

THE UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA

GRADUATE COLLEGE

THE DODGE-LEAVENWORTH EXPEDITION

A THESIS

APPROVED FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

THE DODGE-LEAVENWORTH EXPEDITION

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

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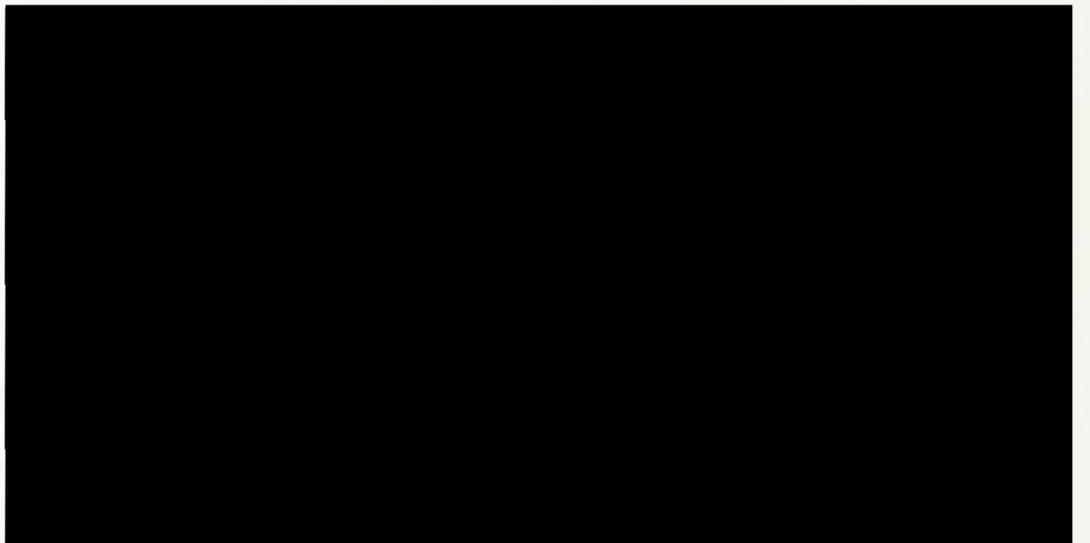
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CHAPTER I

BACKGROUND

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Osage skirmishes soon after Cherokee bands arrived in the West.¹ Removal could not be accomplished so long as there was the threat of bloodshed; thus in 1824 army units from Fort Smith moved to the mouth of Grand River, established Fort Gibson and attempted to maintain peace.² Osages and other local tribes ignored the troops and con-

THE DODGE-LEAVENWORTH EXPEDITION

CHAPTER I

BACKGROUND

Removal of the Eastern Indians to a permanent home beyond the Mississippi River was not a new idea in 1830 when Congress voted to make it the official policy of the United States. During his administration Thomas Jefferson had suggested removal as the only workable solution to the continuing friction between Indians and white settlers, and succeeding presidents pursued the policy with varying degrees of emphasis and success. By the late 1820's settlers along the southern and western frontiers occupied most of the available lands and had begun to encroach upon the territory of the Indians. The time had passed for a slow and deliberate relocation of the Indians; the people of the frontier states demanded action.

Congress responded by passing the Indian Removal Bill which provided the authority and machinery for relocating the tribes beyond the ninety-fifth meridian. This temporarily reduced Indian-settler tensions, but it created new problems farther west. The land set aside for the Eastern tribes was already occupied by the Osages, Comanches, Kiowas and Wichitas who were unwilling, or at least reluctant, to accept the immigrant tribes. Their disapproval was expressed in bloody Cherokee-

Osage skirmishes soon after Cherokee bands arrived in the West.¹

Removal could not be accomplished so long as there was the threat of bloodshed; thus in 1824 army units from Fort Smith moved to the mouth of Grand River, established Fort Gibson and attempted to maintain peace.² Osages and other local tribes ignored the troops and continued their raids on immigrant Indians. In 1832 Secretary of War Lewis Cass admitted the inadequacy of the frontier peace-keeping force at Fort Gibson when he wrote, "Our permanent military posts, garrisoned by infantry, exert a moral influence over the Indians, and protect important and exposed positions. But to overtake and chastise marauding parties and, in fact, to carry on any serious operations against an Indian foe in the level regions of the west, horsemen are indispensably necessary."³ He recommended to President Andrew Jackson that a regiment of dragoons be organized in the belief that such a force would be capable of meeting the Plains Indian on his own terms.

The creation and first campaign of this dragoon regiment is one of the most dramatic events in the history of the early Southwest. To place the story in its proper context, it is necessary to examine the situation on this frontier in the early 1830's and then to review the major happenings which prompted the War Department to order the dragoons to Fort Gibson.

After 1830 increasing numbers of immigrant Indians settled in

¹Grant Foreman, Indians and Pioneers: The Story of the American Southwest Before 1830 (Norman, 1936), 45.

²William Brown Morrison, Military Posts and Camps in Oklahoma (Oklahoma City, 1936), 29.

³American State Papers, Military Affairs, V, 18.

Indian Territory. Soldiers at Fort Gibson attempted to impose restraints upon the native Indians. Traders and missionaries tried to sell them both the material and spiritual trappings of civilization. The result was predictable--hostility.

The immigrant Indians first encountered the Osages, themselves fairly recent arrivals. In 1802 about half the Osages had moved from their home in western Missouri to the Verdigris and Grand rivers. Although they had owned horses since about 1682 and were accomplished riders, they preferred to venture onto the plains on foot.⁴ All other things being equal, this would have given the mounted Plains Indian a decisive advantage over the pedestrian Osage. But all things were not equal. The Osages were regarded as almost super-human by their enemies and their feats of prowess seemed to justify this evaluation. Many Osage warriors stood over six feet tall and towered above the braves of other tribes. One observer claimed an Osage could cross sixty miles of dry prairie almost as quickly as a man on horseback and then fight like the very devil.⁵

The Caddoes who occupied the territory into which the Osages moved in 1802 were no match for these giants. Within four years the Osages had firmly established themselves in their new home, and in less time their restless, bellicose nature had inflamed the entire area. Josiah Gregg had contact with the Osages and described them as "unsurpassed in simple rogueries" and noted that they placed the highest values

⁴ John Joseph Mathews, The Osages: Children of the Middle Waters (Norman, 1961), 126.

⁵ Grant Foreman, Advancing the Frontier, 1830-1860 (Norman, 1933), 119.

on "Expertness at stealing."⁶ A few years after the Osages' arrival, Choctaws, Creeks and other Eastern tribes began moving onto their Indian Territory lands. The better organization and arms of the civilized tribes and the protection from white soldiers offset the Osages' physical advantages, but could not prevent a series of small-scale conflicts that kept the Indian Territory in a state of upheaval for years. No amount of persuasion, bribing or force seemed to be effective in altering the Osages' character. Gregg commented that the habits "of the Osage do not appear to have undergone any material change, notwithstanding the exertions of the government and the missionaries to civilize and christianize them."⁷ By 1837 Commissioner of Indian Affairs C.A. Harris reported to the Secretary of War, Joel R. Poinsett, that the "Osage are the same wild predatory beings as ever."⁸ The Osages, alone of all the Woodlands Indians, seemed to have resisted the tendency to adopt the white man's ways.⁹ While many Eastern Indians enhanced their wardrobes with hats, frock coats and colorful ribbons which they improved by the addition of feathers and paint, the Osages rejected most changes in their clothing. Washington Irving described them as having a "fine Roman countenance," wrapped toga fashion in blanket and with a bristling ridge of hair which resembled the crest

⁶ Josiah Gregg, Commerce of the Prairies, Edited by Max L. Moorhead (Norman, c1954), 428.

⁷ Ibid., 429.

⁸ Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Annual Report, 1837.

⁹ George Catlin, Letters and Notes on the Manners, Customs and Condition of the North American Indians (4th ed.; London, 1844), II, 41.

of a helmet.¹⁰ Leggings and moccasins completed the apparel of the warrior.

To the west of the Osages, a thirty-mile-wide strip of scrub oak, cottonwood, and dense undergrowth called the Cross Timbers marked the boundary of the domain of the Plains Indians. The Cross Timbers had screened these tribes from the first thrusts of civilization, but as traders and other tribes pressed upon them, their role in frontier affairs became more important.

The foremost of the Plains tribes were the Comanches, frequently compared to the Arabs in horsemanship and military skill. By 1830 bands of Comanches, scattered from Texas to the Kansas border, constituted a major threat to the flourishing Santa Fe trade and to peaceful settlement of the Eastern Indians. George Catlin, pioneer American Indian artist, described the Comanches as low in stature, "often approaching corpulency. . . . heavy and ungraceful; and on their feet one of the most unattractive and slovenly-looking races of Indians that I have ever seen; but the moment they mount their horses, they seem at once metamorphosed, and surprise the spectator with the ease and elegance of their movements."¹¹

Almost as warlike as the Comanches were the Kiowas. Like the Comanches, they were originally mountain Indians who had moved onto the plains about 1700 and eventually occupied most of western Oklahoma.¹²

¹⁰Washington Irving, A Tour on the Prairies, Edited by John Francis McDermott (Norman, c1956), 21-22.

¹¹Catlin, North American Indians, II, 66.

¹²Muriel H. Wright, A Guide to the Indian Tribes of Oklahoma (Norman, 1951), 169-71.

Catlin pictured them as

a much finer looking race of men, than either the Comanches or Pawnees--all tall and erect, with an easy and graceful gait--with long hair, cultivated oftentimes so as to reach nearly to the ground. They have generally the fine and Roman outline of head, that is so frequently found at the north,--and decidedly¹³ distinct from that of the Comanches and Pawnee Picts Wichitas .

The Comanches and Kiowas were primarily nomadic buffalo hunting people who relied on their sedentary ally, the Wichitas,¹⁴ for grain and vegetables. The Wichitas were longtime residents of the Southwest. Coronado mentioned either them or a closely related tribe living on the southern plains when he explored the region in 1541. Bernard de la Harpe, an early French explorer, definitely placed them in the Arkansas valley as early as 1719. In contrast to the tipi-dwelling Plains tribes, the Wichitas built permanent villages of dome-shaped houses made with thatched prairie grass. They cultivated extensive fields of tobacco, pumpkins, melons, squash, beans and corn. For meat they relied on their own hunters or trade with neighboring tribes.

Up to 1830 the United States government had made no official contact with these loosely allied Plains tribes. But complaints from the recently arrived civilized tribes concerning their incursions and reports of their raids on Santa Fe traders made it clear government action could not be delayed long.

By 1831 the situation in the southern portion of the Indian

¹³Catlin, North American Indians, II, 74.

¹⁴The term Wichitas was first formally applied to this tribe at the conference at Camp Holmes in 1835 and did not come into general usage until the late nineteenth century. Before this, the tribe was known variously as the Pawnee, Pawnee Pict, Tavehash, Taovayas and Toyash.

Territory had deteriorated to the point that Creeks sought the assistance of the federal government. In a memorial dated October 29, 1831, they characterized the native Indians as wild, "dependent altogether upon the chase for support," and war loving. The memorial pointed out that the Creeks' objective was "to cultivate the land, to support our families by our industry, and to preserve peace not only with our white, but also with our red brothers." These objectives, it continued, could not be realized because of "depredations from small bands of those Indians (Comanche) who live on our southern and western frontiers." The Creeks requested that a commission be appointed "with the power of making selection of deputations from different tribes west of the Mississippi, to hold a general council with the view of making such arrangements as that peace may hereafter be preserved amongst the different tribes."¹⁵ The memorial was directed to the Department of War, then charged with the administration of Indian affairs.

Secretary of War Lewis Cass forwarded the memorial to the President who referred it to Congress with a recommendation that the requested commission be established. On July 14, 1832, Congress authorized the creation of a three-member commission to examine the territory reserved for the immigrating Indians, settle boundary controversies, pacify the native tribes and recommend improvements in processing immigrant Indians.¹⁶ Before the commission could assemble, it became necessary for the United States to confront the Plains Indians with a show of

¹⁵ Joseph B. Thoburn and Muriel H. Wright, Oklahoma: A History of a State and Its People (4 Vols.; New York, 1929), II, 790.

¹⁶ Foreman, Pioneer Days in the Early Southwest, 86.

force deep in their own territory. The collapse of Spanish authority in Mexico was accompanied by a relaxation of the restrictive trade policy which had barred importation of foreign goods. American traders were quick to recognize the opportunities for great profit from trade with New Mexicans, long starved for manufactured products. After 1822 a flourishing trade developed between the western Missouri settlements and Santa Fe. Several routes were used by the traders, but all crossed the hunting grounds of the Plains Indians. After a few years of experience the traders adopted the relatively safe convoy system, but the reports of attacks against small, vulnerable parties caused the public to demand better protection. Two widely publicized incidents in the Plains Indian country focused national attention on this problem.

The first involved Jedediah Strong Smith who, at thirty-two, was almost a legend. In his eight years with the Rocky Mountain Fur Company, he extended its activities to California and opened two routes to the Pacific Coast. In 1831 Smith had decided to settle down to farm life in Ohio, but he could not resist one last western excursion. When his brothers outfitted several wagons for the Santa Fe trade, Smith postponed his plans to take up farming and agreed to accompany them on the first leg of the trip.¹⁷

The journey went smoothly until the Arkansas River was crossed. Beyond it lay the Cimarron Desert, a sixty-mile-wide arid strip, crisscrossed by buffalo trails. Without a guide and with only the vaguest

¹⁷Maurice S. Sullivan, Jedediah Smith: Trader and Trail Breaker (New York, 1936), 210-12.

conception of the route, the party set a southwesterly course. After three days, lack of water forced Smith to move ahead in search of the Cimarron River.¹⁸ That was May 27, 1831. The next day the wagon train reached the Cimarron without word from Smith. Later they were informed that he had been slain by a Comanche band near the river.¹⁹

Several months later one of Smith's brothers described the incident in a letter to another member of the family.

He saw the Indians before they attacked him, but supposed there was no possible chance of an escape. He therefore went boldly up with the hope of making peace with them, but he found that (his) only chance was defense. He killed the head chief. I do suppose that they rushed upon him like so many bloodhounds. The Spaniards say the Indians numbered fifteen to twenty.²⁰

The second event to focus national attention on the Plains Indians later occurred in 1833 when a group of twelve traders returning from Santa Fe by way of the Canadian River valley encountered a band of Kiowas in Mexican territory about 150 miles west of the one hundredth meridian. The Americans, who had about \$10,000 in specie, attempted to avoid conflict, but when one member of the party ventured out to retrieve some mules, the Indians launched their attack. Two traders were killed and another wounded, but for thirty-six hours the survivors held the Kiowas at bay. With the situation hopeless, the party decided to attempt an escape under the cover of darkness. After filling their pockets with all the silver dollars they could carry, the traders buried the remainder of their money and crept through the Indian positions on foot.

¹⁸Ibid., 215.

¹⁹Gregg, Commerce of the Prairies, 66.

²⁰Austin Smith, Walnut Creek on the Arkansas, 300 miles from

With hundreds of miles separating them from the nearest friendly outpost and in the dead of winter, they struggled to keep alive. After forty-two days, five of them were found by Creek Indians near the Arkansas River and eventually two others arrived in the settlements.²¹

The Kiowa version of the episode told that after the flight of the traders, the attackers found a few coins among the property left behind. The Kiowas, who did not know the function of money, pounded the silver dollars into ornaments. On the way back to their village they encountered a band of Comanches who explained the usefulness of these coins. They returned to the scene of the attack and unearthed the thousands of dollars the Americans had been forced to abandon. Mexican traders later confirmed that they had seen Indians spending silver dollars.²²

News of these and other raids on Santa Fe traders was widely reported in the press and soon produced a reaction in Washington. Lewis Cass, in the annual report of the War Department in 1834, informed the President that Kiowa and Comanche "war parties have annoyed our citizens in their intercourse with the Mexican States and have rendered the communication [with them] difficult and hazardous."²³ The Superintendent of Indian Affairs reported that the Plains tribes had "no idea whatever of the power of the United States, and unless some mode should be

settlements, letter, September 24, 1831, to one of his brothers, quoted in Sullivan, Jedediah Smith: Trader and Trail Breaker, 226-27.

²¹Niles Weekly Register (Baltimore), 23 March 1833, p. 51, and Gregg, Commerce of the Prairies, 253-56.

²²James Mooney, Calendar History of the Kiowa Indians, in Bureau of American Ethnology, Annual Report for 1895-96 (Washington, 1898), 255.

²³U.S. Senate, Executive Document, 22d Congress, 1st Session, No. 90, 8.

speedily adopted to inform them . . . injury to hundreds of our citizens will be felt." He also pointed out that if these tribes continued harassing Santa Fe traders, the immigrant tribes would lose respect for American authority.²⁴ Even before the Superintendent recommended "informing" the Indians of American power, the commission established in response to the Creek memorial had convened at Fort Gibson for that very purpose.

After receiving Congressional authorization to establish an Indian commission, Lewis Cass dispatched letters of instruction to several prospective members. These letters directed the commissioners to adjust existing difficulties between the tribes and recommended locations for tribes yet to immigrate. They were to secure the promise of the Osages to move to a reservation established for them in south central Kansas by the treaty of 1825. Finally, the commissioners were to establish a permanent peace among the Plains tribes. For this purpose the Secretary of War directed several companies of mounted rangers to proceed to Fort Gibson to assist them in the execution of their duties.²⁵

Montfort Stokes, governor of North Carolina, accepted the chairmanship of the commission. Stokes was seventy years old at the time of his appointment but still vigorous and alert. Although his major qualification for the position was political support of President Jackson,²⁶ he addressed his assignment with determination. Despite constant

²⁴ Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Annual Report, 1834.

²⁵ American State Papers, Military Affairs, V, 26-27.

²⁶ William Omer Foster, "The Career of Montfort Stokes in Oklahoma," Chronicles of Oklahoma, XVIII (March, 1940), 36.

rumors about his failing health, he accompanied several expeditions into the Indian country and soon became personally acquainted with the tribes and their problems.²⁷ Other commissioners were Henry L. Ellsworth, a Hartford, Connecticut, businessman, and the Reverend John F. Schermerhorn of Utica, New York, a persistent applicant for appointment to the commission; Colonel S.C. Stambaugh, editor of a Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, newspaper, was appointed commission secretary.

