

## Chapter 4: The Military Seeks Control

During the 1850s, the Southern Plains illustrated a pattern of contact and conflict that had become common throughout the western United States. Indian peoples who dominated areas before the establishment of American rule and the significant influx of Anglo-Americans found their preeminence in jeopardy. On the Central Plains, a combination of environmental change and inadvertent overuse of resources by Indian and Anglo alike endangered the riverine environments that sustained Cheyennes and overland travelers alike. Pressure created by use of the river valleys for grazing threatened buffalo herds as early as the 1840s, more than two decades before white buffalo hunters in the employ of railroads and the military began to wipe out these enormous shaggy creatures farther north. On the Northern Plains, along the Bozeman Trail, travelers who disrupted Indian life and broke treaty promises inspired violence between the tribes and soldiers; near Fort Laramie, in 1851, the shooting of a stray cow by an Indian led to the deaths of a number of soldiers and Indians and a permanent rift in relations. The large areas that Native Americans needed to maintain their ways of life assured that conflicts would continue. In the Southwest, the Mescaleros and Comanches faced the same encroachment, the same limiting of range and options, and their experience reflected those of other peoples of their time on the plains and in the West.<sup>1</sup>

The American military, as did its explorers and surveyors, became the enforcers of the doctrine of Manifest Destiny. During the 1850s, the Army first asserted its jurisdiction in the remote portion of the Mexican cession known as the Guadalupe Mountains and the trans-Pecos region. Mescaleros vexed incoming Americans well before the military developed a consistent presence in the area. When Alexander Doniphan, a powerful, just, and self-righteous Missouri lawyer whose military experience before the Mexican War included an expedition to the Navajo, led his troops to El Paso on the route of his subsequent march through Mexico that ended with his participation in the conquest of Chihuahua, Mescaleros ran off a herd of horses and oxen. After a

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<sup>1</sup> Elliott West, *The Way to the West: Essays on the Central Plains* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995), 1-84; Robert Utley, *The Lance and the Shield: The Life and Times of Sitting Bull* (NY: Henry Holt, 1993); James E. Sherow, "The Workings of the Geodialectic: High Plains Indians and Their Horses in the Region of the Arkansas River Valley, 1800-1870," *Environmental History Review* 16 2 (Spring 1992).

seventy-mile pursuit, soldiers found the oxen — twenty of them speared — but the Mescaleros and the valued horses had disappeared. As Anglo-Americans headed west in the rush to the California goldfields, the Mescaleros found them easy prey; so were stagecoaches, which were typically alone and defended only by a driver and any willing passengers. By the 1850s, the Mescaleros developed a habit of harrying Americans who passed through their region.<sup>2</sup>

The low-level conflicts and the ongoing tensions between Indians and the Americans it precipitated presaged the first U.S. military forays into the mountains that harbored the Apache peoples, with logistic support provided by Fort Bliss, one of a series of posts built starting in 1848 in what is now El Paso. The Army would eventually build chains of forts along the Rio Grande and the San Antonio-El Paso road to guard against depredations and support military expeditions. In 1850, Lieutenant Enoch Steen led an Army detachment from Doña Ana to the Organ Mountains, home of the Sierra Blanca Apaches, to the northwest of Guadalupe Mountains. The Sierra Blancas rarely participated in the raiding to their south; they simply wanted to be left alone. In this instance, they bluffed the soldiers, claiming to have a war party of more than 2,000 awaiting the military; in reality 200 or 300 warriors were all that this small band could muster. Steen's detachment turned back.<sup>3</sup>

This initial Army foray only delayed a certain conflict. Increased American presence in the region and the growing numbers of Apachean peoples limited the economic resources available in the Guadalupe Mountains and on both sides of the Pecos River. American activities curtailed the range of these peoples, and game became scarce as the presence of the various trails through the region shortened the distance the Mescaleros could travel without conflict. When the American government promised Mexico in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo that it would halt Indian raiding south of the border, another source of Apachean sustenance became first contested and later disappeared. All of this placed the Apache tribes of the southern plains in a difficult position. The Comanches to the east kept them pinned across the Pecos, the mountains no longer provided enough game for sustenance, and American soldiers sought to prevent them from using Mexico as a source of food. In 1850, a number of Mescalero and Lipan leaders told Brevet Captain A.W. Bowman of the Quartermaster Corps that the Indians “must steal from somebody; and if you will not permit us to rob the Mexicans, we must steal

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<sup>2</sup> Sonnichsen, *The Mescalero Apache*, 57-58; Goetzmann, *Army Exploration in the American West, 1803-1863*, 157; Bernard DeVoto, *1846: The Year of Decision* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1943), 13, 83-84, 391-94; Merk, *History of the Westward Movement*, 368; an excellent map of the war with Mexico can be found in Mark C. Carnes and John A. Garraty with Patrick Williams, *Mapping America's Past: A Historical Atlas* (NY: Henry Holt, 1996), 98.

<sup>3</sup> Robert G. Ferris, ed. *Soldier and Brave: Historic Places Associated with Indian Affairs and the Indian Wars in the Trans-Mississippi West*. Washington, D.C.: United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1971: 318; Sonnichsen, *The Mescalero Apaches*, 58-59; “Record of Engagements with Hostile Indians in Texas 1868 to 1882,” *West Texas Historical Association Year Book*, IX (1933): 101, 105, 114, 117.

from you or fight you.”<sup>4</sup> The clarity of this geopolitical understanding presented only ominous long-term overtones. As early as mid-century, the Mescaleros and Lipans recognized that the choices they faced worsened their circumstances.

The Mescaleros soon sought to forge a separate arrangement with the Americans. In September 1850, an entire band of Mescaleros from the Davis and Guadalupe Mountains, led by Simon Manuel and Simon Porode, appeared at the community of San Elizario to see what the newly entrenched Americans had to offer. Treated well by American authorities in both San Elizario and El Paso, the Mescaleros promised to return for treaty talks. No record of their return exists.<sup>5</sup> From the Mescaleros’ perspective, the Americans were only slightly different from the Mexicans. Mescalero people could presume that the Americans needed their cooperation as much as did the Mexicans and Spanish before, and the arrangement of treaties, at which both sides occasionally winked and then surreptitiously violated — Americans in general to acquire land, Mescaleros to find food and stores to survive — served as general guideline for interactions. In this, the Mescaleros misunderstood their new neighbors and future adversaries. The Americans were not the Mexicans; the newcomers understood their role in the region in entirely new ways.

The Mescaleros could also see that the newcomers were different. These Americans had many more soldiers and guns than their predecessors, better means of transportation, and less fear of the wide-open hinterlands that had been Mescalero domain. They seemed to embody abundance; big, well-armed men on large horses, eating regularly and wearing warm clothing. To the Americans the Mescaleros appeared decimated but threatening, “more filthy than swine and as precarious and uncertain as the wolf,” in the words of Major Jefferson Van Horne, who led a battalion of the Third Infantry escorting a long train of supply wagons to El Paso in 1850. Under these new circumstances, the Mescaleros recognized their predicament and shied away from contact with the growing number of whites in their region. Only the southernmost groups, in the Davis Mountains, could not resist the dangerous temptations to attack passers-by on the southern route to El Paso.<sup>6</sup>

The military presence became increasingly threatening to the Mescaleros, who sought ways to preserve the limited world left them. The construction of Fort Bliss near El Paso in 1848 signaled the beginning of an escalated Anglo presence. New Mexico Territorial Governor James S. Calhoun, who served as the Indian agent for the territory in the manner of most territorial governors, sought to utilize the Army as a way to secure treaty arrangements. This coercive club offered a forceful reminder; in April 1851, the Jicarilla leader Francisco Chacon

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<sup>4</sup> Sonnichsen, *The Mescalero Apache*, 60-61; quote from *Report of the Secretary of War for 1850*, 295-97.

<sup>5</sup> Sonnichsen, *The Mescalero Apache*, 62.

<sup>6</sup> Sonnichsen, *The Mescalero Apache*, 64-65, 82-84.

and two Mescalero leaders, Josecito and Lobo, signed a treaty with Calhoun. The governor sought ways to provide for the people who embraced his offer, albeit out of necessity as much as desire. Ongoing raiding was a threat to order in the New Mexico Territory. Calhoun planned to isolate Mescalero and Jicarilla bands at least 100 miles away from the nearest white settlements. Josecito encouraged his people to try agriculture as an economic strategy, and for a time, the experiment seemed to work. Even after Calhoun's untimely death in 1852, Mescalero leaders kept seeking an arrangement. A party of about thirty Mescaleros visited Santa Fe at the end of June 1852, and the warm reception they received prompted hopes of a solution that would keep violence to a minimum. Positive sentiments on both sides ran high in the summer of 1852.<sup>7</sup>

The fractious nature of relations between Native Americans and incoming soldiers and civilians dashed any hopes of maintaining peaceful coexistence. In retaliation for a military attack on Jicarilla people, some of the tribe's warriors and a band of Utes attacked a stagecoach, killing more than ten passengers, including a Philadelphian who had come west with his wife and baby to be the sutler at Fort Buchanan. The wife and baby were kidnaped and later killed as the soldiers closed in on their Indian captors. This incident became a wedge between Indians and whites, more divisive than typical raiding because of the death of the sutler, an economic asset to the region, and his family. The incident pitted Americans and Mescaleros against each other with the worst expectations and spurred a much harsher policy from the new civilian leader, David Meriwether, who became governor of New Mexico Territory in August 1853. Meriwether believed that the policies preceding his tenure had been too lenient and in 1854, the New Mexico Territory experienced a range of skirmishes and uprisings that seemed a prelude to an all-out war with the eastern Apache peoples.<sup>8</sup>

