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EL CAMINO MILITAR

By F. T. CHEETHAM

ON THE 13th day of December, 1850, President Millard Fillmore issued his proclamation declaring the settlement of the boundary dispute between the State of Texas and the United States, and that the organic act creating the Territory of New Mexico passed by congress on September 9, 1850, was in full force and effect. This act extended the constitution and laws of the United States to the newly created territory and carried with it the duty of the general government to protect the inhabitants against invasion by all enemies both foreign and domestic. In fact it had been the policy of the government to do this ever since the armed forces of the United States had seized the territory in 1846. General Kearny in his proclamation made at Santa Fé on August 19, 1846, had proclaimed for the inhabitants protection against the incursions of hostile Indians.

Relying on this assurance, adventurous settlers pushed northward from Taos and Abiquiu and established settlements in the San Luís valley, then a part of the territory. Costilla was settled in 1848. In 1851 a colony settled on the Culebra river near the present town of San Luís, Colorado. In the spring of 1854, Lafayette Head and about fifty families located on the north side of the Conejos river.

The Utes and several roaming bands of Apaches regarded these settlements as invasions of their hunting grounds and began making war on the settlers. The government had, off and on since the Pueblo Rebellion of 1847, kept

troops at Taos. Afterwards the war department erected a fort on the Rio Grande del Rancho, about nine miles south of Taos. In 1852, Fort Massachusetts was built on Ute Creek about six miles north of the present town of Fort Garland, Colorado. However, during the winter of 1853 and 1854, this fort was unoccupied. On March 13, 1854, a war party of Utes and Apaches attacked the settlers on the Conejos. Under the leadership of Lafayette Head the Indians were beaten off. Securing reinforcements, the Indians, about 250 strong, attacked Troops F and I of the First U. S. Dragoons (afterwards known as the First U. S. Cavalry) on a bridle path in the Embudo Mountains. The soldiers numbering sixty strong were commanded by Lieutenant Davidson. They suffered heavily, losing all but seventeen men and only four escaped injuries.

General Garland, commanding the Department of New Mexico, ordered Lieutenant Colonel Cooke to take the field and chastise the marauders. What followed can best be gleaned from his report:

Headquarters Department of New Mexico
Albuquerque, April 1, 1854.

Colonel: I have the honor to enclose herewith, for the information of the general-in-chief, a copy of a report from Major Blake, first dragoons, very unsatisfactory as regards particulars.

The Indians, Jicarilla Apaches and Utahs, have managed to combine a force of 250 warriors, and unexpectedly attacked a company of dragoons, 60 strong, about 25 miles from Fernandes de Taos, under the command of Lieut. J. W. Davidson, first dragoons, and succeeded, after a desperate conflict, in overwhelming it. Lieut. Davidson and Assistant Surgeon Magruder, both wounded, returned from the battlefield with about seventeen men, most of them wounded.

The troops displayed a gallantry seldom equalled in this or any country, and the officer in command, Lieut. Davidson, has given evidence of soldiership in the highest degree creditable to him. To have sustained a deadly contest of three hours, when he was so greatly outnumbered, and then to have retired with the fragment of a company, crippled up, is amazing, and calls for the admiration of every true soldier.

To prevent further disaster, I have ordered Lieut. Col. Cooke,

second dragoons, to take the field, with about 200 dragoons and a company of artillery armed with rifles.

If hostilities are continued—and I have little doubt such will be the case—I will be forced to call upon the governor of this Territory for two or three companies of volunteers.

It is very desirable that a strong mounted force, with a good supply of horses, be sent out early in the spring.

** ** ** **

I am, Colonel, very respectfully your obedient servant,

JNO. GARLAND

Brevet Brigadier General Commanding

Lieut. Col. L. Thomas,

Asst. Adjt. General, Headquarters of the Army, New York.

Headquarters Department of New Mexico
Santa Fe, April 30, 1854.

COLONEL: I have the honor to report, for the information of the major general commanding the army, that Lieut. Col. Cooke, second dragoons, on hearing of the disaster which befell the command of Lieut. Davidson on the 30th March, proceeded, with the available force at Fort Union, in the shortest possible time to Taos, where he organized a force of 200 men, and on the instant marched in pursuit of the Indians, whom he overtook on the 8th on the upper branches of the Agua Calientes, and immediately gave them battle, the result of which will be found in the enclosed copy of his report. This prompt and energetic movement reflects the highest credit upon this officer, and I feel satisfied has prevented the Utahs from making common cause with the Jicarilla Apaches. It is known that the Indians lost six warriors in the affair of the 8th. It has also been ascertained that they have lost four of their chiefs since the commencement of hostilities, and nearly the whole of their animals and baggage. Their pursuit was checked for a few days by a violent storm of wind and snow which lasted thirty hours, and very nearly paralyzed the whole command. The enemy had previously led their pursuers over the most rugged ground which troops were ever known to campaign in—the spurs of the mountain often reaching to the height of 3,000 feet, very abrupt, and covered with snow several feet in depth.