Ellsworth was the first to begin his journey to Fort Gibson. He departed from Hartford on August 20, 1832. En route he met Washington Irving, Joseph Latrobe and the Count de Portales, who were on a sightseeing tour of the West. Latrobe, an Englishman, and Portales, a Swiss, had become acquainted with Irving during their voyage from Europe. Both were financially independent and seeking adventure through travel.²⁸ When Ellsworth invited them to accompany him to Fort Gibson, they were unable to resist the opportunity "of seeing the remnants of those Great Indian Tribes. . . . the pristine wilderness, and herds of buffaloes scouring their native prairies, before they are driven beyond reach of a civilized tourist."²⁹ They traveled down the Ohio to St. Louis, and then overland to Fort Gibson by horse.³⁰ Upon reaching Fort Gibson, Ellsworth found that his fellow commissioners had not yet

²⁷William H. Ghent, "Montfort Stokes" in Dictionary of American Biography, ed. Dumas Malone, 22 Vols.; (New York, 1946), XVIII, 67-68.

²⁸Charles Joseph Latrobe, The Rambler in Oklahoma: Latrobe's Tour with Washington Irving, Edited by Muriel H. Wright and George H. Shirk (Oklahoma City and Chattanooga, 1955), vii-x.

²⁹Irving, A Tour on the Prairies, xvii.

³⁰Ellsworth continued to Independence, Mo., by boat.

arrived and that Colonel Matthew Arbuckle, the post commander, had just dispatched a ranger troop west to contact the Plains tribes and invite them to send representatives to a council at Fort Gibson.³¹ The Rangers, a battalion of six companies commanded by Major Henry Dodge, had been created in 1832 to serve in the Black Hawk War. The companies were to be manned by volunteers who were recruited for one year and were to provide their own arms, horses and uniforms. Each company was composed of four officers, fourteen non-commissioned officers and one hundred privates. Most of the Rangers were backwoodsmen, many of whom regarded their enlistment as an opportunity to spend a year of adventure away from the farm. Aside from Major Dodge, the only experienced officers in the battalion were Captain Nathan Boone from Missouri and Captain Jesse Bean from Tennessee.³² The training, discipline and efficiency of the Rangers were somewhat less than that of regular troops, but they suffered no shortage of esprit.³³ Five of the companies were ordered to Fort Armstrong at Rock Island, Illinois, the base of operations against Black Hawk's Sac and Fox warriors. The sixth company under Captain Bean was instructed to report to Fort Gibson in Indian Territory. It arrived on September 14, 1832, and after several weeks of training was dispatched into the Indian country.

³¹Otis E. Young, "The United States Mounted Ranger Battalion, 1832-33," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XLI (December, 1954), 465.

³²All three had served under General Jackson in 1815 at New Orleans.

³³Ibid., 455-57.

said, "The troops departed on October 6, just two days before the arrival of the Ellsworth party. Ellsworth decided that he could best familiarize himself with the Indians' problems by accompanying Bean's force into the interior. Arbuckle dispatched an express with orders for Captain Bean to wait for Ellsworth to join him."³⁴

In the meantime, Ellsworth invited his traveling companions to accompany him on the expedition. On October 10, 1832, the party left Fort Gibson accompanied by a Ranger officer and fourteen men; within four days they caught up with Captain Bean's troop, which then resumed its march up the Arkansas River. Ellsworth, Irving and Latrobe kept journals during the march and agreed that the Rangers acted more like they were on an unorganized hunting trip than a military expedition to overawe the Indians. Latrobe commented that "neither the officers, nor men were considered to belong to any regular class of regular troops; and that neither one nor the other had any great idea of military discipline."³⁵

Irving observed that the Rangers were "a raw, undisciplined band. . . . without a tradition of military service, without training, without uniforms or commissary, without consciousness of rank."³⁶ Insofar as ability to accomplish their mission was concerned Ellsworth

³⁴Henry L. Ellsworth, Fort Gibson, letter, 5 December 1832, to Benjamin Stillman, quoted in "A Journey Through Oklahoma in 1832: A Letter from Henry L. Ellsworth to Professor Benjamin Stillman," Edited by Stanley T. Williams and Barbara D. Simison, Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XXIX (December, 1942), 389.

³⁵Latrobe, The Rambler in Oklahoma, 45.

³⁶Irving, A Tour on the Prairies, xxi.

said, "the Rangers strike no awe."³⁷ Nor did they have an opportunity to do so, for Bean, who was able to penetrate only as far as the eastern limits of present Oklahoma City, encountered no Plains tribes and thus failed in his mission to invite them to a council with the Stokes Commission. He had been obliged because of the condition of his horses to return by the most direct route to Fort Gibson.³⁸ They arrived in early November and built winter quarters at Camp Jackson, six miles up the Grand. In view of the performance of the Rangers in the field, perhaps it was best that they did not encounter a hostile force.³⁹

Indians Prior to the departure of the Bean expedition, Major Dodge had ordered Boone and Captain Lemuel Ford to proceed to Fort Gibson. They arrived on November 22, and established winter quarters at Camp Arbuckle, a mile and a half below Fort Gibson on the opposite side of the Grand.⁴⁰ With the return of warm weather, Colonel Arbuckle mapped a campaign to demonstrate the military might of the United States to the Plains Indians. Such a display, it was hoped, would make them receptive to proposals for a conference at Fort Gibson with the Stokes Commission. The commissioners hoped to persuade the Plains tribes to let Eastern

³⁷Henry L. Ellsworth, Washington Irving on the Prairies: A Narrative of a Tour of the Southwest in the Year 1832, Edited by Stanley T. Williams and Barbara D. Simison (New York, 1937), 24-25, quoted in Young, "The United States Mounted Ranger Battalion, 1832-1833," 466.

³⁸Ellsworth, Washington Irving on the Prairies, 101, quoted in Latrobe, The Rambler in Oklahoma, 62.

³⁹Young, "The United States Mounted Ranger Battalion, 1832-1833," 467.

⁴⁰Ibid., 467-68.

Young, "The United States Mounted Ranger Battalion, 1832-1833," 468-69.

Indians migrate in peace.⁴¹ On May 6, 1833, Arbuckle directed two companies of the Seventh Infantry and three troops of the Ranger Battalion under Colonel James B. Many to advance into the country between the North Fork of the Canadian and the Red River, territory into which American soldiers had never ventured. The force crossed the Arkansas River May 7 and proceeded without incident to the Red River between the Washita and Blue. There on June 2, an Indian band, possibly Wichitas, seized a member of Captain Boone's company, Private George B. Abbay. The entire force pursued the Indians to the eastern slopes of the Wichita Mountains where lack of food, fatigue and illness forced Colonel Many to abandon the chase and return to Fort Gibson.⁴²

The expedition of 1833 was an even greater failure than that of the year before. Captain Bean's Rangers did not make contact with Plains Indians, but at least they returned intact. Colonel Many not only failed to make contact with the Plains tribes, but allowed them to kidnap one of his men, and then to elude his entire command with apparent ease.

While the army was trying to impress the Plains tribes with a show of force in their own country, the Stokes Commission had begun to negotiate with immigrating Indians who lived near Fort Gibson. After Montfort Stokes arrived at Fort Gibson on February 4, 1833, he joined Commissioners Ellsworth and Schermerhorn in concluding treaties with

⁴¹Foreman, Pioneer Days in the Early Southwest, 104.

⁴²Young, "The United States Mounted Ranger Battalion, 1832-1833," 468-69.

Irving, A Tour on the Prairies, 11.

the Creeks, Cherokees and Seminoles. While the Seminole negotiations were under way, the commission began talks with the Osages in an attempt to persuade them to leave the lands recently ceded to the Cherokees and Creeks, and move to the reservation in present-day southern Kansas assigned to them by the treaty of 1825. The government considered the Osage removal essential to the peaceful settlement of the civilized tribes.⁴³ After about a month of fruitless discussion in late March, the Osages discontinued negotiations. Several bands traveled west for the spring buffalo hunts.⁴⁴

The Osages moved onto the prairies each spring in search of food and adventure. If their buffalo hunting brought them into conflict with other tribes, so much the better; particularly if the other tribes had horses. The Plains Indians had acquired a healthy respect for these fleet-footed giants from the East. More than one tribe had suffered from Osage depredations. During his tour on the prairie, Washington Irving observed that the Indian "encampments are always subject to be surprised by wandering war parties, . . . to be captured or massacred by lurking foes. Mouldering skulls and skeletons, bleaching in some dark ravine or near the traces of a hunting camp, mark the scene of a foregone act of blood."⁴⁵

Barely six months after Irving made this observation, an Osage hunting party proved him correct. This party followed the Washita westward into Kiowa country. The Kiowas, who were grazing their horses near

⁴³Foreman, Pioneer Days in the Early Southwest, 207.

⁴⁴Ibid., 211-12.

⁴⁵Irving, A Tour on the Prairies, 11.

the mouth of Rainy Mountain Creek on the Washita River near present Mountain View, learned that Osages were nearby when they found the shaft of an Osage arrow buried in the shoulder of a buffalo. Since most of the warriors were on a raid against the Utes, the band was almost defenseless. Hasty earthen fortifications were constructed and the Kiowas prepared to defend against attack. For several days no further Osage signs were observed, and the Kiowas broke into smaller groups and moved away from the Washita valley. One band drifted south down Sugar Creek, a tributary of Rainy Mountain Creek, and crossed through a narrow pass to Glen Creek in the Red River drainage system. On the headwaters of the spring-fed stream, the band established camp, pastured their ponies and waited for the return of their warriors. Apparently confident that the Osage danger had passed, they posted no sentries and took no precautions against a surprise attack. Early one morning while most of the camp slept, a young boy went out to tend to his horses and discovered an Osage war party lurking within a few hundred feet of camp. Sighting them, the boy rushed back screaming the warning. Old men, women and children fled to the rocky slopes on either side of the camp, but for many the warning came too late. The Osages attacked with savage fury, not bothering to take scalps from their victims. Rather, they decapitated them and placed their heads in brass buckets, which they arranged haphazardly throughout the camp.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ There are several accounts of the massacre of the Kiowas at Cut Throat Gap, all in substantial agreement. Since most of the versions were obtained from survivors or persons who heard the story second-hand years after the massacre, most differ to some extent on exact details. Captain W.S. Nye, Carbine and Lance: The Story of Old Fort Sill (Norman, 1937), 6-7, relates an account based largely on oral testimony. James

Colonel A.P. Chouteau, influential white trader among the Osages, estimated Kiowa losses at 150.⁴⁷ A few survivors managed to reach another band of Kiowas who alerted all other tribes in the area. The Kiowas, Comanches and Wichitas eventually organized their defenses, but the Osages were long since safely beyond their reach, with about 400 captured horses and a portion of the silver dollars the Kiowas had stolen from the Santa Fe traders. The Osages took only two prisoners, a brother and sister of about ten and fifteen. But to the Kiowas, more important than the loss of life was the loss of their tahme, a sacred medicine doll. Without it, the tribe could not conduct the sun dance held each year in the spring or early summer and considered essential to the regeneration of tribal life.⁴⁸

News of this massacre, the incidents on the Santa Fe Trail and other reports of frontier violence made it apparent to the War Department and members of the Stokes Commission that only a powerful military force penetrating deep into the Plains Indian territory could establish order. This conclusion was reinforced in the spring of 1834 when Plains Indians moved through the Cross Timbers and murdered an Arkansas judge, Gabriel M. Martin, and his Negro slave, and kidnapped his eight-year-old son.⁴⁹ The War Department was no longer willing to entrust the

Mooney, Calendar History of the Kiowa Indians, 257-59, contains an account of the event based on his archeological research and an interview with a survivor.

⁴⁷Foreman, Advancing the Frontier, 1830-60, 118.

⁴⁸Foreman, Pioneer Days in the Early Southwest, 119.

⁴⁹Catlin, North American Indians, II, 47.

prestige of the United States to undisciplined Rangers. Therefore, before the summer campaign of 1834, a new elite force was organized by an Act of Congress and ordered to replace the Rangers at Fort Gibson. The First Dragoon Regiment was to be the best manned and best equipped unit in the American Army.

FIRST DRAGOON REGIMENT

The long struggle between the British colonies and Great Britain left America with a distrust of standing armies. Thomas Jefferson expressed this sentiment when he said, "No standing army can ever oppress our liberties nor occasion bloodshed; a just force can do both."¹ Of all the components of standing armies, the cavalry was the most suspect. European history contained numerous examples of armed troops enforcing unpopular decrees and crushing popular uprisings. In view of this feeling, it is not surprising that the United States cavalry should have been severely reduced after the American Revolution and eliminated entirely after the War of 1812.²

As American settlements expanded to the edge of the Great Plains the slow-moving infantry became less effective in policing the frontier. Plains Indians were mounted; their speed and mobility were more than a match for the American infantry. This was clearly demonstrated in 1823 when four infantry companies, commanded by Major Robert Sibley, escorted the Santa Fe traders into Plains Indian country. Several years later

¹Fletcher Pratt, *The Navy & Marines* (Boston 1947), 113-14.

²Albert G. Brackett, *History of the United States Cavalry from the Formation of the Federal Government to the Present Time* (New York, 1865), 33.

experiences during this convoy duty, Riley recommended that a mounted force be commissioned to serve in the Great Plains.³ By 1832 Indian depredations compelled Congress to organize a military force that could meet mounted braves on their own terms. The battalion of mounted rangers authorized on June 15, 1832, was that force. The performance of this battalion, discussed in Chapter II, proved that cavalry could be effective, but the ranger organization and discipline needed complete overhauling.

CHAPTER II

FIRST DRAGOON REGIMENT

The long struggle between the Thirteen Colonies and Great Britain left America with a distrust of standing armies. Thomas Jefferson expressed this sentiment when he said, "Naval forces can never undermine our liberties nor occasion bloodshed; a land force can do both."¹ Of all the components of standing armies, the cavalry was the most suspect. European history contained numerous examples of mounted troops enforcing unpopular decrees and crushing popular uprisings. In view of this feeling, it is not surprising that the United States cavalry should have been severely reduced after the American Revolution and eliminated entirely after the War of 1812.²

As American settlements expanded to the edge of the Great Plains the slow-moving infantry became less effective in policing the frontier. Plains Indians were mounted; their speed and mobility were more than a match for the American infantry. This was clearly demonstrated in 1829 when four infantry companies, commanded by Major Bennet Riley, escorted the Santa Fe traders into Plains Indian country. Based upon his

¹Fletcher Pratt, The Navy: A History (Garden City, 1941), 113-14.

²Albert G. Brackett, History of the United States Cavalry from the Formation of the Federal Government to the 1st of June, 1863 (New York, 1865), 33.

experiences during this convoy duty, Riley recommended that a mounted force be commissioned to serve in the Great Plains.³ By 1832 Indian depredations compelled Congress to organize a military force that could meet mounted braves on their own terms. The battalion of mounted rangers authorized on June 15, 1832, was that force. The performance of this battalion, discussed in the preceding chapter, proved that cavalry could be effective, but the ranger organization and discipline needed complete overhauling.⁴

Secretary of War Lewis Cass recognized the need for a cavalry unit as an integral part of the army. In his 1832 annual report to the President, Cass called the ranger organization "little superior to that of ordinary militia" and pointed out that the rangers were more costly to maintain than regular units because they were enlisted for only one year. His solution to the problem was the "conversion of the corps of rangers into a regiment of dragoons."⁵ Congress responded in March of 1833 by authorizing a dragoon regiment of ten companies, each composed of three officers and seventy-two enlisted men. Section III of the bill stipulated the regiment was to be subject to mounted or infantry service at the discretion of the President and it was subject to the same regulations governing other army units.⁶

³Otis E. Young, The First Military Escort on the Santa Fe Trail 1829 (Glendale, Calif., 1952), 174.

⁴Grant Foreman, Pioneer Days in the Early Southwest (Cleveland, 1926), 108.

⁵American State Papers, Military Affairs, V, 18-19.

⁶Act for the More Perfect Defense of the Frontier, in U.S. Statutes at Large, IV, 652.

Secretary of War Cass desired to instill the discipline of a regular army unit in the dragoons while avoiding the low caliber of men who usually enlisted in the regular army. Charles Latrobe, the Englishman who had accompanied the rangers on their 1832 expedition, described the enlisted corps as the "scum of the population of the older States."⁷ To assure high standards, dragoon officers were sent to different states to recruit men for their own companies. This precluded sectional bias and insured a truly national composition for the dragoons, who were to be the elite force of the United States Army. This selection of men by their own officers corrected the tendency of recruiters to enlist less desirable personnel to enlarge their recruiting premiums. As a result of these practices, the enlisted men of the regiment were a cut above the average soldier. Catlin described them as "young men of respectable families, who would act . . . with feeling of pride and honour."⁸ However, an evil of the recruiting system remained. Army life was pictured as exciting and adventurous, filled with travel and danger. Recruiters seldom mentioned the monotony of garrison life, the hardships of campaigns and the regimentation of military existence.⁹

Equal care was taken in obtaining officer personnel. Henry Dodge was commissioned a full colonel and given command of the dragoons;

⁷Charles Latrobe, The Rambler in North America 1832-1833 (New York, 1835), I, 230f. quoted in Richard Dalzell Gamble, "Garrison Life at Frontier Military Posts, 1830-1860" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Oklahoma, 1956), 39.

⁸George Catlin, Letters and Notes on the Manners, Customs and Condition of the North American Indians (4th ed.; London, 1844), II, 37.

⁹Charles Augustus Murray, Travels in North America during the Years 1834, 1835 and 1836 (2 Vols.; London, 1839), II, 99.

his second in command was Lieutenant Colonel Stephen Watts Kearny. Dodge recommended that the remainder of the officers be selected "by taking a part . . . from the Regular Army who understand the first principles of their profession and uniting them with Ranger officers who understand the woods service."¹⁰ By blending the professionalism of West Pointers with the frontier experience of the backwoods militia officers, a well-balanced cadre for training the recruits was established. The caliber of the regiment's officers can be judged best by their later accomplishments in the Mexican and Civil wars. Former dragoon officers led armies in the conquest of the Southwest and on both sides during the Civil War.¹¹ Only in one area were the officers ill-prepared; none had cavalry experience.

Recruits were assembled into groups and sent to the temporary headquarters of the regiment at Jefferson Barracks, located on the Mississippi, ten miles south of St. Louis. Upon arrival, the true nature of military service became clear. The uniforms promised the men had not arrived; the drill weapons were obsolete muskets retired after the War of 1812; and their duties were not conquering new lands and defeating Indian foes, but chopping down trees and building stables. In their first drill, the recruits were described as looking like "Jack Falstaff's ragged regiment."¹² Morale, which was high in

¹⁰Louis Pelzer, Henry Dodge (Iowa City, 1911), 81.

