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## Gilpin's Volunteers on the Santa Fe Trail

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THE STEAMERS *Little Mo* and *Harry of the West* came up the river from New Orleans in the summer of 1847 and reaching the ports of Missouri discharged from their crowded decks a battalion of heroes returning from the Mexican War. During a year's fighting in New Mexico, Texas, and Chihuahua the Missouri volunteers had gone without pay, clothing issue, and frequently food for men and horses, yet they had never lost a battle. "Ring-Tailed Roarers" they called themselves, and they looked almost as tough as they thought they were. "The unshorn beards and goat and deer skin clothes of many of them, reminded us of descriptions we have read of the inhabitants of some of the countries of the Russian Empire."<sup>1</sup>

The volunteers (only one or two officers were regulars) were toasted and dined in St. Louis and Independence; Missouri's famed senator, Thomas H. "Old Bullion" Benton, added to their glory in one of his orotund speeches on the Fourth of July, and their commanding officer, Col. Alexander Doniphan, told the public of his soldiers' bravery in spite of the limited support of an already dividing nation.<sup>2</sup> But the celebrations soon ended, for a call came for a new kind of war.

It was only while they were heading for home that the Missouri volunteers had first heard of the savage Indian attacks that had broken out on the Santa Fe trail during their absence. This highway, leading from Missouri to the Mexican settlements, had for 25 years been a source of considerable commerce and specie, making Missouri one of the few solvent states in that era of frenzied frontier speculation. Several times the army patrolled the trail, but normally it was a punitive body, serving as a substantial,

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1. *American Flag*, Matamoros, Mexico, June 7, 1847.

2. *Ibid.*, July 17, 1847.

but distant threat to troublesome Indians.<sup>3</sup> With the outbreak of the Mexican War, however, regulars and volunteers alike were sent to Mexico and the trail was left unguarded. Perhaps more damaging to the system of protection was the departure, also to Mexico, of the chief merchants of the noted "Commerce of the Prairies" with their hundreds of teamsters and heavily loaded, and armed, wagons. Tough, experienced, and well organized, this latter group was the equivalent of several companies of soldiers when protecting themselves and their goods from the Indians.

But since the summer of 1846 all of these usual means of defense had disappeared. Small parties of merchants and travelers could not cope with the Plains Indians. Nearly every company was attacked, although some of the reports of complete massacres were greatly exaggerated. Little groups of merchants were scattered along the Arkansas trying to return home while Santa Fe was filled with destitute traders whose market had been destroyed by war and Indian attacks upon New Mexicans. These men, too, needed immediate protection for the road home, lest they starve in New Mexico. Missourians estimated that hundreds of whites would be killed if the government did not act promptly to suppress the Indians.

Action began with a War Department order of July 20, 1847, authorizing the governor of Missouri to recruit and outfit a detachment of troops to restore peace to the Santa Fe trail.<sup>4</sup> The governor acted promptly and within these loose instructions created the "Separate Battalion of Missouri Volunteers," also known variously as the "Indian Battalion" and the "Oregon Battalion."

Attempting to use the Ring-Tailed Roarers as the nucleus of the new battalion, the governor found little affirmative response. Doniphan was the logical commander, but he wanted to retire to his family and his farm, and the choice fell to his executive officer, Maj. William Gilpin.<sup>5</sup>

Gilpin, now promoted to lieutenant colonel, was a veteran of the campaign in northern Mexico. A member of a distinguished Phil-

3. Max Moorhead, *New Mexico's Royal Road* (Norman, University of Oklahoma Press, 1958), p. 69.

4. Lt. Col. William Gilpin, Fort Mann, August 1, 1848, to Adj. Gen. R. Ivers—Record Group 94, G 449, A. G. O., National Archives; 50th Cong., 2d Sess., *House Ex. Doc. No. 1* (Serial 537), p. 136.