In the Guadalupe Mountains, the Mescaleros were drawn into some of these forays. Much of the turmoil occurred north of the trans-Pecos region. Mescalero leaders such as Josecito tried to keep their people out of the fighting, but government reports blamed them as well as the newly adversarial Sierra Blanca people. The death toll rose; the road from San Antonio to El Paso ceased to be safe, wagon trains of emigrants to California stopped at Hueco Tanks or Eagle Springs experienced attacks, ranches were raided for stock, and a seemingly endless list of similar encounters made restraint difficult. The Army regarded the area from the White Mountains in New Mexico to the Pecos as hostile; a Mescalero leader named Gómez from the Big Bend region in west Texas routinely raided the El Paso-San Antonio road; and a number of Mescaleros and Lipans had crossed over into Coahuila and Chihuahua and raided the road from there. As 1854 ended, the Mescaleros had been drawn into the conflict their

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<sup>7</sup> Sonnichsen, *The Mescalero Apache*, 65-67, 69; Captain William Banta and J.W. Caldwell, *Twenty-Seven Years on the Texas Frontier* (L.G. Park: Council Hill, Okla.: 1893): 189-201.

<sup>8</sup> Sonnichsen, *The Mescalero Apache*, 67-69.

leaders tried to avoid as an Indian war brewed on the southern plains.<sup>9</sup>

The deteriorating diplomatic climate showed the fundamental changes that differentiated American sovereignty from that of its predecessors. From the initial Mescalero perspective, all European and Neo-European peoples were the same; they all needed Apachean allies both to assure their control and to provide a buffer against the threat of Comanches, the Utes and the Navajos. U.S. behavior quickly showed that new rules governed these interactions. Instead of offering treaties, the Americans made demands; when Mescalero people acquiesced or were compelled to comply, the Americans made more demands. Worse, the Americans did not honor the treaties made with the Mescaleros. William Carr Lane, governor between Calhoun and Meriwether, reached an agreement with the Mescaleros that promised to provide agricultural implements and help sustain them for four years while they learned to till the soil. The U.S. Senate refused to ratify this treaty, and all the Mescaleros received was a piece of paper that had no practical value. The Americans came to the region in ever-greater numbers, established frequently used routes through Mescalero lands, and in some instances appeared to be settling on lands the Mescaleros saw as their own. The Mescaleros experienced what they regarded as unprovoked violence, not recognizing that American settlers could not or did not care to differentiate among the many native groups that surrounded the Rio Grande. When incidents occurred, whites made no effort to distinguish among Indians; typically, the first ones they saw were deemed guilty of whatever offense preceded the moment.<sup>10</sup> Under these circumstances, Mescaleros felt unjustly persecuted and entitled to revenge. When they took their vengeance, whites felt entitled to their own.

Retaliation took the form of military attack as well as vigilante action. Early surveys of Mescalero land paved the way for military intervention in support of civilian objectives; in January 1854, Lt. Col. Daniel T. Chandler led a force of 150 soldiers into the Sierra Blancas to search for the Mescaleros. Chandler did not find any Mescaleros, but did discover a fine location for a military outpost near the junction of the Rio Bonita and the Rio Ruidoso to the east and north of the Guadalupe Mountains. Later that year, Chandler led a summer campaign against the Mescaleros, holding talks with leaders José, Negrito, Pluma, and a son of the famed leader Gómez. Chandler wanted the Mescaleros to give up those responsible for recent raids, including an attack on Eagle Springs and killings on the El Paso-San Antonio road. The Mescalero leaders said the men responsible were not part of their band but promised to find them and turn them over to the soldiers. This ruse allowed the Mescaleros to leave and they avoided Chandler for the rest of the summer, but the Army's intrusion into their traditional

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<sup>9</sup> Sonnichsen, *The Mescalero Apache*, 69-72; Kelly R. Hays, "General Garland's War: The Mescalero Apache Campaigns, 1854-1855," *New Mexico Historical Review* 67 3 (July 1992), 251-68; Dixie L. Dominguez, "Hueco Tanks: A Vital Resource in Southwestern History," *Password* Vol. 31, No. 3 (Fall 1986): 125.

<sup>10</sup> Hays, "General Garland's War," 254.

territory was one reason for increased Mescalero raiding through 1854.<sup>11</sup>

The failure of this expedition and another to the north that sought to root out Mescalero people prompted the next round of military action, undertaken by troops from the departments of New Mexico and Texas. Units from Fort Bliss and Fort Davis traveled across the Trans-Pecos early in 1855 in an unsuccessful search. New Mexican forces had better luck. Led by Captain Richard S. Ewell, a baldheaded man with a high voice and bulging eyes who went on to become a lieutenant general in the Confederate army, eighty men from the 1<sup>st</sup> Dragoons left Fort Thorn on the Rio Grande in southern New Mexico a few days before New Year's Day. Another group, 50 infantry and 29 dragoons from Fort Fillmore in the Mesilla Valley commanded by Captain Henry W. Stanton, received orders to proceed to the Capitan Mountains to rendezvous with Ewell's command. Moving south along the Rio Peñasco, the two commands initially met little opposition, but within one week, Ewell's men were under consistent attack. On January 17, the Mescaleros attacked the soldiers with arrows and bullets. Assuming he was close to Mescalero winter strongholds filled with grain and the other supplies nomadic people kept to help them through the winter, Ewell maintained his march. A battle followed the next day in which Stanton and a small detachment blundered into a trap; he and another soldier paid with their lives before Ewell's men arrived to disperse the Mescaleros. A few days later, Ewell withdrew and headed to Las Lunas. To the north of Ewell, a small military detachment under Lt. Samuel D. Sturgis overtook a raiding party of a dozen Mescaleros in the Manzanos Mountains. Three Indians were killed and four wounded, at the cost of three Dragoons and one civilian injured.<sup>12</sup>

Despite the failure to achieve significant military objectives, these Army expeditions altered the circumstances in which the Mescaleros and the Americans grappled. Before this, the Mescaleros believed that they had some control of the conflict's broad outlines. Generally, they picked the time and place of their raids, successfully avoided pursuit, and easily escaped or retreated into the mountain sanctuaries with little fear of serious pursuit. Chandler, Ewell, Stanton and Sturgis shattered all sense of complacency or superiority the Mescaleros felt. Not only did the Americans penetrate the heart of the Mescalero homeland, they did so in the winter, at the time of year when nomadic peoples were most vulnerable. If soldiers destroyed their stores of food, nothing stood between the Mescaleros and the cruel fate of starving time, when people tried to survive on whatever food they could scrounge from the cold, dry winter world.

Winter raids became a standard American tactic against western Indians, used by Kit Carson against the Navajos in 1863 and by General George Crook against the Lakotas and

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<sup>11</sup> Hays, "General Garland's War," 258-59.

<sup>12</sup> Hays, "General Garland's War," 261-62; Sonnichsen, *The Mescalero Apaches*, 74-80; Robert M. Utley, *Frontiersmen in Blue: The United States Army and the Indian, 1848-1865* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1967): 149-153.

Cheyennes in 1875, 1876, and 1877. Ante- and post-bellum frontier soldiers were hardly crack troops; made up of new immigrants in search of work, those who sought the excitement of military action, and groups despised by mainstream society such as the Irish before the war and African-Americans afterwards, only Civil War veterans, hardened by the effects of war and skillful in their execution of military tactics, changed the post-bellum mix. With the exception of the African-American Ninth and Tenth Cavalry regiments, frontier military units showed little continuity. Winter attacks offered an important avenue to show strength and weaken Native American adversaries. Nomadic western peoples lived in the saddle and often relished warfare as a way for young men to prove their worth within the bounds of their society. Federal troops were volunteers or wartime conscripts, men who typically knew little of the skills battle required and less of what they soon faced on the plains. Military supply lines and the winter assaults they enabled evened the terms of engagement between seasoned Native American warriors and the almost always inexperienced and often dilatory, alcoholic, or barely competent federal troops. In a situation where the stultifying dullness of routine left little to do but drink, when officers whose training did not include the tactics of Indian warfare failed to effectively adapt, lead, or inculcate discipline, and in a time before Congress authorized funds to train soldiers to shoot, the problems of the military seem entirely of a piece with those of the society from which it sprang. The advantage of winter attack by men on grain-fed horses who carried their own feed against people who depended on stored food and natural forage and who lacked experience with winter fighting changed the terms of engagement.<sup>13</sup>

Mescalero retaliation for attacks on Apache people inspired other military responses that showed the vulnerability of all parts of the Mescalero homeland to soldiers' incursions. A band that attacked an Army horse-grazing camp about twenty-five miles east of Los Lunas was pursued by Fort Thorn soldiers to the Guadalupe Mountains, where units from Fort Bliss took up the chase. If any illusions about the protection the mountains provided remained to the Mescaleros, this second penetration shattered them. As the military prepared another attack, Mescalero leaders reported peacefully to their new Indian agent, Dr. Michael Steck, at Fort Thorn, stopping the military raid. Although officers were disappointed, for the moment the continuous skirmishing ended.<sup>14</sup>

The Americans offered the bands a tract of land that measured twenty-seven miles wide and stretched from the Pecos River to the mountains adjacent to the newly established Fort Stanton, at the junction of the Rio Ruidoso and the Rio Bonita. The appearance of the

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<sup>13</sup> Robert Utley, *The Lance and the Shield*; ; Edwin L. Sabin, *Kit Carson Days, 1809-1868: Adventures in the Path of Empire*, rev. ed. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995); ; R.C. Gordon-McCutchan, *Kit Carson: Indian Fighter or Indian Killer?* (Niwot, Colorado: University Press of Colorado, 1996); .