Col. Cooke is now at a small Mexican village (Rito) west of the Rio Grande, and though suffering with chills and fever, has sent out two detachments of about 140 men each, in hot pursuit, and with strong hopes of bringing the Indians to battle. Their numbers have been reduced by desertions, wounds, and death, to about 100 warriors. That is the greatest number now assembled at any one point.

It is all-important to crush this band of *pirates*. They have too long indulged in murder and plunder to leave a hope of reformation. They do not pretend to keep good faith in *treaties* or promises. Their thorough chastisement will undoubtedly have its effect upon the contiguous tribes now looking on with deep interest for the result, and will give us assurance of many months of peace.

I have made strong efforts to bring this business to a speedy close, and will succeed if it is within the reach of possibility. Unusual and extraordinary measures have been taken to effect this desirable object, and which will be explained in another communication.

I have not as yet had a report of operations of the three companies ordered to Sierra Blanco to divert the attention of the Mezcalero from this quarter.

I am, Colonel, with great respect, your obedient servant,

JOHN GARLAND

Brevet Brigadier General Commanding.

Lieut. Col. L. Thomas,

Asst. Adjt. General, Headquarters of the Army, New York.

Headquarters Department of New Mexico.
Santa Fe, June 30, 1854.

COLONEL: In making report of the militant operations against the Jicarilla Apaches under the eye and orders of Lieutenant Colonel Cooke, 2nd dragoons, for the information of the general-in-chief, I will confine myself to the simple remark that all has been done which was in the power of troops to do.

I approve most cordially the manner in which Lieutenant Colonel Cooke has conducted his campaign.

The Jicarilla Apaches have been most thoroughly humbled and beg for peace. They are dispersed in small parties with the exception of one band, which is now hard pressed by about one hundred men under Major Blake and Captain Ewell, 1st dragoons.

In order to a full understanding of the vigorous prosecution of the campaign, the difficulties encountered and overcome, I have thought it advisable to transmit the detailed reports of Lieutenant Colonel Cooke, marked A, of Brevet Major Carleton, 1st dragoons, marked B, and of Lieutenant Ransom, 1st dragoons, marked C. These officers are entitled to the highest commendation for the zeal, activity, and gallantry displayed by them in prosecuting the war; they have proven *that* to the Indians which is worth more to us than a victory; that is, they are not safe from pursuit in the most inaccessible parts of the Rocky mountains.

For the activity and zeal displayed by the junior officers, and for other interesting details, I respectfully call attention to the accom-

panying reports already referred to. All speak in the highest terms of praise of the Mexicans and Pueblos employed as trailers, spies, etc. Captain Quinn, who had the immediate charge of them, gave evidence throughout of sagacity and indomitable courage; the same remark will equally apply to Mr. Kit Carson, sub-agent of Indian affairs.

I will simply add, in conclusion, that one hundred and eighty men are now in the country of the Mezcalero Apaches, under the command of Brevet Lieutenant Colonel Chandler, 3rd infantry. This band of Indians has been infesting the road leading from El Paso to San Antonio, committing murders and robberies; the steps which I have taken will, it is believed, put an end to their depredations in that quarter.

The Navajoes have remained quiet this year; a small party of them, renegades, stole some hundreds of sheep last month, which the nation has restored to the proper owners.

The Utahs are playing a doubtful game, and have to be watched very closely; their sympathies are all with the Jicarilla band of Apaches.

I am, Colonel, very respectfully, your obedient servant,

JOHN GARLAND

Brevet Brigadier General Commanding Department.

Lieut. Col. L. Thomas,

Asst. Adj. Gen., Headquarters of the Army, New York.¹

These affairs with the Indians demonstrated the necessity of constructing military roads to reach the outposts of the territory. Congress accordingly, by an act approved July 17, 1854, appropriated \$20,000.00 to construct a military road from Taos to Santa Fé; and for another from Santa Fé to Doña Ana, including the sinking of wells, the sum of \$12,000.00.

The order of Jefferson Davis, secretary of war, concerning these appropriations, is of interest:

War Department

Washington, November 28, 1854.

SIR: By an act approved July 17, 1854, the following appropriations are made for the construction and repair of roads in the Territory of New Mexico, viz: from Taos to Santa Fé \$20,000.00, and from Santa Fé to Doña Ana, including the sinking of wells if required, \$12,000. You are hereby charged with the execution of these works.

