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ADOBE mounds, almost melted back into earth, scattered slivers of decaying lumber, and heaps of time-weathered bricks are the only markers today of Fort Bascom, New Mexico. In this modern age of five-strand barbed wire fences and securely locked gates, the site, located on a gentle bend of the Canadian River, is practically inaccessible to the general public. But less than a century ago the range was open, and soldiers from Fort Bascom patrolled a vast expanse of Eastern New Mexico and West Texas to protect the sparsely settled region from hostile Indians. Born in Kentucky, George N. Bascom was appointed to West Point from his home state. He entered the Academy on July 1, 1853, and was graduated as an infantry lieutenant exactly five years later. His first assignment was of routine peacetime duty in the East, but before the end of 1859 he had been reassigned to frontier duty. On April 23, 1859, he joined the 7th U. S. Infantry at Fort Buchanan, New Mexico. On February 21, 1862, Captain Bascom, 16th U. S. Infantry, gave his life in defense of the Union at the Battle of Valverde.[1]

Brigadier General James H. Carleton assumed command of the Department of New Mexico on September 18, 1862. It is doubtful that he could have made a wiser choice when he selected Captain Peter W. L. Plympton to command the force sent out to build "a new post on Red River, near the mouth of Utah Creek."[2] On August 15 of 1863, the fort was

1. George W. Cullum, *Biographical Register of the Officers and Graduates of the U. S. Military Academy at West Point, N. Y., from its Establishment in 1802 to 1890.*

2. *The Rio Abajo Weekly Press*, Aug. 25, 1863, p. 3. This reference to Red River was made by the above cited newspaper. There has always been some confusion about the name of the river and it is often referred to as the "Red Canadian." However, when the newspaper pin-pointed the spot as being near the mouth of Utah Creek (or Ute Creek) there should have been no question as to the proper name of the river, since "Red River" was usually applied only to the northern portion of the stream. The newspaper seems to have been alone in this error as other contemporary reports, some by Fort Bascom personnel, refer to the site as being on the south bank of the Canadian. [This article was extracted by F.D.R. from the author's *History of Fort Bascom, New Mexico, 1863-1870.* M.A. Thesis, Eastern New Mexico University].

announced as New Mexico's newest military post and took its place as a frontier institution of the West.[3]

Plympton was born in Missouri in 1827 and spent most of his life on the frontier. The son of an army officer, he was appointed at large to the U. S. Military Academy and graduated from there in 1847. He served in his home state until 1850 and for the next eight years saw service at several frontier posts farther west. He was stationed in New Mexico at the outbreak of the Civil War and was cited for "gallant and meritorious service" at the Battle of Valverde. He received a similar citation for his part in the Battle of Peralta.[4]

Plympton twice served as commanding officer of Fort Union. He stayed at Fort Bascom only long enough to get the post erected. He returned to Santa Fe for a staff job but later commanded Fort Defiance and assisted in the removal of the Navajos to the Bosque Redondo. In 1866, when only thirty-nine years old, Plympton died while on frontier duty at Galveston, Texas.[5]

The mission of Plympton and his men, who comprised Company "F" of the 7th U. S. Infantry and Company "I" of the 1st New Mexico Volunteers,[6] was widely acclaimed throughout the territory. It prompted an Albuquerque newspaper to predict that "By and by, a man can go alone . . . to the States, take his meals at taverns, and sleep in a house every night of the trip."[7] The paper also reported the following:

> The new post is named in honor of Capt. George N. Bascom . . . we suggest that the town that will probably spring up in that neighborhood before long be also called Bascom. The name is euphonic and we know of no better way of honoring those who have died in our defense, than by giving their names to counties and towns.[8]

3. Records of the United States Army Commands. (Undated material from the National Archives)

4. Cullum, *op. cit.*, p. 841.

5. *Ibid.*

6. Records of the United States Army Commands. (Undated material from the National Archives)

7. *The Rio Abajo Weekly Press*, Aug. 25, 1863, p. 3.

8. *Ibid.*

The suggestion of the newspaper was ignored. The town that did spring up was built five miles west of Fort Bascom, because "it was unlawful to sell whiskey within five miles of a military post."[9] The soldiers stationed at Fort Bascom named the town themselves and chose to call it "Liberty" because it was the one place where they were under no restraint.[10] After Fort Bascom was abandoned as an active military post, Liberty lived on as a small ranching community. It existed until the turn of the century when the railroad pushed through eight miles to the south. Apparently, the citizens of Liberty realized the significance of the railroad, for they packed up their town and moved to form the nucleus of Tucumcari, New Mexico.[11]

Fort Bascom was built on a rolling plain. It was bordered on the north by the Canadian River and by one of the numerous mesas of the region. The plain stretched eight miles westward to the base of Mesa Rica. To the south and east, the terrain was undecided between level plains, gentle hills, and rock-strewn cedar brakes. Small creeks, usually dry, and ravines carved up the land in threading a path to the Canadian River. A good growth of gramma grass promised to make ranching profitable.

The wife of an army officer stationed at Fort Bascom once wrote: "Life seemed horribly empty at Fort Bascom . . . Day succeeded day and I found no joy in the common tasks."[12] It should be pointed out that the woman, who for a long period of time was the only white woman at the post, was writing under extreme stress as her infant child had just died. But she came close to accurately describing the simple, but stern, life of any frontier outpost.

Duties of the soldiers, at times dangerous enough, were frequently menial, but necessary tasks. Particularly during the first two years of the fort's existence, soldiers laid down

9. *The Tucumcari Daily News*, Aug. 11, 1952.

10. *Ibid.*

11. Herman Moncas, Personal Interview, Aug. 30, 1954. Mr. Moncas owns and operates a drug store in Tucumcari, N. M., and for many years has made a hobby of collecting museum pieces, and stories, of the West.

12. Mrs. Hal Russell, "Memoirs of Marian Russell." *Colorado Magazine*, Vol. 21 (Jan., 1944), p. 35.

their arms to become carpenters and masons.[13] The lack of timber resources in the immediate area made it necessary to send details to forest reserves to procure lumber. Until the completion of a well within the post proper, the hauling of water from the Canadian River was a daily task.

Troopers were often required to spend weeks encamped in the rugged Mesa Rica to watch for hostile Indians. Long patrols and escorts were other duties that more often than not were energy-sapping trips that did little to break the monotony of the daily grind.

It would be an error to assume, that because of the smallness and near isolation of the post, that military discipline was lax. One form of punishment frequently meted out to troopers at Fort Bascom was dubbed the "California Walk" because it brought to mind the long trek from California to Albuquerque by the First California Volunteers during the Civil War. The "Walk" was described by one observer as follows:

> The offending soldier was forced to carry on his shoulder a four-foot length of heavy, green log. Around and around the flag pole he marched from daylight to dark—an hour of continuous marching followed by an hour of rest beside his burden in the hot sunshine. Sometimes a soldier would be sentenced to sixty days of the California Walk. I have seen as many as six doing it at the same time.[14]

The same observer reported another form of punishment which, if it was actually done, was much more severe. According to the observer, the offender was suspended by his thumbs for hours at a time, with his toes just clearing the ground. One soldier, who had been hanging in that fashion so long that his thumbs had swollen to an ugly purple, asked one of the other troopers to wipe his nose for him. The poor soldier's plight was considered a great joke at Fort Bascom. Although it places a strain upon the imagination to believe

13. *Fort Bascom Letters Sent*, Aug. 26, 1865. (Unsigned letter to Colonel W. M. Enos, Department of New Mexico, Santa Fe.) All material cited as *Fort Bascom Letters Sent* was obtained on micro-film from the National Archives, Washington, D. C. The letters cover a period from July 24, 1865 through Dec. 6, 1870.

