the Department of New Mexico’s tenuous hold on lands west of the Pecos.49

Carleton understood well that Skillman’s group posed a threat to his department. In January 1863 and again in April, the Union general requested that the governor of Chihuahua prevent Confederates from using Mexico as a safe haven from which to spy on the United States. In his replies, Terrazas assured Carleton that he would take prompt action to prevent a recurrence. Despite such assurances, the rebel agents continued to enjoy free access through Mexico.50

While Carleton took Skillman’s spying seriously, he dismissed the recurring Confederate invasion rumors as nothing more than the boy who cried wolf. The Union general wrote, “At this moment I consider such probabilities so remote as to justify me in employing the troops under my command in chastising hostile tribes of Indians.” Certainly, the Indian threat was of more immediate concern, but the rumors forced Carleton to guard against any potential Texas incursion. This was a wise precaution, as the rebels were in fact actively formulating plans to recapture the Southwest. In January 1863, the Confederate commander of Texas, Maj. Gen. John Bankhead Magruder, endorsed a two-pronged invasion into the Department of New Mexico’s territory. One force would travel along the Canadian River through the Texas Panhandle and sever the Union supply lines to Fort Union. The second group would move through the Trans-Pecos, capturing the Union strongholds of Fort Bliss and Franklin.51

Magruder delayed sending this expedition until the Union campaign for control of the Mississippi River was resolved. “The operations of the enemy have, for the present,” he wrote, “put a stop to any movements in that direction [the Southwest].” Magruder’s superior, Gen. Edmund Kirby Smith, commanding the Confederacy west of the Mississippi River, vetoed any immediate invasion of the Trans-Pecos, New Mexico, and Arizona. Although Kirby Smith appreciated such patriotic efforts, he urgently needed all available rebel troops at “points more exposed to the approach of the enemy,” such as the Mississippi. When Vicksburg and the Mississippi fell to the Union in the summer of 1863, the invasion of the Southwest quickly dropped to a
low priority status. The federal campaigns at Galveston, Texas; Sabine Pass, Texas; Brownsville, Texas; and the Red River over the next year ensured that the Trans-Pecos offensive stayed on the back burner.  

Union offensives in the eastern half of Texas during 1863 and 1864 heightened Confederate concerns that the Department of New Mexico might also launch an attack east of the Pecos River, threatening the state's western flank. These fears were realized when Union general Nathanial P. Banks captured Brownsville in November 1863. Banks wrote to Carleton via U.S. consuls Kimmey and Creel, suggesting a coordinated movement into the interior of Texas.  

Carleton endorsed Banks's plan in principle. However, he lacked the men and the resources to participate. Throughout the Civil War, federal troop levels in Arizona, New Mexico, and West Texas rarely exceeded three thousand men. With Carleton's forces stretched thin, the Union general informed his superiors that he could not address all the challenges that confronted him, let alone mount an invasion into Texas. Instead, Carleton focused on securing his department and maintaining a defensive posture against the Confederates on his eastern flank.

In September 1862, Carleton ordered guards stationed at Hueco Tanks, east of Franklin, to watch the upper road to the Pecos, and at Fort Quitman on the Rio Grande, to cover the lower road to San Antonio. Carleton also directed the commander at Fort Stanton to post pickets on the Pecos River to watch for rebel forces marching up the watershed into New Mexico. Troops from Fort Stanton established scouting camps on the Pecos. One camp was at its junction with the Hondo River, and a second was downstream in Texas at Horsehead Crossing.

Scouts camped at Horsehead Crossing on the Pecos from April through June 1863 reported no signs of the enemy or Indians. Then, on 19 July 1863, two hundred Apaches came close to annihilating Lt. Juan Marquez and his scouting party during a six-hour running fight on the Pecos. After exhausting their ammunition, Marquez and his men made a frantic dash for the river, with the warriors in close pursuit. The soldiers slowly wound their way upstream by hiding beneath the river's tall bluffs, and they eventually evaded their pursuers. Although the men suffered one fatality and several wounded, they had "fought well" against thirteen to one odds. The commander of Fort Stanton called their escape "a miracle." When a subsequent patrol came upon the battle site, they found articles of clothing "saturated with blood" and "pools of blood . . . on the ground occupied by the Indians."  

During the next patrol downstream from Fort Stanton to Horsehead Crossing, the commanding officer, 2nd Lt. Elisha E. Latimer, waited tensely for an attack: "[I kept a] sharp lookout for Indians as I fear them more than I do the
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Texans. My detachment is much too small for the [scouting] duty.” Latimer’s superior, Maj. Joseph Smith, agreed, and at the end of July, cancelled the Union picket at Horsehead Crossing. Smith, the commander at Fort Stanton, believed that this camp on the Pecos was not safe for less than a company of men, “on account of the Indians running off their stock.”

Smith claimed that he lacked sufficient men to keep a permanent camp downriver in Texas, but he vowed to keep scouting on the Hondo River as far as the Pecos. “At such time as it will be safe” and when the Apaches were less menacing, the major would resume the patrols south to Horsehead Crossing. During October 1863, one scout ventured only to the Pecos River’s junction with Delaware Creek, near the Texas-New Mexico state line, before returning home. Fort Stanton, with its manpower stretched to the breaking point, could not protect its own patrols. The Indian attack on the Pecos River illustrated once again just how tenuous a hold the Union exerted over the Trans-Pecos.