<sup>14</sup> Hays, "General Garland's War," 262-65; Sonnichsen, *The Mescalero Apaches*, 80-81; Morris E. Opler, "Mescalero Apache," in Alfonso Ortiz, ed., *The Handbook of North American Indians: Southwest V* 10 (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1983), 421-23;

Mescaleros who accepted the new reservation lands shocked even the most grizzled New Mexicans. Even Governor Meriwether, no friend of the Mescaleros, pitied them. They seemed “in the most destitute condition imaginable,” hardly the warriors who disrupted white segments of the territory and threatened its people, livestock, and communication arteries. The Indians had little food and clothing, weak horses, and no obvious way to survive on or off this newly created reservation. Despite American promises, the bands could count only on limited assistance from the federal government, and ending up being forced to seize food to feed themselves. In some eyes, this was stealing; from other perspectives, survival. In one instance, Lydia Spencer Lane, the wife of a Fort Stanton officer, watched Mescalero men cut up a mule that had died, presumably of disease, at the post and carry off everything but the bones and hooves. “A dead mule is not to be despised,” she mused, “when one is starving.” The next day, the same men were back in search of more food.<sup>15</sup>

Hunger became a constant for the reservation Mescaleros, prompting some attempts to leave the reservation and return to the mountains that long sustained them. Until they returned stolen stock — typically only the horses remained; the Mescaleros often ate everything else they took — Steck refused to help them. Some Mescaleros did leave for the mountains. The treaty they signed with Meriwether promised them provisions, but the U.S. Senate refused to ratify it. Promised food arrived intermittently, if at all. More Indians left the reservation. Finally, in November 1856, more than one year after the Mescaleros stopped fighting Americans, Steck relented. He gave them blankets, shirts, knives, tobacco, and provisions and promised them five cows and thirty *fanegas*, a Spanish measure equaling about two and one-half bushels, of corn each full moon as long as they behaved themselves. Earlier he had begun a farming project, embarking on the typically futile white attempt to turn nomadic hunters into agriculturalists. One result of this Indian-white cooperation was that in the minds of Army officers and Indian agents, the reservation Mescaleros became differentiated from the groups in the Sierra Blancas who refused to surrender and continued their raids. The reservation effectively drove a wedge through intra-tribal relations as it changed the Mescalero lifestyle.<sup>16</sup>

This stasis persisted as the military presence in southeastern New Mexico and far western Texas grew. Fort Stanton was the culmination of a chain of six forts built near the Mescaleros between 1851 and 1855. Forts Fillmore and Conrad were built in 1851 to control local Apaches and Navajos. Fort Thorn was established in 1853, a year before Fort Craig and Fort Davis, the latter located on the San Antonio-El Paso Road. Named after the officer killed early in 1855, Fort Stanton was intended to maintain Army control over the adjacent

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<sup>15</sup> Hays, “General Garland’s War,” 267-68; Sonnichsen, *The Mescalero Apaches*, 82-83; Lawrence Lindsay Mehren, “A History of the Mescalero Apache Reservation, 1869-1881 (MA thesis, University of Arizona, 1968): 15-55; Alfred Thomas, *The Mescalero Apache, 1653-1874*, Apache Indians XI (NY: Garland Publishing, Inc.: 1974).

<sup>16</sup> Hays, “General Garland’s War,” 268; Sonnichsen, *The Mescalero Apaches*, 83-85.



reservation. Mescalero people on the reservation took up farming, but relations between them and the people of the Mesilla Valley deteriorated. Hispano and Anglo ranchers did not like the fact that Indians owned good bottom land with water. Ranchers routinely encroached on Indian land, running cattle without permission and calling for military protection when Indians resisted the trespassing. From pursuers of the Mescaleros, the Army evolved into arbiters of disputes between the Mescaleros and Anglo and Hispano settlers. In one incident in 1858, the Mesilla Guards, a local group that practiced this pattern, were arrested for an attack on a Mescalero camp. Apache retaliation, probably by people from the Gila region to the west of the Rio Grande, took lives; those in the Mesilla Valley blamed nearby Mescaleros, and again the Army had to stand between civilians and the Indian peoples the American government made wards of the nation.<sup>17</sup>

The attack on Fort Sumter in Charleston, South Carolina, harbor on April 12, 1861, reverberated throughout the country, even to peripheries such as the Guadalupe Mountains and the trans-Pecos region. Secession split the ranks of the American Army. Many of its West Point-trained officers were southerners who sympathized with the rebellion and chose their home state over the nation. In an era in which state's rights remained a prominent intellectual rationale, such a decision often tore men apart. Many southern officers followed their states into secession, anticipating the dilemma of Robert E. Lee, who despite powerful allegiance to the military and the principles of the nation as well as a strong personal desire to avoid secession, sided with his beloved home state of Virginia. On the peripheries, the impacts of such decisions were even greater. Across the west, 313 officers — about one-third of the total in the U.S. Army — left their commands to serve the Confederacy. If officers at the scattered forts in Mescalero country supported the Confederacy, the federal presence that supplied food to the Indians and quieted conflict quickly disappeared. Officers loyal to the Union began to move the men under their command, who did not have the luxury of choosing sides in the conflict, back east. Some of the officers joined the armies gathering at Fort Leavenworth in Kansas and others were fated to be made prisoners of war in Texas. When secessionist Texans under Lieutenant Colonel John R. Baylor rode west to claim the new Confederate Territory of Arizona, they controlled not only much of the area of the Mexican cession and the Gadsden purchase, but also lands flanking the old Butterfield stage line from San Antonio to Tucson. Baylor was ordered to occupy Fort Bliss in El Paso, abandoned by Union troops, and attack Fort Fillmore near Las Cruces. Even the troops at Fort Stanton by the Mescalero reservation burnt their supplies and on Aug. 2, 1861, left to join other Union forces in Albuquerque. Only troops in northern New Mexico — a small number of Regular Army troops and volunteers raised in New

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<sup>17</sup> Ferris, *Soldier and Brave*: 226-227, 318, ; Leonora Barrett, "Transportation, Supplies, and Quarters for the West Texas Frontier Under the Federal Military System 1848-1861." *West Texas Historical Association Year Book V* (June 1929): 97-99; Sonnichsen, *The Mescalero Apache*, 83-88; Opler, "Mescalero Apache," 422.

Mexico, Colorado and California — remained opposed to a Confederate Southwest.<sup>18</sup>

For the Mescaleros on the reservation and their relatives in the mountains, the departure of the American troops from Fort Stanton offered a range of options. The Mescaleros clearly experienced a kind of liberation, but also likely felt deprived of the security such arrangements produced. As these hungry people watched the Union troops try to burn supplies, they must have wondered about the white peoples' sense. Confederate arrival produced no breakthroughs. The Confederates were obsessed with the conquest of a greater Southwest and dallying with Indians, reservation or otherwise, held no important position in their world view. Fighting between newly arrived Confederate troops and the Mescaleros began almost as soon as the southerners arrived at the ruins of Fort Stanton.

The new invaders came to New Mexico to drive the Union soldiers out and capture southwest lands for the Confederacy, not to battle Indians. After an ongoing series of skirmishes around Fort Stanton, the Confederates returned to Doña Ana. They departed, leaving the Hispanos who grouped around the fort and stretched to a community called Placitas (which later became the famed Lincoln) scrambling for protection from the strengthened Mescaleros, who capitalized on the absence of the bluecoats to renew old rivalries. Soon after the departure, all the Hispano ranches around the dismantled Fort Stanton were abandoned. Along the old Butterfield route — which Mescaleros from the Guadalupe and Davis Mountains almost severed, at the sheep ranches near Pecos, on the *Jornada del Muerto* — Mescalero raiders again appeared, to attack and claim the bounty of triumph.<sup>19</sup>

Abortive Confederate attempts at peace with the Mescaleros failed. A Mescalero leader named Nicolás rode a stagecoach nearly 200 miles to El Paso to meet with the Southerners and promise them peace. He departed on a stage, grabbed a colonel's gun after about twenty miles and disappeared into the brush. Within days, raiding commenced again. Seven soldiers under a lieutenant accompanied by seven civilians sent after the Mescaleros blundered into another trap and all were killed. The Mescalero fortunes rose and their power returned just as the Union blunted the Confederate advance outside Santa Fe at Glorieta Pass in March 1862. As they retreated down the Rio Grande, the disconsolate Confederates had few resources left to expend on the Mescaleros and even less inclination to tangle with them. As federal troops returned to southern New Mexico, they too had to grapple with the Mescaleros thought tamed almost a decade before.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Ralph E. Twitchell, *Leading Facts of New Mexican History* v 2 (Cedar Rapids, IA: Torch Press, 1911), 363-69; Fehrenbach, *Lone Star*, 367-68; Sonnichsen, *The Mescalero Apache*, 88-91; Alvin M. Josephy, Jr. *The Civil War in the West*. NY: Vintage Books, 1991: 34, 46, 49-50..