14. Russell, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

that such inhuman torture was used, it should be remembered that it wasn't practical to restrict individual freedom on a frontier outpost, and that the only satisfactory method of dealing with minor offenses was corporal punishment.

Fort Bascom was built to accommodate three companies.[15] Its strength varied through the years, but it was apparently considered too strong by the Indians for a direct attack. However, the surrounding ranches knew no immunity from the hostile Comanches and Kiowas.

One of the ranches that suffered a number of attacks was located at the mouth of Ute Creek, about fifteen miles east of Fort Bascom. The ranch was owned by William B. Stapp and Charles Hopkins, who were also partners in a store near Fort Bascom.

On one of these attacks, Hopkins was killed, and his wife survived a harrowing experience.[16] The attack occurred when Hopkins was alone at the ranch. Stapp was keeping the store at Fort Bascom, and Mrs. Hopkins was at the home of her parents, who lived a few miles west of the Stapp-Hopkins ranch. Hopkins, on the day of the attack, had told his wife he would join her at the home of her parents by noon. When he failed to appear, she became worried and rode to the ranch. She found a band of Indians plundering the house, and the lifeless body of her husband near a curbed well.[17]

Mrs. Hopkins dismounted and ran to the body of her husband but was seized by an Indian who pressed a knife to her throat. A renegade Mexican riding with the Indians interceded for her life.[18] He told the Indians that the woman was his sister, and they contented themselves with cropping off her long black hair, and throwing her into the well.

The well, which contained only a small amount of water, was not deep but the fall injured Mrs. Hopkins, and she was unable to free herself. As night fell the Mexican returned,

15. Charles F. Coan, *A History of New Mexico*, p. 378. Chicago and New York: The American Historical Society, 1925.

16. W. H. Stapp, Personal Interview, Aug. 31, 1954. Mr. Stapp, the son of William B. Stapp, is a retired druggist who makes his home in Las Vegas. He was very active in the successful drive to get the ruins of Fort Union declared a national monument.

17. Russell, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

18. W. H. Stapp, Personal Interview, Aug. 31, 1954.

helped her from the well, and then rejoined the raiding Indians.[19]

In the fort proper, danger from the Indians was not great. However, there were some threats to the health and well-being of the people living there. One officer died of typhoid fever while serving at the post.[20] An officer's wife, whose infant had died at the fort, once found two large rattlesnakes in her quarters.[21]

Another soldier was mutilated because he could not hold his tongue. A Mexican laundress became outraged over something a soldier was supposed to have said about her and promised to cut off his tongue if he ever repeated his remarks. The soldier only laughed, and "again his tongue betrayed him."[22]

A few days later, the soldier went on a drunken spree with the laundress' husband. They retired to the Mexican's quarters to sleep off the intoxication, and somehow, during the night, the laundress managed to slice off the tip of the soldier's tongue. He spent many days in the hospital on a liquid diet.[23]

The average soldier at Fort Bascom received eleven dollars per month, plus rations. The rations included four pounds of coffee and one-fourth pound of tea a month. Soap was issued very sparingly. The troopers also received a bit of salt side each month and all the hardtack, beans, and beef they wanted.[24]

The lot of the soldier may have been much better than that of other persons living in the territory. *The Santa Fe New Mexican* described army life when it published the following article soon after Fort Bascom was founded:

> Now is a good time to enlist as a volunteer. . . . Many a poor, healthy man is now working as a peon for scarcely anything worthy to be called wages, and for equally scanty food and

19. Russell, *op. cit.*, p. 36.
20. *Fort Bascom Letters Sent*, Captain John V. Dubois to DeForrest, June 13, 1867.
21. Russell, *op. cit.*, p. 37.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 35.
23. *Ibid.*
24. *Ibid.*, p. 37.

> clothing. When a soldier . . . is sick a physician attends him. His officers are bound to treat him with care and justice. . . . He receives good abundant food and clothing. . . . The laboring man can find no mode so easy, creditable, and profitable to discharge himself from poverty and service, as enlisting as a volunteer. The duties of the service promote patriotism, punctuality, courage and manliness.[25]

Apparently, entertainment facilities at Fort Bascom were practically non-existent. There is no record of company parties and dances, but these activities were probably held with some regularity. Horseback riding was a fairly popular sport, particularly with officers and their wives.

Since the sale of whiskey within five miles of the post was unlawful, thirsty soldiers had to be resourceful in order to supply themselves with spirits. Their resourcefulness on one occasion led to a letter of chastisement from the post commander to the post sutler, Hopkins.[26]

Hopkins was supposed to receive whatever supply of water he required from the detail which hauled water from the river. But one day the soldiers refused to give him water unless in return he would supply them with liquor. Hopkins almost lost his franchise to operate the store when he complied with their demands rather than take the problem to the post commander.[27]

A hospital was maintained at Fort Bascom with a medical officer, the post surgeon, assigned there to care for the ills of all personnel at the fort. By the nature of his duties, the post surgeon enjoyed more independence than other officers. This independence was reflected at Fort Bascom by two letters, one to the post surgeon and the other to Department of New Mexico headquarters. The first, written by the post adjutant on the order of the commanding officer, states:

> The Major commanding directs me to say to you that the practice of keeping soldiers (who are well enough to perform their

25. *The Santa Fe New Mexican*, Nov. 7, 1863, p. 1.

26. *Fort Bascom Letters Sent*, Lieutenant Colonel E. H. Bergmann to Mr. Charles Hopkins, June 8, 1866. The "sutler's store" was operated for the convenience of military personnel.

27. *Ibid.*

> ordinary duties) on the sick report for the purpose of employing them as laborers, messengers, servants at the hospital must cease at once and can not be allowed in the future.
> At this moment every man is needed . . . If soldiers (on the sick list) with cough, cold, or similar diseases are so far recovered as to be able to perform errands for the hospital in the cold morning air, and at considerable distance from the post, without endangering their state of health, it would be surprising if their duties proper should do so.[28]

The second letter, written personally by the post commander, forwarded to department headquarters the resignation of the surgeon. The post commander commented that he had called the doctor's attention to the "improper language used in the document, and requested a change in his style of writing," but that the surgeon had returned the letter without explanation.[29]

Toward the end of the Civil War, military personnel in New Mexico were struggling to regain control over the Indians. One of the attempted solutions was a Navajo reservation on the Pecos River called the Bosque Redondo. Fort Sumner was constructed there to control the Indians. If the Navajo reservation had lived up to the high expectations and hopes of its architect, Brigadier General James H. Carleton, Fort Bascom would have never been concerned with the institution, and a skeleton force at Fort Sumner might have been sufficient to keep the Indians under control.

Ranchers and Mexican sheep herders charged the Navajos with stealing their stock. At least one army officer believed most of the stories of depredations were fabricated. The officer was Lieutenant Colonel E. H. Bergmann, who commanded Fort Bascom from July of 1865 until September of 1866.