Because Smith withdrew his pickets from Texas, he missed intercepting Skillman at Horsehead Crossing in mid-November. Confederate authorities in San Antonio, worried that Carleton might make a move eastward, had ordered their spies westward to learn the latest intelligence on Union operations. One spy company, composed of Rife and six men, scouted the lower road to Fort Stockton, while a second detachment under Skillman reconnoitered the upper road to Franklin and El Paso del Norte. By this time, Trans-Pecos residents understood that Skillman’s visits entailed only spying and did not portend an imminent rebel invasion. One local said that despite the spurious invasion rumors over the preceding year, some people still raised “a big hullabaloo” whenever Skillman appeared, “as in these times it don’t take much stretching to make a frog bigger than a mastodon.” After spending several weeks in the region collecting information about Carleton’s forces, the spymaster returned to San Antonio.

In January 1864, Skillman went to Houston to receive a new assignment from Magruder. In addition to the usual task of collecting information on the Department of New Mexico, Magruder directed his spymaster to compile a map of the best routes for moving troops to West Texas. The general wanted the logistics in place before he made Confederate troops available for an invasion of the Southwest. To fund the spy company’s trip westward, Magruder authorized the sale of five hundred dollars worth of cotton in Mexico. Skillman left San Antonio on 6 February 1864 and went into camp near Presidio del Norte on 3 April.

By the time Skillman returned to Presidio del Norte in April 1864, Union counterintelligence operations in the Trans-Pecos had markedly improved, thanks to the able efforts of Carleton, the U.S. consuls in Mexico, and Capt.
Albert H. French, one of the department’s finest field officers. French and his men surprised Skillman’s spy company in camp on 15 April 1864. The Union troops captured four of the rebels and killed another four, including Skillman. Two others, Rife and William Ford, escaped across the Rio Grande.⁶¹

Carleton dealt Confederate spy operations in Mexico and the Trans-Pecos a serious blow. Magruder’s intelligence network west of the Pecos River never fully recovered. Others, such as James W. Magoffin, an ardent secessionist and former post sutler at Fort Bliss, offered their services as spies. No one, however, could fill Skillman’s shoes. Carleton had greatly weakened one of Texas’s most potent threats to his department.⁶²

As one menace from Texas faded, another quickly took form in the Texas Panhandle region. A month after Skillman’s death, “a band of guerillas” attacked several freighting trains on the plains east of New Mexico. The first raid took place on 18 May 1864, at Cedar Springs, where bandits stole seventy to eighty mules from freighter Manuel Antonio Otero’s wagon train. Two days later and sixty miles south of Cedar Springs, these same “rogues,” described as forty-eight Americans, waylaid the wagon train of freighter D. Felix Garcia while in camp at Palo Duro Creek.⁶³ After killing one of the Indian herders, the desperados robbed the freighters of their clothing, provisions, and livestock.

New Mexico governor Henry Connelly speculated that the thieves were from Franklin and in pursuit of a Mr. Moya, who was traveling through the region with a large amount of gold. Connelly remarked, “I should not be surprised if some of the correspondents of Mr. Skillman about El Paso, had something to do in this robbery.” Even in death, Skillman cast a long shadow.⁶⁴
For the remainder of the war, the greatest Texan menace facing the Department of New Mexico came not from Confederates, but from Kiowas and Comanches attacking wagon trains on the Santa Fe Trail, from Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, to Fort Union. Indians from the Texas Panhandle and Llano Estacado committed depredations along the supply routes and then returned to their camps. A number of these camps were in Texas, along the Palo Duro Creek–Canadian River watershed, near modern Spearman, Texas, and in Yellow House Canyon, in Lubbock and Crosby counties. In the summer of 1864, the tribes decimated the freighting business to and from New Mexico. In July and August, Kiowa and Comanche warriors killed twenty-three teamsters and made off with hundreds of mules and oxen. The two tribes were jealous that U.S. Indian agents had appeased raiding Cheyennes and Arapahoes with a generous amount of supplies while they had received nothing.

In early August, seventy Kiowa and Comanche warriors peacefully approached a wagon camp and after visiting a short while, suddenly attacked their hosts. The raiders killed five Americans, but let the Mexican freighters go free, and even provided them a yoke of oxen for their journey home. The Indians told the Mexicans “to go back to New Mexico as they did not wish to kill them, but that they would kill every white man that came on the road.” After learning of this attack, Carleton angrily observed, “The discrimination which the Comanches have frequently made in favor of the [Mexican] people, and against Anglo-Americans cannot be regarded in any other light than as an insult to the Government.”

