

1-1-1987

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Francis C. Kajencki

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### Recommended Citation

Kajencki, Francis C.. "The Battle of Glorieta Pass: Was the Guide Ortiz or Grzelachowski?." *New Mexico Historical Review* 62, 1 (1987). <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/nmhr/vol62/iss1/4>

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# The Battle of Glorieta Pass: Was the Guide Ortiz or Grzelachowski?

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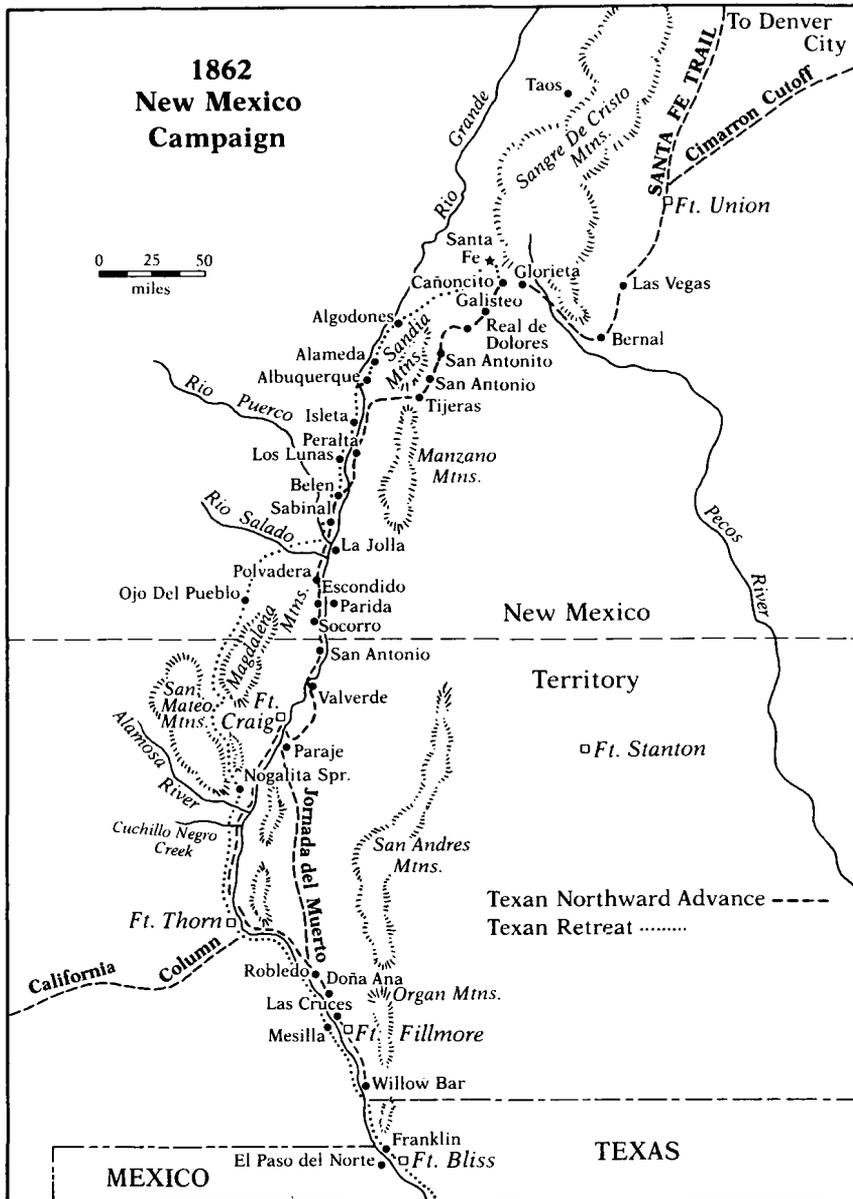
FRANCIS C. KAJENCKI

A Roman Catholic priest, identified by historians only as Padre Ortiz, played a key role in the Battle of Glorieta Pass on March 28, 1862. It was Ortiz who led Major John Chivington's force, which earlier had destroyed the Confederate supply train, through the mountains in darkness to the safety of the Union lines.