5. Doniphan's campaign in Mexico was frequently delayed by an inability to locate the main body of American troops. At Chihuahua some of his officers urged staying where they were, but Doniphan ordered otherwise. He told the men that while they "might possibly have found fair reasons for staying, I'm for going home to Sarah and the children." The expression soon became the watchword of Doniphan's Ring-Tailed Roarers.—Frank S. Edwards, *A Campaign in New Mexico with Colonel Doniphan* (Philadelphia, Carey and Hart, 1847), p. 131.

adelphia family, he was a friend of Andrew Jackson and Senator Benton. He received a West Point cadetship but resigned to go west. He fought in the Seminole War, edited a St. Louis newspaper to campaign for Benton and Van Buren, traveled to Oregon with Fremont, and was in 1861 to be Lincoln's appointment as first governor of Colorado territory. Under Doniphan his chief accomplishment was a necessary but diversionary campaign to pacify the Navajos before the American troops could safely enter Mexico. Gilpin was the most experienced choice immediately available to command the new detachment.

Much to his disappointment Gilpin persuaded only a few of the Roarers to serve. They had had enough of the desert and the miserable supply of the army on the frontier; almost all of the men declined to re-enlist. But the need for haste was great, and Gilpin's command was filled out with the newest of recruits, about half of whom were Germans, newly arrived in the West, seeking the soldier's bounty lands. Instead of Doniphan's experienced and toughened veterans, Gilpin was to lead a motley aggregation of foreigners, misfits, and city lads who were to see their first Indians three weeks after joining the army.

Gilpin was tormented from the beginning. His recruits went into the field with no training worthy of mention. He had no superior officer to direct him. The War Department failed to establish any chain of command for him to use. The battalion was mustered in and equipped at Fort Leavenworth, but was never placed under any department or other headquarters. Gilpin thus got into the habit of dealing directly with the adjutant general, the secretary of war, and even the President when he sought help. No one but Gilpin felt responsible for the Separate battalion, and it quickly became *too* separate. Tactics were to require considerable dispersal of the unit, resulting in even more looseness of control and administration. Many of Gilpin's problems could have easily been solved in a more orthodox outfit, but his officers, too, were all volunteers, and according to the custom of the time, were elected by the enlisted men often after spirited campaigning and concession making.

Two of Gilpin's five companies came from St. Louis, and nearly all of these men were German. So few of them, and their officers as well, spoke English, that they became the object of hostility on the part of the other companies. In their turn they suspected the "Americans" of evil intent toward them.<sup>6</sup>

6. A company of Germans from St. Louis had nearly mutinied against Doniphan when ordered out on the trail without their baggage in July, 1846.—Ralph Bieber, ed., *Marching With the Army of the West, 1846-1848* (Glendale, Calif., Clark, 1936), p. 75.

By reasonable standards Gilpin's battalion should never have left Fort Leavenworth. It was in sorry shape. Gilpin blamed his predicament on "the ignorance, the laziness and the vicious character of officers in the frontier depots." Chief target of his attack was Lt. Col. Clifton Wharton, commanding officer of Fort Leavenworth and probably able enough. Wharton, however, with no jurisdiction over Gilpin, was expected to supply him. For a variety of reasons Wharton failed to do this, and the vague command structure made settlement of their problems unreasonably difficult.

Unfortunately both men were seriously ill. Gilpin had contracted malaria in Mexico and suffered with it throughout the Indian campaign. Wharton wasted from an unknown fever and was to die while Gilpin was in the field. Unquestionably their mutual irritations were aggravated by their poor health.

By late September, 1847, the battalion was up to strength, two companies of cavalry, one of foot artillery and two of infantry, totaling about 850 men.