<sup>19</sup> Sonnichsen, *The Mescalero Apache*, 91-93; Twitchell, *Leading Facts of New Mexican History* V 2, 429.

<sup>20</sup> Sonnichsen, *The Mescalero Apache*, 94-96; Alvin Josephy, *The Civil War in the American West* (Alfred A. Knopf, 1995); Twitchell, *Leading Facts of New Mexico History* V 2, 360-90.

To accomplish this task, the Union military sent Brevet Brigadier General James H. Carleton, a man with extensive experience in the West that dated to the Mexican War era. The thick-haired, heavy-sideburned native of Eastport, Maine, almost fifty in 1862, was still a powerful leader and a conscientious person. First appointed a second lieutenant of the Dragoons in 1839, he was cited for bravery in the Mexican War, led the 1st California Volunteer militia in 1861, and was appointed brigadier general in the U.S. Volunteers a year later. Respected as one of the most competent and dependable American military officers, Carleton was a formidable adversary for Indian people throughout his four-year tenure in New Mexico.<sup>21</sup>

By February 1863 Union forces turned their attention back to the Indian threat. Carleton considered the possibility of another Confederate invasion “so remote as to justify me in employing the troops under my command in chastising the hostile tribes of Indians by which the settled portion of the Territory are surrounded.”<sup>22</sup> Against the Mescaleros, Carleton initiated a campaign that typified his leadership: he declared all-out war. Carleton ordered Colonel Christopher “Kit” Carson and five companies of New Mexico Volunteers to find the Mescaleros, kill the armed men, capture the women and children, and destroy stock and foodstuffs. Carleton did not want treaties or agreements; unconditional surrender was his sole military objective. In his first encounter with the Mescaleros, Carson’s volunteers fired upon two leaders, Manuelito and José Largo, who were on their way to Santa Fe to ask for peace. They and a number of their warriors died. Other Army columns were ordered by Colonel J. R. West of the First Infantry California Volunteers, commander of the District of Arizona, to search for Mescaleros; one expedition, led by Capt. N. J. Pishon found nine deserted *rancherías* in the Guadalupe Mountains, but he expressed disappointment at missing the chance for a military engagement. As the relentless military continued the pursuit, the Mescaleros recognized that their moment of freedom had ended. They surrendered to Carson, who was sympathetic to Indian people, rather than to the few Regular Army officers who remained on duty in New Mexico. On Feb. 17, 1863 one hundred Mescaleros arrived at Fort Stanton; the group left March 5 for the reservation Carleton created in 1862 at the Bosque Redondo, near Fort Sumner. Later, other Mescalero leaders went to Santa Fe, and asked for peace talks. More than 400 were sent to Bosque Redondo.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Twitchell, *Leading Facts of New Mexican History* V 2, 428-29; Sonnichsen, *The Mescalero Apache*, 96-97.

<sup>22</sup> Carleton to Brig. Gen. Lorenzo Thomas, Adjutant-General, U. S. Army, February 1, 1863, in Robert N. Scott, ed., et al. *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, 70 vols in 127 parts (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1880-1901), series I, vol. 15, serial 21, p. 670, hereafter cited as *O.R.*

<sup>23</sup> Sonnichsen, *The Mescalero Apache*, 99-104; Twitchell, *Leading Facts of New Mexican History* V 2, 429; Andy Gregg, *Drums of Yesterday: The Forts of New Mexico* (Santa Fe: The Press of the Territorian, 1968): 17-22; West to Capt. Ben C. Cutler, Assistant Adjutant General, November 9, 1862, in Scott, et al, *O.R.*,

Bosque Redondo typified the problems of reservation life. The Mescaleros had been nomadic throughout their history. At the Bosque Redondo, they were confined to a limited area with resources near the Pecos River, effectively caged in by New Mexicans who raised cattle around them. However, there were few living options for the Mescaleros. "We are worn out," their leader Cadete told Carleton in Santa Fe, "we have no more heart, we have no provisions, no means to live." Their survival depended on Carleton. If the Mescaleros followed his rules, they were fed. If individuals fled, Carleton's men hunted them down. There were few choices. By summer 1863, the Mescaleros at Bosque Redondo had become agriculturalists by the force of Carleton's will.<sup>24</sup>

The reservation became a location of much tension for Mescalero people, nearby settlers, and the military. The enforced agricultural lifestyle did little to improve the Mescalero situation. The problems of the reservation became aggravated when Carson and his men successfully carried out Carleton's orders and returned from Navajo country with numerous Navajos forced to walk to their exile at the Bosque Redondo. Eventually, 9,000 Navajos were sent to Bosque Redondo, overwhelming the roughly 400 Mescaleros who lived there, and expropriating resources that the Mescaleros regarded as their own. Mescalero people soon had to travel almost twenty miles to find wood for cooking. Farming attempts also failed. After a successful crop in 1863, a series of disasters — including blight, hail, drought, and flooding — demolished the weak agricultural underpinnings of reservation life. The Mescaleros also began to suffer from diseases that they avoided while roaming the plains; their concentration eliminated the protection from prolonged epidemics that mobility provided. Also, Navajos and Mescaleros fought constantly, in organized and spontaneous ways, but the Mescaleros were thoroughly outnumbered. Under this pressure, Mescalero customs suffered and the social structure of tribal life began to deteriorate.<sup>25</sup>

Despite the seeming harshness in his military posture, Carleton also cared for his wards in a typical nineteenth-century fashion. He wanted the reservation to succeed, and on numerous occasions went out of his way to provide food, blankets, and other necessities. Carleton also advocated fair treatment, particularly of the Navajos, whom he favored above the Mescaleros. He insisted that the American government provided an institutional structure suitable to transforming Indian people into cultural Americans who believed in individual enterprise and private property. Carleton stood hard against the nomadic ways of Indian life, and in a sentiment

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series I, volume L/1, serial 106, p. 212.

<sup>24</sup> Sonnichsen, *The Mescalero Apache*, 102-04; Twitchell, *Leading Facts of New Mexican History* V 2, 429.

<sup>25</sup> Sonnichsen, *The Mescalero Apache*, 104-05; Twitchell, *Leading Facts of New Mexican History* V 2, 429; Opler, "Mescalero Apache," 422; L.R. Bailey, *The Long Walk: A History of the Navajo Wars, 1846-68* (Los Angeles: Westernlore Press, 1964): 164-180.

that presaged the *noblesse oblige* of a later time, equally firm against the abandonment of Indians by their conquerors. In his concern, he emerged as a champion of Indian rights from a moral perspective as others became obsessed only with the act of conquest and any economic advantages that might stem from it.

Carleton clashed with Dr. Michael Steck, who became Indian superintendent of New Mexico in 1863. Steck never liked the Bosque Redondo reservation, and it became even less appealing with almost 10,000 Navajo there as well. He decided that since the Army established this untenable arrangement, the Army could pay for its upkeep. Carleton, the military commander of the territory during the war, could not understand what he regarded as Steck's intransigence, and the Mescaleros suffered as a result of their conflict. The two clashed repeatedly, and letters from each to the nation's capital screamed with insults and derogatory comments about the other. Despite the letters, neither Steck nor the Mescalero agent, Lorenzo Labadie, convinced Carleton of the validity of their point of view. Only a public outcry against Carleton's autocratic rule of the territory in 1865 impinged upon his empire.<sup>26</sup>

These distractions deprived Carleton of the near-total control he previously enjoyed, and without his iron will, conditions at the reservation became even more untenable for the Mescaleros. Beginning in about 1864, Mescalero people began to drift away from the reservation. Ojo Blanca, a respected leader, left first; forty-two of his followers joined him. Although Labadie convinced him to return a few months later, a subsequent census revealed that more than 900 Mescaleros and other Apaches were missing. Even though Carleton cracked down on the Indians, creating a more complicated system of passports and passes and renewing his old order that any male Indian found off the reservation could be shot on sight, the escapes continued. A few left here, more there. Soon after, raiding of Anglo-American and Hispano settlements began again; Mescalero people took sheep, cattle, and horses, emptied a wagon train, and even ambushed a party of soldiers in the Sacramento Mountains as they accumulated goods and supplies. Southeastern New Mexico had changed, others such as the Navajos staked claims to the region, and the Mescaleros found that they faced competition for their territory. A battle between Mescalero and Navajo men near Alamogordo left one Navajo dead and the Mescaleros minus 500 sheep and thirteen burros they had taken, proving that life off the reservation could be as hard as that on it for the Mescaleros.<sup>27</sup>

As a result, the U.S. Congress appropriated \$100,000 for the upkeep of the reservation and its people, but the project became another in the ongoing series of deceptive tactics that worked against both the Mescaleros and Navajos at Bosque Redondo. The money was allocated to buy food, clothing, and supplies. As occurred in many other instances, white suppliers and government buyers defrauded the Indians. When the supplies arrived at Bosque

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<sup>26</sup> Sonnichsen, *The Mescalero Apache*, 112-15; Twitchell, *The Leading Facts of New Mexican History* V 2, 434-37.