In mid-October officers from both Fort Sumner and Fort Bascom learned that three thousand Comanches and Kiowas were encamped at Palo Duro Creek, east of Fort Bascom. Mexican Comancheros (native New Mexican traders) returning from a trading expedition at Palo Duro Creek reported seeing large herds of American horses and mules at the Indian camp, many of them branded “U.S.” Carleton ordered Colonel Carson to mount a retaliatory expedition and teach the depredating tribes a lesson. On 6 November 1864, Carson’s force of 410 men, composed of soldiers, Apaches, and Utes, left Fort Bascom and marched east into Texas along the north side of the Canadian River.

On 25 November 1864, between one and three thousand warriors attacked Carson’s command at Adobe Walls on the Canadian River just south of present-day Spearman. The two sides fought fiercely in a series of running engagements lasting from morning until evening. Despite the Comanches and Kiowas’ overwhelming numerical superiority, they were unable to overrun the Union force. The wise advice of Carson’s Apache and Ute scouts,
the protective walls of the old adobe fort, and the two mountain howitzers ably manned by Lt. George H. Pettis's crew saved Carson's command from the same fate as Gen. George Armstrong Custer twelve years later.68

Although the Battle of Adobe Walls sent a strong message to raiding Native Americans, the persistent Indian threat compelled Carleton to commit considerable resources and manpower to protecting his supply routes for the remainder of the war. One-third of the Department of New Mexico's troops remained "on the plains" escorting wagon trains and teamsters as late as May 1865. Clashes with various Indian tribes, not Confederates, continued to generate the bulk of Union casualties in the Department of New Mexico between August 1862 and June 1865.69

Texas surrendered on 2 June 1865, and the Civil War finally ended for the Department of New Mexico. In retrospect, Carleton, with his spare resources, often exerted only the most tenuous hold over his command. Nevertheless, he managed to keep the area under Union control. Despite numerous Comanche and Kiowa raids, the Union general protected his vital supply lines to Kansas by escorting teamsters along the Cimarron Route. Carleton also restored law and order to the Texas Trans-Pecos, a region left in chaos following the Confederate retreat from New Mexico in the summer of 1862.

Although the rebel Texans never mounted a reinvasion of the Southwest, spies and exiles in Mexico forced Carleton to devote much of his attention to combating their machinations. After a two-year struggle, the general struck a decisive blow against the Confederate intelligence network in West Texas by eliminating their valued spy. Skillman's death effectively signaled the passing of the long-held rebel dream of a Southern empire stretching to the Pacific.

A number of Texas history books neglect to mention that the enemy occupied part of the state, the Trans-Pecos, for almost three years during the Civil War. Other Lone Star studies only briefly mention the rebel occupation west of the Pecos and often minimize the area's importance to the Confederacy. Nonetheless, the fact remains that in western Texas, the Department of New Mexico and its commander, Carleton, enjoyed some measure of success. Any final assessment of Carleton's performance during the war should consider how he addressed the age-old question, "What to do about Texas?" The record shows that in this regard, Carleton and the Department of New Mexico answered this question, and answered it effectively.

Notes

1. Regarding the Pecos River Compact, see Handbook of Texas Online, s.v. "Pecos River" (by Delmar J. Hayter), http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/PP/rmp2.
html. For more on the Compromise of 1850 and the court case New Mexico v. Texas, see Handbook of Texas Online, s.v. “Compromise of 1850” (by Roger A. Griffin), http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/CC/nbc2.html; and Handbook of Texas Online, s.v. “New Mexico v. Texas” (by John H. McNeely), http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/NN/nmri.html.

2. In works that deal with the Southwest during the Civil War, historians generally focus on the Confederate campaigns in Arizona and New Mexico, or the career of Brig. Gen. James H. Carleton, Union commander of the Department of New Mexico. Historians Jerry D. Thompson, Donald Frazier, John P. Wilson, and L. Boyd Finch have written a number of studies on the Civil War in New Mexico and Arizona and on Confederate general Henry H. Sibley’s failed New Mexico campaign in 1862. Historian Aurora Hunt has studied Carleton and his command of the Department of New Mexico. Historian Gerald Thompson has examined the Union administration of the Bosque Redondo Indian Reservation at Fort Sumner, New Mexico. Due to the solid scholarship on these topics, events concerning the western part of New Mexico Territory, Arizona, Navajos, and the Bosque Redondo Indian Reservation will not be discussed in this paper. For more on Texas Civil War narratives, see Seymour V. Connor, Texas: A History (Arlington Heights, Ill.: AHM Publishing Corp., 1971), 197; Rupert Norval Richardson, Texas, The Lone Star State, Prentice-Hall History Series (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1943), 252; Rupert Norval Richardson, Texas: The Lone Star State, 8th ed. (Upper Saddle River, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 2001), 218; Robert A. Calvert, Arnoldo De León, and Gregg Cantrell, The History of Texas, 3d ed. (Wheeling, Ill.: Harlan Davidson, 2002), 140; Randolph B. Campbell, Gone to Texas: A History of the Lone Star State (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 252, 258; Stephen A. Townsend, The Yankee Invasion of Texas, Canseco-Keck History series (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2006), 148; Stephen A. Dupree, Planting the Union Flag in Texas: The Campaigns of Major General Nathaniel P. Banks in the West, Red River Valley Books series (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2008), 198; Jerry D. Thompson, ed., New Mexico Territory during the Civil War: Wallen and Evans Inspection Reports, 1862–1863 (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2008); Jerry D. Thompson, “Drama in the Desert: The Hunt for Henry Skillman in the Trans-Pecos, 1862–1864,” Password 37 (fall 1992): 107–26; Martin Hardwick Hall, “The Formation of Sibley’s Brigade and the March to New Mexico,” in Lone Star Blue and Gray: Essays on Texas in the Civil War, ed. Ralph A. Wooster, Fred H. and Ella Mae Moore Texas History Reprint Series (Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 1995), 149; and Ralph A. Wooster, Texas and Texans in the Civil War (Austin, Tex.: Eakin Press, 1995), 42. Thompson, Martin Hardwick Hall, and Ralph A. Wooster are among the few scholars that discuss events in Trans-Pecos Texas after 1862.