An experienced, but ailing commander, an inexperienced staff, commanding recruits half of whom spoke no English, were in Gilpin's words, "ordered into the wilderness naked." Wharton, he wrote to President Polk, had provided no cavalry sabers, no officers' arms, no copies of laws, regulations, or instructions, no forage, not enough food, arms, or ammunition.<sup>7</sup>

The consequences were apparent within a month. Gilpin heard rumors that the major Plains tribes planned an alliance which would destroy the commerce of the prairies completely in 1848. He moved his battalion up the trail to Fort Mann, a small stockade in the present Dodge City area. He left three companies here to enlarge and repair the fort while he led the two cavalry troops to the upper Arkansas where the Arapaho and Cheyenne were assembling. Gilpin planned to spend the winter in the vicinity of Bent's Fort persuading or frightening the Indians into discarding the idea of an alliance. He was to achieve some success after a vicious winter spent in tents among the Indians, but complete disorganization threatened his forces down river at Fort Mann.

Capt. William Pelzer was left in charge and that German officer soon acquired a reputation described in the St. Louis papers as "notorious." In mid-November he invited some 65 wandering Pawnees into the fort to eat and smoke. Badly frightened by the boldness of these Indians Pelzer misunderstood their actions.

7. Gilpin, Bent's Fort, January 8, 1848, to Secretary of War William L. Marcy.—Letters Received, G62, A. G. O., National Archives.

Wrote Pelzer to Gilpin ". . . i report to you the facs of a small skarmish with had here." A "trip" of Pawnees came to the fort, "they shekt hands with us and i envoited them to come with me to the Fort." Pelzer evidently hoped to hold the Indians until he got word to Gilpin, but the Pawnees became wary and tried to escape. Pelzer ordered his men to fire. Two Indians were killed and perhaps two dozen wounded. "i understand that Capt. Kocialioski had forbidden his men to load after i hat given the command, he could not see any necessity of it. . . . i wish you was here . . . to get information how to get these other savages. P. S. i don't like to feet them any longer."<sup>8</sup>

Few people could see any "necessity of it." Gilpin was angry and demanded a court-martial; army headquarters began an investigation; the Plains tribes grew more restive. At Bent's Fort the old frontier merchant, Ceran St. Vrain, urged calmness and suggested that the army write the affair off as the effect of mutual suspicions on ignorant troops, but Gilpin's mission had started badly.<sup>9</sup>

Meanwhile, a more unusual scandal was about to brighten the Kansas winter for the troops at Fort Mann. Somehow, back in September, 1st Lt. Amandus Schnabel had managed to recruit into Company D a young woman named Caroline Newcome. How many men were in on the secret we cannot judge, but she traveled with the troops and first reached official notice at Fort Mann. Lieutenant Schnabel disguised Caroline in soldiers' clothing and had her report under the name of Bill whenever she stood formation. According to his court-martial charges he resorted "to various means to keep the said female disguised as a male, off from duty in the Company under different pretexs and during all or portions of that period, (several weeks), was tenting, sleeping and cohabiting with the said female, thereby *defrauding the United States of the service of a good and competent soldier.* . . ."<sup>10</sup>

The fraud was revealed when Pvt. Bill Newcome became pregnant and her lieutenant tried to get her to desert. Schnabel was court-martialed after some delay resulting from Captain Pelzer's inability to arrest him. It was determined that Schnabel should

8. Capt. William Pelzer, Fort Mann, November 19, 1847, to Gilpin.—Record Group 94, G368, A. G. O., National Archives.

9. Col. John Garland, Jefferson Barracks, May 24, 1848, to the adjutant general.—Letters Received, G210, A. G. O., National Archives.

10. The italics are the author's, but the language is Gilpin's. He probably saw nothing amusing in the incident or in his own business-like conclusion.—Court-martial record, Bent's Fort, January 4, 1848, Record Group 94, G368, A. G. O., National Archives.

be discharged from the service but the proceedings also revealed that the enterprising officer was further guilty of spreading rumors that E company was about to make war on C and D. Unfortunately for the story his purpose remains a mystery.

Up the Arkansas Gilpin and his cavalry were facing a critical shortage of food for man and animal. William Bent thought he could provide beef enough for the winter, but his partner St. Vrain vetoed the proposal; the two men almost fell out, but the soldiers got no beef. What supplies were forthcoming resulted from Gilpin's trading with the Indians and New Mexicans, but there was little help for the horses. The ground was frozen, the grass gone. Before winter was well along the cavalry was dismounted and waiting for the arrival of new mules in the spring.