<sup>27</sup> Sonnichsen, *The Mescalero Apache*, 115-17; Opler, "Mescalero Apache," 422.

Redondo just prior to Christmas, most were useless. Crates were full of ruined and rusty implements, broken plows and shovels, poor materials, and even shoddy blankets. One physician, Dr. George Gwyther, who wrote about this incident almost a decade later, remembered: "I took one pair of [blankets] to the scales, and by accurate weight found they weighed 4½ pounds; and a single government blanket, such as is issued to troops, weighs 5½ pounds, and costs \$4.50, the reader can judge the honesty of an invoice which charged \$22 per pair for such articles." Although the scandal brought federal officials to New Mexico, the Mescaleros' lot again failed to improve. Some tribal leaders counseled staying, but as cold weather set in late in the fall of 1865, every Mescalero who could walk rose one night and left the reservation. A few days later, the weak, the ill, and the old also disappeared. Only nine Mescaleros, old and infirm, remained at Bosque Redondo. After more than three years of horrible living conditions, the Mescaleros returned to their mountains, determined to stay there. Even as it became more dangerous from soldiers, settlers, and other Indians alike, the Mescalero way of life offered an alternative to brutal dependency on whites, destructive idleness, and slow starvation.<sup>28</sup>

As New Mexico Territory lacked the economic or military resources necessary to bring the Mescaleros back to the reservation and federal troops had other assignments, the groups resumed their old ways. After the reservation system failed them, the Mescaleros scattered to confuse pursuers, again breaking into their historically based groupings across different mountain ranges. The people who once inhabited the Guadalupe Mountains seemed to have returned, as did those in the Sierra Blanca, the Davis Mountains, and the Sacramento Mountains. Others headed for the *Llano Estacado*, controlled by their old enemy, the Comanches; a few even joined Comanche war parties as Indians understood that their rivalries with whites superseded their own historical animosity. Mescaleros also developed good relations with the Lipan Apaches, whom they joined on buffalo hunts and in defensive and occasionally offensive action against the Comanches and other Indian groups, and continued raiding Anglo-American, Hispano, and Indian stock and crops. In one instance, the Mescaleros seized 1,165 head from cattle entrepreneur John Chisum. Their period of freedom lasted a number of years, as postwar chaos and attention elsewhere — especially to the reconstruction of the South — made Indian issues in New Mexico Territory a peripheral issue.<sup>29</sup>

Although from a Mescalero perspective this era offered the most promise since the days before American soldiers pursued them, in reality, the situation was a brief interlude before U.S. institutions and technologies applied their full force on the region. As the 1860s drew to a close, Anglo-American commercial endeavors also approached the area. Goodnight and Loving carved their trail along the Pecos River, Chisum and other cattle barons coveted more of the

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<sup>28</sup> Sonnichsen, *The Mescalero Apache*, 117-29; Opler, "The Mescalero Apache," 422.

<sup>29</sup> Morris E. Opler and Catherine H. Opler, "Mescalero Apache History in the Southwest," *New Mexico Historical Review* 25 1 (January 1950), 20-21.

sparse range for their cows, and changes in administrative patterns that favored the cattle trade created a context that soon pressured Mescalero hideouts. As they eyed the increasing number of fat cattle in the valleys below, the Mescaleros could not know that their freedom would soon face even greater outside pressure. In 1869, the U.S. Army again assumed responsibility for the Indians of the New Mexico Territory. Despite the overwhelming advantages held by the military, more than a decade passed before the Army took command of the region, establishing temporary subposts at places such as Pine Springs and Manzanita Springs.<sup>30</sup>

Military responsibility meant more active pursuit of the Mescaleros. With the 1869 appointment of Lieutenant A.G. Hennisee to Fort Stanton, a proximate military presence not seen in the region since the early 1860s resurfaced. Hennisee's men scoured the region for the Mescaleros, although largely without success. The Mescaleros recognized the power of a proximate military that could pursue, demoralize, and eventually capture them; Carson's earlier pursuit proved as much. The tribes also feared a return to the Bosque Redondo. As a result, the Mescaleros assiduously avoided both Fort Stanton and Hennisee, preferring to stay hidden in their mountains except when raiding. Despite the best efforts of the Army, Mescalero forays continued unabated.<sup>31</sup>

The Guadalupe Mountains again became a center of Mescalero activity. The remote forbidding mountains provided shelter from pursuit as well as a possible escape route onto the *llano* to the east. Occasionally soldiers pursued the Indians into the Guadalupe, but to little long-term advantage. Although on occasions before and after Hennisee's arrival, such as a pursuit of the Mescaleros out of Fort Union by Captain Francis P. Wilson that left more than twenty-five Mescaleros dead in 1867, the military enjoyed great success, generally all soldiers could do was note the Mescaleros' presence and power in the Guadalupe Mountains. Ongoing Indian activities made these mountains even more important in the face of accelerated military pressure.<sup>32</sup>

The 1869 arrival of a new officer in the region, Lieutenant Howard Bass Cushing of Troop F of the Third Cavalry, contributed to the pressure. A native of Wisconsin and decorated Civil War veteran, Cushing gave the Americans an advantage that had not enjoyed since assaults at the beginning of the 1860s. Like his predecessors, Cushing aggressively subscribed

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<sup>30</sup> Opler and Opler, "Mescalero Apache History in the Southwest," 21.

<sup>31</sup> Opler, "Mescalero Apache," 422-23; Opler and Opler, *Mescalero Apache History in the Southwest*, 22-23.

<sup>32</sup> Barbara Biggers, "An Ethnohistorical Study of the Mescalero Apache in the Guadalupe Mountains," unpublished paper, Texas Tech University, 1979, 12; Leo Oliva, *Fort Union and the Frontier Army in the Southwest* (Santa Fe: National Park Service, 1993) Southwest Cultural Resources Center, Professional Papers no. 41; see also Charles Haecker and Neil C. Mangum, "Historical and Archaeological Investigations of Apache War Sites, Guadalupe Mountains National Park," (unpublished paper), copy courtesy of National Park Service, Santa Fe.

to the doctrine of all-out war, and pursued the Mescaleros with a tenacity and alacrity that equaled Carson's. Cushing's first encounter with the Mescaleros occurred in July and August 1869, when he served with a unit sent to the Sacramento Mountains. A small and indecisive skirmish with the Mescaleros ensued, the troop returned to Fort Stanton, and the military planned future engagements aimed at ousting the Mescalero from the mountains.<sup>33</sup>

Military pursuits continued, and as winter approached, Cushing led Troop F after raiding Mescaleros. In November 1869, Cushing's men chased into the Guadalupe Mountains after a band of Mescaleros thought to have stolen stock from a ranch on the Río Hondo. The troop found Mescalero *rancherías* near Sitting Bull Falls in the northern portion of the mountains and in the battle that followed, destroyed them, recaptured the stolen livestock, and seized more than thirty Mescalero horses and mules. The Mescaleros watched the aftermath of the battle with trepidation. Cushing clearly posed the same problem as had Carson earlier in the decade, but with an even greater degree of intensity. The November raid in the mountains was both a signal and a threat to the Mescaleros. It indicated the presence of a new and revitalized Army that possessed greater determination than at any time since the Mescaleros left Bosque Redondo and it threatened tribal strongholds deep in the mountains.<sup>34</sup>

After a brief respite at Fort Stanton, Cushing again set out after the Mescaleros. On December 19, 1869, a new campaign began, designed in every way to mirror the successes of other winter marches throughout the American West. Winter gave the American military an advantage; Indian supplies were fixed in location, while soldiers could restock from elsewhere. Even if the soldiers lost their supplies, they could retreat to their forts and secure more. Cold weather and little available forage or game pinned the Mescaleros in their mountains and forced them to stand and fight rather than flee until more advantageous conditions arose. Winter conditions made Mescalero assets into liabilities, a reality that the astute Cushing recognized and utilized.

Cushing's December-January campaign demoralized the Mescaleros. The Army units returned to the area where Cushing found the *rancherías* in November and discovered exactly what they expected: the Mescaleros had abandoned that area. Following mountain trails to the south, on December 26, Cushing and his men discovered another *ranchería* at a spring believed to be near Bone or Guadalupe springs. Cushing charged up the canyon, and the Mescaleros waited for the cavalry to close the distance. As the soldiers came within range, the Indian let loose one "good round volley from guns and arrows," Cushing recalled, inflicting some damage on the soldiers. The military advanced, and the Indians dispersed, fleeing into the hills and nearby canyons. Cushing could not send men after them, for he commanded too few soldiers to chase down the many dispersing people, but he secured the Indian camp. As he rode

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<sup>33</sup> John P. Wilson, "Indian Fighter Extraordinary," 40.