1. From Executive Documents, 2nd Session, 33rd Congress, Volume 1, Part 2 (1854-1855), pp. 33-36.

As indicated by the terms of the appropriation act, the want of water is one of the difficulties to be overcome on the route last mentioned, and your attention will be first directed to that object. It is believed that the readiest and cheapest mode of procuring water will be by sinking artesian wells, and for that purpose the apparatus procured to make examinations in connection with the exploration of railroad route to the Pacific, will, when no longer required on that work, be turned over to you at Santa Fé.

When, as in these cases, a comparatively small amount of money is appropriated for a long line of road, the department has directed that the road be first rendered practicable for wagons through its entire length, and that the remainder of the appropriation be expended on the more difficult portions of it, so as to render the whole as uniform as possible. You will pursue this plan in executing the work now intrusted to you.

It is deemed best to have the work done by contract if practicable, and in making contracts for the purpose, to endeavor to have them taken by persons residing near the line of the road, or otherwise personally interested in its completion, stipulating either for the execution of a specified quantity of work, or, what perhaps is preferable, for the completion of a certain portion of the road, payment being subject to your approval of the work.

You will consult freely with the commanding officer of the department in regard to the location and construction of the roads.

The amount of the above-mentioned appropriations will be placed at your credit with the assistant treasurer at St. Louis, Missouri.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

JEFF'N DAVIS

Secretary of War.

Captain E. P. Scammon,

Corps Top. Engs., Santa Fé, New Mexico.²

Before the Taos-Santa Fé military road could be completed, a call for troops was again made. Troops B, D, and F of the 1st Dragoons and Battery D, 2nd U. S. Artillery, participated. Six companies of volunteers, four of which took part in the Saguache campaign, were recruited by order of the governor of the territory, who commissioned Capt. Ceran St. Vrain as colonel commanding. This expedition left Taos in February, 1854, and followed the trace made by the settlers from that place to Fort Massachusetts on Ute

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 42-43.

Creek at the foot of the Blanca Range. From Fort Massachusetts the forces crossed the San Luis Valley and on March 19 it encountered the Indians in the Cochotopa, not far from the present town of Saguache. The Utes fled and were again attacked in the Poncha Pass on the 21st and 23rd of March. The troops then returned to Fort Massachusetts to replenish their supply of munitions. Col. St. Vrain, with the volunteers, was sent over the Sangre de Cristo Pass to attack the Apaches, while the regulars went north. The latter had two fights with the Utes, first on the headwaters of the Arkansas on April 29, and in the Saevatch valley on May 1 and 2. Col. St. Vrain encountered the Apaches on the Purgatoire river and gave them a good beating. The regulars suffered a terrific loss of horses in this campaign, for they could not secure forage and the horses died of starvation. The volunteers mounted on native horses. They grazed on sweet bark cottonwoods and pawed up the snow to eat the grass underneath.

The route of the first road built by the army was approximately Santa Fé to Velarde (then called La Joya), thence through the hills to Dixon (Embudo Plaza), thence to Peñasco via Ojo Sarco, and over the pass between the Rio Pueblo and the Rio Grande del Rancho to Fort Burgwin, or Cantonment Burgwin, as it was officially called, and from the fort to Taos. The pass just mentioned is known to this day as the "U. S." Hill, because the road was built by the army.

In 1858, Capt. J. N. Macomb of the Corps of Topographical Engineers, made surveys of three proposed routes for the road from Taos to Santa Fé. His findings are set forth in his report to Col. J. J. Abert, chief of Topographical Engineers, U. S. A., on September 29, 1858, as follows:

IV. ROAD FROM TAOS TO SANTA FÉ

This road is one of very great interest and importance, whether considered in a commercial or military light, as the means of affording an easy outlet for the abundant products of the rich and justly cele-

brated valley of Taos, or as the route of communications between the headquarters of the department and the upper posts of the valley of the Rio del Norte.

The chief obstacle to the easy construction of a road between Taos and Santa Fé is the mountainous formation which extends westwardly from the great southern branch of the Rocky mountain range, in the vicinity of the Moro Peaks, and crosses the Rio del Norte, constituting a formidable natural barrier between the valley of Taos and the country around Santa Fé. At present wagons pass with great difficulty over the route by the eastern part of this barrier; but the road is very circuitous and rough, crossing mountain streams and immense stony hills and being in many places annually encroached upon by deep arroyos. To improve this route, and make the grade easy enough for loaded wagons, would considerably increase its present length; and the great expense which it would cause could produce no lasting benefit, owing to the exposure of the work to destruction from the mountain torrents in the rainy season.

Between the above route and the Rio del Norte there is a bridle path which passes in a direct course through El Embudo, but it is so steep that in wet weather animals pass over it with difficulty. The heavy grade and mobile character of the soil throw it out of consideration as a wagon road route.