Gilpin was criticized for this inactivity by another old frontier hand who visited Bent's Fort that winter. Tom Fitzpatrick, mountaineer, guide, and now Indian agent for the Plains on the recommendation of Gilpin's friend, Senator Benton, made Bent's his headquarters. He had just completed a tour of the Santa Fe trail and was also discouraged by conditions. Santa Fe was in deplorable shape—drunkenness, sickness, license all abounded—the backwash of the war, Fitzpatrick thought. But as with Gilpin, Fitzpatrick's greatest concern was the new Indian menace now made doubly serious by the vast increase in the number of settlers going to California and Oregon.

Gilpin and Fitzpatrick, who had first met in 1843 en route to Oregon with Fremont, clashed over Indian policy. Old Broken Hand, as the tribes called him, would not help Gilpin locate the Arapaho and Cheyenne on the Arkansas as buffers against the fiercer Comanche tribe. Fitzpatrick hoped that the first two tribes would settle down along the Platte as they apparently desired, and furthermore he seriously distrusted a system that would place so many strong forces alongside one another.

On his part Gilpin refused Fitzpatrick a ten-man detail for some police action farther north. The latter then complained to the War Department that Gilpin would not co-operate with him and was waging a fruitless, lethargic campaign. While the men disagreed on much, they concurred that the Indians needed firm control immediately in the form of more troops and more forts. Only the most serious results could otherwise be expected. Gilpin, in fact praised Fitzpatrick as the only officer who could give the

government the facts it needed in the face of considerable public sympathy for the Indians.<sup>11</sup>

More or less with Broken Hand's blessing, Gilpin planned a spring campaign to meet what he called the "annual migration" of the Apaches and Comanches northward to the Arkansas. Now augmented by Company E, the non-German infantry unit, he determined to get new supplies at El Moro in New Mexico and then seek out and defeat the two tribes. But before he could move from Bent's Fort more turmoil arose.

One hundred and twelve men (all with German appearing names), petitioned the colonel for the removal of Captain Pelzer for misconduct and his inability to maintain military order.

The details were intriguing: Pelzer was charged with regular intoxication, selling government property, and swindling the men of their pay. Then three officers signed and sent to Gilpin a different plea; they wanted Gilpin to return to Fort Mann to put an end to near mutiny. Officers were drunk during Indian scares; Pelzer's men took to shooting at one another while on hunting expeditions, and one soldier accidentally killed another. In general, "things were made disagreeable," said the officers.<sup>12</sup> So far, most acts had gone unpunished and military discipline had just about disappeared.

Gilpin sent a protest off to Secretary of War William L. Marcy asking to discharge his Germans and to court-martial several officers, ". . . to crush out the evils every day aggravating in the service in this country . . ." and ". . . to furnish the means of crushing insubordination in commissioned officers. . . ." <sup>13</sup>

With this demand and several unsavory newspaper accounts at hand the War Department decided upon an investigation of Gilpin's command, although blandly wondering what Gilpin was doing at Bent's Fort when it was thought he had been sent to Fort Scott. A single officer was to go to Fort Leavenworth, talk with Colonel Wharton and then the two men would inspect Gilpin's battalion together. Before this was accomplished Gilpin began his spring campaign.

He obtained his supplies in New Mexico and throughout March

11. David Lavender, *Bent's Fort* (Garden City, N. Y., Doubleday, 1954), pp. 304-307; LeRoy R. Hafen and W. J. Ghent, *Broken Hand* (Denver, Old West, 1951), pp. 197-211.