<sup>34</sup> John P. Wilson, "Indian Fighter Extraordinary," 40.



through it, Cushing noted the impressive bounty his men captured. In the forty to fifty “wigwams,” as Cushing described them, soldiers found many buffalo robes and dressed and tanned beef, deer, and antelope hides as well as 20,000 pounds of prepared mescal and 15,000 pounds of jerked and packed beef, meat treated so that it would last throughout the winter. The soldiers seized clothing, cooking utensils, bows and arrows, and other materials as well. Here were the tribe’s stores for an entire winter. Cushing’s men destroyed everything they captured, and at the end of the day, all these valuable stores and materials were aflame. As the Mescaleros watched their winter supplies burn, Cushing accomplished his purpose. Once again the military intimidated the tribes, but this was even more devastating. Mescalero preparations for the winter had been destroyed in one attack, and they recognized that they would have to forage for survival throughout the winter. This was a damaging and demoralizing blow.<sup>35</sup>

The tenacious Cushing continued south through Upper Dog Canyon, intending to deceive the Mescaleros. He moved along Dark Canyon and toward XT Springs and the Río Azul, the Blue River, in a manner designed to convince his adversaries that he planned an immediate return to Fort Stanton. On the morning of December 30, Cushing took forty men and left his supply train on the trail. Veering to an old trail south to the Ojo Sotalosa, the junction of Nickel and Lamar creeks in Texas, Cushing and his men found pony tracks. Soon they saw a wisp of smoke over a distant mountain and trailed that to another *ranchería* in a canyon — most probably at the mouth of McKittrick Canyon. A battle followed. Cushing again captured a heavily stocked *ranchería* and destroyed extremely valuable food caches and materials. As the camp went up in flames, the Mescaleros in the hills around organized a rally. At one point more than forty warriors came over a mountain toward the canyon, but they stopped out of rifle range, behind large boulders. There they stood and cursed the soldiers in Spanish, but could not advance. They felt powerless to save any of their dwindling stores. Cushing’s pressure produced not only military results, but a feeling of growing helplessness among the Mescaleros.<sup>36</sup>

Although Cushing returned to Fort Stanton and soon after departed for Arizona, where he was killed in a foray in 1871, military pressure against the Guadalupe Mountains Indians continued. The tactics that Kit Carson initiated in 1862 became standard: mobile Indian people had no recourse after destruction of their supplies during winter months and the Army could press its advantage against weakened foes. In January 1870, Captain Francis S. Dodge left Fort Davis with 200 Buffalo soldiers from the Ninth Cavalry, possibly the largest military expedition into the Guadalupe Mountains. On January 20 and 21, they engaged the Mescaleros

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<sup>35</sup> Lieutenant Howard B. Cushing to Post Adjutant, Fort Stanton, January 8, 1870, copy located in Albert Schroeder Collection, Mescalero Apache 1859-1875, New Mexico State Records Center and Archives, Santa Fe; Wilson, “Indian Fighter Extraordinary,” 46, offers the name “Sanguinara” or bloodstone for the canyon, a name he noted did not persist.

<sup>36</sup> Lieutenant Howard B. Cushing to Post Adjutant, Fort Stanton, January 8, 1870.

at the head of Delaware Creek. They killed about twenty-five men, captured several more, and destroyed additional valuable supplies. Skirmishes continued and they began to show results favorable to the Army. In February, a small Mescalero band led by José La Paz returned to Fort Stanton and resumed agriculture, signaling a change in attitude among at least a few of the Mescaleros. Further military actions in April, May, and June 1870 pressured the Mescaleros even more. Cushing's methods changed power relationships, and the tactics and consequences of he and his successors gradually drove these Indians back into the arms of American society.<sup>37</sup>

Although Cushing's forays had dramatic impact, they were only part of the process of driving the Mescaleros back to the reservation and into a system where they became inconsequential to the society that conquered them. Even after 1865, as Army's presence in the region remained intermittent, in some ways it functioned effectively. The old stage station at Pine Springs became a familiar stopping point for American soldiers. Water and shelter could always be found there and the location stood next to one stretch of what remained of the old Butterfield route, one of the important navigational landmarks and routes in the region. The soldiers' presence sometimes impinged upon the Mescaleros, who sought to water animals and camp near the limestone-based springs at the base of the mountains. Even the occasional presence of soldiers at Pine Spring offered another reason, symbolic and actual, for the Mescaleros to give up their ways. They could see as well as anyone that their world continued to narrow.

Changing military and administrative procedures also affected the Mescaleros. By about 1871, the U.S. Army garrisoned as many as 800 soldiers in five posts — forts Richardson, Griffin and Concho in Texas, Fort Selden in southeastern New Mexico, and Fort Bowie in Arizona — as a defense against Kiowa and Comanche raiders as well as occasional Cheyenne and Arapaho attacks, all aimed at northern Mexico. Mescaleros and Chiricahuas Apache participated in the same practice, as did a group of the Kickapoo who fled the prairies of Illinois during the 1830s and settled south of the Mexican border. The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848 gave Americans the responsibility to halt such raids, and the Army found itself with a vexing and complex problem. Nor could they successfully protect their own side of the border from members of the same raiding groups who slipped north from Mexico. The international border complicated the military situation and gave Indian peoples in the region a unique kind of impunity.<sup>38</sup>

At about the same time, President Ulysses S. Grant began a new Indian policy that

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<sup>37</sup> Wilson, "Indian Fighter Extraordinary," 46-47; Sonnichsen, *The Mescalero Apache*, 128; Commanding Officer, Fort Davis, to Inspector General, Department of Texas, January 28, 1871, copy in Guadalupe Mountains National Park library.

<sup>38</sup> Robert Utley, *Frontier Regulars: the United States Army and the Indian, 1866-1890* (NY: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1973), 352-55; John Mack Faragher, *Sugar Creek* tells the story of the Kickapoo departure;

became known as the “peace policy.” After election to the White House in 1869, he found a battle between the military and reform groups for control of Indian administration that resulted from policy decisions made twenty years before. In 1848, the Bureau of Indian Affairs shifted from the War Department to the Department of the Interior, ending military administration of Indian peoples and increasing tension between civilians and the military over Indian issues. The military generally retained the view that military solutions produced better results, but chafed at the more complicated situation that Department of the Interior administration required. By the late 1860s, these issues had come to a head. Military leaders believed since they were forced to address the consequences of failed Indian policy, they should administer Indian life; reformers sought a more conciliatory policy. Despite his Civil War background as commander of the Union Army, Grant sided with the civilian reformers and instituted a policy described as “conquest by kindness.” One result was that on some reservations the position of Indian agent was split off from the military. Typically, religious groups offered candidates for such slots. Another more ominous situation for the Mescaleros developed; this clear distinction between the on- and off-reservation Indians permitted the military to treat all off-reservation Indians as hostile, a situation in the trans-Pecos that occurred during the Civil War but was later relaxed. The reformers who favored Grant’s policies could rarely implement them on the reservations, and Indians often left reservations simply to have enough food to eat. Such an edict gave Cushing a kind of permission his predecessors lacked since the Civil War and accounted for much of the success of the military in the Guadalupe Mountains.<sup>39</sup>

These combined factors helped bring the Mescaleros out of the mountains and back to the lower elevations of their historic range near the Tularosa River. Slowly at first they came, spurred by the difficulties of life when the military could penetrate their strongholds and intrigued by the concept of civilian agents. In 1871, Vincent Colyer, a Society of Friends leader and an advocate of Indian people, received a presidential commission to explore Indian issues. Of the Mescaleros, he remarked that they had been at peace for a long time and should be granted a reservation; the Mescalero situation had been in turmoil since the closing of the Bosque Redondo. In 1873, Colyer’s suggestion became law, as an area of the Mescalero range — mainly mountainous, with only a very little lower elevation land — became the Tularosa Reservation, south of Fort Stanton and east of Tularosa, permanently given to the Mescaleros. The Indians protested such a small and useless reservation; without sufficient lowlands, agriculture was doomed and hunting at higher elevations could not sustain anyone. Despite its shortcomings, Indian numbers at the reservation increased; in 1871, 400 people received supplies at the reservation post. By 1873, the number grew to 2,679, an incredible increase supported by an 1872 census count, which reported 830 Mescaleros, 440 Aguas Nuevos, 350 Lipans, and 310 Eastern Chiricahua Apaches, also called Warm Springs Apache, at the reservation. For the second time, the Mescaleros’ lifestyle — hunting and gathering — ended as

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<sup>39</sup> Utley, *Frontier Regulars*, 195-200.

a result of military action.<sup>40</sup>

Reservation life offered little for the Mescaleros the second time around. Although there were fewer Native peoples at Tularosa during the 1870s than lived at the Bosque Redondo a decade earlier, the variety of tribes led to instances of intra-Indian conflict. A Mescalero appeal persuaded Congress to add arable land to the east and hunting grounds on the west side of the Sacramento Mountains to the reservation in 1875; an 1882 order added grazing land to the east and excised land that miners sought. The reservation remained crowded and unsafe, even with the departure of the Eastern Chiricahua to a new reservation. Beginning in 1874, whites reversed the pattern that had so long made their lives uncomfortable. They raided the reservation, stealing horses. In one instance, they attacked a Mescalero encampment within the reservation along the Pecos River, killing men, women, and children while a nearby Army unit did nothing. The possibilities of reservation living again seemed untenable, and a number of Mescaleros once more fled to the mountains. Whites made the presumption upheld by law, that by leaving the reservation the Mescaleros had become, in the parlance of the time, "hostile," and could be hunted down and killed at will. Adventurers anxious to experience "Indian hunting" killed three Mescaleros and according to some accounts, took their scalps, before the Army arrived and escorted the starving, freezing, and terrified Mescaleros back to the Tularosa reservation in January 1875. "It was heart-rending," Indian agent W. D. Crothers wrote, "to see a class of human beings so destitute of the absolute necessities of life; many of them almost naked and bearing marks of an outraged class of human beings."<sup>41</sup>

Despite instances of justice and kindness toward the Mescaleros, their conditions worsened. The Mescaleros rarely knew who posed a greater danger to them: the squatters on the reservation and their settler friends, or the military units designated to protect them. No consistency in military policy became evident; even a congressional investigation showed that the Mescaleros were not at fault when they fled, but still squatters and settlers raided and took Indian stock and possessions. In 1877, a smallpox epidemic among the demoralized, poorly fed, and increasingly socially dislocated Mescaleros compounded their problems. Mescalero life and social organization took another blow.<sup>42</sup>

The beginning of the famed Lincoln County War in 1877, in which Billy the Kid became a notorious figure, also menaced the Mescaleros. The Tularosa reservation was close to Lincoln, New Mexico, a wide spot in the Río Hondo Valley west of modern Roswell, New

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<sup>40</sup> Opler and Opler, "Mescalero Apache History in the Southwest," 23-24; Opler, "Mescalero Apache," 422-23; Sonnichsen, *the Mescalero Apache*, 138-44; Lawrence Mehren, editor. "Scouting for Mescaleros: The Price Campaign of 1873." *Arizona and the West*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (September 1968): 171-190.