In the spring of 1866, Carleton ordered him to station three pickets in the surrounding canyons and mesas. In carrying out the instructions, Bergmann scouted the countryside for eight days, and failed to sight a single Indian, or detect a single Indian sign. In his report, he stated:

28. *Ibid.*, Lieutenant R. D. Reupell to Surgeon J. C. Brey, Dec. 28, 1865.
29. *Ibid.*, Bergmann to Major S. McKee, March 1, 1866.

> In conclusion I beg leave here to state that rumors of pretended 'Navajo outrages' committed in the Conchas Valley . . . are almost daily brought here by Mexicans. In the beginning, I readily believed these stories and went out with scouting parties in the months of January, February, and April last, . . . but I was never fortunate enough to encounter Indians, see their signs, nor even could find one of the great number of Mexican herders who had seen Indians or Indian signs. I thought it best not to report these apparently invented rumors.[30]

Bergmann then commented that all the herders and settlers who had resided in the area for over a year had not been molested by Navajos, but that "all those who are here only a few days from the lower country are daily complaining of being robbed and killed."[31] He did not explain, however, how anyone managed to complain of being killed.

A few days later, the countryside was combed again after the reported murder of the Fort Bascom expressman. The expressman, a civilian, carried mail and official correspondence between Fort Bascom and the outside world to Hatch's Ranch located midway between the post and Fort Union. Other couriers took over at that point. The victim, if he was actually killed, was identified only as "Chambers."[32]

Possibly connected to the incident was a report received on May 20, 1866, that a band of thirty Navajos were encamped northwest of Fort Bascom and were molesting herders in that vicinity. Bergmann sent a company of troopers under Captain C. M. Hubbell to investigate the report. Hubbell's orders read in part:

> . . . Should you find any Navajo or Apache Indians in that vicinity without passports, or are you satisfied that they have committed robberies, you are hereby ordered to destroy all (men) of them without mercy. Try all in your power to punish these marauders.[33]

Hubbell returned to Fort Bascom on June 2, 1866, but

30. *Ibid.*, Bergmann to DeForrest, May 12, 1866.
31. *Ibid.*
32. *Ibid.*, Bergmann to DeForrest, June 8, 1866.
33. *Ibid.*, Bergmann to Hubbell, May 24, 1866.

apparently had nothing enlightening to offer, for Bergmann led a scouting party west of Fort Bascom on the same day. He spent six days in the field searching for clues to the murder and for Indian signs. He failed to find either.[34]

With the coming of the new year, 1867, Fort Bascom got a new commanding officer, Colonel A. J. Alexander, who had no doubt of his authority to kill any Navajo outside the reservation. In writing to Major General George Sykes, who commanded Fort Sumner, Alexander said his instructions were to scout thoroughly the country north of the reservation and kill every Indian capable of bearing arms that he could find.[35] In another letter, he indicated that the order applied only to Navajo Indians, but that the instructions would be given to soldiers who wouldn't know the difference between a Navajo and a Comanche.[36]

The new post commander wasted no time in leading a scouting expedition. Alexander's force, patrolling in a westerly direction from Fort Bascom, ran across a fresh Indian trail. The troopers followed it until they came upon a party of seven Navajos, six men and one woman, the latter, untrue to Indian custom, the only mounted member of the band.

Upon his approach the Indians showed "no disposition to either fight or run, observing which I discharged my pistol at them, and ordered the men to fire on them." This unexpected, and probably uncalled for, aggressiveness had the desired result, as the Navajos broke for a mesa, but only to be overtaken by the mounted soldiers.

> I sent most of the men around to head them off from the rocks, which they succeeded in doing. When the Indians doubled back down the deep rocky draw, and came out close to me, begging for their lives with such piteous gestures, that I gave the command to cease firing and took them prisoners.[37]

With the seven Navajos held as prisoners, Alexander struck a fresh trail which he said was made by four men and

34. *Ibid.*, Bergmann to DeForrest, June 8, 1866.
35. *Ibid.*, Alexander to Major General George Sykes, Fort Sumner, Jan. 3, 1867.
36. *Ibid.*, Alexander to Hubbell, Jan. 4, 1867.
37. *Ibid.*, Alexander to DeForrest, Jan. 12, 1867.

one woman. One of the captives informed him that Manuelito, one of the more famous Navajo chiefs, was a member of the second party. The troopers took up the chase, but the second band of Indians proved more resourceful than the first. When Alexander's column was within a mile of them the Indians fired the prairie, and the blaze held the soldiers at bay until the fugitives escaped to a rocky mesa. Alexander found it "impossible to trail them except with extreme labor and great difficulty" and gave up the pursuit at nightfall.

The captive Indians made a successful break for freedom that night, but according to Alexander, the escape was part of his plan. After the soldiers had pitched camp, Alexander told the Indians that the woman would be returned to the Bosque Redondo since he "did not kill squaws."[38] After carefully dropping other hints that the men were to be slain, he withdrew one of the sentinels shortly after midnight.

He did not have to wait long for results. Soon after the guard was removed the Indians dashed from the camp. The troopers gave a brief chase, but Alexander had recall sounded before the Navajos could be overtaken. In describing the escape, he wrote:

> The Indians, I think, got off without injury, although I heard one cry out, as if struck. Neither soldiers nor Indians knew of my intentions, and I think the latter got back to the reservation with a wholesome scare. . . . I felt satisfied that if they had been sent back in a week or two, the effect would have been bad for our future operations, whereas by letting them escape in this manner, I think the effect will be good.[39]

During this period, the Navajos were harassed not only by federal troops, but also by natural enemies, the Plains Indians, who felt that their land had been intruded upon. Activities of the Kiowas and Comanches during the years of the Bosque Redondo were not only troublesome for the Navajos, but for Fort Bascom personnel as well.

The Comanches made a practice of stealing stock from the Bosque Redondo, and then selling the animals to Mexican

38. *Ibid.*
39. *Ibid.*

traders. The traders, who claimed to have bought the cattle in good faith, were always reluctant to return the stock to the Navajos. Often the Navajos left the reservation at night to steal their own stock from the Mexicans.

A band of Kiowas caused trouble in the summer of 1867 when Captain John V. DuBois was commanding Fort Bascom. A Mexican youth brought word to the post that twenty Kiowas had attacked a ranch house about twenty-five miles southwest of Fort Bascom. The Mexican youth and an American, identified only as "Mr. Thompson," were the only occupants of the ranch at the time of the raid.

The Kiowas did not molest the Mexican boy, but took Thompson with them to serve as a guide toward a ranch further west where some Texas trail drivers were holding a large herd of cattle. Upon receiving the report DuBois immediately dispatched a force of twenty-seven men which, after traveling only fourteen miles, met Thompson heading toward Fort Bascom. Thompson continued to the post and reported to DuBois. No mention was made of overtaking the Kiowas.

Thompson told DuBois that the Kiowas destroyed everything at the ranch house, and then pressed him into service as a guide to lead them to the cattle herd. According to Thompson, the Kiowas promised to kill all Texans and Navajos but planned to spare all Americans. Their distinction between a Texan and an American probably originated during the Civil War.

Before the Kiowas reached the cattle herd, they came across the trail of eleven Navajos and joyously followed it at a gallop toward Mesa Rica. However, fresh trails were found at the foot of the mesa, and the Kiowas became frightened after they estimated Navajo strength at sixty or more. They turned again toward the cattle herd, but fortunately for the Texans, the Kiowas stumbled upon a single Navajo.