12. Petitions, February 20, 22, 1848.—Letters Received, G62, A. G. O., National Archives.

13. Gilpin, near Bent's Fort, March 10, 1848, to Marcy.—Letters Received, G62, A. G. O., National Archives.

and April, 1848, sought out the Apaches and Comanches in the plains and canyons east of the Sangre de Cristo mountains. For weeks the cavalry saw scarcely an Indian but a great deal of desolation. Warned of the army's coming, the Indians adopted a scorched earth policy. For hundreds of miles they burned the prairie grass, drove off all the game and fled—the Apaches into Chihuahua, the Comanches into western Texas, as well as Gilpin could determine.<sup>14</sup> With mixed emotions Gilpin in May turned his troops northward toward the Arkansas where the Cheyenne, Arapaho, and Kiowa reputedly awaited his coming to make new peace talks. Back at Fort Mann the usual mischief prevailed. Germans quarreled with Americans and refused to obey their officers. Pelzer challenged another officer to a duel with cavalry sabers—issue unknown. "Green lieutenants" wrote "scandalous letters . . . published in the St. Louis papers" and Colonel Wharton engaged in "injurious scribbling," while the Indians grew bolder.

They first began with long distance sniping. Then on June 18, 1848, a detachment escorting the paymaster was attacked by two to three hundred Indians while a similar group watched from the distance. Casualties were slight, but the Indians drove off a number of horses and mules despite determined efforts to recapture them. The Indians recovered their dead and wounded in unusual fashion. As the soldiers watched fascinated, "a female, who seemed to be their queen, mounted on a horse, decorated with silver ornaments on a scarlet dress, . . . rode about giving directions about the wounded. . . ." Her efforts were so successful that the troops had trouble assessing the Indian casualties and got no prisoners.

While only four soldiers were wounded, the experience was shaking. The boldness of an attack upon troops, the unprecedented specter of a queen, and the presence of rifles among the braves unsettled the Separate battalion, and the feeling was intensified when oldtimers concluded that they had been fighting Comanches. Nearly a thousand warriors were observed before the frightened command safely reached Fort Mann again.<sup>15</sup>

14. St. Louis Reveille, May 29, 1848. Somewhere Gilpin added 20 mountain men to his force, a measure that would greatly disturb the Indians.

15. 1st Lt. B. Royall, Fort Mann, June 21, 1848, to Jones.—Record Group 94, G449, A. G. O., National Archives; 39th Cong., 2d Sess., House Ex. Doc. No. 1 (Serial 537), pp. 141-144. Apparently this was the fight which has become known as the Battle of Coon Creek.—See James H. Birch, "The Battle of Coon Creek," in *Kansas Historical Collections*, v. 10, pp. 409-413. Birch, who was there, says the Indians did not have guns.



Gilpin and the main body of the cavalry had finally returned to that post for the first time since early winter. He convinced the awaiting Cheyenne, Arapaho, and Kiowa tribes that the government was ready to negotiate a treaty with them, but that he, Gilpin, lacked the power to do it. He then persuaded them to withdraw to the Platte and await agents from Washington who could make the arrangements.

With substantial delay, the treaty ultimately came off as planned. After the construction of "new" Fort Kearny and Fort Laramie in 1848 and 1849, the government decided it was finally ready to negotiate with the northern tribes, and at Fort Laramie in 1851 not only the three with which Gilpin dealt, but virtually all of the major northern tribes met with Indian Agent Fitzpatrick and accepted gifts and annuities in exchange for agreeing to settle in certain prescribed areas.<sup>16</sup>

Achieving the separation of the tribes was Gilpin's chief victory of the campaign. From time to time in the past, Comanches and Apaches alike had co-operated with the more northern tribes even though on occasion they fought one another. Now such an alliance was most unlikely, and Gilpin had reason to feel that he had divided the most dangerous Indians and minimized their threat thereby. It is futile to guess what might have been, and one cannot be sure how important Gilpin was in preventing a major Indian alliance. But considering the long history of Indian strife yet to come after 1848, it is fair to say that an alliance for even a season or two could have been most destructive to frontier settlement. Casualties to '49ers and the Oregon-bound would have been staggering.