On March 26, 1862, advance elements of the Union and Confederate forces clashed at Apache Canyon in Glorieta Pass, thirty miles southeast of Santa Fe. Chivington defeated the Confederates but broke off the engagement and retired to his camp at Kozlowski's Ranch. Here he was joined by the main Union command under Colonel John P. Slough. Slough planned a two-pronged attack on Brigadier General Henry Sibley's Confederate army, believed to be at Johnson's Ranch in Apache Canyon. Slough marched 900 men from Kozlowski's along the Santa Fe Trail toward the Confederate position. Meanwhile, Chivington with about 450 soldiers, and guided by Lieutenant Colonel Manuel Chavez, followed a mountain trail to the high ground overlooking Johnson's Ranch. Slough's plan called for both columns to converge on the enemy.

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Francis C. Kajencki, a retired army colonel, lives in El Paso and is the author of a biography of Civil War General Joseph Kargé, *Star on Many a Battlefield*. He currently is researching and writing about Poles in the nineteenth-century Southwest.



1862 New Mexico Campaign from Don E. Alberts, ed., *Rebels on the Rio Grande: The Civil War Journal of A. B. Peticolas*. Courtesy Don E. Alberts.

Becoming impatient, Lieutenant Colonel William Scurry, the senior Confederate officer at Johnson's, moved down the Glorieta Pass for about six miles to near Pigeon's Ranch, where he collided with Slough. They battled each other to near exhaustion for six hours. Although the Confederates finally drove off the Union troops, their victory was only temporary, since Chivington struck a devastating blow to their rear. Arriving on the heights above Johnson's Ranch, he surprised the Confederate supply train, loaded with ammunition, clothing, commissary items, medical supplies, and forage. His soldiers attacked and destroyed the train of sixty to eighty wagons.<sup>1</sup>

Leaving this scene of destruction, Chivington's raiders climbed back up to the mountain summit from where they had first attacked. They were met by Lieutenant Alfred S. Cobb, with orders from Colonel Slough to rejoin the main command at Kozlowski's at once. Cobb warned Chivington that the enemy held the trail he followed. Since it was almost dark, there seemed to be no way to get back safely, and Chavez knew only the trail along which they had come. He was unwilling to lead the strike force along any other path. William Clarke Whitford narrates what happened next:

At this point in the deliberation, a Mexican Catholic priest on a milk white horse, and who is now known to have been Padre Ortiz, from a small hamlet near the Pecos ruin, rode into their midst and saluted the officers in Spanish. He offered to lead them to their camp over the mountain alongside the pass and by a shorter course, and warned them that if they returned by the old trail they would doubtless meet with some of Scurry's troops, and have trouble in the night. Chavis [*sic*] was acquainted with this priest, understood what he said, and advised Chivington to accept his service. In intense darkness, over steep ridges, through narrow defiles, and along a pathless route, he conducted the column in safety to the main road near the Pecos pueblo, where the troops had turned into the Galisteo trail in the morning.

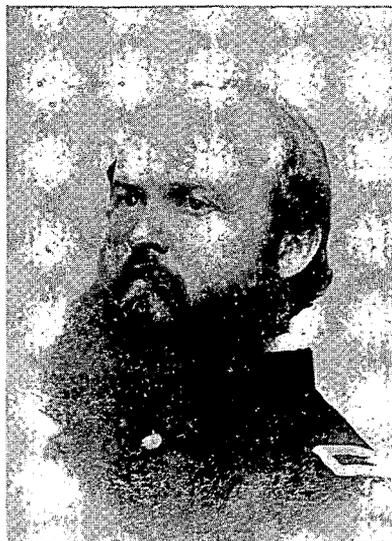
Shortly thereafter Chivington's exhausted command reached Kozlowski's Ranch. Their comrades "joyously welcomed the victors and eagerly listened to the account of their achievements."<sup>2</sup>

The destruction of the Confederate supply train turned the Battle of Glorieta Pass into the decisive action of the Civil War in New Mexico.