3. Andrés Reséndez, ed., A Texas Patriot on Trial in Mexico: José Antonio Navarro and the Texan Santa Fe Expedition, Library of Texas series (Dallas, Tex.: Degolyer Library and William P. Clements Center for Southwest Studies, Southern Methodist University, 2005), xix. While Texas exerted a questionable claim to New Mexico as part of its republic, New Mexico residents considered themselves citizens of Mexico and viewed the Santa Fe Expedition in 1841 as an aggressive encroachment into Mexican territory.

4. The Texan officers submitted their assessments in May 1862. Wallen, New Mexico Territory during the Civil War, 2–6; and John P. Wilson, When the Texans Came: Missing


9. Various period maps also show the Fort Smith–Santa Fe Road as the Fort Smith–Albuquerque Road.


12. Feeding Indians and Union troops at Fort Sumner required considerable supplies of beef. James Patterson of Illinois, William C. Franks of Alabama, and Thomas L. Roberts, former Union captain in the First Infantry, California Volunteers, sensed a lucrative opportunity. They formed a partnership in the summer of 1864 to supply Texas cattle to Fort Sumner and the Bosque Redondo Reservation. Patterson and Franks traveled into Confederate Texas to make surreptitious arrangements with a number of Lone Star cattlemen, including John Chisum. On occasion Carleton provided escort for Texas herds coming up the Pecos River to Fort Sumner. Contrary to popular legend, cattlemen Charles Goodnight and Oliver Loving did not establish the famous Texas cattle trail to Fort Sumner in 1866 that bears their names. Instead, Texas ranchers who traded with the Union army blazed this trail two years earlier. For more on this clandestine trade, see Glen Sample Ely, "Gone from Texas and Trading with the Enemy: New Perspectives on Civil War West Texas," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 110 (April 2007): 455-63. In May 1863, Fort Sumner and Fort Stanton had aggregate troop strengths of 112 and 100, respectively. In April 1864, Fort Sumner and Fort Stanton maintained a contingent of 213 and 87 soldiers. By May 1865, troop strength rose at Fort Sumner to 317 soldiers and declined at Fort Stanton to just 70. Department of New Mexico Troop Returns, 10 May 1863; Department of New Mexico Troop Returns, April 1864; and Troop Strength Report, 14 May 1865. See also Brig. Gen. James H. Carleton to Thomas, 30 September 1862, r. 123, M619, RG 94, NA. Col. Christopher "Kit" Carson sent scouts down the Pecos through the end of 1862.


14. Ibid.

15. Dr. O. M. Bryan to Brig. Gen. Joseph R. West, 26 February 1863, Unregistered
Letters and Orders Received, compiled 1862–1870, District of Arizona, pt. 3, ARC Identifier 1715290, MLR At-3 20, RG 393, NA. In May 1863, the military post in Las Cruces, New Mexico (adjacent to Mesilla), reported an aggregate strength of 97 troops. Department of New Mexico Troop Returns, 10 May 1863. In April 1864, troop strength reached 195 soldiers, and in May 1865, the total reached 106 men. Department of New Mexico Troop Returns, April 1864; and Troop Strength Report, 14 May 1865. For the location of the post in Las Cruces, see Anderson, Map of the Military Department of New Mexico.


17. 2d Lt. Joseph F. Bennett to Maj. William McMullen, Special Orders No. 20, 7 April 1863, box 9, General Orders, 1863–1864, entry 18, Fort Bliss, Texas, pt. 5, RG 393, NA. Carleton declared martial law over the Union-occupied Trans-Pecos. For examples of Carleton’s martial law decrees, see Brig. Gen. James H. Carleton, Proclamation Assuming Control over Arizona as its Military Governor, 8 June 1862, Headquarters, Unregistered Letters Received, June 1862–September 1862, Department of New Mexico, RG 393, NA; and General Orders No. 15, 14 August 1862, Headquarters, Unregistered Letters Received, June 1862–September 1862, Department of New Mexico, RG 393, NA.


19. Maj. Joseph Smith to Commanding Officer at Franklin, Texas, General Orders No. 9, 21 June 1864, box 9, General Orders, 1863–1864, entry 18, Fort Bliss, Texas, pt. 5, RG 393, NA. For more on the Texan refugees and the rebel spies among them, see Ely, “Gone from Texas and Trading with the Enemy,” 452–55. One such military tribunal occurred on 22 October 1864 in Santa Fe, New Mexico. See box 1, Miscellaneous Letters Received, 1863–1866, entry 3161, Department of New Mexico, pt. 1, RG 393, NA.