They killed the helpless Indian, scalped him, and then completed their savagery by cutting out his tongue. Satisfied with the day's work, they returned Thompson to his looted ranch and freed him—after warning him to quit the ranch,

for they planned to drive everyone from that section of the country.[40]

In the years between 1865, soon after Kit Carson's fight with the Kiowas at Adobe Walls, and late 1868, when a winter campaign was staged against the Comanches, relations between Fort Bascom troopers and the warriors of the plains were strained. While there was no singularly spectacular Indian depredation, and no large punitive expedition against the Plains tribes, the Comanches were a constant source of irritation in Eastern New Mexico.

A detachment of Fort Bascom troopers, while on routine patrol one day in 1865, came upon two Mexican women who were apparently lost. The women were taken to the post where it was learned that they had somehow managed to escape a Comanche camp. Details of the escape were not recorded.[41]

One of the women was middle-aged and had been a prisoner of the Comanches so long that she had forgotten her native tongue, but the other was considerably younger and spoke Spanish fluently. The younger woman reported that their flight had been delayed soon after leaving the Comanche camp when the older woman gave birth to a baby. The infant, born of a woman fleeing savage warriors on the wilderness of the plains, had little chance for survival, and died soon after birth. The two women concealed the child's body under brush before continuing their forced march toward civilization.

The younger woman readjusted to civilization easily, and was soon sent to Santa Fe to pick up the threads of her life again. But the older woman "had been with the Indians too long." She resisted all rehabilitation efforts, and when last mentioned was finally put to work under the post's Mexican laundress.

In the summer of 1866, the commanding officer of Fort Bascom, Lieutenant Colonel E. H. Bergmann, made a trip deep into Comanche country under verbal orders from Santa

40. *Ibid.*, Captain John V. DuBois to DeForrest, Aug. 9, 1867.
41. Russell, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

Fe. The trip was for the purpose of attempting by peaceful means to secure stock which the Indians were thought to have stolen from Fort Sumner and from a New Mexico rancher, Mr. Thomas Roberts. The expedition was not overly successful, as Bergmann found only five horses, which he recovered, bearing the government brand. He failed to locate any animals belonging to Roberts. Bergmann did, however, make some interesting observations, and leave a rather complete account of the trip.

Bergmann took only ten men, some of them civilians who enjoyed the confidence of the Comanches, and departed from Fort Bascom on July 26, 1866. He knew where to look for the Comanches, as he led his party in a southeasterly direction from Fort Bascom, but the Indians learned of his approach and retreated. They feared that Bergmann's party was only the advance guard of a large military force. The civilians vainly tried to overtake the fleeing Comanches to inform them of the purpose of Bergmann's visit.

Although the Indians were well-mounted on fresh ponies, Bergmann doggedly kept up the pursuit until his persistence was rewarded. On about August 1, he captured two Mexicans who had been traveling with the Comanches. By using them as guides, he was soon able to bring the Indians to a stand about two hundred fifty miles southeast of Fort Bascom. Bergmann said the place was "on the Llano, . . . and very close to Texas settlements." In all probability the officer was referring to the Llano Estacado, the Staked Plains, for if he meant the Llano River he would have been deep into Texas and up to three hundred miles wrong in his estimate of the distance from Fort Bascom.

According to Bergmann, the Indians were not anxious to meet him to hear what he "had to say, because they anticipated that it could be nothing pleasing to their ears." However, he said he was determined to carry out his instructions and therefore continued to advance toward a Comanche rancheria. His advance was not challenged as the Indians, after some skillful long-distance communication, decided to welcome the party into their rancheria. Bergmann was par-

ticularly impressed by the Comanches' ability to communicate with each other over a long distance.

> Their precautions and their mode of communicating news from one party to another . . . are very ingenious and deserve to be admired. At a distance of not less than twelve miles, the rancheria was informed, by a party of warriors who had come out to meet me, that there was [*sic*] only ten in my party, and that we did not come to fight. Orders were asked if we could enter the village. The answer returned was: 'Bring them in, they will be welcome.' All this was done rapidly . . . just as if a telegraph had been used, and required nothing more than one of the common round looking glasses.[42]

The rancheria Bergmann entered consisted of one hundred sixty lodges. The officer stressed that the strength of the camp could not be calculated by that number, however, since many of the young men were away on the warpath, and that Indians did not have need of many lodges during the summer. He found not only Comanches but several Kiowa war parties paying a friendly visit to their allies. Bergmann said all of the Indians were splendidly mounted and well-provided with arms. He failed to see a single warrior who did not possess a revolver, and said a great number of them were armed with two pistols.

Bergmann was astonished to discover that at least one-half of the warriors in the camp were either Mexican captives, or Mexicans who lived voluntarily with the Comanches. He considered them more dangerous than actual Indians, for many of them had a fair command of the English language and were constantly boasting of entrapping and killing travelers. The officer described them as follows:

> These wretches who understand (English) so well throw travelers off their guard. They delight in narrating their outrages and triumphantly show how they betrayed and entrapped, and then afterwards butchered poor white men who were foolish enough to believe these monsters.[43]

One white child, a ten-year-old boy, was being held pris-

42. *Fort Bascom Letters Sent*, Bergmann to DeForrest, Aug. 11, 1866.
43. *Ibid.*

oner by the Kiowas at the camp. Bergmann offered money, horses, and mules for the boy's release, but the Indians refused. He assumed a threatening manner, but said his words were "spoken to blocks of granite." The officer said he was tempted to try to rescue the child by force, but that he knew that it would not be possible even "if acting recklessly, and without consideration of committing suicide."

In conferring with the various chiefs, Bergmann found them rather antagonistic toward him. Although the Indians told him that if the troops waged war, they (the Comanches) would claim the right to say they had not called for it, Bergmann said their speech was "nothing but empty words and laughable excuses," and that the Indians were hunting for an excuse to justify them robbing and murdering in New Mexico. He also said:

> It is my unqualified opinion that a sound and severe thrashing would do them a great deal of good—it would cool down their boldness with which at present they seem to be richly supplied, and chiefly, it would prevent them from making depratory [*sic*] excursions into this territory.[44]

Bergmann's conference with the Comanches seemed to have little effect as the situation showed no improvement over the next several months, during which time Fort Bascom underwent a complete reshuffling of post commanders. In the spring of 1867 Captain John V. DuBois, a West Point trained officer, became commanding officer of the post.[45]

DuBois graduated from West Point in 1855, and was on frontier duty in New Mexico the following year. He returned to the East for the Civil War, and was wounded at the Battle of Corinth, Mississippi, in October, 1862. He attained the rank of brevet lieutenant colonel for gallant services during the war. With the close of the Civil War he returned to frontier duty and saw service at Fort Sumner prior to taking command at Fort Bascom.