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1. Martin Hardwick Hall, *Sibley's New Mexico Campaign* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1960), 158.

2. William Clarke Whitford, *Colorado Volunteers in the Civil War: The New Mexico Campaign in 1862* (Denver: State Historical and Natural History Society, 1906), 122-23.



John M. Chivington and John P. Slough, commanders of the First Colorado Volunteers at the Battles of Glorieta and Apache Canyon. Courtesy Colorado Historical Society.

Left without supplies, General Sibley became completely discouraged. His army retreated to Texas and never threatened New Mexico again.<sup>3</sup>

The crucial help of Padre Ortiz made the Union victory possible. Had Chivington's force been captured or destroyed, Sibley might have been encouraged to reach for his original goal of capturing Fort Union and its military stock. The outcome of his New Mexico campaign could have been much different.

Who was Padre Ortiz? Since this Hispanic surname is common, what was his given name? Martin Hardwick Hall writes that Ortiz came "from a small village near the Pecos ruins." Marc Simmons identifies him as "a priest from the village of Pecos." Reginald S. Craig, a biographer of Chivington, places Ortiz at the Pecos Pueblo. These historians, unfortunately, are not specific enough. They fail to provide not only the priest's given name but also his assignment to a parish or other religious duty.<sup>4</sup>

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3. Hall, *Sibley's Campaign*, 140–60.

4. Hall, *Sibley's Campaign*, 159; Marc Simmons, *The Little Lion of the Southwest: A Life of Manuel Antonio Chaves* (Chicago: Swallow Press, 1973), 185; and Reginald S. Craig, *The Fighting Parson: The Biography of Colonel John M. Chivington* (Los Angeles: Westernlore Press, 1959), 125.

Given this uncertainty, this writer undertook to solve the mystery of Padre Ortiz. The archives of the Catholic Archdiocese of Santa Fe do not contain any such individual. Furthermore, Fray Angelico Chavez in *Archives of the Archdiocese of Santa Fe, 1678-1900*, lists four priests named Ortiz: Fernando, Jose Eulogio, Juan Felipe, and Rafael. But they all served prior to 1858. The national Catholic directory for 1855 shows the mission church at Pecos, *Nuestra Senora del Refugio*, as attended by the pastor at San Miguel del Vado, the Rev. Francisco Leyva. The 1855 directory also contains the name of the Rev. Fernando Ortiz at *San Juan de los Caballeros*. This Indian pueblo is located approximately forty miles north of Santa Fe, a considerable distance from Pecos.

The next available directory (1865) is devoid of the name Ortiz for the Diocese of Santa Fe. Priests from Santa Fe made visits to the mission church at Pecos, now called *Nuestra Senora de los Angeles*.<sup>5</sup>

The Rev. Philip Herndon, pastor of St. Anthony's Church in Pecos, told this writer that the parish was established on October 7, 1862 (six months after the Battle of Glorieta Pass). It was called initially *Nuestra Senora de los Angeles*. The first baptism took place on the same date. Father Herndon said the signature of the priest who recorded the baptism is fairly long but illegible. However, he was certain the signature bears no resemblance to "Ortiz." He opined that it is a name of French origin. Further entries in the church record book continue until November 30, 1863, when a gap occurs, to 1870. This break explains why the church reverted to the status of a mission, since the Catholic directory for 1865 shows that *Nuestra Senora de los Angeles* was attended by priests from Santa Fe.<sup>6</sup>

Could the name of Padre Ortiz be a mistaken identity? Historical evidence points strongly to Padre Polaco, the Rev. Alexander Grzelachowski and Chaplain of the Second New Mexico Infantry Regiment, as the priest who led Chivington's men over the pathless route to the safety of Kozlowski's Ranch.