¹¹Jefferson Davis, Stephen W. Kearny and David Hunter played key roles in the Mexican and Civil wars and many other officers of the regiment served in lesser capacities. Biographical sketches of many of these officers are found in later footnotes.

¹²[James Hildreth], The Dragoon Campaigns to the Rocky Mountains (New York, 1836), 37.

late spring, sagged badly by mid-summer. Courts martial were in constant session for infractions that ranged from insubordination to desertion. Discipline was harsh and punishment sometimes inhumane, but no more so than in any other American unit or foreign army of that period. Training normally consisted of a morning drill, after which the men would be assigned fatigue duty for the remainder of the day. Occasionally an inspection, review or some other formation was scheduled in the afternoon.

The drudgery of army life weighed heavily on the recruits. Many chose to escape either physically or mentally when their dreams of conquest faded into the reality of drill and fatigue duty. Some deserted while others found relief in alcohol. These were the two great problems of army life during the 1830's. War Department statistics indicate that one-fifth of the men enlisted during 1830 and 1831 deserted,¹³ and the Surgeon General reported that at one post twenty-two of the twenty-eight deaths were attributed to intemperance.¹⁴ For either offense punishment was severe. One offender was sentenced to be confined in the guard house for thirty days, during which he was required to march for nine hours a day with a fifty-pound pack. Two captured dragoon privates were branded with the letter "D" on their hips, shaved bald and drummed out of the army.¹⁵ Others were confined in leg irons for months and then forced to serve out the rest of their enlistment without pay.

¹³Ruth A. Gallaher, "The Military-Indian Frontier 1830-1835," Iowa Journal of History and Politics, XV (July, 1917), 408-09.

¹⁴American State Papers, Military Affairs, IV, 85.

¹⁵Grant Foreman, Ft. Gibson: A Brief History (Norman, 1936), 18-19.

worn the Army pay in the 1830's provided little compensation for these hardships. Privates received five dollars a month, out of which they had to buy furnishings for their barracks, including kitchen implements.¹⁶ The military budget of the early 1830's allowed for no frills and even neglected a few of the essentials. One member of the regiment describing the bleak existence of the soldier on the frontier wrote, "Here . . . no religion is found. No missionary thinks of the soldier; no chaplain, no Sabbath, are there for him; but every day alike brings with it its accustomed round of duties and labors."¹⁷ Morale was further depressed, according to this soldier, by the abusive treatment of the officers who "had a little brief authority, and . . . seemed determined to use it."¹⁸

before Although the soldiers of the dragoon regiment were disappointed and disillusioned with army life, conclusions concerning the effectiveness of the regiment should not be drawn solely from their opinions or morale. The condition of the dragoons was no worse than that of any other unit, but they had the best officers and enlisted personnel in the United States Army. Despite grumbling in the ranks, the regiment had much potential. Training proceeded and even without horses and uniforms the men gradually hardened to the regimen of army life and acquired fundamental military skills. parade on November 9, and an inspection by the

Inspect When the dragoon horses arrived in October, mounted training started and morale improved as rumors spread that the regiment was about to march for the frontier.¹⁹ The regiment's uniforms had not arrived by November; most of the recruits were still dressed in civilian clothing

¹⁶ [Hildreth], The Dragoon Campaigns to the Rocky Mountains, 45.

¹⁷ Ibid., 79.

¹⁸ Ibid., 45.

¹⁹ Ibid., 55.

worn threadbare by months of drill and fatigue duty. When it became apparent that the Army Quartermaster was not going to provide uniforms before winter, Dodge took matters into his own hands. "By great exertion and numerous expedients, a quantity of clothing nearly sufficient to cover them [the dragoons], but of all qualities, colors and patterns, was obtained."²⁰

Training at Jefferson Barracks could go little beyond an introduction to military life. The real training for Indian service was field duty in which the troops actually marched for extended periods, set up camp at night, foraged for food and learned to use their weapons. This may have been the reason Dodge elected to move part of the regiment before it was up to strength. He ordered the first battalion, Companies A through E, to prepare to march to Fort Gibson. At least one dragoon officer was appalled by the prospect of leading raw recruits to the frontier so late in the season. Philip St. George Cooke, a young West Point graduate whose army career would span fifty years, bitterly denounced the decision to march to Fort Gibson. He believed that Congressional pressure had forced the army to commit the dragoons before they were adequately trained and equipped.²¹

After a mounted parade on November 9, and an inspection by the Inspector General the following day, the battalion was pronounced "in excellent order."²² On November 20, 1833, Dodge led half of the regiment

²⁰ Philip St. George Cooke, Scenes and Adventures in the Army: or Romance of Military Life (Philadelphia, 1857), 220.

²¹ Ibid.

²² [Hildreth], The Dragoon Campaigns to the Rocky Mountains, 52.

on its first march through the sparsely settled areas of Missouri and Arkansas into the land set aside as an Indian territory.

Until this time, Dodge had divided his attention between his ranger battalion, which was being disbanded, and the dragoons. With the departure of the first battalion for Fort Gibson, he assumed command for the first time. Dodge was not a professional soldier, but had gravitated toward the military during the War of 1812 and the unsettled period of frontier development that followed. He had been a major general in the Missouri militia and a lead prospector and smelterman in Michigan Territory. As a result of his service during the Black Hawk War, President Jackson appointed him a major and gave him command of the Ranger battalion, formed in 1832.²³ He was described by a member of the dragoons as "a man about say fifty, thick set, somewhat gray, a thorough backwoodsman, very fond of talking over his own exploits; . . . on the whole a clever man, but not much of a soldier."²⁴ Albert G. Brackett, early historian of the cavalry, concurred in this opinion of Dodge's military ability. He wrote, "As a partisan commander he was no doubt, a good one, but as a colonel of the regular regiment, . . . there is no doubt that he was found wanting."²⁵ Neither critic specified in what manner Dodge lacked military ability. It is possible that Dodge's political appointment to command was responsible for their opinions; an examination of his military service reveals little

²³John C. Parish, "Henry Dodge" in Dictionary of American Biography, eds. Allen Johnson and Dumas Malone (22 Vols.; New York, 1946), V, 348-49.

²⁴[Hildreth], The Dragoon Campaigns to the Rocky Mountains, 42-43

²⁵Brackett, History of the United States Cavalry, 35.

derogatory information and indicates that he was an able field commander. Both observers had high praise for the regiment's second in command, Lieutenant Colonel Stephen Watts Kearny, a professional army officer whose military ability was widely recognized.

The march began in a carnival-like atmosphere and covered only three or four miles the first day. The men were excited and inexperienced in packing their equipment and in establishing camp. Progress certainly must have been slowed by the eighteen prisoners who "walked hand-cuffed and chained, some with a cannon ball to the leg."²⁶ Soon the dragoons became accustomed to field duty and averaged about eighteen miles a day. On the 25th of November, snow began to fall on the inadequately clothed battalion.²⁷ While each dragoon struggled to stay warm in the light fatigue uniform and one blanket, heavy winter uniforms were being shipped to Fort Gibson.²⁸ Fodder for horses became scarcer and the men had long since spent the last of their money on extra food bought from settlers along the route of march.

Little preparation had been made for the arrival of the dragoons at Fort Gibson. Neither rations for the men, corn for their mounts nor housing for either was available there.²⁹ Dodge ordered construction of a camp about a mile and a fourth west of the fort near a canebreak where the horses could be grazed.³⁰ Each troop constructed a barn-like

²⁶ [Hildreth], The Dragoon Campaigns to the Rocky Mountains, 60.

²⁷ Ibid., 69.

²⁸ Grant Foreman, Pioneer Days in the Early Southwest, 109.

²⁹ Pelzer, Henry Dodge, 87.

³⁰ Dodge's Military Order Book, 63-64, quoted in Pelzer, Dodge, 87-88.

barracks of logs covered with oak shingles which afforded some protection from the weather. The winter was particularly bitter; temperatures dropped to twelve below zero, preventing the delivery of supplies up the ice-choked Arkansas River.³¹ Although the sixty-man barracks were warmer than the tents they replaced, they were poorly calked. "Often, during a rainy day, . . . the thousand apertures in the roofs admit[ted] the water most copiously."³² Only those soldiers fortunate enough to have procured buffalo robes succeeded in staying dry. Particularly leaky were the chimneys through which quantities of water poured into the dragoons' beans, making them "somewhat less strong than common."³³

The rations of the dragoons were poorer than the accommodations. Variety was non-existent, and quality was low. Army fare at Camp Jackson, the name given to the dragoon encampment, consisted of pork, flour and beans. Coffee was also included in the rations, but it was so diluted that its quality could not be judged.³⁴

After the initial adjustment to their new station, the dragoons again settled into the routine of drill and fatigue duty. In the evenings friendly Indians frequently were invited into the barracks, where they joined the soldiers in dancing to fiddle music provided by the men from Tennessee. Some soldiers played cards and others read the few volumes that composed the unit library. Dodge did not let

³¹Pelzer, Dodge, 88.

³²[Hildreth], The Dragoon Campaigns to the Rocky Mountains, 86.

³³Ibid.

³⁴Ibid., 85.

³⁷Ibid.

inclement weather interfere with training. He reported, "I will have the Dragoons Drilled both on foot and Horseback and feel Confident they will be prepared for any Service required of them early in the Spring."³⁵

At this point, the summer mission of the dragoons was still undecided. The abduction of Ranger Abbay by the Plains Indians during the fall expedition of 1833, had generated much concern in Washington. On December 18, 1833, Lewis Cass dispatched a letter to Colonel Matthew Arbuckle, commanding officer at Fort Gibson, in which he referred to the President's concern over the capture of Abbay and asked for recommendations regarding his liberation. In reply, Arbuckle reported that an appeal had been made to the Pawnees of the Platte who, he believed, could influence Abbay's captors to release him. As an alternative, Arbuckle proposed to send a trader known to the Plains Indians through the Cross Timbers ahead of the dragoons to arrange a meeting. Such a meeting, he pointed out, might result in "much greater security to our citizens passing from Arkansas Territory in the direction of Santa Fee," and secure the release of Abbay.³⁶ Furthermore, he suggested that in such a meeting the "commanding officer of the dragoons would probably have it in his power to induce these wild Indians to agree to an early meeting between them and the Indians on this Frontier, with whom they are at war, for the purpose of settling their disputes."³⁷ Turning to the problem of logistical support, Arbuckle recommended that supplies be

³⁵Dodge's Military Order Book, 63-64, quoted in Pelzer, Dodge, 88.

³⁶Arbuckle, Ft., Gibson, February 8, 1834, letter to Cass, Record Group 98, Records of the United States Army Commands (Army Posts), National Archives.

³⁷Ibid.

stockpiled along the route of march prior to the departure of the dragoons. This would reduce the number of pack animals required and improve the unit's mobility.

The arrangement made with the Pawnees of the Platte was the work of the Stokes Commission. Henry L. Ellsworth had toured the Platte country in the summer of 1833 and brought a number of the Pawnees' principal warriors to Fort Gibson. Upon receipt of the Cass letter concerning Abbay, the commissioners and Arbuckle persuaded the Pawnees to act as intermediaries between them and the Plains Indians. The Pawnees were offered a reward for their services and instructed to tell Abbay's captors that if he were released, the commissioners would "redeem all their people now [captive] among the Osages."³⁸ The commissioners believed this plan would lead to the meeting with the Plains Indians that the two previous ranger expeditions had failed to produce. Unfortunately, their plan was no more successful than the rangers' had been. Either Abbay was already dead, or the ability of the Pawnees of the Platte to influence the southern Plains tribes had been overestimated.

Even before the Pawnees were asked to intercede, Ellsworth had made other arrangements to set up a meeting between the commission and the Plains Indians. Since the Comanches and several other bands frequently crossed the Red River into Mexican territory, Ellsworth hoped to persuade the Mexicans to use their influence on the roving tribes in arranging a meeting. He commissioned Sam Houston, who lived with the Cherokees near Fort Gibson, to travel to Texas to enlist the support of

³⁸ Stokes, Ellsworth and Schermerhorn, Ft. Gibson, February 3, 1834, letter to Cass, Record Group 98, Records of the United States Army Commands (Army Posts), National Archives.

the Mexicans in this undertaking. Whether Houston journeyed to Texas as a bona fide agent of the Stokes Commission, or as a secret agent of Andrew Jackson to give leadership to the rebellion, remains a mystery. Houston dispatched several reports to Ellsworth in which he told of his progress in arranging a meeting of the Comanche Indians. In one he wrote, "I found them disposed to make a treaty with the United States" and he advised the commissioners that the Comanches should arrive at Fort Gibson in April or May of 1834.³⁹ Marquis James in his biography of Houston, The Raven, asserts that "The President . . . clothed Houston with official powers and concocted a confidential mission to Texas under a United States passport."⁴⁰ Houston's success depends upon which role he was playing when he crossed the Red River in 1832. If he were a secret American agent dispatched to give leadership to a Texas revolution, he was an unqualified success. But as an agent of the Stokes Commission, his reports were of little value and his arranged meeting with the Comanches failed to materialize.

Albert Pike, an early traveler in the Southwest, later noted as the foremost poet of Arkansas, disputed Houston's evaluation of the Comanches' intentions. He wrote the Secretary of War that "Gov. Sam Houston of Tennessee will effect nothing with the Comanches." Houston, he explained, had talked only to the Texas Comanches; the bands which roamed north of the Red River were responsible for the unsettled

³⁹Houston, Natchitoches, La., July 13, 1833, letter to Ellsworth, Record Group 98, Records of the United States Army Commands (Army Posts), National Archives.

⁴⁰Marquis James, The Raven: A Biography of Sam Houston (Indianapolis, c1929), 182.

conditions in American territory. Pike dismissed the possibilities of a successful military campaign against these Comanches because "Possessed of numberless horses, and, having a prairie to flee to . . . they defy prusiut." Rather, he proposed the government dispatch a small treaty party to the Comanches in which he offered to serve as guide and interpreter.⁴¹ Pike's offer was not accepted, nor were his warnings heeded concerning the futility of sending a military force against the Comanches. Pike's conclusion regarding the ineffectiveness of the army against the Comanches was probably based on the performance of infantry units. The Secretary of War also had recognized the disadvantages which the infantry faced when fighting mounted Indians and had already recommended the formation of the dragoons. The bill authorizing the dragoons, signed just two weeks before Pike wrote his letter, would enable the army to meet the Indians on equal terms.

By mid-February the War Department had weighed the various recommendations for confronting the Plains tribes and reached its decision. On February 19, 1834, the Commanding General of the Army, Major General Alexander McComb, ordered Brigadier General Henry Leavenworth to assume command of the dragoons and two regiments of infantry stationed at forts Gibson and Towson. His instructions were to use the dragoons

for ranging the country occupied by the Comanches and other tribes, that have been in the habit of plundering our people and interrupting our trade with Santafe and the other Mexican States. You will therefore direct Colo. Dodge to proceed with his Reg. as

⁴¹Pike, Ft. Smith, March 16, 1833, letter to Cass, quoted in Fred W. Allsopp, Albert Pike (Little Rock, Ark., 1928), 56.

early as practicable in the Spring, upon this service to proceed through the country occupied by these tribes.⁴²

McComb told Leavenworth that the Third and Seventh Infantry regiments were at his disposal and that the First Dragoon Regiment should be "assembled, armed and equipped and ready for service by the 1st of May."⁴³

Houston, still playing the role of American advisor on Indian affairs, warned Cass in March, 1834, that an armed expedition would result in the certain execution of Abbay. He also predicted failure for any military expedition and recommended that a small party of skilled woodsmen be sent to negotiate with the Indians.⁴⁴ The decision of the Secretary of War remained firm. The liberation of Abbay was of secondary concern to him. More important was the termination of the outrages committed by the Plains tribes against American citizens, and the prevention of further atrocities upon the immigrating Indians.⁴⁵ With the receipt of firm orders for an expedition to the Plains Indian country, the planning phase came to an end and specific preparations for a summer campaign began.

General Leavenworth assumed personal command of the troops

⁴²McComb, Washington, D.C., February 19, 1834, letter to Leavenworth, Record Group 98, Records of the United States Army Commands (Army Posts), National Archives.

⁴³Ibid.

⁴⁴Samuel Houston and Andrew S. Hughes, March 12, 1834, letter to Cass, quoted in Amelia W. Williams and Eugene C. Barkers, eds., The Writings of Sam Houston 1813-1863 (8 Vols.; Austin, Tex., 1938), I, 281-83.

⁴⁵American State Papers, Military Affairs, V, 170.

assembled for the summer campaign at Fort Towson on April 20, 1834.⁴⁶ The new commander was described by one of his men as "a plain-looking old gentleman, tall yet graceful, though stooping under the weight of perhaps three-score winters."⁴⁷ His friendliness quickly endeared him to the troops. His mild manner was somewhat deceptive, for Leavenworth was a strict disciplinarian and a thorough planner with extensive military experience.⁴⁸ The same day he assumed command, he ordered the commander of Fort Towson to construct a road to the mouth of the Washita River and stockpile provisions there which would be required to support the campaign.⁴⁹ Captain James Dean, with two companies of the Third Infantry, was assigned this duty.

Leavenworth proceeded immediately to Fort Gibson and directed Colonel Dodge to determine whether the Santa Fe traders in Missouri desired a military escort and instructed the commander of the Seventh Infantry to lay out a series of military roads, one along the north bank of the Arkansas to the Cimarron, another directly to the mouth of Little River on the Canadian and a north-south road that would connect these two routes with the one being built from Fort Towson to the Washita.⁵⁰

Leavenworth ordered a review of the troops at Fort Gibson and Camp Jackson shortly after his arrival to enable him to evaluate the

⁴⁶ [Hildreth], The Dragoon Campaigns to the Rocky Mountains, 102.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 104-05.

⁴⁸ W.J. Ghent, "Henry Leavenworth" in Dictionary of American Biography, ed. Dumas Malone (22 Vols.; New York, 1946), XI, 80.