The officer's tour of duty at Fort Bascom, as indicated by his letters, was not enjoyable for him. He had a double

44. *Ibid.*
45. *Ibid.*, Captain John V. DuBois to DeForrest, March 31, 1867.

assignment as post commander and commanding officer of one company. His letters written to Santa Fe indicate that he considered Fort Bascom a forgotten post which was being left to shift for itself. Finally, on July 5, 1867, DuBois asked to be transferred. He wrote:

> My health renders the double duty of post and company commander more than I can properly perform. I have neglected my company lately for want of time, and respectfully request to be sent to some post where I am not senior officer, when it can be done without injury to the service.[46]

Apparently, it could not be done without injury to the service for several months. DuBois was not transferred until April, 1868. Soon after leaving Fort Bascom, DuBois was arrested and placed on trial, but the existing record fails to record the alleged offense. At any rate, the officer was apparently acquitted, for he did not lose his commission, and was soon on duty again at several New Mexico and Arizona posts.

DuBois' army career ended on May 17, 1876, after he had put in a tour of duty in the Sioux Indian country. He was discharged for a "disability contracted in the line of duty," and died at the age of forty-six on July 31, 1879, in his home state of New York.[47]

In May, 1867, DuBois and an Indian agent received separate orders to negotiate with the Comanches for the release of white captives. The orders seem to have applied to different Comanche bands and different captives. DuBois was instructed to attempt to secure the release of the son of a Mr. Hubert Weinard,[48] while the Indian agent, Lorenzo Labadi, was to negotiate for the freedom of Rudolph Fisher.[49]

In replying to his orders, DuBois asked for authority to hire a guide. He said he could do nothing without one. In a later letter, the officer said the Comanches refused to "come in for a talk."[50] According to DuBois, the reluctance of the Co-

46. *Ibid.*, DuBois to DeForrest, July 5, 1867.
47. Cullum, *op. cit.*, p. 616.
48. *Fort Bascom Letters Sent*, DuBois to DeForrest, May 10, 1867.
49. *Report on Indian Affairs by the Acting Commissioner, for the Year 1867*, p. 214.
50. *Fort Bascom Letters Sent*, DuBois to DeForrest, May 23, 1867.

manches was at least partly due to the fact that they believed Fort Bascom to be garrisoned only by Negro troops. He said the Comanches would not kill Negroes, as they had many of them in their tribe. He didn't explain, however, how that situation would keep the Comanches from coming to Fort Bascom on a peaceful mission.

DuBois took no action during the rest of the month. In June, he repeated his request for authority to hire a guide, or to send Mexican runners to the Comanche camp. The authorization for runners must have come, for in July DuBois reported that three Mexicans had returned with a reply from the Comanches to a proposal he had sent them. The proposal offered to purchase the release of the captives.[51] The Comanches' reply was apparently in the negative, as DuBois made no further mention of the case during the rest of his stay at Fort Bascom.

Labadi, the Indian agent, took quick action on his orders. He started for Comanche country in early May, and did succeed in holding a conference with some of the chiefs. He found the camp he sought about one hundred miles east of the boundary line between New Mexico and Texas. Labadi saw the Fisher boy, another white youth, and one Negro boy, all being held captive by the Comanches. However, he failed to secure their release. The Indians said the more important chiefs were away on the warpath, and that no one at the camp had authority to free the captives.

The Comanches also told Labadi that they still raided Texas settlements because they were unaware that the United States was at peace with that state. They closed the interview by asking for another meeting after they had had time to gather up all their captives. There is no record of the second meeting.

In commenting on his expedition, Labadi showed that he held soldiers in low esteem. He took only six civilians with him and no army personnel. "I did not call either at Fort Sumner or Bascom," he wrote, "because I preferred to go

51. *Ibid.*, DuBois to DeForrest, July 12, 1867.

with six citizens to going with forty soldiers. I considered it more safe."[52]

In July, 1867, DuBois summed up Comanche activities in a letter to his superiors in Santa Fe. Although he did not mention any raids in the neighborhood of Fort Bascom, he wrote that the Indians were making constant forays into Chihuahua, and that the United States was required by treaty with Mexico to stop such raids. He also said that the Comanches, "in contempt of the act of congress and military power," held a Negro boy as a slave.[53]

A few days later, DuBois wrote that he thought Fort Bascom had been visited by a spy for the Comanches. The officer had been absent from the post for a few days, and upon his return learned that a Mexican who claimed to be an escaped prisoner of the Comanches had spent three days at the post.[54] It was of the utmost concern to DuBois, who had earlier written that Fort Bascom was insecure and susceptible to Indian attack.[55] Any fears he may have had, however, turned out to be needless worry for the post was never attacked.

Not all difficulties of this period were caused by the Comanches. DuBois, seemingly unhappy at Fort Bascom, had difficulty in keeping his men in hand. In July, 1867, he wrote that he had been forced to report three desertions during the month and had three men unaccountably absent. The officer said that the probable cause was irregularity in payment, and the employment of soldiers as common laborers without extra pay.[56] The following month, DuBois reported that he had lost one private by desertion and one sergeant by suicide.[57]

Further disturbances were caused by cattle thieves who would have been happy to have their work attributed to the Comanches. Perhaps the most interesting raid of white cattle rustlers came in late April, 1867, when Captain George W.

52. *Report on Indian Affairs, by the Acting Commissioner for the Year 1867*, p. 215.
53. *Fort Bascom Letters Sent*, DuBois to DeForrest, July 12, 1867.
54. *Ibid.*, DuBois to DeForrest, July 27, 1867.
55. *Ibid.*, DuBois to DeForrest, May 10, 1867.
56. *Ibid.*, DuBois to DeForrest, July 27, 1867.
57. *Ibid.*, DuBois to DeForrest, Aug. 16, 1867.

Letterman was commanding Fort Bascom. Letterman was absent at the time, and the incident was handled by Lieutenant John D. Lee.[58]

A fresh cattle trail was found leading from the vicinity of the post and a quick check revealed that government cattle were missing. Lee immediately dispatched a sergeant and five enlisted men to follow the trail. The troopers followed the trail forty miles before they came upon the cattle, which were being driven by two men. The thieves abandoned the cattle and made good their escape. The place where the cattle were recovered was just a few miles from a ranch owned by Mr. Charles M. Hubbell. Hubbell held a contract to supply Fort Bascom with beef.

The soldiers followed the trail of the thieves and were not overly surprised to learn that it led directly to Hubbell's ranch. The sergeant asked for Mr. Hubbell but was told that he and an employee, Mr. Sam Smith, had arrived a short time previously, but had left immediately. The party picked up the trail from the ranch and followed it to Fort Bascom. Hubbell was to make a delivery of beef on April 21. He and Smith appeared at Fort Bascom on April 20, but were apparently not questioned about the attempted cattle theft. Neither Hubbell nor Smith appeared on the following day, and neither was mentioned in any correspondence thereafter.

Letterman wrote that from all the circumstances, it appeared to him that Hubbell and Smith were guilty of the theft.[59] Since Hubbell appeared the day before the beef delivery was scheduled, and then apparently left the vicinity of Fort Bascom, it appears that he hoped to fill his contract with the post's own cattle.

But in spite of other problems, Fort Bascom's chief task —that of protecting the territory from the Comanches—remained unchanged, and toward the end of 1868 a long promised full-scale war was in the offing. In 1865, General Carleton had directed the commanding officer of Fort Bascom to relay the following message to the Comanches:

58. *Ibid.*, Letterman to DeForrest, April 27, 1867.
59. *Ibid.*

> Tell them that the question of a bitter war is left with themselves. If they attack our trains we will make war upon them which they will always remember. Tell the chiefs that if our trains are attacked we shall not wish to see them again; that we shall not believe ever in their sincerity, certainly not in their ability to control their people.[60]

By the time the "war which they will always remember" came, Carleton was no longer commander of the New Mexico military department. He had been replaced by General George W. Getty. But a change in personnel had no bearing on the approaching conflict.