20. Brig. Gen. Joseph R. West to Capt. Benjamin C. Cutler, 27 February 1863, in OR, ser. 1, vol. 50, pt. 2, 330. In May 1863, aggregate troop strength at Hart’s Mill, Texas, was 228. By April 1864, the number of troops at Franklin, Texas (the new district headquarters that replaced Hart’s Mill), increased to 372 men, making the military post the second-largest garrison in the Department of New Mexico. By May 1865, troop strength in Franklin declined to 85 men. Department of New Mexico (including the District of Arizona) aggregate strength for May 1863 totaled 2,866 soldiers. In April 1864, the department had 3,619 troops, and by May 1865, only a total of 2,313 men remained. Department of New Mexico Troop Returns, 10 May 1863; Department of New Mexico Troop Returns, April 1864; and Troop Strength Report, 14 May 1865. This decline was the result of expired enlistments combined with a dearth of
re-enlistments and reinforcements. Carleton’s pleas to Union general-in-chief Henry W. Halleck for more troops in the second half of 1864 and again in early 1865 proved largely unpersuasive.


23. Report of Persons and Articles Employed and Hired, January 1865, Quartermaster Reports and Returns, 1865, entry 510, Fort Bliss and Franklin, Texas, pt. 3, RG 393,
Another El Paso County resident, A. B. Rohman, was also active in leasing buildings to the federal army during this period. Monthly fees for each building typically ranged from six to forty dollars ($156 to $1,040 today). In February 1865, W. W. Mills collected $234.93 in rent ($6,108.18 today). Abstract of Expenditures, February 1865, Quartermaster Reports and Returns, 1865, entry 510, Fort Bliss and Franklin, Texas, pt. 3, RG 393, NA.


27. Abstract of Purchases Paid at Franklin, Texas, March 1865, Quartermaster Reports and Returns, 1865, entry 510, Fort Bliss and Franklin, Texas, pt. 3, RG 393, NA. In March 1865, Eugene Von Patten furnished 14,000 pounds of corn to the army at Franklin for $1,200 ($31,200). Nathan Webb and Henry J. Cuniffe supplied 10,445 pounds of bran for $365.57 ($9,528.22). Price Cooper delivered 718 feet of tallow, 1,680 pounds of corn, and 22,400 pounds of hay, for a total of $526.70 ($13,694.20). Three months earlier, Cooper signed a 600-ton hay contract for the post at Franklin, at $27.50 per ton, or for a total of $16,500 ($429,000). See U.S. Congress, House, Contracts Made by the Quartermaster’s Department, 1865, 38th Cong., 2nd Sess., 1864–1865, H. Exec. Doc. 84, vol. 14, serial 1230, p. 124. Regarding Cooper’s contracts, in December 1862, residents of Franklin voiced “much complaint” after Cooper neglected to pay his hay cutters, the effect of which “greatly injured the credit of the Government with the working class,” as “they cannot distinguish the difference between the Govt. and a contractor.” Maj. William McMullen to Brig. Gen. Joseph R. West, 6 December 1862, Unregistered Letters Received, District of Arizona, pt. 3, RG 393, NA. See also Porter, “Letters Home,” pt. 4, 188; and Mills, Forty Years at El Paso, 177. Early in the war, Simeon Hart supplied goods to Confederate troops at Fort Bliss. Later, he became a major and quartermaster for the Confederate army in Texas. See Simeon Hart File, Confederate Papers Relating to Citizens or Business Firms, 1861–1865, microcopy 346 [hereafter microcopy number, RG 109, NA].


30. Ibid.; and 1st Lt. James H. Toole to Col. John C. McFerran, 3 April 1865, Quartermaster Reports and Returns, 1865, entry 510, Fort Bliss and Franklin, Texas, pt. 3, RG 393, NA.

31. El Paso County, Texas, Federal Census, 1860, r. 1293, microfilm, (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Record Service, 1867), *Eighth Census of the United States*, microcopy 653, Records of the Bureau of Census, RG 29, National Archives, Washington, D.C.; and “Itinerary,” Maj. David Fergusson to 2d Lt. Joseph F. Bennett, 18 February 1863, box 1, Miscellaneous Records, 1850–1866, entry 3183, Department of New Mexico, pt. 1, RG 393, NA. This itinerary came from a journal documenting a roundtrip from Mesilla, New Mexico, to Chihuahua, Mexico, between 6 January and 12 February 1863. This last item cited is an unpublished journal chronicling Fergusson’s trip, which accompanied his published report. This trip itinerary is important as it contains many firsthand observations of everyday life in Mexico, Texas, and New Mexico during the Civil War.