⁴⁹ [Hildreth], The Dragoon Campaigns to the Rocky Mountains, 103.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 105-06.

units' readiness for the forthcoming campaign. Afterwards, he announced the dragoons were "in excellent order, much better than could have been reasonably expected considering the very many disadvantages . . . during the past winter."⁵¹ At the review, Leavenworth told the dragoons "The eyes of the whole country are upon this corps, and much is expected of it."⁵² He expressed his displeasure concerning reports about the number of deserters, estimated at over 100.⁵³

In compliance with Leavenworth's orders and the wishes of the St. Louis traders, Dodge dispatched Company A, under the command of Captain Clifton Wharton, to escort the 1834 wagon train as far as the Mexican-American border. Wharton's company, which departed Fort Gibson in early May, did not return in time to participate in the expedition to the Plains Indian country.

The dragoons' uniforms and weapons finally arrived at Fort Gibson. The former were specifically designed to do justice to the army's elite unit. Described as "better suited to comic opera than to summer field service,"⁵⁴ the uniforms consisted of a double-breasted coat, trimmed in yellow, with two rows of gilt buttons, and ornamented with gold lace and a star. The trousers were blue-gray with a yellow stripe running down the outside seam of each leg. The eagle perched atop their infantry-type hat was blinded by a drooping white horsehair pompom. Ordinarily, the trousers were secured by a black patent leather belt, but for formal wear it was replaced by an orange silk sash. Black

⁵¹Ibid., 107. ⁵²Ibid. ⁵³Ibid., 108-09.

⁵⁴Wilbur Sturtevant Nye, Carbine and Lance, the Story of Old Ft. Sill (Norman, 1937), 8.

silk socks and white gloves completed the wardrobe.⁵⁵ If the uniforms appeared a little mildewed it was because they were not properly dried by the salvage crew which recovered them from the bottom of the Arkansas River after the steamboat on which they were being transported sank.⁵⁶ For protection, the trooper was armed with a sabre, a Hull breech-loading carbine and pistol.⁵⁷

In discussing plans for the campaign with Leavenworth, the Indian commissioners suggested that the dragoons might win the favor of the Plains Indians by restoring their people held as hostages by other tribes. Leavenworth agreed and dispatched a dragoon troop to procure Comanche, Kiowa and Washita hostages held in the immediate vicinity. An American trader who planned a commercial expedition west of the Cross Timbers had similar plans and had obtained the Kiowa boy and girl captured by the Osages at the massacre of Cut Throat Gap the year before. The boy died after being butted in the abdomen by a goat, but Leavenworth bought the girl from the trader.⁵⁸ The dragoon troop secured this girl and a Wichita woman in late May from a band of Osages camped about thirty-five miles from Fort Gibson.⁵⁹

⁵⁵Army and Navy Chronicle (Washington), Vol. I, 392, quoted in Foreman, Pioneer Days in the Early Southwest, 123.

⁵⁶Cooke, Scenes and Adventures in the Army, 224.

⁵⁷Niles Weekly Register (Baltimore), Aug. 2, 1834, p.389.

⁵⁸Foreman, Pioneer Days in the Early Southwest, 119-20.

⁵⁹Captain Edward V. Sumner, Camp Jackson, May 24, 1834, letter to Dodge, Record Group 98, Records of the United States Army Command (Army Posts), National Archives. and Hildreth, The Dragoon Campaigns to the Rocky Mountains, 118. Apparently the Kiowa prisoner bought by Leavenworth from the American trader was still in the custody of the Osages. Grant Foreman gives a detailed account of the transaction for

Spring brought relief from the hardships of winter but soon gave rise to the greater problems of disease and oppressive heat. Fort Gibson had earned a reputation as one of the most unhealthy posts in the American army, and the rainy spring was the worst season of the year.⁶⁰ Even before the expedition began, men were reporting to sick call with the fever. The mercury which reached 107 degrees in early June, coupled with the humidity, increased the difficulty of preparing for the expedition. As the campaign approached, activity increased to fever pitch. The blacksmith shops were in continual operation, tailors and saddlers found constant employment and the troops readied equipment and completed the final stages of training.⁶¹ Despite these frantic preparations, the dragoons were not ready by the first of May. In fact, on that date the second battalion was still being formed at Jefferson Barracks. The last three companies of this battalion did not arrive until early June, just a few days before the start of the expedition.⁶²

A few weeks before the campaign, news reached Fort Gibson of the attack on Judge Martin's party.⁶³ Leavenworth dispatched a detachment which found the bodies of the judge and one of his Negro slaves. It was assumed that his young son had been kidnapped by the attackers. The recovery of the boy, Matthew, was added to the list of objectives

the girl conducted between the Osages and the trader, but two members of the dragoons recorded that both women were obtained from the Osages.

⁶⁰ Foreman, Fort Gibson, 20.

⁶¹ [Hildreth], The Dragoon Campaigns to the Rocky Mountains, 119.

⁶² Ibid., 40-41.

⁶³ Catlin, North American Indians, II, 47.

to be accomplished by the dragoons. ⁶⁵ With these

Despite Leavenworth's optimistic evaluation of the dragoons' readiness, one enlisted member of the regiment doubted the effectiveness of their training. He pointed out that the unit lacked personnel schooled in horsemanship and dragoon tactics and questioned the wisdom of sending "a newly recruited regiment, under marching orders to explore a wild and unknown region of the country."⁶⁴

George Catlin, an artist granted permission by the Secretary of War to accompany the expedition, also expressed doubts about the prospects for success. He believed that the six-week delay in launching the campaign would make it more difficult for the regiment to live off the land. Beyond this, Catlin felt that the size of the force would frighten the Indians into fleeing from the dragoons, rather than negotiating with them.⁶⁵

Despite the doubts of subordinates and civilians, General Leavenworth continued to plan carefully one of the largest military operations ever conducted in Indian Territory. On June 2, he ordered the creation of three posts to serve as forward bases for the expedition. The most northerly, Camp Arbuckle, was to be located at the end of the road being laid out to the junction of the Cimarron and Arkansas rivers. To the south, Camp Holmes (also known as Camp Canadian) was established at the confluence of the Little River and the Canadian. On the southern flank, at the end of the road being laid out from Fort Towson to the mouth of the Washita River, Camp Washita was to be

⁶⁴ [Hildreth], The Dragoon Campaigns to the Rocky Mountains, 119.

⁶⁵ Catlin, North American Indians, II, 38-39.

garrisoned by the two companies under Captain Dean.⁶⁶ With these outposts established for logistical support and the arrival of the second dragoon battalion from Jefferson Barracks, General Leavenworth ordered the regiment to prepare for departure on June 15, 1834.

THE EXPEDITION

On June 15, 1834, over 500 officers and men of the First Dragoon Regiment embarked upon a campaign to contact the wild tribes of the Southern Plains. Despite hasty training, they were an impressive

¹The information for chapters III and IV is based primarily on five sources. They are all first-hand accounts in the form of letters or journals written by members of the expedition. The official journal of the expedition was written by First Lieutenant Thompson B. Wheelock, a member of Dodge's staff. It was first published in the American State Papers, Military Affairs, V, 373-82. It has subsequently been published in "Peace on the Plains," Edited by George W. Jirik, Chronicles of Oklahoma, XXVIII (Spring 1958), 2-41, and in "Colonel Henry Dodge and his Regiment of Dragoons on the Plains in 1834," Annals of Iowa, XVII (Third Series; January 1930), 173-97. George Catlin chronicled the expedition in letter form in Letters and Notes on the Manners, Customs and Condition of the North American Indians (2 Vols.; 4th ed.; London, 1844). From the 19th to 27th of July Catlin remained in a sick camp while the dragoons proceeded farther west. The description of the meeting at the Wichita village contained in Catlin's work was written by Joseph Chadwick. Sergeant Hugh Evans, a member of G Company and an unidentified member of I Company maintained journals similar to Wheelock's. Although they are not as complete as the official journal, they present the expedition from the vantage point of the man in the ranks and often discuss topics not covered in Wheelock's journal. Evans' journal was reprinted under the title "The Journal of Hugh Evans, Covering the First and Second Campaigns of the United States Dragoon Regiment in 1834 and 1835," Edited by Fred S. Perrine and Grant Foreman, Chronicles of Oklahoma, III (September 1925), 175-215. The I Company journal was published under the title "A Journal of Marches by the First United States Dragoons, 1834-1835," Edited by Louis Pelsor, The Iowa Journal of History and Politics, VII (July 1909), 331-78. The fifth account has aroused a controversy over the identity of the author. It is a book of letters supposedly written by James Mildreth, a private soldier in B Company. It was pub-

⁶⁶Foreman, Pioneer Days in the Early Southwest, 114.

CHAPTER III

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force "marching in beautiful order and forming a train of a mile in length."² Several of the dragoon officers were discussed in the preceding chapter and it was also suggested that many played key roles in both the Union and Confederacy during the Civil War. Of these Jefferson Davis is probably the best known. At the time of the expedition Davis was a lieutenant, just a few years out of West Point. Captain David Hunter, also a graduate of the Military Academy, eventually rose to the rank of major general in the Union army and served as the chairman of the commission which tried the conspirators in the assassination of President Lincoln.³

with the routine of military life and his sophistication in general make it improbable that a young backwoods New Yorker, just enlisted in the army, actually wrote the letters generally attributed to Hildreth. Joseph B. Thoburn, in an interesting bit of historical detective work, concluded that the real author of the book was William L.G. Miller, an Englishman of aristocratic background. Thoburn's "The Dragoon Campaign to the Rocky Mountains," Chronicles of Oklahoma, VIII (March 1930), 35-41, is a complete account of the investigations that led him to this conclusion.

²Catlin, North American Indians, II, 45.

³Davis, a member of E Company (reorganized) on the expedition, was an 1828 West Point graduate. He was stationed in the Old Northwest prior to the Black Hawk War. After the Dodge-Leavenworth expedition, he resigned from the army but served in the Mexican War as a Mississippi volunteer colonel. After the war, he declined a commission as brigadier general in the United States Army. Subsequently he served as U.S. Senator from Mississippi and Secretary of War. During the Civil War he served as President of the Confederacy. Hunter, the commander of C Company (reorganized) of the expedition, was an 1822 West Point graduate, who served on the frontier from Michigan to Texas during the early years of his career. He was chief paymaster for the Army of Occupation in Mexico in 1847-48, and commanded Union forces throughout the Civil War. He retired from the army in 1866 as a major general. George W. Cullum, Biographical Register of the Officers and Graduates of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, N.Y., from its Establishment, March 16, 1802 to the Army Reorganization of 1866-67 (3 Vols.; New York, 1868), I, 333-34 and 232-33.

The column was not exclusively military. The Secretary of War had authorized several civilians to accompany the expedition. George Catlin went to sketch and paint the Plains Indians and Joseph Chadwick, a St. Louis merchant and trader, accompanied the dragoons to establish contact with the tribes among whom he wished to establish trading posts. Count Beyrick, a German botany professor, and his assistant planned to collect specimens of the Southwestern flora. It is possible that other civilians left Fort Gibson with the expedition, but the men named above are the only ones mentioned in the official expedition journal maintained by Lieutenant Thompson B. Wheelock.⁴ Thirty-four Indians accompanied the dragoons. The two women obtained from the Osages were being returned to their own people by General Henry Leavenworth as a gesture of good will. The Cherokees, Delawares, Osages and Senecas sent warriors to serve as guides and hunters for the dragoons and to act as their representatives to the Plains tribes. These warriors had not reached Fort Gibson when the regiment departed.⁵

For a few days the dragoons remained at Camp Rendezvous, about twenty miles west of Fort Gibson, while the companies that arrived in June completed preparations for the march. By the 20th, the

⁴Jesse Chisholm, a Cherokee mixed-blood trader and trail blazer who later laid out a portion of the cattle trail that bears his name, may have accompanied the expedition as a guide and interpreter. Carolyn Thomas Foreman, "Col. Jesse Henry Leavenworth," Chronicles of Oklahoma, XIII (March 1935), 25, says that Chisholm was General Leavenworth's interpreter and guide on the 1834 expedition to the Comanches. Montfort Stokes is supposed to have been present at the conference with the Plains tribes according to [Hildreth], Dragoon Campaigns to the Rocky Mountains, 160. I have been unable to verify that either of these men actually accompanied the expedition. None of the five men who maintained journals on the expedition mentions Chisholm, and only Hildreth says Stokes was present.

⁵Wheelock, "Peace on the Plains," 10.

representatives of the friendly Indian tribes had arrived and all companies were ready except K, which was ordered to join the regiment upon completion of preparations. The next day Colonel Henry Dodge ordered the force to proceed down the road recently opened to the mouth of Little River. Progress was slow because of the herd of cattle and cumbersome covered wagons that accompanied the dragoons.

While several hundred miles from the Cross Timbers and the Plains Indians, the dragoons encountered their real enemy--disease. Before the first day's march began, the surgeon pronounced twenty-three men unfit for duty and sent them back to Fort Gibson. While still east of the Cross Timbers illness reduced the dragoon ranks by half and before they met the first Plains Indians, their ability to withstand Indian attack was doubtful.⁶ By the time they began their return trip, they were no longer an effective fighting force. Although Leavenworth and Dodge probably did not realize it when they left Fort Gibson, they had less to fear from Indians than from disease.

It took the dragoons five days to cover the seventy miles to the mouth of Little River. The route, through country occupied by the immigrant Eastern Indians, was well marked and the regiment advanced with little difficulty. Along the way, several of the soldiers were impressed by the fertility of the land. An enlisted member of I Company recorded that it was "a fine country, entirely uncultivated which seems of no value while in the hands of these half civilized Indians. But the time no doubt will arrive and that too before many years when civilization shall have extended its influence entirely throughout

⁶Ibid., 9.

that region of the country lying west of the Arkansas."⁷ Catlin was even more enthusiastic, describing the land as "one of the richest and most desirable countries in the world for agricultural pursuits."⁸ The landscape was a mixture of prairie and woodlands; expanses of open, treeless plains were surrounded by miles of heavily wooded, rolling terrain. The ridges were covered with stands of scrub oak, and in the valleys grapevines, plum trees, wild roses, currants and gooseberries formed dense thickets.

Before they reached the Canadian River, the men began to complain about scarcity of good water. Sergeant Hugh Evans of G Company reported, "We would travel whole days at a time without coming to any water at all[;] what we came to occasionally was of the worst kind, the top all covered with green slime . . . perfectly muddy and unfit for use by man or horse."⁹ Even the Canadian was reported to be "uncommonly dry" for so early in the summer.¹⁰

The dragoons forded the Canadian on June 25 and established Camp Canadian across the river from the site where Lieutenant Theophilus H. Holmes¹¹ was constructing one of the forts to protect the new system

⁷ [Anonymous], "A Journey of Marches by the First United States Dragoons, 1834-1835," 341.

⁸ Catlin, North American Indians, II, 46.

⁹ Evans, "The Journal of Hugh Evans," 182.

¹⁰ [Anonymous], "A Journal of Marches by the First United States Dragoons, 1834-1835," 342.

¹¹ Theophilus H. Holmes was a lieutenant in the Seventh Infantry at the time of the dragoon expedition. He later served in the Seminole Wars in Florida and the Mexican War. During his army career he was stationed at most of the posts in Indian Territory and by 1861 had risen to the rank of major. In that year, he resigned from the United States

military roads. Leavenworth, who had gone ahead before the dragoons had completed preparations for the expedition, was waiting for the regiment to join him there. The next day he, Dodge and a party of about forty left the regiment under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Stephen W. Kearny and proceeded to the camp being built at the mouth of the Washita. The rest of the regiment followed the same day after leaving twenty-seven sick persons at Camp Canadian, under the care of Assistant Surgeon Samuel W. Hailes.¹²

Leavenworth and the advance party passed a village of 500 to 600 Osages under Black Dog, ten miles from Camp Canadian. Two warriors joined the expedition, which continued to march almost due south through the woodlands country just east of the Cross Timbers.¹³

The first sightings of buffalo confirmed that they were approaching plains country and provided sport for the party. Leavenworth, Dodge, Catlin and several other officers spurred their horses and galloped toward the lumbering animals. After a headlong chase, one buffalo was killed, but the fat cow sought by Catlin succeeded in disarming her pursuer and escaping. The next day as the hunters complained of aches and pains from their exertions, Leavenworth told Dodge, "this running

had been seen in the vicinity of the
 army to accept an appointment as a brigadier general in the army of the Confederate States of America. Later, as a lieutenant general he was given command of the Trans-Mississippi Department. Because of his advanced age he retired from active duty before the end of the war and returned to his native North Carolina, where he died in 1880. Carolyn Thomas Foreman, "Lieutenant-General Theophilus Hunter Holmes, C.S.A., Founder of Fort Holmes," Chronicles of Oklahoma, XXXV (Winter 1957-58), 425-34.

¹²Wheelock, "Peace on the Plains," 11.

¹³Ibid., 12.

for buffaloes is bad business for us--we are getting too old, and should leave such amusements to younger men."¹⁴ As the party topped the next small hill, Leavenworth forgot his resolve to leave buffalo chasing to younger men. Just across the knoll a small herd grazed peacefully. Shouting orders to his companions, Leavenworth galloped full speed after a calf. The animal dodged and the General's horse fell. When Catlin reached the downed rider he was struggling to get to his feet. With Catlin's assistance Leavenworth stood up and promptly fainted; he recovered in time to prevent the artist from opening a vein, the standard first aid procedure. After a few hours Leavenworth rejoined the party with no apparent injuries, but Catlin later observed that "From that hour to the present, I think I have seen a decided change in the General's face; he has looked pale and feeble, and been continually troubled with a violent cough."¹⁵ Several days later, Leavenworth told him that "he was fearful he was badly hurt."¹⁶

The advance party rendezvoused with the two companies of the Third Infantry, commanded by Captain James Dean, on June 29 at the mouth of the Washita River. While Dean was building Camp Washita and stockpiling supplies for the expedition, he learned that Wichita warriors had been seen in the vicinity.¹⁷ When Leavenworth was informed of this fact, he announced his intention to lead the expedition personally and gave orders for the two infantry companies to follow the dragoons with

¹⁴Catlin, North American Indians, II, 50.

¹⁵Ibid., 51. ¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Wheelock, "Peace on the Plains," 31, actually says that Pawnee Indians were seen; however, he referred to a tribe known today as the Wichitas.

the slow-moving baggage train and be prepared to reinforce the mounted element if necessary.¹⁸ While waiting for the main body of the expedition to reach Dean's camp the General dispatched a patrol to reconnoiter the country beyond the Washita. It confirmed the report of Wichitas in that direction.