The Las Vegas, New Mexico, *Daily Optic*, March 14, 1881, gave credit to Grzelachowski as the person who guided Chivington's men

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5. Fray Angelico Chavez, *Archives of the Archdiocese of Santa Fe, 1678-1900* (Washington, D.C.: Academy of American Franciscan History, 1957), 260-61; *The Metropolitan Catholic Almanac and Laity's Directory, 1855* (Baltimore: Lucas Brothers, 1855), 243-45; and the same directory for 1865, 182-86.

6. Telephone interview with Rev. Philip Herndon, pastor of St. Anthony's Church, Pecos, New Mexico, February 19, 1985. Father Herndon served a number of years in the Pecos area. In 1978 he was pastor of Our Lady of Guadalupe Church in Villanueva, a few miles south of San Miguel del Vado; *Catholic Almanac, 1865*, p. 183.

through the mountains to Johnson's Ranch. Noting the nineteenth anniversary of the Battle of Glorieta Pass, the *Optic* stated:

With the assistance of A. Grzelachowski, a Polander and at the present day a prosperous merchant at Puerto de Luna, as a guide through a secret pass, Chivington started out on his dangerous errand. . . . The Yankee sharpers reached the train, which was composed of thirty-six wagons at 2 o'clock in the afternoon. . . . It was the work of a few minutes only to apply the torch, and the rations and ammunition of the Texans were soon sending up volumes of smoke.<sup>7</sup>

The *Optic* seems to have ignored the service of Manuel Chavez. However, a chance discovery of primary source data confirms and explains Grzelachowski's special role. These data are the facts contained in his letter to Captain Gurden Chapin, Acting Assistant Adjutant General, Department of New Mexico. Writing to Chapin on August 4, 1862, Grzelachowski stated:

In the engagement between our troops, and the so-called confederate forces, at Canon del Apache, while accompanying Col. Chivington's command, returning from the place where the enemy's train was by us destroyed, the horse I was riding, my private property, died. Will you please to inform me if I have a right to claim from the government an indemnification for my horse, and if so, what course must I pursue to receive such indemnification.<sup>8</sup>

That Grzelachowski's horse died from the ordeal of the march is not surprising. Even Chivington dismounted and led his horse on foot, as he stumbled behind the mounted priest. Grzelachowski undoubtedly had to ride his horse to be able to lead the soldiers through the trackless mountains.<sup>9</sup>

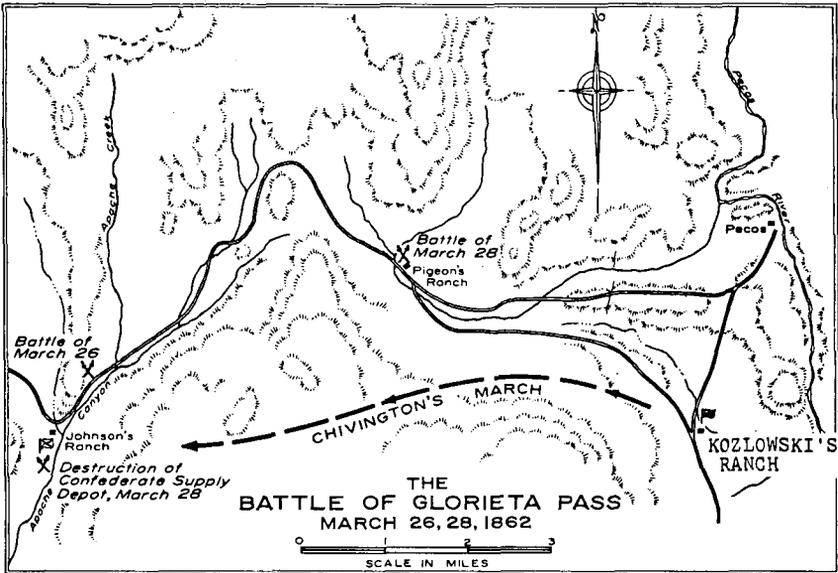
Additional evidence points to Grzelachowski as Chivington's guide.