32. Porter, “Letters Home,” pt. 3, 121, 125; and W. W. Mills to Maj. William McMullen, 1 January 1863, Unregistered Letters Received, District of Arizona, pt. 3, RG 393, NA. Mills claimed that Hart arranged for the Confederate soldiers to wrongfully kidnap and imprison him in 1861. In 1870 an El Paso County jury agreed and ordered Hart to pay Mills $50,000 ($1.3 million today) for Hart’s wrongful kidnapping and imprisonment of Mills in July and August 1861. See El Paso County District Court Records, 9 November 1870, University of Texas at El Paso Special Collections Library, University of Texas at El Paso.


34. Ralph P. Bieber, ed., *Exploring Southwestern Trails, 1846–1854*, Southwest Historical Series (Glendale, Calif.: Arthur H. Clark Company, 1938), 311–12; El Paso County, Texas, Federal Census, 1860, p. 3, r. 1293, M653, RG 29, NA; and Special Orders No. 1, 4 January 1862, chapt. 8, vol. 277, p. 28, Miscellaneous Special Orders, Adjutant General of Texas, 1862–1865, RG 109, NA. Henry Skillman and his brother William D. Skillman, in partnership with a Mr. Cochran, received $3,520 in Confederate money for delivering 148 tons of hay. Henry also collected $250 for his four trips as a military courier to New Mexico. From 1851 to 1854, Henry worked as a mail contractor in Texas and New Mexico. Throughout 1861 William served the San Antonio–San Diego Mail Line as Deputy Postmaster and Agent in Mesilla, New Mexico. In September 1862, William received permission to travel to Richmond, Virginia, on matters pertaining to his “private business.” Henry Skillman and William D. Skillman Citizens Files, M346, RG 109, NA; and *Mesilla (N.Mex.) Times*, 24 August 1861.


36. Ibid. The secondary road that Skillman took from Leon Holes, Texas, to Presidio del Norte, Mexico, was part of the famous freighting trail that ran from Chihuahua, Mexico, to San Antonio and Indianapolis, Texas. Presidio County, Texas, land surveys from the 1850s list Skillman as a chain carrier on a number of surveys ranging from Fort Davis to Spencer’s Ranch. For more on wartime intelligence operations in Presidio del Norte and Texas’s Big Bend, see Glen Sample Ely, “Skullduggery at Spencer’s Ranch: Civil War Intrigue in West Texas,” *Journal of Big Bend Studies* 21 (2009): 9–29.

38. Skillman Report; Mills, Forty Years at El Paso, 191; El Paso County, Texas, Federal Census, 1860, pp. 3, 9, r. 1293, M653, RG 29, NA; and New Mexico Territory, Federal Census, 1860, pp. 3, 61, r. 712, M653, RG 29, NA. Stephenson leased Fort Fillmore, New Mexico, to the Confederate army and furnished supplies to General Sibley at Fort Bliss during the Confederate campaign in New Mexico. See Hugh Stephenson Citizens File, M346, RG 109, NA; and Maj. William McMullen to Brig. Gen. Joseph R. West, 1 December 1862, Unregistered Letters Received, District of Arizona, pt. 3, RG 393, NA.

39. Skillman Report. Aggregate troop strength for the Department of New Mexico reached 2,866 men in May 1863. This total included troops stationed in Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas. Department of New Mexico Troop Returns, 10 May 1863.


42. Skillman Report; and Brig. Gen. Joseph R. West to Maj. David Fergusson, 3 January 1863, in OR, ser. 1, vol. 15, p. 635. Skillman omitted this kidnapping attempt from his official report, noting that nothing of interest occurred during his return trip. Skillman’s party may have tried to seize Union sympathizers living in Presidio del Norte. One of these targeted sympathizers may have been William Hagelseib, who regularly provided intelligence to the Department of New Mexico. The kidnap attempt could also be related to the ongoing feud between Ed Hall and John Burgess that sparked several violent border incidents at Presidio del Norte during the Civil War. For more on Hagelseib, Hall, and Burgess, see Ely, “Skullduggery at Spencer’s Ranch,” 10–11, 21–24. During Skillman’s trip in October–December 1862, he also established a communications network at Presidio del Norte. Every few months, either he or an associate would pass through, collecting any waiting messages or letters. For more on this practice, see Winfield Scott Garner Statement, in Brig. Gen. James H. Carleton to Col. William Hoffman, 27 June 1864, Letters Received, 1864, Records of the Commissary General of Prisoners, 1861–1905, C729, Record Group 249, National


Don José Maria Uranga to Maj. William McMullen, 29 December 1862, Unregistered Letters Received, District of Arizona, pt. 3, RG 393, NA.