That the Comanches were not completely isolated was demonstrated by their possession of guns; Gilpin surmised that they were obtaining guns and ammunition from the Osage tribe. In this he was right. A thriving trade between the two groups had become an annual affair. By treaty the Osage received lead, powder, firearms, and other necessities from the government. The Comanches being excluded from this largess engaged in direct private enterprise. They stole mules from the Santa Fe merchants, swapped the animals for the guns, ammunition, and other supplies of the Osage and then proceeded back to the Santa Fe trail the better equipped to continue the thriving business.<sup>17</sup> It was best for Gilpin's peace

16. St. Louis *Reveille*, June 5, 1848; Hafen and Ghent, *op. cit.*, p. 228; George B. Grinnell, *The Fighting Cheyennes* (Norman, University of Oklahoma, 1956), p. 100; Ray A. Billington, *Westward Expansion* (New York, MacMillan, 1949), p. 653.

17. Osage Indian agent John Richardson said that in 1847 1,500 mules were thus traded at a value of \$50 to \$75 a head.—Robert N. Richardson, *The Comanche Barrier to South Plains Settlement* (Glendale, Clark, 1933), p. 186.

of mind that he did not know all of these aspects of the trade, as to these same Comanches he now could turn his full attention.

Their opportunities were on the increase. Undaunted by the tragedies of the past season, merchants returned in great numbers to the trail already crowded by many settlers. Gilpin estimated that 12,000 persons, 3,000 wagons, and 50,000 head of stock paraded before Fort Mann during the Summer of 1848.<sup>18</sup> To protect these people and their possessions Gilpin divided his battalion into small detachments and shuttled them back and forth across eastern Kansas as escorts to the reviving business.

His scattered units were regularly harassed by large numbers of braves who became increasingly bolder while introducing the recruits to their trickery. The red queen was not reported again, but the soldiers encountered the same stubborn Comanche determination to recover the dead and wounded. Occasionally one or two Indians would make themselves into decoys and pull the inexperienced soldiers away from their post in pursuit. At times a white horse was turned loose among the troopers' animals and succeeded in luring the latter into the hands of the Indians. Gilpin's artillery had limited value as soon as the Indians realized its shortcomings. They learned how to outmaneuver the heavier guns and often closed so tightly with the soldiers that the weapons could not be fired at all.

In the midst of this Indian-White struggle the German-American War, as the War Department looked upon Gilpin's special problem, gradually drew to a close. Gilpin arrested Captain Pelzer on a long list of charges, and the latter promptly submitted his resignation on grounds of family illness. Lieutenant O'Hara made the same request because, "I cannot consistently with my own feelings associate and be commanded by the officers of whom charges have been preferred and I cannot acknowledge them as officers and gentlemen."

O'Hara had been unable to control his Germans. They had ridiculed him, cursed him, and refused to camp where he ordered. Many of his men were clearly guilty of disobedience to their superior officer and probably in a technical sense were deserters. Someone even shot at him for ordering an overnight march.

"O'Hara is a young American holding his commission in a co. exclusively of Germans— he has suffered himself to be intimidated and driven from his command on more than one occasion." Gilpin wanted a general court-martial for all of his shakier officers—per-

<sup>18</sup> R. L. Duffus, *The Santa Fe Trail* (New York, Longmans, Green, 1900), pp. 220-222.

haps as many as six. "The nature of the service in this wilderness is the most trying to human nature conceivable. . . ." <sup>19</sup>

Gilpin's relief was on the way. The War Department appointed Col. John Garland at Jefferson Barracks to make an investigation of the Separate battalion and recommend action to save the unit from collapse. Garland was accompanied from Fort Leavenworth by Gilpin's enemy, Colonel Wharton, post commander, but Wharton had shortly to return to Leavenworth critically ill. He died there July 12, 1848. With a small escort Garland resumed his inspection alone.<sup>20</sup>

He found Gilpin at Fort Mann and in control of his unit. Garland talked with all of the principals. Since Pelzer was a volunteer, the inspector "reluctantly accepted" his resignation and ordered him out of the Indian country. The same fate was dealt to Lieutenant Schnabel, but his good friend Pvt. "Bill" Newcome had long since left and was considered beyond military jurisdiction. Three other lieutenants, including O'Hara, were also permitted to resign as "absolute drawbacks to the Bn." Several privates were discharged with disgrace, and one, Auguste Falbush, was sent to St. Louis on murder charges growing out of the hunting accident. A number of men were acquitted of the crime of stealing horses and mules.