The Treaty of Medicine Creek Lodge called for fixed homes, farms, and agricultural implements for the Indians. In return, the Indians were to give up all claims to their former ranges, cease war on the frontier, and make amends for their wrongs. However, not all of the Plains chiefs were parties to the treaty. The chiefs who refused to sign declared that terms of the treaty were unacceptable and that they would not abide by them.

The result was that depredations again flared throughout the southwestern frontier during the spring and summer of 1868. The winter campaign was entrusted to a Civil War hero, General Phil Sheridan, who immediately set about forming plans for the expedition. By November, he had assembled well-trained troops and winter supplies at a number of posts within the Division of the Missouri. Concerning the approaching campaign, he wrote:

> As soon as the failure of the grass and the cold weather forces the scattered bands to come together to winter in the milder latitudes south of the Arkansas, a movement of troops will take place from Bascom, Lyon, Dodge, and Arbuckle, which I hope will be successful in gaining a permanent peace.[61]

Fort Bascom enjoyed relative quiet just prior to the military buildup. One raid was reported on September 18, 1868, when Indians struck within three miles of the post to

60. Ralph Emerson Twitchell, *The Leading Facts of New Mexican History*, Vol. 4, p. 222. Cedar Rapids, Iowa: The Torch Press, 1912.

61. *Report of the Secretary of War, Part 1*, p. 21. (1868).

steal a herd of horses owned by W. B. Stapp. The Indians, probably Comanches, killed one herder and wounded another. They were not overtaken by pursuing Fort Bascom troopers.[62]

Later in the fall, when Captain Louis Morris was commanding the post, nearly two hundred men were put in the field to operate against hostile Indians.[63] Results of this expedition were not recorded, and it is likely that the troopers were recalled to participate in the approaching winter campaign.

The military buildup did not escape notice in New Mexico. In October, 1868, the *Santa Fe New Mexican* noted that a large force was on hand at Fort Bascom to "warm up" the Indians.[64] The following month, news of the coming campaign had apparently been made public as the same paper observed:

> It is understood that General Sheridan has fully waked up to the emergency of Indian affairs in the western portion of his department, and that the campaign now organized is intended to be no summer holiday affair, but a regular and decided business operation.[65]

A seasoned fighter, Colonel A. W. Evans, was placed in command over the forces at Fort Bascom. The choice pleased the *New Mexican* which said Evans was known to be an excellent officer.[66] Evans, a West Point graduate, saw action at Valverde and Peralta in New Mexico during the Civil War, and was cited for "gallant and meritorious service" during these battles.

He returned to the East to lead the First Maryland Volunteers against Rebel forces and fought in a number of battles, including the action that resulted in the capitulation of Confederate troops at Appomattox, where he was again cited for gallantry. He returned to the West immediately after the

62. *Fort Bascom Letters Sent, op. cit.*, Captain Louis Morris to Lieutenant Edward Hunter, Sept. 18, 1868.
63. *Ibid.*, Lieutenant James K. Sullivan to Hunter, Oct. 15, 1868.
64. *The Santa Fe New Mexican*, Oct. 27, 1868, p. 2.
65. *Ibid.*, Nov. 3, 1868, p. 1.
66. *Ibid.*

Civil War and commanded various forts in Texas until 1868 when he was chosen to lead the column out of Fort Bascom against hostile Indians.[67]

From Fort Bascom, Evans went to several Arizona posts for duty against the Apaches, and later he fought against the Sioux in the Dakotas. After a brief return to Arizona for the final Apache uprising, Evans retired from the army after more than thirty years of service—practically all of it on the frontier.[68]

The role of Fort Bascom in the winter campaign of 1868 was planned at Division headquarters level. Evans' command was to advance down the Canadian River to drive all hostile Indians toward Fort Cobb in Indian Territory. Another column, operating out of Colorado, was to flush out all hostile Indians in that area. The main offensive was to come from the eastern edge of the Division of the Missouri, where a formidable force had been assembled.

Evans had an imposing force at his command. It included six cavalry companies, one infantry company, and a battery of mountain howitzers.[69] It is hard to estimate the total number of troopers under Evans' command, but if all the companies were at full strength, the column could have totaled over a thousand soldiers.

Evans' party marched out of Fort Bascom on November 18, 1868, and proceeded down the north bank of the Canadian River. On December 7, at Monument Creek, Texas, about one hundred and eighty-five miles below Fort Bascom, Evans ordered a fortified supply depot built. From his supply camp he resumed the march on December 18, 1868. He left tents behind him and took only enough wagons to haul his ammunition.[70]

Evans marched the command steadily for over forty miles and then struck a trail made by a village of Cheyennes. He followed the trail which led him across the Canadian

67. Cullum, *op. cit.*, p. 496.

68. *Ibid.*, p. 497.

69. *The Santa Fe New Mexican*, Feb. 23, 1869, p. 1.

70. *Ibid.* The reported distance from Fort Bascom would make this creek somewhere in the vicinity of present-day Borger, Texas. Present-day maps fail to show a creek by that name in the region, but do show several unnamed draws.

River and deep into Indian Territory to a point thirteen miles south of the Wichita Mountains. Unable to find water, Evans detoured to the northeast, and the troopers made a dry camp near the Wichitas on Christmas Eve.[71]

The stage was set for a Christmas Day battle to be fought in deep snow with a howling north wind driving the temperature below zero.[72] The troops were up early on Christmas Day. Evans sent scouts scurrying in all directions to pick up Indian signs.

One scout returned early to report that he had seen and talked to two Indians, and Evans immediately dispatched Major Tarleton and one company of cavalry to capture them. Meanwhile, he pushed forward with the rest of his command to make a new camp.

Major Tarleton had traveled only a short distance when he was engaged by a band of Comanches in the mouth of a canyon. The Comanches were in sufficient strength to hold Tarleton at bay, so the officer sent a runner to Evans for reinforcements. Two companies of cavalry and two mountain howitzers came to his aid and enabled him to force the Indians to fall back on their village farther up the canyon.

The Comanches offered brave resistance, but the troopers pressed them closely; and the battle was won when two shells from the howitzer exploded in the village. The Comanches fled "two and three on a horse."[73] No mention was made of army casualties, while the Indian loss was estimated at twenty-five killed.

The Comanches left behind "all the paraphanalia [*sic*] of a rich Indian camp,"[74] which included buffalo robes, weapons, saddles, lariats, powder, lead, tobacco, salt, sugar, flour, dried buffalo meat, and corn meal. After the Indians had already broken, Evans brought up his entire command and burned the village. He pursued the Comanches until darkness made trailing difficult.

On the following day Evans wished to continue the pur-

71. *Ibid.*
72. Richardson, *op. cit.*, p. 319.
73. *The Santa Fe New Mexican*, Feb. 23, 1869, p. 1.
74. *Ibid.* (Quoting telegram sent by General Sherman)

suit, but he had already marched his command almost two hundred miles from his supply depot, and his rations were running low.

He decided to set a course for Antelope Hills which would take him near the supply depot. From there he planned to detour in a southeasterly direction before returning to Fort Bascom and perhaps strike the trail of the Indians once more. He put his plan into operation and on December 28, 1868, made camp near Antelope Hills, about thirty miles from Fort Cobb.