The route to which I give the preference, after a careful examination of all of them is as follows:

From Taos, in a southwesterly direction for about 18 miles, to a point on the Rio del Norte called "Sienaguilla," thence through the cañon of the Rio del Norte, by cutting a roadway into the slope of the left bank, 15 miles to La Joya; and thence by the road common to all the routes above named, 40 miles, to Santa Fé; being in all 73 miles, and 14 miles shorter than the present difficult and objectionable wagon road. The greater part of the first section above named is over easy ground, requiring scarcely any work to make a perfect road; but on approaching Sienaguilla there will be some heavy work for about 3 miles, involving the crossing of two deep arroyos and the easing of three very considerable hills.

From Sienaguilla to La Joya, for 15 miles, involving the removal of broken rock and the cutting of the roadway into the side of the mountain, and constituting the expensive feature of the road, but offering a grade which is scarcely a perceptible departure from the true level, and affording the only chance for a permanent roadway to pass the mountains.

The remaining section of forty miles requires considerable work at certain points, such as a new location near Pojoaque, to avoid arroyos and to be protected against their encroachments, and also a

new location, involving much cutting and grading, along Tesuque creek, and among the sand hills just north of Santa Fé.

The accompanying estimate shows the probable cost of effecting this great work, and it is hoped that the importance of the route will lead to its favorable consideration.

* * *

IV. ESTIMATE FOR COMPLETING THE ROAD FROM TAOS TO SANTA FÉ

Section from Taos to Sienaguilla, 18 miles -----	\$ 13,500.00
Sienaguilla to La Joya, through the cañon of the Rio del Norte, 15 miles -----	82,500.00
From La Joya to Santa Fé, 40 miles -----	21,500.00
From which deduct the balance on hand of appropriation made by act of July 17, 1854 -----	\$ 4,500.00
Leaving total required for the completion of a road from Taos to Santa Fé -----	\$113,000.00

All of which is respectfully submitted by your most obedient servant,

J. N. MACOMB

Captain Topographical Engineers.

Sept. 29, 1858.

Colonel J. J. Abert

Commanding Corps Topographical Engineers, U. S. A.
Washington, D. C.³

In 1861 an act was passed (approved March 2nd) to provide for the completion of the military roads from Fort Union to Santa Fé, and from Taos to Santa Fé, New Mexico. This act carried an appropriation for the Taos-Santa Fé road of \$15,000,00.⁴

The 42nd Congress passed an act⁵ entitled "An Act providing for the completion of the Military Road from Santa Fé to Taos in the Territory of New Mexico":

Be it enacted, etc., That the sum of twenty-five thousand dollars be and the same is hereby appropriated for the completion of the military road from the city of Santa Fé to Fernández de Taos, in the Territory of New Mexico, to be ex-

3. See Archives, War Dept.

4. 12 Statutes at Large, page 208.

5. Chap. 312, 3rd session, approved March 3, 1873.

pended under the direction of the Secretary of War.

Two years later the 43rd Congress provided "for the completion of the military road from the city of Santa Fé to Fernández de Taos, in the Territory of New Mexico. Six thousand six hundred and forty-four dollars and eighty cents, in addition to the unexpended balance of the appropriation made by Act of March third, eighteen hundred and seventy-three, which is hereby continued and made available, to be expended under the direction of the Secretary of War."⁶

Concerning the constructing of this road, which commenced in accordance with the recommendations of Captain Macomb, Captain Smith H. Simpson, who came to New Mexico in 1853 and settled in Taos a few years later, related to the writer the following story: A detachment of army engineers, under the command of a lieutenant, started work in the Rio Grande Cañon at Cieneguilla (now called Pilar). The lieutenant laid out the road to cross the river by a bridge at Cieneguilla, run down the right or west bank of the river and recross a few miles below. About \$2,000.00 worth of timbers had been collected at the above named place and they were held by booms in the river. Some two or three miles of the road had been opened up on the first bench west of the river. Before the grade was completed the lieutenant was called to Washington and left the work in charge of his first sergeant. While the lieutenant was in Washington the men ran out of grade stakes, so to keep the men occupied, the sergeant put the men to work blasting the rock slides on the east or left bank of the river, as they had a large quantity of black powder. They found the slides did not respond to their blasts, so, before the lieutenant returned, they had a road practically opened down the left bank where the road now is. Upon his return, the lieutenant on looking over the situation, ordered the booms cut and the timbers went on down the river. The road was completed on the east side.

⁶. Chapter 180, 43 Congress, 2nd session. 1854 Statutes at Large, Page 391. Approved March 3, 1875.

This road, from Taos to and through the Rio Grande Cañon, has since been known locally as "El Camino Militar." As the present road from Santa Fé to Taos and on to Fort Garland, Colorado, follows in the main the line established and used by the soldiers, it would seem that to retain the name El Camino Militar would be fitting and appropriate.

Who knows but that this road leading from Santa Fé to Fort Garland, being the shortest and most direct line between the industrial sections of Colorado and the heart of New Mexico and on to the border, may again become of great strategic importance as a military road.