<sup>41</sup> Opler and Opler, "Mescalero Apache History in the Southwest," 24-25; Sonnichsen, *The Mescalero Apache*, 140-57.

<sup>42</sup> Opler and Opler, "Mescalero Apache History in the Southwest," 26-27; Sonnichsen, *The Mescalero Apache*, 156-58.

Mexico. The city was the center of this profiteers' war between different factions of mercantile traders who traded in cattle and sold supplies to the government. Fort Stanton itself stood a mere nine miles from Lincoln, and clearly the military and commercial leaders were well acquainted. Selling cattle to the Army was a prime source of profit, especially when enhanced by the addition of stolen cattle. When the Regulators, which included Billy the Kid, and the House of Murphy gunmen went to war in 1877-78, the reverberations rang all the way to the already intimidated Mescaleros. They believed that no whites could be trusted, and the lackadaisical approach of the Army — not only to white attacks on the Indians, but also to the consistent but widely scattered conflict of the Lincoln County War — more than offset any trust developed by Indian agents such as the sympathetic Frederick C. Godfroy, who succeeded Crothers in 1876. Turmoil again compelled the Mescaleros to flee to the higher ground where they felt safe and that they called home.<sup>43</sup>

The Lincoln County War only compounded existing problems for the Mescaleros; for other Apachean groups in the trans-Pecos region, the situation was new and frightening. Although the Jicarilla Apaches agreed to join the Mescaleros at Tularosa, the Lincoln County situation remained so dangerous that only thirty-two ventured to the Mescalero Reservation. Conflict between other Indians and the government also had an impact on the Mescalero reservation. Efforts to move the Warm Springs Apache, whose reservation lands until May 1877 were at Ojo Caliente, south of Socorro, New Mexico, to the San Carlos Reservation on the Gila River, east of Globe in the Arizona Territory, met with strong Indian resistance. Every time the military escorted these Apaches to the Arizona Territory, they simply left and returned to their New Mexico homelands. One Chiricahua band, led by Victorio, spent most of the two years between 1877 and 1879 searching for a home that both they and the U.S. government could accept. Victorio's band became so successful as renegades that when the Indian agent at the Mescalero reservation warmly welcomed the newly arrived Victorio and the fifty to sixty men who followed him in June 1879, both the Indian leader and the government agreed to the situation. Victorio even arranged for him and his men's families to come to Tularosa, and the oft-used Mescalero Reservation acquired new inhabitants. This peace was short-lived. Soon after, in 1879, a judge and a prosecuting attorney arrived at the reservation for a visit and some hunting. Victorio assumed they came to try him on existing counts of horse theft and murder, and the leader and his men again fled. Victorio's success at avoiding the troops sent to retrieve him and especially at surviving in the old way, by raiding, made him an admired figure on the reservations. Other Indians admired his success at confounding the Army, and soon some undertook their own breakouts. Early in 1880, more than 200 Mescaleros were among the many who imitated the prestigious and increasingly powerful Victorio.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Sonnichsen, *The Mescalero Apache*, 157-58; Opler and Opler, "Mescalero Apache History in the Southwest," 27; Robert M. Utley, *Billy the Kid: A Short and Violent Life* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 54-56, 103-06.

<sup>44</sup> Sonnichsen, *The Mescalero Apache*, 159-84; Opler and Opler, "Mescalero Apache History in the

The decision to follow Victorio was not difficult for most Mescaleros. Once again, the Army failed to protect the bands, and again the Mescaleros received unclear messages about their fate from Indian agents and military commanders. Some Mescaleros fled the reservation because they feared attacks by area settlers, for southeastern New Mexico had become home to a range of legal and extralegal militia and other organized but not officially sanctioned armed groups. Military attack remained the greatest concern of other Indians, especially after Colonel Edward Hatch arrived in the area with more than 1,000 Ninth Cavalry troops — who, along with the Tenth Cavalry and two infantry units, the 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> Regiments, comprised the famed African-American Buffalo soldiers — and Indian scouts.<sup>45</sup>

The Buffalo Soldiers took a different view of military life than did most other postwar soldiers. Many joined the United States Colored Troops during the Civil War, and in the Army, they endured the same constant prejudice and derision that African-Americans experienced throughout American society. The military did have advantages for men whose options outside it were narrow. Regular if shoddy meals, shelter, clothing, and a modest income meant a great deal to people who were the children of slaves and who found most other possible opportunities blocked by social strictures, custom, and law. Even African-Americans born and raised free in the North found military service an appealing option. The Army uniform conveyed the pride of those who defeated slavery and also limited if only slightly the prejudice of the time. While other soldiers deserted, drank themselves into a stupor, and committed suicide in astonishing numbers, Buffalo Soldiers became among the most professional of American troops. They routinely enjoyed the lowest rates of desertion and the highest rates of re-enlistment in the western Army.<sup>46</sup>

An engagement near Ojo Caliente, about thirty-five miles up the Alamosa River from the Rio Grande in southwestern New Mexico on September 4, 1879 inaugurated an extended conflict between Victorio's band and the Army, different from other famed Indian chases such as Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce or Dull Knife's breakout. Alone among them, Victorio led; he was not chased, but instead set the course that the soldiers followed almost without a whit of concern for their whereabouts. Unlike Joseph or Dull Knife, Victorio was in his homeland; he knew the ground, he knew the distances to water, the places to hide, and every locale from which to derive food or stage an ambush. He knew the situation better than did his pursuers; even the sky assisted him as he divined which nights would be moonlit and which would not. Victorio also crossed international borders, repeatedly using Mexico as a sanctuary. Victorio

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Southwest," 28-29; Utley, *Frontier Regulars*, 366-74; Opler, "Mescalero Apache," 423.

<sup>45</sup> Robert M. Utley, "The Buffalo Soldiers and Victorio," *New Mexico Magazine* (March 1984): 47-50.

<sup>46</sup> Utley, "The Buffalo Soldiers and Victorio," 47-48; William L. Leckie, *Buffalo Soldiers: A Narrative of Negro Cavalry in the West* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1967).

did not flee the American troops; he simply outdistanced them as he returned to his homeland to live his life as his people had for as long as they could remember. For a long time, the idea of a chase existed clearly in the minds of American soldiers, but only on the very fringe of Apache thinking about the situation.

After Ojo Caliente in September 1879, Victorio's attacks in southwestern New Mexico grew in frequency, and the Army responded. Ranchers and others throughout the Mesilla Valley chased Victorio. In encounters, they suffered staggering casualties. Colonel Hatch deployed most of his Buffalo Soldiers in an effort to find Victorio. One unit, led by Major Albert P. Morrow, even crossed the international border to the Warm Springs stronghold, the Guzman Mountains in northern Mexico, in pursuit. Victorio seemed not at all bothered by the soldiers behind him; he was on his home ground and he knew the soldiers were exhausted from the campaign and their hard ride. When the soldiers found Victorio near the Corralitas River on October 27, the Indians easily held their own and punishing the troops, compelled them to return to the north side of the border. Skirmishes continued with Mexican military units. Victorio's men, now numbering as many as 150, destroyed two parties of Mexicans in the Candelaria Mountains south of Juarez, and moved back across the border to avoid the expected Mexican retaliation.<sup>47</sup>

U.S. military leadership seemed unequal to the task of fighting Victorio, a situation easily apparent to the people on the Mescalero reservation. By December 1879, reports of Victorio's men in the Sacramento Mountains emboldened the Mescaleros and sent fear through Anglos, Mexicans, and the military around the reservation. After Victorio returned to New Mexico, panic ensued, and Hatch himself took charge of the troops who faced this vaunted Indian leader. Hatch's first venture was a failure; in Hembrillo Canyon, a nearly inaccessible spot in the San Andres Mountains, Victorio's band countered an Army assault in April, killing eight soldiers, and disappearing before the soldiers could regroup. Hatch combined troops from Arizona with Civil War hero and Colonel Benjamin Grierson's men from Texas. With pursuit tactics failing, Hatch decided to try to eliminate any supplies Victorio could get from reservation Indians. Hatch and Grierson decided to eliminate any help that Victorio might receive from Indians north of the border. After a few incidents, including one in April 1880 where one thousand soldiers converged on the Mescalero Reservation from all directions as the Mescaleros came in at the request of the agent only to discover they were to be disarmed and relieved of their horses, the Mescaleros again fled, fearing an imminent massacre or abandonment and eventual starvation on the reservation. The military gave chase and a number of Indians were killed by Army carbines. Grierson felt sure Victorio would receive no more support nor warriors from the New Mexico reservation. Victorio's Warm Springs warriors returned to their home in the Mogollon and Black ranges in southwestern New Mexico, where