Garland found a Pawnee, wounded in Pelzer's Fort Mann massacre, still a prisoner in irons. He released the brave and sent him to his chief with apologies and assurances that the White Father had punished and disgraced the guilty captain.

In less than a month the colonel finished his task and left for a promotion and a new assignment. The inspection report put little blame upon Gilpin—the troubles had always occurred in his absence. He had failed to impart a sense of discipline among his company officers, a code which might well have been carried on down the line to the recruits. But the officers were recruits, too. They were volunteers, little interested in the service, far from the commanding officers' observation, and apparently campaigning only because of the bounty lands that would become theirs for a period of enlistment. Furthermore, as the adjutant general had informed Garland, the detachments were so scattered that it was impossible for Gilpin to find enough officers with sufficient rank

19. Pelzer, Fort Mann, May 30, 1848, to Marcy; Gilpin, Fort Mann, June 10, 1848, to Marcy.—Letters Received, G270, A. G. O., National Archives.

20. Jones, Washington, May 9, 1848, to Col. John Garland.—Record Group 94, G368, A. G. O., National Archives; Fort Leavenworth, Post Returns, July, 1848, A. G. O., National Archives.

to conduct a court-martial. The factors that frustrated Gilpin permitted license among the troops, who, obviously a carefree lot at best, worried little about punishment and were unaware that dishonorable discharge meant loss of their right to bounty lands.

Garland also informed the War Department that the suspicions of Germans and Americans were discreditable to both groups. The fears that were generated were unfounded and unnecessary and most destructive to the worth of the command.

He felt that at the root of all of the trouble with the Separate battalion, however, was the method of electing officers, ". . . the desire to gain popularity at the expense of discipline has no doubt been the most fruitful cause of that insubordination." In this analysis Garland saw the weakness of the prevailing system that touched many commands besides Gilpin's. Inexperienced volunteers had the decisive voice in selecting officers up to the level of regimental commander, and young lieutenants and captains of the era openly campaigned for appointment (or election) to vacancies by courting the good will of the enlisted men. Laxness and indulgence provided an easy road to promotions.<sup>21</sup> Gilpin, himself, had been a victim of the technique during the Mexican War. Although capable and reasonably popular, he had been defeated for the position of lieutenant colonel in Doniphan's regiment because the soldiers voting distrusted him for having attended West Point, however briefly.

Colonel Garland had acted decisively and correctly. The War Department approved all of his actions relative to the Separate battalion, and inasmuch as the treaty of peace with Mexico had finally been ratified, orders were issued to discharge all volunteer units promptly. In the opinion of the adjutant general these instructions made it unnecessary to take any further steps against the rascals of Gilpin's command.

Their war against the Indians was not yet over, however. Continuing his policy of harassing the Comanches, Gilpin selected a detachment of about 100 men and under the immediate command of Capt. John C. Griffin sent them to seek out and destroy the tribe wherever it might be found. By very rapid traveling the soldiers surprised and attacked a Comanche village along the Cimarron. During a three-hour battle in which about 30 braves and no whites were killed, the Indians continued to guard their village until the

21. Fort Leavenworth, Post Returns, July, 1848; Garland, Jefferson Barracks, Mo., August 3, 1848, to Jones, Record Group 94, G363; Garland, Fort Mann, July 14, 1848, to Jones, Record Group 94, G368; and Garland, Jefferson Barracks, August 16, 1848, to Jones, Record Group 94, G368, all A. G. O., National Archives.

noncombatants could escape. Then the warriors also fled after once again performing amazing feats to rescue their dead and wounded in the face of howitzer and heavy rifle fire.<sup>22</sup>

Later in July a similar foray destroyed another large village of perhaps 800 to 1,000 lodges and recovered hundreds of head of stolen livestock at the cost of five soldiers wounded.