By the time the regiment reached Camp Washita on July 1, forty-eight officers and men were ill and seventy-five horses and mules disabled. The surgeon blamed the illness on over-exertion in the heat of the day.¹⁹ Among those ill was Leavenworth, who refused to admit that he was sick despite a burning fever and a marked shallowness of breath. Catlin realized that illness in the regiment had reached epidemic proportions. He wrote, "Nearly one-half of the command . . . have been thrown upon their backs, with the prevailing epidemic, a slow and distressing bilious fever."²⁰ Leavenworth was finally forced to acknowledge the extent of the sickness. After crossing the Washita, he abandoned his plans to lead the dragoons and ordered a reorganization of the nine companies into six companies of forty-two enlisted men each. These six under Dodge were to proceed by forced marches into the Plains Indian country unencumbered by baggage wagons or livestock. Leavenworth planned to follow in a few days with the wagons and reinforcements. About 200 other dragoons remained at Camp Leavenworth, twelve miles

¹⁸ Catlin, North American Indians, II, 47.

¹⁹ Wheelock, "Peace on the Plains," 13.

²⁰ Catlin, North American Indians, II, 49. This estimate is over twice the number reported ill by Wheelock. Perhaps Catlin included the men who returned to Fort Gibson as well as those who had been temporarily disabled by the fever.

from the Washita River, where the sick could be treated and the heavy equipment readied to follow Dodge. It was hoped that this location on the higher prairie would be more healthful than the lowlands around Camp Washita.²¹

This reorganization of the regiment and the bridging of the Washita River occupied about a week. During this time, final preparations were made for the expected encounter with the Plains Indians. The best horses and mules were issued to the men selected to march with Dodge; each soldier was given ten days' rations and instructed to make them last twenty, and issued eighty rounds of ammunition.²² On the third and fourth of July, the dragoons ferried their baggage across the Washita, which Catlin compared to the Rubicon, and organized on the west bank for the first major American invasion of the domain of the Plains Indians.

As the dragoons proceeded almost due west, the landscape began to change. The regiment traveled across greater expanses of flat, grassy prairies where trees and thickets grew only along the creek banks. Signs of Indian activity, such as fresh pony tracks and embers of recent campfires, increased, and an Indian scout was discovered reconnoitering the dragoons' camp. The soldiers attempted to capture him, but were unsuccessful.²³

Sentinels were particularly edgy on the night of July 7th. One

²¹ Wheelock, "Peace on the Plains," 14.

²² [Anonymous], "A Journal of Marches by the First United States Dragoons, 1834-1835," 344.

²³ Ibid.

of them believed he saw an Indian creeping out of the bushes and fired. His Indian was a strayed dragoon horse returning to camp. The wounded animal's cries, the shouts of the sentry and the gunfire soon convinced the dragoons that they were under attack. Hasty fortifications were thrown up and the regiment tensely awaited the attack. Finally, cooler heads prevailed but during the commotion the regiment's horses stampeded and scattered across the countryside. It took a day for the dragoons to recover most of their mounts.²⁴

One of the officers attributed this fiasco to the greenness of the men and their lack of experience in the field.²⁵ The episode seemed to corroborate Lieutenant Philip St. George Cooke's fear that the regiment was inadequately trained for duty against Indians. Neither their parade field training, the march from St. Louis nor winter experience at Fort Gibson had prepared them for a campaign against a foe schooled in mounted warfare since birth. However, it is doubtful that any amount of training could really have prepared the dragoons for Indian warfare. Only through actual service in Indian country could the regiment develop into an effective fighting force. Despite their hasty training, the dragoons were better prepared than the soldiers who fought in the earlier Indian wars on the American frontier, because they were led by professional officers schooled in frontier service.

Before continuing, Dodge sent Kearny back to Camp Leavenworth to take charge of the sick camp in compliance with orders from Leavenworth. Ten soldiers whose horses had not been recovered after the

²⁴Catlin, North American Indians, II, 54.

²⁵Wheelock, "Peace on the Plains," 15.

stampede returned with him. The command resumed the march west on July 9, and soon encountered a small party of mounted Indians, believed to be Wichitas. A forty-man patrol led by Captain Hunter was dispatched under a white flag to intercept them. After pursuing the Indians for a few miles the patrol returned, reporting that the party had eluded them.²⁶ The next day the regiment entered the Cross Timbers. This natural border separating the Plains Indians from their more advanced neighbors was described as a great thicket "composed of nettles and briars so thickly matted together--as almost to forbid passage." The "horses were so torn by them that the blood literally streamed down their legs and breasts."²⁷ The dragoons divided into three columns and picked their way through the thickets for three days before reaching the western limits of the Cross Timbers and the open plains.

The dragoons found several pieces of saddle bags in the Cross Timbers which they believed belonged to the Martin party.²⁸ With Indian signs becoming more frequent, Dodge issued general orders to the command to be constantly ready "to meet any attack or molestation that might be offered."²⁹

As the dragoons proceeded farther onto the plains, the number of buffalo increased. This indicated that the Plains Indians who

²⁶ [Anonymous], "A Journal of Marches by the First United States Dragoons, 1834-1835," 346.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid., 347.

²⁹ Evans, "The Journal of Hugh Evans," 187.

followed the buffalo herds might be close at hand and that the dragoons would not be restricted to half-rations. In fact buffalo meat came to comprise the major part of the dragoons' rations. Years later, Jefferson Davis' wife recalled that since the expedition her husband regarded buffalo meat as the "most distasteful of all foods."³⁰

An occasionally cloudy or rainy day brought brief relief from the 100 degree-plus weather, but by July 10 lack of water and searing heat increased the column's discomfort. One soldier claimed that "scorching rays" of the sun made it "almost hot enough to have roasted an egg in the sand."³¹ The hot, dry heat of the plains failed to have the curative effect that Leavenworth and Dodge had hoped. The health of the troops continued to deteriorate. By the time the dragoons broke through the Cross Timbers, several of the men were so ill that they had to be carried on litters.³² Although there was some temporary improvement upon reaching the plains the number of sick increased each day.

Wheelock noted several springs of rock oil along the route of march,³³ but far more interesting to the members of the expedition were the herds of small, wild mustangs which roamed the open plains. Catlin described them as the wildest and most sagacious animals of the prairie. He and his friend Chadwick left the expedition and crept within gunshot range of a herd. After Catlin sketched the scene, they decided to try

³⁰Varing Howell Davis, Jefferson Davis: Ex-President of the Confederate States of America (2 Vols.; New York, c1890), I, 155.

³¹Evans, "The Journal of Hugh Evans," 186.

³²Wheelock, "Peace on the Plains," 16.

³³Ibid.

to capture "a noble, fine looking iron grey" by creasing it. Creasing was a method of capture by which the horse was shot through the gristle on the top of the neck. This stunned the animal long enough to allow the hunters to hobble it. Of course, keen markmanship was the critical element in the process. Catlin and Chadwick proved to be somewhat less than expert, for when they reached the downed animal they discovered to their great mortification that their aim was a little low. The horse was "quite dead."³⁴ After this, both men seemed content to watch their skilled Indian guides capture horses. Their method was to lasso one while riding at full speed. The noose over the wild horse's neck tightened until he had been choked down. He was then hobbled and broken.

On July 14, the dragoons broke camp at 8:30 A.M. and had marched half a mile when they sighted a band of about thirty Indians. After identifying them as Comanches, Dodge ordered the white flag advanced. Despite this gesture of friendly intentions, the Indians maintained their distance from the dragoons. Finally, Dodge ordered the regiment to halt while he and several members of his staff advanced. When they were within half a mile of the Comanches, Dodge stopped the party and sent the white flag forward again. One of the Indians, with a white buffalo skin on his lance, left the band and cautiously approached the waiting dragoons. After fifteen minutes, he assured himself that the whites intended to honor the white flag and "dashed up to Col. Dodge, with his extended hand, which was instantly grasped and shaken."³⁵ Upon seeing this, the other warriors galloped full-speed

³⁴Catlin, North American Indians, II, 58.

³⁵Ibid., 55.

toward the dragoons and greeted them enthusiastically.

After the prolonged greeting ceremonies, a "pipe was lit, and passed around."³⁶ The Comanches were formidable looking warriors. From a distance Catlin thought they resembled Mexican cavalymen with the sun glinting off their lances. Their dress and weapons seemed perfectly adapted to mounted hunting and warfare. Each had a quiver slung on his back and "his bow grasped in his left hand, ready for instant use, if called for. His shield was on his arm, and across his thigh, in a beautiful cover of buckskin, his gun was slung--and in his right hand his lance of fourteen feet in length."³⁷ Communication was difficult, but by a double translation from English to Spanish to Shoshonean, Dodge was able to convey the idea that he was on a mission of peace in behalf of his President, who desired to know and trade with the Comanches and other tribes of the plains. The Comanches told Dodge that they were on a hunting excursion and offered to take him to their village located a few days' march to the west. Dodge accepted and the march was resumed, with the Comanches leading the way. In further discussion Dodge learned that the Comanches were allied with the Kiowas and the Wichitas.³⁸ The latter were reported to have a village several days' journey west of the Comanche camp. The Comanches promised to send for the Wichita chief so that he might discuss plans for a council with Dodge.³⁹

³⁶Ibid., 56. ³⁷Ibid.

³⁸[Anonymous], "A Journal of Marches by the First United States Dragoons, 1834-1835," 349.

³⁹Wheelock, "Peace on the Plains," 17.

The warrior who had ridden up to the dragoons was a Spanish half-breed named His-oo-san-ches, who normally would have been held in contempt by full-blooded Comanches.⁴⁰ He had earned the respect of his tribe by repeated acts of bravery in warfare and hunting expeditions. The half-breed gave Dodge his first real clue concerning the Martin massacre. The Wichitas were holding a Negro man and a white boy prisoners.⁴¹ With this information and positive intelligence concerning the location of the Wichita village, prospects for a successful conclusion of the mission improved. Despite the apparent friendliness of the Comanches, Dodge remained apprehensive. He placed "officers and men on the alert, as if in the atmosphere of war."⁴² The Indians proved trustworthy and the dragoons arrived without incident at the Comanche camp in two days.

Their village, of 600 to 800 skin lodges and a herd of over 3,000 horses and mules, was located in a valley at the foot of a range of mountains which was believed to be a spur of the Rockies. "The land," one of the dragoons reported, "is admirably [admirably] adapted to their mode of life, but could not possibly support a permanent settlement & although of a productive & fertile soil, but would be of little value for agricultural purposes owing to the lack of many appendages, such as timber, water & building materials."⁴³ This observation was remarkably astute, for the soldier, after only a week in the open

⁴⁰ Probably a phonetic pronunciation of Jesus Sanchez.

⁴¹ Evans, "The Journal of Hugh Evans," 189.

⁴² Wheelock, "Peace on the Plains," 18.

⁴³ [Anonymous], "A Journal of Marches by the First United States Dragoons, 1834-1835," 351.

prairie, had correctly identified the chief characteristic that would retard settlement for another two generations.

The dragoons stopped several miles from the village while Comanche messengers went forward to inform the camp of their arrival. Dodge formed the regiment into three columns and positioned himself and his staff in front to await the Indians.

During periods of peace, the Comanches customarily were lax in village defense and Indians in camp were unaware of the approach of the dragoons. When the regiment suddenly appeared on the high ground overlooking the village, the camp panicked. Women and children scurried about, warriors chased their horses and general confusion prevailed. The arrival of the hunters, who had led Dodge to the camp with news of the peaceful mission of the regiment, reassured the village. After about an hour, several hundred braves mounted their horses and formed a line within thirty feet of the first echelon of dragoons.⁴⁴ For half an hour the two forces stood their ground gazing at each other. Finally one of the Comanche chiefs rode up to Dodge and shook his hand. Followed by chiefs and braves he then proceeded down the ranks of dragoons shaking hands with each one.⁴⁵ During these formalities, which took about an hour, the Comanches invited the dragoons to camp in their village. Dodge declined the offer, preferring to establish camp across the creek from the Comanches in an area bordered on all sides by steep gullies. A chain of sentinels was posted around the camp and orders

⁴⁴Wilbur Sturtevant Nye, Carbine and Lance: The Story of Old Fort Sill (Norman, 1937), 8-9.

⁴⁵Catlin, North American Indians, II, 61.

were issued not to visit the Comanche village without specific permission. Among the tents pitched in the camp was a hospital tent which now housed twenty-nine patients.⁴⁶ Among them was Catlin, who diagnosed his malady as fever and ague.⁴⁷

Despite Dodge's orders to remain aloof, the curious Comanches invaded the regiment's camp in large numbers to gaze at their white visitors. Although the Comanches were familiar with the Spanish who had traded with them for years and the Anglo-Americans who plied the Santa Fe trade, this was the first large military expedition they had ever seen at close quarters. A flourishing trade developed in which the dragoons bartered blankets and knives for horses. Catlin related one incident in which a Comanche brave offered him the best mule he had ever seen for "an old and half-worn cotton umbrella."⁴⁸

As the fear of surprise attack lessened, Dodge allowed a few men to enter the Comanche village. Since they were the first official representatives of the United States to meet the Comanches, the visitors were surprised to find an American flag flying over one of the lodges. They speculated that the Indians might have captured it from a Santa Fe caravan.⁴⁹

Catlin, who continued to sketch and paint despite his fever, noted that "We white men, strolling about amongst their wigwams, are looked upon with as much curiosity as if we had come from the moon; and

⁴⁶ Wheelock, "Peace on the Plains," 18-19.

⁴⁷ Catlin, North American Indians, II, 62.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 62-63.

⁴⁹ [Hildreth], The Dragoon Campaign to the Rocky Mountains, (New York, 1836), 158.

evidently create a sort of chill in the blood of children and dogs."⁵⁰ As an artist, Catlin was more observant of the Comanches and their way of life. Their equipment was ideally designed for their nomadic existence. The tipis collapsed and all their possessions could be loaded on travoises, formed of tent poles, which were pulled by horses and dogs. Moving was strictly women's work; the men rode leisurely alongside while their squaws and dogs toiled to move the village.⁵¹ In games, such as ball playing, the Comanches were not as advanced as the Eastern Indians, but Catlin ranked them without equal in equestrian skill. He at first believed one of their feats was performed by magic, since he could find no logical explanation for it. It was a "stratagem of war, learned and practiced by every young man in the tribe, by which he is able to drop his body upon the side of his horse at the instant he is passing, effectually screened from his enemies' weapons as he lays in a horizontal position behind the body of his horse with his heel hanging over the horse's back." He finally learned that the feat was accomplished not by magic, but by braiding a horsehair halter into the horse's mane so that a loop was formed under the animal's neck. This loop supported the rider when he slipped down on the side of his horse.⁵²

Despite the Comanches' willingness to discuss peace and to send messages to the Wichitas, Dodge was unable to arrange negotiations. He was ready to open talks with Ta-wah-que-nah (the mountain of rocks), a 300-pound warrior who represented himself as the Comanche chief, until it was learned that the actual head chief was leading a buffalo hunting

⁵⁰Catlin, North American Indians, II, 64.

⁵¹Ibid., 65. ⁵²Ibid.

party and would return within a day or two.⁵³ After waiting two days, Dodge began to suspect the sincerity of the Comanches and decided to march for the Wichita village. The march was resumed at 11:00 A.M. on July 18, with an Indian guide from the Comanche camp leading the way.

The number of sick had increased to thirty-three, many of whom were litter cases. Since the route the guide indicated led through rugged mountain country, Dodge decided to establish another sick camp to enable the regiment to move more rapidly. About seven miles west of the Comanche camp a breastwork of bushes and trees was constructed for the sick, numbering thirty-nine. Surgeon Clement A. Finlay and about thirty-five able-bodied men under the command of Lieutenant James F. Izard were assigned to care for the sick and protect the encampment. Catlin, now so ill that he could no longer ride, was among those left behind.⁵⁴ The proximity of the sick camp to the Comanche village and the weakness of its defenses, made it particularly vulnerable. Despite the apparent friendliness of the Comanches, Izard suspected treachery, based on his experiences escorting the Santa Fe traders in 1829. He "kept every man who could possibly bear arms on constant guard" and refused to let the Comanches enter his camp. His alertness and determination gave the Comanches little opportunity to surprise the camp.⁵⁵

⁵³Wheelock, "Peace on the Plains," 19.

⁵⁴Ibid., 20. James F. Izard, assigned to H Company (reorganized) during the expedition, was an 1828 West Point graduate. He served under Major Bennet Riley during the Santa Fe trail convoy in 1829 and in the Black Hawk War in 1832. In 1836, while leading an advance guard against the Seminoles in Florida, he was fatally wounded. Cullum, Biographical Register of the Officers and Graduates of the U.S. Military Academy, I, 331-32.

⁵⁵Philip St. George Cooke, Scenes and Adventures in the Army or Romance of Military Life (Philadelphia, 1857), 226.

The regiment, now reduced to 183 men, moved directly through "immense blocks of granite piled on each other from 500 to 1,000 feet in height."⁵⁶ These were the same mountains seen from the Comanche village. Later explorations would prove that it was not a spur of the Rocky Mountains, but an isolated range of very old, igneous origin. They would eventually be named the Wichitas, after the tribe the dragoons were trying to locate. The craggy rocks made progress difficult. The dragoons were forced to dismount and lead their horses, whose shoes had been completely worn down.⁵⁷ Although the mountains abounded in wildlife, including prairie dogs, bears, deer and rabbits, Dodge was pushing forward too rapidly to allow time for foraging. Rations were almost exhausted by the time the regiment reached the level plain once again.

As the dragoons were setting up camp in the evening of July 20, a single mounted Indian was observed about two miles away. Lieutenant Lucius B. Northrop⁵⁸ and several of the Osage scouts were sent to capture him. The Indian at first attempted to escape but when the pursuers overtook him, he offered no resistance. His identity was definitely established as a Wichita when the Wichita prisoner accompanying the expedition recognized him as one of her relatives. Her ability to translate facilitated communications; the prisoner said he was returning

⁵⁶ Wheelock, "Peace on the Plains," 21.

⁵⁷ [Anonymous], "A Journal of Marches by the First United States Dragoons, 1834-1835," 353.