Meanwhile, some of the Indians defeated in the battle had gone to Fort Cobb to complain that their lodges were burned and stock killed by a "bunch of Texans." General Sheridan, temporarily at Fort Cobb, sent out scouts to learn what troops were involved in the action. *The Santa Fe New Mexican* reported that Sheridan was pleased that the "little column from New Mexico . . . had traveled so far, and dealt so severe a blow to a notoriously bad and desperate band of Indians."

After making camp at Antelope Hills, Evans apparently gave up the idea of trying to strike the Indians again on his way back to Fort Bascom. His men and animals were suffering badly, and he was anxious to reach his supply depot. The troopers stumbled into the depot on January 13, 1869. Most of them were on foot. The supplies on hand must not have been sufficient as Evans was required to send two men to Fort Bascom to procure supplies when his column was still sixty miles from the post.[75]

Unfortunately, the men, both civilians, failed to reach the post. They were killed on February 20, 1869, by Navajo Indians who were apparently on their way to Comanche country on a stock-stealing expedition. Two other ranchers were killed at approximately the same time, presumably by the same band of Indians.[76]

Evans' littered trail back to Fort Bascom was still visible a year later when a United States Special Indian

75. *Ibid.*, March 23, 1869, p. 1.
76. *Ibid.*

Commissioner, Vincent Colyer, retraced the route. Colyer was on an inspection tour of the Indian country, and came upon Evans' tracks when he left Camp Wichita, Indian Territory, for Fort Bascom. He described the trail as follows:

> The skeletons of dead horses from which the wolves had devoured the flesh, cast-away saddles, bridles, axes, camp coffee-kettles, etc., strewed the way of Evans' route with the same ghastly and expensive marks of an Indian war as we had seen on Sheridan's trail. . . . Beyond Antelope Hills we came across the remains of several army wagons in so good a condition that I most heartily wished I had the wheels on my farm at home. . . . I mention these things to show how willingly our people will waste thousands of dollars in a costly war, and begrudge a few cents, comparatively, on school houses, and instructors in the interest of peace.[77]

When Colyer arrived at Fort Bascom, he found the officers and ranchers of the area rather alarmed because Comanche chiefs were being held prisoners in Santa Fe. The chiefs had become so frightened after the winter campaign that they came to Fort Bascom to surrender. They were placed under arrest and sent to Santa Fe, later to be transferred to Fort Leavenworth, and finally to their reservations. But the citizens of Eastern New Mexico feared reprisal by the Comanche bands if the army persisted in holding their chiefs as prisoners. But after the winter campaign of 1868, duties of the troopers stationed there changed from those of Indian fighters to those of a border police agency. There were still occasional Indian raids, but the principal task confronting the troopers was that of controlling the illegal commerce between Mexican Comancheros and the Comanche Indians. The illegal trade, which gave the Comanches arms and ammunition and the Mexicans stolen Texas cattle, was not a sudden development, but it did reach a climax in Fort Bascom's waning years.

Writing in 1867, A. B. Norton, New Mexico Indian Superintendent, said that when he took office that "unrestrained

77. *Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Made to the Secretary of the Interior, for the Year 1869*, p. 88.

commerce was being carried on between the Comanches and the Mexicans, and . . . in fact, the territory was filled with Texas cattle."[78]

According to Norton, he and General Carleton issued orders revoking all trading permits, and conditions improved immediately. However, the superintendent charged that the Commissioner of Indian Affairs began issuing licenses, and that the situation became as bad as ever. He wrote:

> When no cattle or horses are found in the Comanche camp by the Mexican traders, they lend the Indians their pistols and horses and remain at the camp until the Comanches have time to go to Texas and return, and get the stock they desire.[79]

To combat the situation, Norton recommended that no more trading permits be issued, that all permits already in force be revoked, and a trading agency built at Fort Bascom. Under his plan one trader would be appointed to operate out of Fort Bascom. Norton also urged that all Texas cattle and all goods of unlicensed traders be confiscated whenever found.

Norton's recommendation for a trading agency at Fort Bascom was never acted upon, but soldiers of the post did begin clamping down on the illegal commerce. On August 30, 1867, a detachment of seventeen men was sent from the post to investigate reports of a large party of Comancheros. About sixty miles east of the fort, the troopers overtook six Mexicans with eleven donkeys loaded with goods. None of the Mexicans had papers authorizing them to trade with the Indians, although they claimed other members of their party, who had preceded them into the Indian country, had legal permits.

The soldiers doubted the story, and forced the traders to accompany them to Fort Bascom where the Mexicans were released and the goods confiscated. The confiscated goods included five hundred pounds of beans, forty butcher knives, and several pounds of lead and powder.[80]

78. *Report on Indian Affairs, by the Acting Commissioner for the Year 1867*, p. 194.
79. *Ibid.*, p. 195.
80. *Fort Bascom Letters Sent*, Letterman to DeForrest, Aug. 31, 1867.

In making a report of the action the post commander, Captain George Letterman, said that several other parties had been intercepted on their way to Comanche country. Some had permits signed by private individuals who claimed that they were empowered by Washington officials to trade with the Comanches. Others had no licenses of any kind. Letterman had a poor regard for all of them. He wrote:

> I believe all these traders to be scoundrels who succeed frequently in smuggling contraband goods through to the Indians and in bringing back stolen cattle in return, notwithstanding the efforts of the military to prevent such practices.[81]

On the following day Letterman again reported contact with Mexican traders. He said that he had taken eighty-two head of cattle from a party of Comancheros and it was evident that all of the stock had been stolen in Texas. On September 7, 1867, the officer wrote that he was holding eight hundred head of confiscated cattle at Fort Bascom.[82]

To guard the trails leading into Comanche country, troopers were divided into small units and stationed out of Fort Bascom as pickets. Occasionally these pickets acted rather arbitrarily in dealing with persons suspected of carrying on illegal trade. In such instances the troopers drew sharp reprimands from the post commander.

One such case involved a group of traders returning to New Mexico from Comanche country. The traders, after being intercepted by troopers of one of the pickets, went to Fort Bascom to complain that their personal weapons as well as a horse and a mule had been confiscated. Letterman sent a letter to the sergeant in charge of the picket that spelled out regulations to be used in confiscating property. In part, it said:

> You should bear in mind that all captured property is to be properly cared for. An accurate inventory of all stock and goods seized by you will be required at this headquarters in order that the whole matter can be fully investigated by the

81. *Ibid.*
82. *Ibid.*, Letterman to DeForrest, Sept. 7, 1867.

> proper authorities. In no case will the traders be deprived of the arms and ammunition necessary for their own protection. Say one pistol or rifle to each man and ammunition not exceeding thirty rounds each. Parties returning from the Indian country will not be deprived of any arms or ammunition whatever.[83]

The illegal traffic continued through 1870, the last year of Fort Bascom's existence as a military post. Captain Horace Jewett became commanding officer late in 1869,[84] and in the spring of 1870 he reported rumors of a large trading expedition. According to Jewett's informant, the party consisted of twenty Mexicans and six Pueblo Indians. Their train included about seventy pack animals.