In January 1863, Confederate military authorities placed Tom Rife on temporary detached service from his cavalry unit to join Skillman's group. The following year, Rife received a permanent assignment to the spy company. See Jan. and Feb. 1864 Company Muster Roll; March 1865 Regimental Return (detached service records); and Henry Skillman to Col. John S. Ford, 4 February 1864; all from Thomas Rife,


51. Brig. Gen. James H. Carleton to Brig. Gen. Lorenzo Thomas, 10 May 1863, r. 195, M619, RG 94, NA; and Maj. Gen. John Bankhead Magruder to General S[amuel]. Cooper, 8 January 1863, chapt. 2, vol. 132, Letters Sent, District of Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona (TNMA), RG 109, NA. Maj. Gen. John Bankhead Magruder appointed Col. Spruce M. Baird to command the expedition into Union territory, which was to proceed through Texas and New Mexico to Arizona, and “make a lodgment in that country.” Although Baird, a prominent secessionist from New Mexico, was “an officer and a gentleman of much merit,” as of January 1863, he still had not raised the necessary troops for such a movement. Maj. Gen. John Bankhead Magruder to Gen. S[amuel]. Cooper, 8 January 1863.


party on horseback at Horsehead Crossing in December 1862. Before the war, Daily drove stagecoaches with Skillman. Although Skillman was in the area at the time, he did not mention this Horsehead Crossing encounter to his superiors. Another possibility was that the rebels on the Pecos were secessionist exiles from El Paso led by the Olguin brothers. Union major McMullen reported that these Indian scouts were shadowing federal patrols in the Trans-Pecos during December 1862. See Brig. Gen. Joseph R. West to Capt. Benjamin C. Cutler, in OR, ser. 1, vol. 50, pt. 2, pp. 266–67; and Maj. William McMullen to Brig. Gen. Joseph R. West, 6 December 1862, Capt. Nathaniel J. Pishon to Brig. Gen. Joseph R. West, 22 December 1862, and Brig. Gen. Joseph R. West to Capt. Benjamin C. Cutler, 28 December 1862. Unregistered Letters Received, District of Arizona, pt. 3, RG 393, NA.


59. Maj. Andrew G. Dickinson ordered Rife and Skillman west in November 1863. See Maj. Andrew G. Dickinson to Turner, 23 November 1863, Andrew G. Dickinson Confederate Compiled Service Record, M323, RG 109, NA; and C. B. Miller to Ernest Angerstein, 13 December 1863, Letters Received, r. 283, M619, RG 94, NA. Skillman’s group on this trip reportedly included a Lieutenant Dodson, Judge Holt, and Darkey Holmes. In July 1863, Skillman planted another bold rumor while visiting San Ygnacio, Mexico. He claimed that he and his men would soon burn Hart’s Mill and kidnap General West. See Henry J. Cuniffe, U.S. Consul, El Paso del Norte, Mexico, to Col. Nelson H. Davis, 30 December 1863, box N87, 1864, Letters Received, AG, RG 94, NA.

S. "Rip" Ford Papers, Texas Confederate Museum Collection, Nita Stewart Haley Memorial Library, Midland, Texas [hereafter RFP, NSHML]; Col. John S. Ford to Col. James Duff, 9 February 1864, box 1, TCM94.1.443, RFP, NSHML; "Statements of Captured Skillman Spy Company Members Jarvis Hubbell, Peter Allen, John Dowling, and Winfield Scott Garner to Union Maj. John C. McFerran in Santa Fe, NM," 23 May 1864, in Brig. Gen. James H. Carleton to Col. William Hoffman, 27 June 1864, Letters Received, CGP, RG 249, NA; [Albert]. H. French Report, 24 April 1864, Letters Received, Department of New Mexico, r. 22, M1120, RG 393, NA; and Capt. Albert H. French to Brig. Gen. James H. Carleton, 5 May 1864, Letters Received, Department of New Mexico, r. 23, M1120, RG 393, NA. Texas State cartographer A. R. Roessler produced a series of maps from Skillman's expedition in March 1864. See A. R. Roessler, Best Route for the Movement of Troops from San Antonio to El Paso [sic], Texas, Being the One Travelled [sic] by the State Geological Corps of Texas in 1860 and by Henry Skillman's Party in March 1864, Plats 100ab and 1004L A. R. Roessler Collection, Map Collection, Texas State Library and Archives Commission, Austin, Texas. The third plat from Fort Davis to El Paso is missing. Pvt. Stanislaw Czartoryski, Company F, First Louisiana Cavalry Volunteers, delineated the maps. The accompanying narrative journal by Roessler is in folder T1-10-1 at the same archives. From 1863 to 1865, Magruder was never able to spare the necessary men for an invasion of the Southwest.

61. Two of the four rebel casualties, fatally wounded during the attack, died a short time later. See Ely, "Skullduggery at Spencer's Ranch," 18–21; and Thompson, "Drama in the Desert," 107–26. In 1866 French convinced Skillman's common-law widow Rufina to sell him her late husband's property, located in Survey 6 at Concordia Ranch near El Paso, Texas, for one dollar. The following year, French sold the same parcel for four hundred dollars. For more on French's purchase and sale, see El Paso County, Texas, Deed Records, 26 September 1866, 5 March 1867, El Paso County Archives, El Paso, Texas. After being mustered out of army service in August 1864, French landed numerous government contracts in El Paso County and in New Mexico.