⁵⁸ Lucius B. Northrop, a member of H Company (reorganized) on the expedition, was graduated from West Point in 1831. He was stationed on the frontier until 1839 when he resigned from the army. Reappointed a first lieutenant during the Mexican War, Northrop retained his commission until 1861, although he did not return to active duty. At the

to his village about five miles from the dragoon camp. Dodge assured him that he would not be harmed and that he would like to meet with the leaders of his tribe.⁵⁹

Since the regiment was just over a fourth of its original size and without prospects of reinforcement, Dodge hesitated to release the Indian, who could then lead his tribe back to attack the dragoons. After weighing the alternatives, Dodge decided to set him free. In reaching this decision, he apparently realized that his best hope of meeting with the Plains tribes and obtaining the release of their captives was through friendly gestures. The size of his decimated regiment made overawing them impossible. In case of attack, an orderly withdrawal could still be made, but only a peaceful approach offered any prospect of success in accomplishing the objectives of the mission. Dodge was gambling that release of the captive would be interpreted as a friendly gesture by the Wichitas. In case it was not, the dragoons would be ready. "Bayonets were fixed, and every preparation made for conflict."⁶⁰

While the dragoons waited, one of their hunting parties had succeeded in killing two deer. This was the first fresh meat since leaving the Comanche village, but hardly enough to satisfy 183 men who had not had a substantial meal in almost a week. Sergeant Evans wrote, "After dividing our scanty repast we retired to rest though not in a

outbreak of the Civil War he left his medical practice in South Carolina to serve in the army of the Confederate States of America. Cullum, Biographical Register of the Officers and Graduates of the United States Military Academy, I, 392.

⁵⁹ Evans, "The Journal of Hugh Evans," 191.

⁶⁰ Wheelock, "Peace on the Plains," 22.

pleasant mode for sleep for we every moment expected attack."⁶¹

Morning broke without sign of Indians. Before the march was resumed, the father of the Wichita hostage rode into the dragoon camp.⁶² Their joyful reunion was the first indication that the Wichitas intended to receive the expedition. The dragoons had gone a mile or two toward the Wichita village when they were met by about sixty warriors who were soon reinforced by hundreds more.⁶³ The meeting was friendly and the dragoons were invited into the camp. On the way, the regiment was halted several times by distraught groups of Indians who begged Dodge not to attack. Despite their numerical superiority, the Wichitas appeared to be a peaceful people.⁶⁴ Dodge reassured them of his friendly intentions and continued through cornfields enclosed by fences of brush. The sight of cultivated fields and meat drying on racks in the village greatly improved the morale of the troops. In the village, populated by about 2,000 Indians, Dodge realized that despite the Wichitas' peaceful appearance, the regiment's safety depended upon maintaining amicable relations. Accordingly, he ordered that no food would be taken without the consent of its owner. The sharp traders who had swapped two-dollar knives for Comanche horses were now trading good cotton shirts "to squaws for two ears of corn." The dragoons literally tore the buttons

⁶¹Evans, "The Journal of Hugh Evans," 191.

⁶²Ibid., 192. Wheelock, "Peace on the Plains," 22, says the Indian was the squaw's uncle.

⁶³[Anonymous], "A Journal of Marches by the First United States Dragoons, 1834-1835," 354.

⁶⁴Wheelock, "Peace on the Plains," 22.

off their uniforms and took the clothes off their backs to purchase corn, melons, green pumpkins, squash, plums and horse and buffalo meat. The men ate their first substantial meal which, according to Evans, "was verry thankfully received as we were on the brink of starvation."⁶⁵

The Wichita camp contained 400 thatched lodges, which looked like beehives thirty feet high and forty feet in diameter. The village was located between a 600-foot granite bluff and the north fork of the Red River.⁶⁶ The well-built lodges and carefully tilled fields revealed the difference between the Wichitas and the nomadic Comanches. Somewhat of a rarity among Plains tribes, the Wichitas were relatively stable agriculturists. The red cotton skirts of many of the women indicated they engaged in a fairly regular trade with the Mexicans. Their division of labor was similar to the Comanche system; men were warriors and hunters, and women performed all menial tasks.

The principal Wichita chief was on a visit to the Pawnee Mohaw country, but Dodge arranged a council for the next day between the leading men of the tribe and himself and his staff.⁶⁷ A campsite was selected about "a mile below the village at the foot of a high rocky mountain in a small grove of locust trees."⁶⁸ Still not convinced of the Wichitas' trustworthiness, Dodge ordered the camp to stay alert.

⁶⁵ Evans, "The Journal of Hugh Evans," 193.

⁶⁶ Wheelock, "Peace on the Plains," 22.

⁶⁷ The Pawnee Mohaw, better known today as the Pawnees, lived along the Platte River in Nebraska. Muriel H. Wright, A Guide to the Indian Tribes of Oklahoma (Norman, 1951), 202-04.

⁶⁸ Evans, "The Journal of Hugh Evans," 192.

he told his hosts he had learned they had captured a white soldier last summer and taken a white boy in the spring. Dodge demanded return of the boy and positive information concerning the man. He reminded the Wichitas he had obtained one of their women from the Osages at great expense and trouble. She would be returned only after these demands were met.

CHAPTER IV

MEETING WITH THE PLAINS TRIBES

The first formal negotiations between the Plains Indians and the United States began on the morning of July 22, 1834, in a thatched white lodge near the Red River, southwestern boundary of the United States and Mexico. The next day the arrival of the principal chiefs of the Comanches and Kiowas expanded the scope of the negotiations. Merely by meeting with these three tribes, Colonel Henry Dodge had accomplished a feat that both Sam Houston and Albert Pike considered impossible. However, Dodge's orders called for him to attempt pacifying the Plains tribes and recovering several Americans captured by them. Surrounded by hundreds of armed Indians, Dodge had to rely upon diplomacy.

First, the American Colonel told the Wichita council he had been sent by the Great American Captain who wished to establish peace among all people under his jurisdiction. He explained the President would like for them to visit him in Washington and make a treaty which would insure lasting peace. After such a treaty had been concluded, Dodge promised they would receive many presents and white traders would be sent among them to provide blankets, rifles and other products. To prove his sincerity, Dodge stated that when he had passed through the Comanche village, he could have destroyed it, but instead he gave the people presents and treated them with kindness. Before concluding,

he told his hosts he had learned they had captured a white soldier last summer and taken a white boy in the spring. Dodge demanded return of the boy and positive information concerning the man. He reminded the Wichitas he had obtained one of their women from the Osages at great expense and trouble. She would be returned only after these demands were met.¹

In the absence of their chief, the Wichita council was headed by We-ter-ra-shah-ro, a Waco chief,² He denied any knowledge of the white boy and accused the Comanches of seizing the white soldier.³ Dodge remained adamant and restated his demand for the boy and definite information concerning Abbay. The chief conferred with his council and informed the Colonel that a tribe he called Oways, not the Comanches, had captured the ranger and killed him when they returned to camp. Dodge asked the location of the Oway camp, but before he could get an answer, a gunshot in the lodge created confusion, and the women and children fled.⁴ Inside the lodge the Wichitas, suspecting treachery, prepared to defend themselves. According to one account, only the "utmost calmness and presence of mind" of Colonel Dodge and most of his officers prevented bloodshed. The Wichitas were finally calmed, but they had to

¹Thompson B. Wheelock, "Peace on the Plains," Edited by George H. Shirk, Chronicles of Oklahoma, XXVIII (Spring 1950), 23.

²Ibid., 33. The Waco, or Wacoah, was a small Caddoan tribe of the same linguistic group as the Wichitas.

³George Catlin, Letters and Notes on the Manners, Customs and Condition of the North American Indians (2 Vols.; 4th ed.; London, 1844), II, 71.

⁴Wheelock, "Peace on the Plains," 24. Apparently the Oways were a product of the chief's imagination. No tribe by that name has been identified as living on the plains.

see the bloody hand of the Cherokee who had accidentally shot himself before they would resume the conference.⁵ Even then they continued to harbor doubts concerning the motives of the soldiers. This near-disaster underscored the insecurity of the dragoons' position and the absolute necessity of doing nothing to antagonize their hosts.

Nevertheless, Dodge continued to press the chief concerning the return of the kidnapped boy. During the discussion, the dragoons found a Negro living among the Indians who said that a "boy had recently been brought into their village, and was now a prisoner amongst them."⁶ A long period of strained silence followed, during which the Indians consulted among themselves, and finally ordered the boy be brought in from the cornfield where he had been hidden. When he arrived, he told Dodge his name was Matthew Wright Martin.⁷

After the excitement over the boy's return subsided, Dodge asked the chief a series of direct questions. First, how did the Comanches get the American flag flying over their camp? The chief explained it had been sent to them by the Pawnees from the Platte. Concerning a query about Spanish trade, Dodge was informed that a Spanish trading party had recently left the village traveling west. To this he promised, "The Americans will give you better and cheaper goods than the Spanish

⁵ [Anonymous], "A Journal of Marches by the First United States Dragoons, 1834-1835," Edited by Louis Pelzer, Iowa Journal of History and Politics, VII (July 1909), 356.

⁶ Catlin, North American Indians, II, 71.

⁷ Ibid. Wheelock's journal makes no mention of the Negro's part in the recovery of the boy.

do."⁸ Pursuing the question of Ranger Abbay further, Dodge was told that "the Indians who live near St. Antoine, in Mexico, captured Abby, and that they killed him on Red river."⁹ Dodge seemed to accept this explanation and turned to the problem of Indian attacks on the Santa Fe traders. The chief accused a "roving tribe of very bad Indians called Wakinas" of being the culprits.¹⁰

Satisfied that the Wichitas did not have Abbay, Dodge returned the young woman he had brought from Fort Gibson to her family and friends "who embraced her with the most extravagant expressions of joy and satisfaction."¹¹ Chadwick recorded,

The heart of the venerable old chief was melted at this evidence of white man's friendship, and he rose upon his feet, and taking Colonel Dodge in his arms, and placing his left cheek against the left cheek of the Colonel, held him for some minutes without saying a word, whilst tears were flowing from his eyes.¹²

With friendship once again firmly established, Dodge expressed his pleasure over the exchange of prisoners and suggested the Wichitas and Osages exchange all their prisoners. To affect this exchange Dodge said, "The American President will have a treaty of peace made between you all; then you will meet and exchange prisoners; this will be done when the next grass grows."¹³ Despite the extensive preparations made for the expedition, neither Dodge nor Leavenworth had been empowered to treat with the Indians. In fact, at this time no one was authorized to negotiate formally with the Plains tribes. The commissions of Stokes

⁸ Wheelock, "Peace on the Plains," 25.

⁹ Ibid. ¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Catlin, North American Indians, II, 72.

¹² Ibid. ¹³ Wheelock, "Peace on the Plains," 26.

and his associates had expired on July 14, 1834, and new commissioners had not been named. Dodge's only authority was to invite the tribes to a conference to be conducted at such time as Congress established a new commission, or to invite them to go to Washington to negotiate directly with the War Department. Therefore, Dodge asked, "Will your chiefs go with me now to see the American President? . . . The President will be happy to see you, and will make you, as I told you before presents of handsome guns, coats, &c."¹⁴ After deliberating, the Wichitas replied, "We do not like to pass . . . through the thick timber country between us and the white man."¹⁵ Dodge assured them that a "big road" was being built through the Cross Timbers and then let the matter drop until the Wichitas had time to discuss it at length among themselves.

Before the meeting adjourned the Colonel asked how a Negro happened to be in a Wichita camp. The chief said they got him from the Comanches and offered to give him to Dodge. As it turned out, the Negro was quite content with his existence among the Indians and preferred to remain with them where his only duty was to watch their herd. But Dodge insisted on "liberating" him, and he was accompanied out of the Indian camp under guard to prevent escape.¹⁶ This concluded the first day's meeting. Although no chiefs of other tribes had come to participate in the discussions, the arrival of several Comanche warriors seemed to indicate their chief planned to take part.

The next morning negotiations resumed in Dodge's tent with

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶[Anonymous], "A Journal of Marches by the First United States Dragoons, 1834-1835," 358.

Wa-ter-ra-shah-ro and two of his principal warriors representing the Wichitas, and the leaders of the friendly Indian bands which accompanied the dragoons. Dodge opened discussions by asking if the Wichitas had reached a decision about visiting the President. After prolonged discussion, one of the Indians agreed to return with the expedition. Still conscious of the necessity of winning the friendship of the Wichitas, Dodge arranged a ceremony to demonstrate his appreciation of an act of service performed by a member of the tribe. During the interrogation of the Martin boy, it was learned that after his capture most of the Indians wished to kill him, and that his life had been spared by the intervention of one warrior who not only shielded him from the others, but also nursed him through an illness. Dodge expressed his appreciation to this brave for his kindness, and presented him with a rifle and had the Martin boy give him a pistol. After reiterating his promises of many presents for those who would visit the Great Captain, the Colonel asked the chiefs to accept some rifles and pistols. For the first time, the Wichitas acted without long deliberations; they accepted immediately.¹⁷

We-ter-ra-shah-ro opened a new area of discussion by saying that the Wichitas wished to establish peace with the other tribes represented at the conference. He specifically named the Osages as a tribe against whom his people had long been at war and with whom they would like to make peace. The representatives of the Osages and the other tribes were invited to speak. The Cherokee said "the chief of the Cherokees bade me say to you. . . . his people wish to come to you without fear, and that you should visit them without fear. . . . a long time ago it was so,

¹⁷Wheelock, "Peace on the Plains," 27.

there was no war between us. I am rejoiced, and my people will be rejoiced, when they hear that it may be so again. Look at me, you see I speak the truth, I have nothing more to say."¹⁸ Next, the leader of the Osages told the council that he had come in peace and that he hoped the Wichitas would trust Dodge, whom he regarded as a "true father." "The white men," he explained, "have made us happy; they will make you happy. You should go with our father as he wished."¹⁹ An Osage youth spoke next and explained how the white men had helped his tribe. His father had been taught how to build houses, raise cattle and live like whites. The youth had been sent to missionary school where he learned to read and write. A Delaware representative concluded the speeches with a brief statement of his happiness over the prospects of peace between his people and the Plains Indians.

Before the meeting ended, Dodge apologized to the Wichitas for the accidental firing of the pistol the day before and damage done to their crops by dragoon horses during the night. He assured them he did not want to disturb their property in any manner and that all damages would be paid for. The chiefs then adjourned to their own village to decide who should accompany the dragoons on their return trip.

The same day the Comanche chief, Ta-we-que-nah, who had been away from his village when the dragoons visited, arrived at the regiment's camp. Formal talks were held in Dodge's tent, where the Colonel again explained the purpose of his mission. As evidence of his good faith, Dodge reminded the chief that he had treated the women and children of the Comanche camp with great friendliness. The discussion turned to

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Ibid., 28.

enemies of the Comanches who lived south of the Red River. Dodge said the United States could not conclude treaties with them, but promised that the President would protect the Comanches from the Osages and other hostile tribes that lived in American territory. "The flag that you have," Dodge explained, "came to you from the great father at Washington, . . . whenever you show it you will be known as friends."²⁰ The chief agreed to visit the scattered Comanche bands and relay Dodge's message.

The question of Ranger Abbay was raised again, and the chief said, "the Texas Comanches took this white man, and carried him over the Red river and there killed him."²¹ This answer was in substantial agreement with the story of the Wichitas and apparently convinced Dodge that Abbay had been murdered, for this was the last time he brought up the subject.

Dodge invited the Comanches to visit with him in his own country. The chief replied that he would be afraid to come back through the Cross Timbers. When Dodge promised to escort them safely back, Ta-we-que-nah agreed to send his brother.²²

The chief had been informed that Dodge held a Kiowa woman. He explained to Dodge that the Comanches and the Kiowas were allied and that he would like to buy the squaw and restore her to her people. As payment the chief offered to give the Colonel a Spanish girl. Dodge explained that he had brought the girl as a gesture of friendship and that he intended to return her himself.²³ Before the matter could be discussed further, twenty or thirty armed Kiowa warriors galloped into the

²⁰Ibid., 29. ²¹Ibid. ²²Ibid., 29-30. ²³Ibid., 30.

dragoons' camp. Their manacing appearance sent the squaws and children, who were wandering around the camp, scurrying for safety. The sight of the Osage guides infuriated the Kiowas, who seemed on the brink of hostility. The dragoons, with rifles in hand, waited nervously. The Kiowas demanded the return of the girl who had been kidnapped by the Osages during the massacre at Cut Throat Gap. Dodge completely disarmed the Kiowas by agreeing to return the girl. They readily accepted an invitation to a general council of Comanches, Wichitas, representatives of the Eastern tribes and Dodge and his staff.²⁴

Thanks to the Stokes Commission's suggestion to return Osage hostages to their own tribes, Dodge had succeeded in winning the friendship of the Plains tribes. It is difficult to measure the part these restorations played in the success of the mission, but in the case of the Wichitas and the Kiowas, the return of the captives seemed to be the event that established rapport between the dragoons and the tribes.

With the major Southwestern Plains tribes assembled, the last day of negotiations began in a wooded area about 200 yards from the dragoon camp. Two thousand armed Indians in a state of great excitement gathered at the meeting place. The Kiowas seemed particularly aroused. They "embraced Colonel Dodge, and shed tears of gratitude for the restoration of their relative."²⁵ The meeting was opened by the passing of pipes. Dodge greeted the chiefs of the Plains tribes and asked them to return with him to secure "mutual and lasting friendship."²⁶

Displaying his usual good sense of timing, the Colonel formally restored the Kiowa girl to her people. He refused to accept the gifts

²⁴Ibid. ²⁵Ibid. ²⁶Ibid., 31.

offered by the girl's father, explaining that she was returned "as an evidence of the good feeling of his people for them."²⁷ Although the girl's return had pacified the Kiowas, the possession of their sacred taine by the Osages was an issue apt to lead to renewed hostilities.²⁸ One of the Kiowa chiefs demanded the restoration of the sacred medicine doll.²⁹ Dodge and the Osage representatives assured the Kiowas of their good intentions in this matter, and the meeting continued in harmony.³⁰

Dodge explained that the Great White Captain could bring peace to the tribes, send them traders with guns and blankets, and give them cattle to replace the dwindling buffalo herds. Joseph Chadwick was introduced to the Indians as a young man "who has come out with me to see you, and return next summer, and bring goods and trade with you."³¹ Once again the Indians were asked to consider the invitation to go with the dragoons, who were to depart the next day. Titché-totché-cha, the Kiowa chief, agreed immediately; he further promised that all white men who came to his country would be treated kindly.³² Since the other tribes had already agreed to send representatives with the dragoons, Dodge's mission was accomplished. The council adjourned. The Indians returned to their encampments to decide upon representatives and the dragoons prepared for the return march.

²⁷Ibid., 32. ²⁸See page 19.