These skirmishes could mean but little in the ultimate solution of the Indian question. Gilpin proved again the accepted belief that a tight military organization could defeat far more numerous bands of Indians burdened with their women and children. He also proved that he could drive the tribes away from the Santa Fe trail but could guarantee to the merchants no permanent protection once his back was turned. At times Gilpin seemed to think that this sort of cavalry action might be really useful to commerce, but toward the end of his tour of duty he became caustically aware of the futility of pushing nomads one way or another. He well realized that the departure of the Separate battalion would automatically mean the return of the more aggressive tribes.

In August, 1848, War Department instructions ordered the dissolution of the Separate battalion. Gilpin's cavalry made a few last hit-and-run attacks and then went back to Fort Leavenworth.

The Indians returned to the trail. Gilpin, now growing more disappointed in his accomplishment, sent a lengthy report to the adjutant general and a briefer one to Garland protesting that no useful result would come from his year's work unless the government would instantly follow his suggestions for the further control of the tribes. For the moment the Arapaho, Cheyennes, and Kiowas were peaceful, isolated from the southern Indians and ready to settle down under the terms of a treaty. But congress must not wait too long, or the northern tribes might once again listen to the blandishments of the Comanche chiefs. These latter, plus the Pawnees, had been punished by Gilpin and temporarily prevented from destroying communications between Missouri and New Mexico, but Gilpin knew that this would not last. The Apaches, also due for some castigation, had not been hurt, not even found.

In the opinion of Gilpin the permanent settlement of the frontier required a string of forts, as opposed to General Kearny's theory of a constantly moving cavalry. Gilpin recommended constructing four new adobe posts and purchasing Bent's for the sole use of the army. Meanwhile, he insisted, prompt treaties must be made with

<sup>22</sup> Capt. John C. Griffin, Fort Mann, July 12, 1848, to Gilpin.—Record Group 94, C368, A. G. O., National Archives; 30th Cong., 2d Sess., *House Ex. Doc. No. 1* (Serial 537), pp. 146-149.

the northern tribes, and a full scale invasion made to conquer and control the lands of the Apaches and Comanches. An additional reason for haste was the hundreds of white prisoners, mostly Mexican, believed held by these warriors. Otherwise, concluded Gilpin, ". . . all the atrocities of a very severe Indian war may be momentarily looked for, and are certain to burst forth with the early spring."<sup>23</sup>

Gilpin's summation of his year's work on the Santa Fe trail was reliable. He had postponed trouble for a year. That was all. The Indians, momentarily on the defensive, could be contained if the government acted at once. But it did not.

The great father delayed for three years drawing up treaties for the northern plains Indians and indefinitely postponed any punitive action in the south. Even Fort Mann was abandoned by 1850.<sup>24</sup> An entire generation was to pass before the threat of the Comanches and Apaches was to disappear from the American southwest.

Gilpin retired to a Missouri farm, engaged in land speculation and became an authority on the frontier. His literary and political careers were still ahead of him, but his military life had drawn to a close with this most frustrating campaign.

23. Gilpin, Fort Mann, August 1, 1848, to Jones.—Record Group 94, G440, National Archives; 50th Cong., 2d Sess., House Ex. Doc. No. 1 (Serial 537), pp. 106-140; Gilpin, Fort Leavenworth, August 18, 1848, to Garland.—Letters Received, G398, A. G. O., National Archives.

24. "Kansas History as Published in the Press," *The Kansas Historical Quarterly*, v. 15 (August, 1947), pp. 329, 330. One vexing question remained. In 1875 the Bureau of Legal and Departmental Information was still trying to ascertain why Gilpin had arrested a German merchant in 1848 and destroyed the latter's 60 barrels of beer. The War Department did not know.