62. Magoffin, a prominent El Paso County pioneer and secessionist, abandoned his home in the summer of 1862 and accompanied Sibley's men back to San Antonio. In February 1863, Magoffin offered to serve as a supply contractor for a Confederate invasion of the Southwest. He submitted his services as a spy in the Trans-Pecos and Mexico in February 1864. Major Dickinson wrote a letter of support recommending Magoffin for the position as spy. He stated that, despite Magoffin's age, he was worth twenty men. Dickinson boasted, "I'll warrant we know the movements and intentions of the enemy from the time he reaches El Paso." See James W. Magoffin to Maj. Gen. John Bankhead Magruder, 22 February 1863, and Maj. Andrew G. Dickinson to Maj. Gen. John Bankhead Magruder, 11 February 1864, J. W. Magoffin Citizens File, M346, RG 109, NA.

often camped along the Palo Duro watershed, on the north side of the Canadian
River, between Mustang Creek and Adobe Walls. Comancheros (native New Mexican
traders) visited this camp to trade. A number of Department of New Mexico reports
from June to October 1864 referred to this Palo Duro campground. Palo Duro Creek
is not to be confused with Palo Duro Canyon, to the south near Canyon, Texas.
Carleton claimed both attacks occurred on the Cimarron Route, but New Mexico
governor Henry Connelly clearly states that the attack on 20 May 1864 was at Palo
Duro Creek, beyond Fort Bascom.

64. Gov. Henry Connelly to Brig. Gen. James H. Carleton, 22 June 1864, Letters Received,
1863–1865, entry 3, Fort Bascom, New Mexico, pt. 5, RG 393, NA. It is not clear who
these forty-eight Americans were. Confederate general Magruder planned to send
Colonel Baird west to disrupt the Fort Union supply route, but Baird’s men never

Gen. James H. Carleton to Dr. Michael Steck, Supt. of Indian Affairs, 29 October
1864, box N584, 1864, Letters Received, AG, RG 94, NA. Patsokoniki and Quahada
Comanches centered around Yellow House Canyon on the Llano Estacado. Thomas
W. Kavanagh, e-mail message to author, 23 February 2010. The Texas Panhandle
and Llano Estacado regions were part of traditional Kiowa and Comanche territory.
Despite period military reports implicating the Comanches in these raids along
the Cimarron Route, anthropologist Thomas W. Kavanagh states: “There remains
little documentary evidence for Comanche involvement.” Thomas W. Kavanagh,
*Comanche Political History: An Ethnohistorical Perspective, 1706–1875*, Studies in the
Anthropology of North American Indians (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press in
cooperation with American Indian Studies Research Institute, Indiana University,
1996), 463. Kavanagh points out that in addition to Comanches, a number of other
tribes were raiding in the region during the Civil War, including Kiowas, Southern
Cheyennes, and Southern Arapahoes. Kavanagh, email message to author. Historian
Charles L. Kenner argues that the evidence demonstrates Comanche culpability in
some of these Cimarron raids. Charles L. Kenner, *A History of New Mexican-Plains

66. Brig. Gen. James H. Carleton to Dr. Michael Steck, Supt. of Indian Affairs, 29
October 1864, box N584, 1864, Letters Received, AG, RG 94, NA. Kenner and Ka­
vaghan show that Carleton was slow to grasp the complex, layered intricacies of the
Comanchero-Comanche trade in Texas and New Mexico, and the extent to which
his own officers, such as Capt. E. H. Bergmann, and notable New Mexico merchants
and contractors, such as Marcus Goldbaum, participated in this trade. Kenner, *A
History of New Mexican-Plains Indian Relations*, 140–46, 148–52, 156–58; Kavanagh,
*Comanche Political History*, 405–8, 467–71; and Kavanagh, email message to author.

67. Lt. Col. Francisco P. Abreu to Capt. Benjamin C. Cutler, 10 October 1864, in OR,
October 1864, Lt. Col. Francisco P. Abreu to Capt. Benjamin C. Cutler, 18 October
1864, Brig. Gen. James H. Carleton to Col. Christopher Carson, 23 October 1864,
and General Orders No. 32, 22 October 1864, box N584, 1864, Letters Received, AG,

68. General Order No. 4, “Dept. of New Mexico-Synopsis of Indian Scouts and Their Results for the Year 1864,” pp. 10, 13, Letters Received, r. 389, M619, RG 94, NA; Col. Christopher Carson to Capt. Benjamin C. Cutler, 4 December 1864, in OR, ser. 1, vol. 41, pt. 1, pp. 939–42; and McClure, “The Battle of Adobe Walls,” 41–42, 44, 56–57, 64–65. On 27 June 1874, another clash, the Second Battle of Adobe Walls, took place near the old adobe fort, this time between buffalo hunters and Indians. For an excellent map detailing the Canadian River region in Texas and the Adobe Walls site, see A. B. Langermann, “Map of Wegefarth County,” (September 1875) map #16784, Archives and Records, Texas General Land Office, Austin, Texas. This map includes “Bents Fort,” “Bents Creek,” “Adobe Creek,” and “Paladora Creek” (all spellings are as they appear on the map).

69. See Troop Strength Report, 14 May 1865. On 14 May 1865, 747 of the department’s 2,313 men total aggregate troop strength provided protection for wagon trains on the Cimarron Route of the Santa Fe Trail. One-third of these soldiers were stationed at Camp Cold Spring near the Cimarron River, located in the Indian Territory (Oklahoma) Panhandle, just north of Texas. The remaining troops served on floating escort duty with various teamsters traveling across the plains to and from New Mexico.