²⁹Wilbur S. Nye, Carbine and Lance: The Story of Old Fort Sill (Norman, 1937), 15.

³⁰John J. Mathews, The Osages: Children of the Middle Waters (Norman, 1961), 563.

³¹Wheelock, "Peace on the Plains," 31-32.

³²Ibid., 32.

Although the three days of negotiations had been successful, the health of the dragoons had deteriorated. Chadwick reported that the men were "all in a state of dependence and almost literal starvation; and at the same time nearly one half the number too sick to have made a successful resistance if we were to have been attacked."³³ Wheelock blamed their diet of green corn and dried horse and buffalo meat and the excessively hot and dry weather.³⁴

Early on the morning of July 25, the chiefs of the three tribes visited the dragoon camp and were presented with guns and pistols. Fifteen Kiowas, led by the chief Titché-totché-cha, waited to accompany the dragoons. The Comanches were represented by the Spanish half-breed, a squaw and two other warriors. By 3:00 P.M. the Wichitas finally designated We-ter-ra-shah-ro and two warriors to represent them. The expedition marched eastward and after two hours bivouacked for the night. The next day's journey was uneventful except for the departure of the Indian guide who had led the way through the mountains to the Wichita village. He was replaced by one of the Wichitas who seemed more familiar with the country and selected a better route than the one taken on the march west.³⁵ He led them through a broad valley and across the open plains north of the mountains. One of the men speculated that the first guide had led them through the mountains "by a circuitous route probably for the purpose of giving the Comanches time to communicate

³³ Catlin, North American Indians, II, 72.

³⁴ Wheelock, "Peace on the Plains," 32.

³⁵ [James Hildreth], Dragoon Marches to the Rocky Mountains (New York, 1836), 178.

with the Pawnees before our arrival."³⁶

The Plains Indians who accompanied the expedition were allowed to move without restraint. The first day they rode at the head of the column with Dodge, but apparently soon tired of the military regimentation and began traveling at their own rate.³⁷ At night they camped with the dragoons. After two days, the Comanche squaw and warriors left the regiment, giving sickness of the squaw as a reason. The Spanish half-breed remained with the expedition.

On July 27, the command returned to the sick camp near the Comanche village. There the situation had not improved; one man had died, and Catlin and several others were seriously ill. Those who were not sick were almost exhausted from standing sentry duty "every alternate hour for three days without ever being relieved."³⁸ Supplies at the sick camp were almost gone and the men returning from the Wichita camp had eaten most of the provisions purchased there. The supply wagons and reinforcements had not arrived. With game scarce in the vicinity of the sick camp, Dodge decided to march by the most direct route to the Canadian River where the Indians said great buffalo herds were grazing.³⁹ He dispatched an express to Leavenworth with a report of his conference

³⁶ [Anonymous], "A Journal of Marches by the First United States Dragoons, 1834-1835," 358.

³⁷ Hugh Evans, "The Journal of Hugh Evans, Covering the First and Second Dragoon Campaigns in 1834 and 1835," Edited by Fred S. Perrine and Grant Foreman, Chronicles of Oklahoma, III, (September 1925), 205. Wheelock, "Peace on the Plains," 34.

³⁸ Evans, "The Journal of Hugh Evans," 206.

³⁹ Catlin, North American Indians, II, 72.

at the Wichita village and news of his plans to move to the Canadian.⁴⁰

Little is known of the movements of Leavenworth and the troops under his command after the departure of Dodge. It is certain that he marched after Dodge with the baggage wagons and dragoon and infantry reinforcements. Apparently Lieutenant Colonel Stephen W. Kearny and a small detachment of the able-bodied men remained in the Camp Washita-Camp Leavenworth area to care for the sick. Before Leavenworth reached the Cross Timbers, he was overtaken by a party of white men led by Travis G. Wright,⁴¹ an uncle of the boy abducted by the Wichitas. They told Leavenworth of their plan to enter the Indian village, gain the confidence of the tribe and then escape with the boy. The General informed Wright that Dodge was conducting a forced march to the Wichita village with orders to recover they boy and any interference might jeopardize his chances of success. He ordered Wright and his companions to remain with the supply column.⁴² By the time the column reached the Cross Timbers, Leavenworth was critically ill from a combination of the fever, a fall from his horse and the hardships of the march. He died on July 21, the same day Dodge reached the Wichita village. Wright and a detail of soldiers were assigned to take the General's body back to Camp Washita, where it was temporarily buried.⁴³

⁴⁰Wheelock, "Peace on the Plains," 34.

⁴¹Travis G. Wright moved from Tennessee to what is now McCurtain County, Oklahoma, in 1816 when he was ten years old. Wright eventually settled in Texas, just across from the mouth of the Kiamichi, where he lived until his death in 1875. Wright's account of the expedition was written in 1874, almost forty years after the expedition. It is published by James D. Morrison, ed., "Travis G. Wright and the Leavenworth Expedition in Oklahoma," Chronicles of Oklahoma, XXV (Spring 1947), 7-14.

⁴²Ibid., 11-12. ⁴³Ibid., 12.

They returned to the supply column, now commanded by Captain James Dean, who ordered the march to resume. Apparently the Cross Timbers blocked the advance of the heavy equipment and compelled Dean to send a patrol to seek a path through the barrier of thickets. Wright, who accompanied the patrol, reported they suffered from a shortage of water while they "passed out into and through the Cross Timbers." They were able to quench their thirst by eating quantities of wild grapes which nearly made them "tipsy."⁴⁴ One man was sent back to inform the column of the terrain in and beyond the Cross Timbers, while the others proceeded to the base of the Wichita Mountains. There they intercepted the express sent by Dodge, who told them the dragoons were marching directly to the Canadian. The next morning they began their return to Camp Washita where they disinterred the body of Leavenworth. Wright accompanied it to Natchitoches, from where it was shipped to Delhigh, New York.⁴⁵

Dodge and his command, unaware of the happenings in the supply column, broke sick camp on July 28 and marched to the northeast. Progress was slowed by forty-three sick soldiers, seven of whom were on litters. Catlin reported that most of the creeks were dry and that the primary sources of water were "stagnant pools which lay from month to month exposed to the rays of the sun, till their waters became so poisonous and heavy . . . that they are neither diminished by absorption, or taken into the atmosphere by evaporation." Horses "sucking up the dirty and poisonous draught . . . in some instances . . . fell dead in

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

their tracks."⁴⁶ Catlin and Chadwick found one pool inhabited by frogs who could walk on the surface of the water. Chadwick's elation over this biological curiosity was shattered when it was discovered the unique ability was caused by the thickness of the scum on the pool, not by mutation of the frogs' webbed feet.⁴⁷

The heat, reported as "overpowering both to men and horses," affected even the Indians, who were given shirts to prevent further sunburn.⁴⁸ Just when it seemed that all the forces of nature were conspiring against the regiment, their hunters killed several deer; the next day they rode through herds of buffalo, the first in nearly two weeks; and a long, heavy rain broke the heat. With meat, water and relief from the heat, the morale of the soldiers soared. The Indians also seemed in good spirits, for each night they entertained the dragoons with "their wild unintelligible & unaccountable songs . . . creating a compound of the most unearthly discord."⁴⁹

On July 30, the regiment crossed the Washita River and continued through a rolling prairie broken by deep gullies. By August 1, the dragoons reached the Canadian and established a temporary camp about 100 miles west of the point where they crossed that river the month before. Camp was located about a mile from the north bank on a wide, level plain in the midst of several large herds of buffalo. One of these herds stampeded during the evening and thundered to within 200 yards of the

⁴⁶Catlin, North American Indians, II, 77.

⁴⁷Ibid., 78-79. ⁴⁸Wheelock, "Peace on the Plains," 34.

⁴⁹[Anonymous], "A Journal of Marches by the First United States Dragoons, 1834-1835," 359.

camp before veering off. The dragoon mounts became nervous but were calmed in time to prevent another stampede.⁵⁰

For the next few days, most of the able-bodied dragoons dispersed in small groups to replenish the supply of buffalo meat. The men quickly killed enough animals to fulfill their needs, but the hunters continued shooting just for sport until several hundred carcasses surrounded the camp. Catlin condemned the slaughter as cruel and wanton and complained of the damage to the camp caused by the hunters chasing their quarry through it.⁵¹ Seemingly, this hunting spree was condoned by Dodge, perhaps to allow his men to let off steam after the tension of the Indian conference. From a military standpoint its wisdom seems questionable. Scattered in small groups, the dragoons would have been unable to repel a surprise attack, and the killing of hundreds of buffalo must have cut sharply into their limited ammunition supply. Apparently, the August heat soon gave the area around the camp the smell, as well as the appearance, of a slaughtering ground for Wheelock reported that camp was moved a mile for reason of "police."⁵²

In the camp every tent had been turned into a hospital. Catlin was sure the dragoons' drinking water caused both horses and men "to be suffering and dying with the same disease, a slow and distressing bilious fever, which seems to terminate in a most frightful and fatal affection of the liver."⁵³ The dragoon horses also were showing signs

⁵⁰Wheelock, "Peace on the Plains," 35.

⁵¹Catlin, North American Indians, II, 76.

⁵²Wheelock, "Peace on the Plains," 35.

⁵³Catlin, North American Indians, II, 77.

of the bad water, long marches and poor grazing.⁵⁴ Their condition caused Dodge to reconsider the original plan of marching directly to Fort Leavenworth, on the Missouri River. On August 5, Dodge's express returned to the regiment with news of the deaths of General Leavenworth, Lieutenant George W. McClure and about a dozen other men, and the serious illness of 150 others at the Washita. He apparently also reported that the commander of the supply column had decided to return to Fort Gibson by the original route rather than to cut a road through the Cross Timbers and meet Dodge at the Canadian.⁵⁵ With this information, Dodge decided to return immediately to Fort Gibson where his regiment could reassemble and recuperate. He selected a route along the Canadian River to Camp Holmes where he could replenish his rations and obtain wagons for the sick. He dispatched another express to Kearny with news of these plans and orders to return to Fort Gibson with his command.⁵⁶

The regiment broke camp on August 9 and marched eastward along the Canadian River through the Cross Timbers. The closeness of this belt of trees and undergrowth seemed to alarm the Plains Indians. In many places the thickets were so dense that men with axes had to clear a path before the horses could pass. The regiment was further slowed by the litters of sick. The difficult terrain and the heavy burdens began telling on the horses. Many collapsed and had to be abandoned,

⁵⁴ Evans, "The Journal of Hugh Evans," 210.

⁵⁵ It is difficult to determine the exact movements of the supply column, but Wright's account of his part in the expedition indicates that only a patrol from the supply column penetrated the Cross Timbers. Morrison, ed., "Travis G. Wright and the Leavenworth Expedition in Oklahoma," 12.

⁵⁶ Wheelock, "Peace on the Plains," 36.

but Dodge pushed the regiment forward rapidly and encamped near Camp Holmes in the evening of August 9.

The next day rations for four days were drawn from Lieutenant Theophilus Holmes at his camp on Little River. With their first issue of rations since they left Camp Leavenworth and prospects of reaching civilization soon, the morale of the dragoons improved even more. Sergeant Evans reported that as each man prepared his rations his "heart was lighted up with joy when he thought such a hazardous expedition was about to terminate."⁵⁷ The dragoons spent one day resting their horses and servicing their equipment for the final leg of the trip to Fort Gibson. Men too ill to ride were left with Holmes to be transported in wagons back to Fort Gibson.

On August 11, about 200 dragoons started up the road they had traveled in mid-June when their 500-man force was the pride of the American army. They no longer constituted an effective fighting force. Their horses were completely worn out; Wheelock said, "it would be difficult to select ten horses in good order."⁵⁸ To save the remaining mounts, which were collapsing at the rate of eight to ten a day, the dragoons were ordered to walk their horses an hour for every hour they rode.⁵⁹ The remainder of the regiment was scattered over the country east of the Cross Timbers in sick camps. The express who returned from Colonel Kearny reported seventy of the seventy-eight men left at

⁵⁷ Evans, "The Journal of Hugh Evans," 211.

⁵⁸ Wheelock, "Peace on the Plains," 37.

⁵⁹ Evans, "The Journal of Hugh Evans," 211-12.

Camp Washita were sick, and that over one-third of the men at Kearny's camp were ill.⁶⁰

By August 14, the regiment reached Camp Rendezvous and two days later established camp near Fort Gibson. After a week Kearny and his command arrived from the Cross Timbers.⁶¹ Small parties of the sick continued to straggle into Fort Gibson for several weeks, and by November the infantry units stationed at the camps along the newly constructed military roads were withdrawn. With these withdrawals, the summer expedition of 1834 was concluded.

Unfortunately, the return to Fort Gibson did not provide immediate relief for the sick. Deaths continued at the rate of about four to five a day. From his room in the Fort Gibson hospital, Catlin heard the "mournful sound of 'Roslin Castle' with muffled drums passing six or eight times a-day under my window, to the burying-ground."⁶² He estimated that as many as 150 had died since June and speculated the death rate must have been equally high in the infantry regiments. Among those who died at Fort Gibson were Count Beyrick, the German botanist, and his young assistant. They had been stricken with the fever after leaving Camp Washita and were forced to turn back before reaching the Cross Timbers.

Calculated in human lives the cost of the expedition was staggering. Dodge wrote, "Perhaps their never has been in America a campaign that operated More Severely on Man & Horses."⁶³ Neither the

⁶⁰ Wheelock, "Peace on the Plains," 37.

⁶¹ Ibid., 37-38. ⁶² Catlin, North American Indians, II, 80.

⁶³ Dodge, October 1, 1834, letter to George W. Jones, quoted in Pelzer, Marches of the Dragoons in the Mississippi Valley, 47.

hardship of the march nor the "malarial fevers" which early physicians attributed to the unhealthy climate of the river lowlands can account for the high death rate. The fever which swept the Indian territory in 1834 was not the ordinary variety that plagued Fort Gibson each spring and summer. This was a full-blown epidemic. Missionaries to both the Cherokees and Choctaws reported severe sickness which caused the death of one in seven of the newly arriving Indians and which afflicted "nearly all the members of the mission family."⁶⁴

The return to Fort Gibson provided little rest for Dodge and assigned it by the government to the dragoons. Preparations were made for marching the dragoons to winter quarters at scattered points along the frontier and for a general conference with the friendly tribes and representatives of the Plains Indians. This conference and the treaty council of 1835 were the culmination of the efforts of the United States government to make contact with the tribes of the Southwestern Great Plains.

⁶⁴The Missionary Herald (Boston), XXXI (January 1835), 23-25.

CHAPTER V

TREATY OF CAMP HOLMES

In its summer campaign the First Dragoon Regiment overcame inexperience and epidemic to accomplish all of the major objectives assigned it by the War Department. President Jackson, in his sixth annual message told the Congress,

I am happy to inform you that the object [pacification of the frontiers] has been effected without the commission of any act of hostility. Colonel Dodge and the troops under his command have acted with equal firmness and humanity, and an arrangement has been made with those Indians which it is hoped will assure their permanent pacific relations with the United States and the other tribes of Indians on that border.

The success of the dragoons did not resolve the Indian problems on the southern plains; it was merely the first step in that direction. In promising a general conference "when the next grass grows" and in persuading representatives of the Plains tribes to return to Fort Gibson with him, Colonel Henry Dodge laid the foundation for peaceful settlement of the problems between the wild Indians, the immigrant tribes and the white settlers and traders on the Southwestern frontier.

The Arkansas Gazette reported that the Indians who returned with the dragoons were unwilling to continue to Washington, but they

¹James D. Richardson, ed., A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1897 (10 Vols.; Washington, 1896), III, 113.

agreed to participate in a conference at Fort Gibson. Dodge sent runners to the chiefs of all the nearby bands inviting them to meet with the Plains Indians.² By September 1, representatives of seven or eight friendly tribes had arrived and the conference started. Major Francis W. Armstrong, Superintendent of Indian Affairs for the Western Territory, presided at the meeting.³ Governor Montfort Stokes, who had no official capacity since the expiration of his commission in 1834, and Dodge also represented the United States. In the negotiations the American representatives were hampered by their lack of authority to conclude a treaty. Armstrong explained it would be necessary to conduct another council "when the grass next grows after the snows," and made the usual promise of more and better presents at that time.⁴

Even if Armstrong and his associates had been free to negotiate a treaty, it is doubtful the Plains tribes would have honored any agreement signed by their representatives. Except for the Kiowas, the Indians at Fort Gibson were ordinary warriors, not chiefs. Furthermore, to have even the limited effect derived from treaties with the wild tribes, the agreement had to be signed by the leaders of the more

²Arkansas Gazette, 25 November, 1834, p.3.

³Francis W. Armstrong was a native of Virginia who served in the War of 1812. He resigned from the army in 1817, and later became an ardent supporter of Jackson. He was rewarded for this support by an appointment as special agent and superintendent for the removal and subsistence of the Choctaws from their Eastern home to Indian Territory. Later he was appointed Choctaw agent west of the Mississippi. In 1833 Armstrong moved his family into Indian Territory. The next year he was appointed Acting Superintendent of Indian Affairs in the Western Territory. Carolyn Thomas Foreman, "The Armstrongs of Indian Territory," Chronicles of Oklahoma, XXX (Autumn 1952), 293-308.

⁴Grant Foreman, Pioneer Days in the Early Southwest (Cleveland, 1926), 154.

powerful tribal bands. Indian tribes were loose-knit confederacies that seldom adhered to centralized leadership. Most bands refused to be committed to treaty obligations signed by the chiefs of other bands. The American commissioners probably realized any treaty signed under these circumstances would be almost worthless. They concentrated instead on trying to impress the representatives of the wild tribes with the power and wealth of the United States in the hope they would return to their people and advise coming to terms with the government. In this aim, the American negotiations achieved success despite the "mystical" interference of Stokes. While at Fort Gibson, several of the Plains Indians were stricken with the fever. They felt quite sure Stokes, who peered at them through strange glass lenses perched on his nose, had cast an evil eye at them and was responsible for their illness.

The conference ended on the third day and the Plains tribes, escorted by a patrol of dragoons, departed for their home beyond the Cross Timbers. About a week later Black Dog, the Osage chief whose band the dragoons passed on the way to the Wichita village, threatened to attack the returning Plains Indians and to disrupt the good relations established by the dragoon expedition and the Fort Gibson conference.⁶ Dodge immediately ordered an eighty-man patrol to march after the returning Indians to insure they reached their home safely. A party of traders accompanied this patrol to establish the first permanent American trading posts among the tribes of the southern plains.⁷

⁵Arkansas Gazette, 25 November, 1834, p.3.