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7. "Trouncing the Texans," [Las Vegas] *Daily Optic*, March 14, 1881; Francis C. Kenjcki, "Alexander Grzelachowski: Pioneer Merchant of Puerto de Luna, New Mexico," *Arizona and the West*, 26 (Autumn 1984), 248.

8. Chaplain Alexander Grzelachowski, Second New Mexico Volunteers, to Captain Gurden Chapin, Acting Assistant Adjutant General, Department of New Mexico, August 4, 1862, microfilm F801R42 1980, reel 16, frame 0436, Register of Letters Received, Headquarters, Department of New Mexico, 1854-1865, University of New Mexico Library. The author is indebted to Charles Meketa of Corrales, New Mexico, for "discovering" the letter.

9. Craig, *Fighting Parson*, 125.



The Battle of Glorieta Pass, March 26 and 28, 1862. Courtesy National Park Service.

Whitford states that, when the priest rode up before Chivington and his officers, he greeted them in Spanish, a language with which Grzelachowski was fluent. Although he was a natural linguist and spoke several tongues, Grzelachowski preferred Spanish. Even late in life, he continued to use that language in correspondence with his lawyer, Louis Sulzbacher, and his merchant friend, Charles Ilfeld.<sup>10</sup>

Whitford says that Manuel Chavez knew the priest. "Chavis [sic] was acquainted with this priest," Whitford wrote, "understood what he said and advised Chivington to accept his services." Indeed, Chavez and Grzelachowski knew each other well. Chavez was the lieutenant colonel, or second in command, of the Second New Mexico Volunteers and Grzelachowski was the chaplain of this regiment.<sup>11</sup>

Some historical accounts identify Chivington's guide as French. This view would rule out the name "Ortiz." Grzelachowski may have attended a French seminary, and he was in France at the time he was

10. Kajencki, "Alexander Grzelachowski," 243, 245, 256n.

11. Whitford, *Colorado Volunteers*, 122; "List of Commissioned Officers," Second Regiment, New Mexico Infantry, Description Book of Military Units, 25-26, New Mexico State Records Center and Archives, Santa Fe.

recruited for service in the Cleveland, Ohio, diocese. Grzelachowski, therefore, could have been referred to as a "French priest."<sup>12</sup>

In his official report of the fighting in 1862, Chivington mentioned an unnamed aide. In 1884, when he wrote his "Retrospective—The Prospective," he did not identify the nationality of the aide but stated that "a Roman Catholic priest had joined us at the top of the mountain. . . ." In 1890, Chivington called the aide "a native Catholic priest" (probably because the priest spoke in Spanish). The Colonel wrote: "I wish to say of this priest—I wish I had his name—that he was the only native priest that I saw during the entire campaign and our stay afterward in New Mexico who was loyal to the Federal Government."<sup>13</sup>

No Catholic priest called Padre Ortiz can be identified in the region of Pecos, New Mexico, in 1862, when the Battle of Glorieta Pass was fought. On the other hand, primary and secondary historical sources prove that Grzelachowski took part in this decisive battle in the same role attributed to Ortiz. It was indeed Chaplain Alexander Grzelachowski, or Padre Polaco as he was affectionately known, who performed the fateful task that saved Chivington's command from possible capture and destruction.

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12. Charles Gardner, "The Pet Lambs of Glorieta Pass," *Civil War Times Illustrated*, 15 (November 1976), 35; Kajencki, "Alexander Grzelachowski," 244.

13. Chivington's Report, March 28, 1862, *Official Records*, Series 1, IX, 539; Colonel John M. Chivington, "The Retrospective—The Prospective," Film P-L 12, Bancroft Library, University of California—Berkeley; J. M. Chivington, "The Pet Lambs," *The Denver Republican*, April 27, 1890.