The traders were traveling as buffalo hunters, but as they adopted precautions to conceal their trail, Jewett was convinced that they were actually engaged in illegal trade with the Comanches. Jewett's informant was probably a civilian, for at the end of his report he requested that authority be granted to any citizen to arrest traders and seize their property.[85]

On August 26, 1870, Jewett captured an unreported number of persons whom he suspected of trading with the Comanches. He sent them to Santa Fe, and suggested to the officers there that clever questioning might determine the parties behind most of the illegal commerce. Jewett's opinion was that the actual traders were only "luckless Mexicans who took all the risk for wealthy merchants." He suggested that the prisoners might be induced to turn state's evidence.[86]

The prisoners he sent to Santa Fe may have been the same ones referred to by the *New Mexican* on September 6, 1870. If so, Jewett's suggestions were ignored. The paper stated that the men, two Mexicans and one Negro, were released as no charges were made against them. The paper also said the goods confiscated when the men were captured were burned.[87]

83. *Ibid.*, Letterman to unidentified sergeant commanding Fort Bascom pickets, Sept. 15, 1867.

84. *Ibid.*, Captain Horace Jewett to Adjutant General Washington, Nov. 24, 1869.

85. *Ibid.*, Jewett to Major William Kobbe, Santa Fe, March 15, 1870.

86. *Ibid.*, Jewett to Assistant Adjutant General, Santa Fe, Sept. 6, 1870.

87. *The Santa Fe New Mexican*, Sept. 6, 1870, p. 2.

After Fort Bascom was abandoned in December, 1870, exchange between traders and Comanches continued at about the same rate for the next two years. Trade in stolen cattle diminished in 1872,[88] and finally ceased to be a problem. Since the winter campaign of 1868, most of the Plains Indians had been at sullen peace on their reservations, and when warfare broke out again in 1872, the Indians were pressed so closely and harried so effectively by troops operating in Texas that they were unable to engage in stock-stealing and trading as of old.

As previously mentioned, the area around Fort Bascom was not entirely free from Indian depredations after the campaign of 1868. On March 14, 1869, a detachment of troopers investigated a particularly grisly massacre at a salt lake which was used by all settlers of the vicinity, about sixty miles northeast of Fort Bascom.

The victims of the massacre, unidentified by name, included one American and three Mexicans. The American and two Mexicans had been shot while working in the lake and their bodies dragged to shore. The other Mexican had been killed near a wagon on the shore of the lake. All had been shot through the head, and three of them had several bullet wounds in their bodies. The American and one Mexican had been scalped, and the fingers and thumbs of each of the victims' right hands had been cut off.

The investigating soldiers determined that the murders had been committed about March 1, 1869, a date when Indians had also stolen nine horses from the camp of some Texas cattle dealers. The cattle dealers were encamped several miles nearer Fort Bascom. The soldiers found the trail of about ten Indians but could not determine the tribe involved.[89]

In May of 1870, large bands of Navajos returned to the vicinity of their former concentration camp, the Bosque Redondo, and committed two violent acts near Fort Bascom. The Navajos were thought to be enroute to Comanche country for one of their periodic raids.

88. Richardson, *op. cit.*, p. 311.
89. *Fort Bascom Letters Sent*, Lieutenant Cain to Hunter, March 14, 1869.

Jewett reported both raids. The first occurred on May 12 near the mouth of Ute Creek as the Navajos, estimated at fifty in number, took a pistol from a herder and killed two of his sheep. The second raid occurred eight days later. Jewett reported that eighty to one hundred Navajos stole one thousand two hundred sheep from a single Mexican herder.[90] Jewett said the raid occurred just twenty miles from the post, and that some of the Indians probably participated in both raids.[91]

The last Indian raid reported by Fort Bascom officers, although probably not the last depredation in the area, occurred the following month on June 15. The Indians, never definitely identified, struck very near the post at the home of W. B. Stapp.

The Indians killed and scalped a Mexican woman employed by Stapp and stole three horses and several household articles. From there they struck still nearer the post, as they fired at a Fort Bascom sentinel and stole five more horses. No reference was made to any pursuit by Fort Bascom forces.

The raid was unique inasmuch as the Indians involved may have been Cheyennes and Arapahoes. A few days earlier Mexican workers had reported sighting a band of twenty-six or more of those Indians within twenty-five miles of the post.[92] If Cheyennes and Arapahoes were guilty of the raid, it was the only time in Fort Bascom's history that troopers stationed there made contact with them in New Mexico.

In spite of the rash of Indian attacks in May and June, Fort Bascom's days were numbered. After the campaign of 1868 the number of soldiers stationed there declined steadily. Jewett complained on November 24, 1869, that the garrison had been reduced to eighty-eight men—a number, he said, not sufficient for guard duty.[93]

Probably the first hint of abandonment of the post reached Fort Bascom on September 14, 1870. On that date Jewett

90. *Ibid.*, Jewett to Assistant Adjutant General, Santa Fe, May 12, 1870.
91. *Ibid.*, Jewett to Assistant Adjutant General, Santa Fe, May 20, 1870.
92. *Ibid.*, Jewett to Kobbe, June 15, 1870.
93. *Ibid.*, Jewett to Adjutant General Washington, Nov. 24, 1869.

wrote Santa Fe acknowledging instructions to cease a construction and repair program on all buildings.[94] Two weeks later the War Department gave its assent to abandonment, and in December, 1870, Fort Bascom was vacated. The garrison and stores were transferred to Fort Union.

Protests of citizens who perhaps rightly felt that hostile Indians were still a menace in the area were in vain. Many felt that Fort Bascom had been improperly located and that instead of being abandoned that it should be rebuilt about one hundred miles farther southeast.

In view of the facts that depredations continued up to the final months of Fort Bascom's existence, and that illegal commerce with the Comanches did not abate until after 1872, it may well be that the abandonment of the post was premature. But army officials in Santa Fe felt that the heavy expense of supplying the small fort was not justified by its accomplishments.[95]

And so, after seven years as a landmark of white man's civilization, Fort Bascom, like the old soldier, faded away. For seven years blue-uniformed troopers rode from its gates to come to grips with savage Indians, to offer protection to weary travelers, and to make strenuous, though sometimes vain, efforts to safeguard the lives and property of settlers. Fort Bascom and other military posts, either large or small, played the vital role in the winning of the West from a formidable savage foe who made a magnificent stand in the uneven struggle.

Fort Bascom was a frontier institution and its days were numbered even as it was being built. Although little is known about it today, the post left its imprint on Eastern New Mexico. It gave birth to a small ranching community that was destined, after a timely move, to grow into one of New Mex-

94. *Ibid.*, Jewett to Assistant Adjutant General, Santa Fe, Sept. 14, 1870.

95. Records of the United States Army Commands. (Undated material from the National Archives)

Stanley, *op. cit.*, p. 274. Had this suggestion been carried out, Fort Bascom would have been relocated very near present-day Portales, possibly at Portales Springs where water was available.

ico's larger cities;[96] its soldiers safely escorted immigrant trains through hostile Indian country; it encouraged settlement along the grassy banks of the Canadian River; and when, in the opinion of ranking military men, it had fulfilled its mission, it quietly took its place as a symbol of a past era.

96. This town was Liberty, which later helped form the nucleus of present-day Tucumcari. (*Supra*, p. 32). Tucumcari, long an important railway center and the principal city of a vast ranching district, has in more recent years boomed as an irrigated farming region. The 1950 census listed it as having a population of over eight thousand.