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<sup>47</sup> Utley, *Frontier Regulars*, 368-71; Opler and Opler, "The History of the Mescalero in the Southwest," 28-29; Sonnichsen, *The Mescalero Apache*, 164-65.

they continued raiding. With help from north of the border unlikely and Mexicans searching for Victorio's men south of the Rio Grande, the Apache seemed trapped and the career of this vaunted leader appeared close to an end. Again, Victorio outwitted pursuers and returned to Mexico.<sup>48</sup>

Despite the obvious advantages held by the American military, subduing Victorio proved difficult. Hatch wanted to bring Grierson and his Texas-based troops to western New Mexico, but Grierson envisioned a different way to trap Victorio. If they spread his men among subposts along the Rio Grande west of Fort Davis, Grierson argued, they could protect Texas and trap the Apache leader. Although Hatch protested, General Edward O.C. Ord and his superior, General Philip H. Sheridan, allowed Grierson to start his plan. Implementing the maneuver offered Grierson a rare post-Civil War moment in the sun. Successful during the war, superior officers had held him back in its aftermath. Sheridan detested him, Grierson lacked West Point credentials, and he was closely identified with African-American troops, all of which combined to his detriment. In this case, Grierson guessed well, for when Victorio recrossed the Rio Grande into the United States with 500 Mexican troops pursuing him, he found himself between two of Grierson's subposts along the river.

A fierce battle followed at a waterhole called Tinaja de las Palmas in Quitman Canyon, Texas. Grierson and his Tenth Cavalry camped there to await Victorio; scouts under the command of Lieutenant Henry Flipper, the first and then-only African-American officer in the regiment, brought news of Victorio's border crossing. Grierson guarded the one waterhole in the vicinity, knowing that Victorio would have to stop there to water his animals. As the sun rose on the morning of July 30, 1880, Grierson saw Victorio's men advance and then turn eastward to avoid a fight. Grierson sent an officer and ten men to check the Indians' flight. As the expected Army reinforcements rode up, Victorio's chances narrowed. Afraid of being cornered, the Indians fled toward the Rio Grande.<sup>49</sup>

This struggle initiated Victorio's last foray into the United States. On July 31, the U.S. Cavalry chased him across the Rio Grande, but the determined Indian leader turned around and four days later made one last dash for the Guadalupe Mountains along the west side of the Sierra Diablo Range. His goal was to reach the Mescalero Reservation. Grierson anticipated this move and raced northward, covering sixty-five miles in twenty-one hours. He took Rattlesnake Springs, Texas, and in a heated exchange of gunfire, kept Victorio from this crucial water source. After Victorio ambushed a provision train to the east of Rattlesnake Springs and the military fended off his attack, Victorio returned to Mexico with his options limited and his

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<sup>48</sup> Sonnichsen, *The Mescalero Apache*, 173-84; Utley, *Frontier Regulars*, 370; Leckie, *Buffalo Soldiers*, 217-20.

<sup>49</sup> Leckie, *Buffalo Soldiers*, 224-25; Utley, "The Buffalo Soldiers and Victorio," 53-54; Sonnichsen, *The Mescalero Apache*, 187; Utley, *Frontier Regulars*, 372 "The Battle of Tinaja de Las Palmas," *Hudspeth County Herald*, July 23, 1993.



prestige and confidence damaged. Many of the Mescalero Indians with Victorio wanted to surrender and return to their reservation, but he suppressed the revolt by killing the Mescalero leader. The Mexican army still sought Victorio, and by October, his time was running out. The cooperative effort between Mexicans and American soldiers continued until the Mexican government expressed objections to American soldiers on their land. The U.S. Army withdrew, and in the Candelaria Mountains on October 14, 1880, Colonel Joaquin Terrazas led his soldiers against Victorio in the night battle of Trees Castillo. By morning, Victorio and more than eighty of his warriors and supporters — male and female, adults and children — were dead and the remaining women and children had become captives. Victorio's war had finally ended, and with a few exceptions, so had the era of free-roaming Indians in the trans-Pecos region.<sup>50</sup>

As much as some Mescaleros admired and embraced Victorio's actions, his breakout and the raiding that accompanied it complicated life for all the Indians of the Southwest. It revealed the futility of military resistance to the enforced transformation of Indian life. Romantic as it was, Victorio's war was an anachronism, a lone battle fought well after the larger conflict had been decided. Like the Battle of Little Big Horn or the Dull Knife excursion that preceded it or Geronimo's efforts that followed, Victorio's war revealed the ways in which the boundaries of the Southwest had solidified against Indian people. Victorio and later Geronimo succeeded as much as they did because they could use the Mexican border as a way to create the open space they needed to survive. Reservation breakouts could terrorize Anglo and Hispano populations, but they could not turn the clock back to a time where Mescaleros, Chiricahuas, or any other Indian people could control more than the high remote areas of mountain ranges against the intruding cavalry. Much more symbolic in the scope of history than a sustained threat to Anglo dominance, Victorio's war showed how much, not how little, U.S. Army presence supported the institutions of American society. Although the Americans could not yet physically control every inch of the trans-Pecos and the *llano* to its east, the power of their institutions was sufficient to establish control that could only be challenged in intermittent ways. The lesson of Victorio's war was hardly the romantic posture of the rise of a valiant but weakened people; instead it showed the full force of a post-railroad society brought to bear on a small fringe group. More than anything, the chase of Victorio showed that Mexican border or not, Americans had acquired the vaunted patience necessary to wait out and ultimately wear down its Indian foes.

The end of Victorio's war also ended an epoch in the trans-Pecos region. His short-term success but long-term failure revealed that the era in which military chases of Indian people were an ongoing reality had come to an end. There were later skirmishes as reservation conditions failed to improve and some Indian people asserted anger and disappointment, but ever after, the Mescaleros and other southwestern peoples were held within the bounds of their reservations. Although similar reservation breakouts occurred elsewhere in the West into the

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<sup>50</sup> Leckie, *Buffalo Soldiers*, 227-29; Sonnichsen, *The Mescalero Apache*, 187-88.

1890s, in the Southwest only Geronimo sustained a breakout on the level of Victorio after 1880. Victorio's war revealed one final significant change: it showed that with military support and on a largely lawless frontier, the institutions of American society had begun to coalesce.

In this respect, the military served as a vanguard in clearing the area for Anglo-American settlement. No part of this process was easy. Soldiers, politicians and settlers thought it was completed numerous times, but following the beginning of the post-Mexican War surveys, pushing Indians onto reservations and keeping them there took more than thirty years. Outnumbered and usually outgunned, the Mescaleros, the Chiricahuas, and other warriors used their knowledge of the region, their acclimation to high remote places, and their mobility to confound Grierson and inflict damage upon Anglo and Hispano settlers. Only as those opportunities narrowed and larger numbers of more seasoned and determined soldiers, especially the Buffalo Soldiers, trailed them could the military successfully round up Indians and keep them isolated.

For the Army, long-term settlement by ranchers and farmers remained a less important goal than the immediate pacification, especially during the Civil War, of Indian peoples. Many military decisions revealed expediency rather than an attempt to implement a consistent policy that might last as their governing principle. Promises made to the Mescaleros and other Indians were usually worthless, and even well-meaning agents failed to give the Indians a sense of security about their situation. As a result, the old ways and the free life in the mountains often called out to the tribes.

Pacification and removal to reservations hardly ended conflict with Indian people in the trans-Pecos. On a yearly basis that often seemed cyclical, Indian people who had been removed from the region left reservations and returned to their old homes, initiating a pattern of conflict that continued until they were again returned to their reservations. This created a fluidity, a seasonal lack of security that made history real in the lives of settlers in the region and illustrated the layering of life even on this periphery. As they built homes near the waterholes of the region and branched out, Hispano and Anglo-American settlers knew they built in places that Indian people once controlled and still coveted. The cyclical reappearance of displaced Indians in search of a lost world also demonstrated the fundamental falseness of American assumptions about their own power and the resolve of Indian people. To many, especially the soldiers who did the fighting, it seemed that the same battles occurred nearly every year in the same or similar places against the same or extremely similar adversaries. This engendered a lack of security for both soldiers and settlers that permeated their lives.

It also illustrated the difficulty of surviving in the trans-Pecos not only for ranchers but also for those who sought to establish towns. Few communities rose, and the ones that did were tainted by a kind of lawlessness that had been endemic even before the Lincoln County War. Without industrial technology, best exemplified by the railroad, the Americans were no better able to harness the Guadalupe Mountains/trans-Pecos region than were any of their predecessors. Although they had more soldiers, money, and resources, the lines of supply that they created remained too thin to sustain sedentary life. In this era, like no other, the region

earned the sobriquet “frontier.” To figuratively close this era, the values and accouterments of industrial society had to become widely available throughout the region.