⁶Foreman, Pioneer Days in the Early Southwest, 155.

⁷Arkansas Gazette, 25 November, 1834, p.3.

At the same time the conference was being held at Fort Gibson, an officer had been dispatched to take Matthew Wright Martin home to his mother, who lived in southwestern Arkansas. The reunion between the boy and his mother brought this aspect of the expedition to a happy conclusion.⁸

After the departure of the Plains Indians, Dodge and Armstrong dispatched a letter to the Committee on Indian Affairs in which they expressed confidence that "this meeting will have a most happy effect upon the wild tribes residing on the head waters of our water courses."⁹ In Washington, word of the expedition's success and the Fort Gibson meeting produced definite optimism among the members of the Indian Bureau for an early end to the problems in Indian Territory. Commissioner of Indian Affairs Elbert Herring reported to Secretary of War Lewis Cass that "At the general council . . . impressive speeches were delivered . . . which I feel . . . will be productive of substantial good."¹⁰ Cass demonstrated his satisfaction at the progress in settling the Indian problem by appointing Stokes, Armstrong and General Matthew Arbuckle as commissioners to hold a council "with as many of the civilized and uncivilized Indians west of the Arkansas as can be convened."¹¹ Arbuckle had resumed command of Fort Gibson after the

⁸Hugh Evans, "The Journal of Hugh Evans, Covering the First and Second Campaigns of the United States Dragoon Regiment in 1834 and 1835," Edited by Fred S. Perrine and Grant Foreman, Chronicles of Oklahoma, III (September 1925), 214-15.

⁹Dodge and Armstrong, September 7, 1834, letter to the Committee on Indian Affairs, quoted in Foreman, "The Armstrongs of Indian Territory," 303.

¹⁰Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Annual Report, 1834.

¹¹Arkansas Gazette, 19 May, 1835, p.3.

death of General Leavenworth.

After the Indian conference at Fort Gibson, Dodge completed plans for the dispersal of the regiment along the frontier. He established his headquarters at Fort Leavenworth on the Missouri River. Lieutenant Colonel Stephen W. Kearny marched with three companies for Iowa; two companies were garrisoned along the Missouri frontier; and three companies under Major Richard B. Mason remained at Fort Gibson with about eighty dragoons who were still too ill to travel.¹²

During the early spring, several events occurred which emphasized the necessity of holding a general Indian council as soon as possible. Several traders, who had entered the Plains Indian country in September, 1834, returned to Fort Gibson the following March with news that the Plains tribes were becoming restless and asking when the conference would be held. The traders reported the Indians insisted the conference be conducted west of the Cross Timbers on the Red River in the vicinity of the trading post of Holland Coffee.¹³

Prompted by the demand of the Indians and with authorization from Washington, Arbuckle began to make plans for a meeting. On May 5, 1835, the day after he received notification of his appointment to represent the United States at a conference with the Indians, Arbuckle

¹²Richard B. Mason, a native of Virginia and grandson of George Mason, member of the Continental Congress and Constitutional Convention, was a career officer who spent much time on the Southwestern frontier. He later rose to the rank of brigadier general during the Mexican War. Carolyn Thomas Foreman, "General Richard Barnes Mason," Chronicles of Oklahoma, XIX (March 1941), 14-36.

¹³Grant Foreman, ed., "The Journal of the Proceedings at Our First Treaty with the Wild Indians, 1835," Chronicles of Oklahoma, XIV (December 1936), 394.

called the first meeting of the commissioners. Stokes attended and a letter was sent to Armstrong, the other commissioner, informing him of his appointment and asking him to come to Fort Gibson.¹⁴ Arbuckle summoned Colonel A.P. Chouteau, officially to act as an Osage interpreter, but unofficially to serve as his advisor. Chouteau was requested to bring with him several Plains Indians held captive by the Osages to serve as interpreters for the council.¹⁵

On May 11, 1835, Arbuckle and Stokes met with another delegation of Plains Indians, two Wichitas and a Waco, who asked for information concerning the conference. Their meetings continued and on May 14, Arbuckle announced he would dispatch Major Mason with seventy-three dragoons to establish a camp on the headwaters of Little River on the west side of the Cross Timbers. Arbuckle sent Chouteau, the interpreters and the Wichita and Waco warriors with Mason to help arrange the meeting.¹⁶ Mason's instructions were to try to persuade the Plains tribes to return to Fort Gibson for the conference. Failing in this, he was to construct a camp suitable for conducting the negotiations.¹⁷

Mason's column left Fort Gibson on May 18, 1835.¹⁸ Within

¹⁴Ibid., 398. Armstrong, who resided at the Choctaw Agency, fifteen miles west of Fort Smith, was in poor health at the time of his appointment as Indian commissioner. He did not reach Fort Gibson until May 13, and participated in the planning of the conference for only a few days before returning.

¹⁵Ibid., 339. ¹⁶Ibid., 399-400.

¹⁷Arbuckle, Fort Gibson, May 18, 1835, letter to Major General Alexander McComb, Photocopy of Fort Gibson Letterbook, November 1834 to May 1836. Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City.

¹⁸Ibid.

three weeks he reported he had "established his camp on a small branch of the Canadian, which empties into that River on the north side, and on the Western border of the Cross Timbers, and about 150 miles from this post [Fort Gibson]." ¹⁹ He named the location Camp Holmes. ²⁰

Arbuckle ordered Lieutenant Augustine F. Seaton and thirty men from the Seventh Infantry to open a wagon route to Mason's position, and to supply the dragoons there with enough rations to last until mid-September. ²¹

Among the members of Seaton's column was Assistant Surgeon Leonard McPhail, a physician recently assigned to the dragoons. He maintained a diary during the expedition to and from Camp Holmes which adds color to the rather impersonal official journal account. His description of the hardships of frontier travel are similar to those reported by the dragoons the previous summer. Just a few days after leaving Fort Gibson he wrote, "a soldier is taken sick and a plague of flies descends upon us, tormenting horses and men. The heat is terrific and not a breath of air stirs. One of the oxen rolls over and dies." ²² Several days later the heat was broken by unseasonable rains which delayed Seaton's column. However, after a month the soldiers completed the wagon

¹⁹ Arbuckle, Fort Gibson, June 16, 1835, letter to Roger Jones, the Adjutant General, Photocopy of Fort Gibson Letterbook, November 1834 to May 1836. Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City. Camp Mason was located about seven miles south of Noble, Oklahoma, along Chouteau Creek in Cleveland County.

²⁰ This is the second Camp Holmes build along the Canadian. The year before Lieutenant Theophilus H. Holmes had constructed a camp also named Holmes at the mouth of Little River.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Harold W. Jones, ed., "The Diary of Assistant Surgeon Leonard McPhail on his Journey to the Southwest in 1835," Chronicles of Oklahoma, XVIII (September 1940), 383.

road to Camp Holmes.

Just when it seemed that Arbuckle's plans were working smoothly and it would be possible to conclude the treaty, he was reminded that not all of the tribes favored an end of the strife along the frontier. Clermont, chief of the Osages who had attacked the Kiowa village at Cut Throat Gap, and several of his warriors had promised to attend the meeting. But when Arbuckle presented them with a small quantity of tobacco rather than blankets, rifles, powder and lead,

Several of the Warriors expressed a perfect indifference as to the success of the Treaty; alledging that the plunder of Comanche horses, and unrestrained hunting of Game on the Prairie, was more profitable to them than anything they received from the Government of the United States for acceding to, or aiding in a treaty of Peace.²³

Bribery in the form of presents to the Indians seemed to be a prerequisite to successful negotiation. In trying to satisfy all the tribes, Arbuckle was faced with a problem that became chronic in Indian affairs--insufficient funds. He spent over \$6,000 on presents to be given the Indians at the meeting, but the demands of the Indians for gifts far exceeded the funds allocated for that purpose. Both civilized and wild Indians asked for presents almost every time they met Indian commissioners. Clermont demanded them before he would agree to attend the meeting. Black Dog begged for lead and powder because his people were "suffering for want of provisions" and the Comanches refused to wait until after the conference for presents; they wanted them immediately and later, too. Arbuckle's long service on the frontier had given him an insight into the Indian character. He gave in just

²³G. Foreman, ed., "The Journal of the Proceedings at Our First Treaty with the Wild Indians," 402.

enough to the Indians' demands for immediate gifts to whet their appetites while holding out promises of future reward.

Early in July Arbuckle received more disquieting news. Mason reported that he feared he was in imminent danger of attack from the Comanches who had camped near his position.²⁴ Arbuckle immediately sent Captain Francis Lee with F and H Companies of the Seventh Infantry to reinforce the dragoons at Camp Holmes.²⁵ The arrival of Seaton's column on July 11 pacified the Comanche chief who McPhail reported had "made great exertions to induce the other bands to join him and wipe out Major Mason's men."²⁶ A few days later Lee's command reached Camp Holmes; several rounds fired from the cannon he had brought further reduced the danger of an Indian uprising.²⁷

The Indian unrest seemed to stem from the fact that many bands had flocked to the Camp Holmes area at the request of Major Mason only to find that there were no definite arrangements for a conference. A rumor that the meeting would not be held until September created discontent among the tribes.²⁸ The Osages, apparently still unhappy about

²⁴ Arbuckle, Fort Gibson, July 6, 1835, letter to Armstrong, Photocopy of Fort Gibson Letterbook, November 1834 to May 1836. Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City.

²⁵ Washington Seawell (Arbuckle's aide-de-camp), Fort Gibson, July 7, 1835, letter to Mason, Photocopy of Fort Gibson Letterbook, November 1834 to May 1836. Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City.

²⁶ Jones, ed., "The Diary of Assistant Surgeon Leonard McPhail on his Journey to the Southwest in 1835," 285.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ This rumor was probably started by the Osages who were certainly aware that Arbuckle and Stokes favored that date as one that would be convenient for the civilized tribes.

the quality of the presents given them by Arbuckle, seemed intent on exploiting this discontent and wrecking the conference. They told the Plains tribes the Great Father was not coming at all and that Mason and his officers "were no chiefs but as the dead grass of the prairie-- good for nothing."²⁹ Mason's reassurances and the reinforcements prevented hostilities. After remaining for over a month, many of the bands began drifting away in late July as the buffalo grew scarce in that area. Mason persuaded a few representatives of most of the bands to remain by promising the meeting would be held soon. With the situation improved, Mason wrote Arbuckle that "the Western Tribes will, with good intention, attend a general meeting of the Red people on this frontier."³⁰ But he advised the tribes were growing restless and it would be best to hold the conference at his camp as soon as possible. Arbuckle hoped to delay this meeting until September when the weather would be cooler and more of the civilized Indians would be able to attend. However, in view of Mason's warning that many of the Plains Indians were threatening to leave, Arbuckle scheduled the meeting for August 20 at Camp Holmes.³¹

As Stokes and Arbuckle were making final arrangements for the council, they received a letter from Armstrong accompanied by his physician's certification that he was too ill to attend the meeting.³² A

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Seawell, Fort Gibson, July 11, 1835, letter to Captain Lee, Photocopy of Fort Gibson Letterbook, November 1834 to May 1836. Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City.

³¹ Ibid.

³² G. Foreman, ed., "The Journal of the Proceedings at Our First Treaty with the Wild Indians," 405.

few days later Armstrong died at his home at the Choctaw Agency.

By August 6 the two remaining commissioners had concluded arrangements for the meeting; presents had been purchased and shipped, the local Indians had been notified and Camp Holmes had been adequately provisioned and reinforced. Stokes and Arbuckle crossed the Arkansas River and began their journey to the meeting place accompanied by Companies A and D of the Seventh Infantry under the command of Major George Birch.³³ As he left, Arbuckle dispatched an express to Mason with last-minute instructions to construct a brush arbor and log benches near the camp for the conferees.³⁴ Creeks, Osages, Senecas, Quapaws, Cherokees, Delawares and Choctaws left the Fort Gibson area for Camp Holmes about the same time the commissioners departed.³⁵

When Stokes and Arbuckle arrived at Camp Holmes on August 19, they learned the Kiowas had already departed. They were told "they were here and staid for a long time, but their children were starving, and they have gone, and will not return."³⁶ The Arkansas Gazette had another explanation for the Kiowas' departure. It reported, "The Ki-a-ways left the council grounds . . . supposed through fear; as it is thought that Cleremore, the lead Chief of the Osages, endeavored, through false misinterpretations, to make the wild Indians believe that it was the

³³Arkansas Gazette, 25 August, 1835, p.3.

³⁴Arbuckle, Fort Gibson, August 6, 1835, letter to Mason, Photocopy of Fort Gibson Letterbook, November 1834 to May 1836. Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City.

³⁵Arkansas Gazette, 25 August 1835, p.3.

³⁶G. Foreman, ed., "The Journal of the Proceedings at Our First Treaty with the Wild Indians, 1835," 406.

intention of the whites to kill them."³⁷ The other Plains Indians assured the commissioners that the "Kioway's will also agree to any Treaty we may make."³⁸

Camp Holmes was situated in "a beautiful and healthy place, on the immediate border of timber to the east, with a level prairie of 10 miles in width to the west, circled round with sparse woods, and having there a fine running stream and a number of springs."³⁹ Major Mason had probably seen the area the year before as a member of the Dodge expedition which established a temporary camp a few miles to the north.

On August 22, the first formal meeting was held between the commissioners, the Civilized Indians and the Comanches, Wichitas and their associated bands.⁴⁰ Stokes opened the meeting with a speech in which he reassured the Indians of the government's good intentions and vowed the "great Father the President of the United States . . . promised to cherish and protect them in all their just rights."⁴¹ Next, Arbuckle told the gathering "Peace is all your great Father asks of you. . . . We have prepared a Treaty which we believe will best secure

³⁷Arkansas Gazette, 29 September, 1835, p.3.

³⁸G. Foreman, ed., "The Journal of the Proceedings at Our First Treaty with the Wild Indians, 1835," 407.

³⁹Arkansas Gazette, 25 August 1835, p.3.

⁴⁰McPhail's diary indicates the first formal session was on August 20 and that the rain prevented further meeting until August 24. The treaty was signed on August 24 and 25. Jones, ed., "The Diary of Assistant Surgeon Leonard McPhail on his Journey to the Southwest in 1835," 288-89.

⁴¹G. Foreman, ed., "The Journal of the Proceedings at Our First Treaty with the Wild Indians, 1835," 407.

peace between your nations and the United States, and between your people and the red Nations now present."⁴² The proposed treaty was then translated and explained to the Plains Indians. Arbuckle asked the Indians to consider the treaty carefully and make changes if they objected to any of its provisions.

The treaty contained ten articles including pledges of perpetual peace and friendship among the United States and all tribes represented at the meeting, and friendly treatment of all members of tribes not party to the treaty. Americans engaged in trade with Mexico were to be allowed to pass through the plains unmolested; the civilized tribes were promised free access to and hunting beyond the Cross Timbers; article five required the Plains tribes to respect the property of American traders to be sent among them; all signatories were to attempt to settle disputes peacefully; and the Plains Indians were to continue their friendly relations with the Mexican government.⁴³ The representatives considered the treaty the rest of the day. Rain prevented a meeting on August 22, but on the 23rd the council was resumed. Several of the civilized tribes proposed a minor addition to one of the articles, which was accepted by the other representatives and the commissioners. The Wichitas expressed concern over the article by which they pledged not to let the signing of the treaty "interrupt their friendly relations with the Republic of Mexico." They explained the Mexicans had attacked several of their villages and murdered a number of their people. The commissioners explained that to wage war on the Mexicans under these circumstances would not be a violation of the treaty. The

⁴²Ibid., 408. ⁴³Ibid., 409-11.

Wichitas also requested no tribes settle in the area just west of the Cross Timbers because the game would be driven from their hunting ground.⁴⁴ Otherwise, the Wichita representatives were happy with the treaty, particularly with article eight which promised presents for the Plains tribes. In fact, their first chief devoted his entire speech to reflections on his new-found wealth. He said he intended to move his village so he could be closer to his new neighbors. However, in view of his preoccupation with presents, it is probable his real motive was to be closer to the source of the Great Father's gifts. The Comanche chief told the council his people "wished nothing but peace, and friendship."

On August 24 the commissioners obtained the "signatures of the chiefs and representatives of the Comanche, Witchetaw, Cherokee, Muscogee, Choctaw, Osage, Seneca, and Quapaw Nations or Tribes."⁴⁵ During the meeting representatives of the civilized tribes were invited to address the council. Most praised the wisdom of the Great Father and expressed their happiness that peace at last had been established.

The next day, the commissioners distributed presents to the Wichitas and Comanches and attended to other final details. On the afternoon of August 27 they began their return trip to Fort Gibson accompanied by the infantry. Two days later Major Mason and the dragoons broke camp and followed. By September 12, the last unit reached Fort Gibson.

McPhail's diary discusses the diseases suffered by the soldiers on the expedition. Their maladies were similar to those that plagued

⁴⁴Ibid., 411-12.

⁴⁵Ibid., 413.

the dragoons the year before. The most common were dysentery and malarial fever. McPhail blamed a change in the weather for an increased number of "intermittent fever" cases in early August and reported "the winds prevailing blow over a large bottom and marsh a little ways from camp wafting the 'mal-aria' over us."⁴⁶ The remedies he discussed were little superior to the herbs employed by the Indians, but compared to the 1834 expedition, the troops at Camp Holmes in 1835 enjoyed good health. McPhail believed the previous year's high death rate was due to the drastic medication used in treating dysentery and the "frightful doses" of calomel, a mercurial purgative, which he believed caused gangrene of the jaws and face.⁴⁷ Despite McPhail's claim that better medical practices kept the death rate low at Camp Holmes, most of the credit probably belongs to chance. The epidemic that swept the prairies in 1834 had run its course by the time Mason and his men left Fort Gibson in the summer of 1835.

Colonel A.P Chouteau recognized the possibilities of the site of Camp Holmes as a trading post and, soon after the treaty was signed, he constructed a small stockade just down the creek from Mason's position. The trading post became the center of active commerce between the whites and Indians. While at his western trading post in 1837, the Kiowas approached Chouteau concerning a treaty with the United States and the civilized Indians. He led twenty-four Kiowa chiefs and warriors and representatives of several other minor tribes to Fort Gibson where

⁴⁶ Jones, ed., "The Diary of Assistant Surgeon Leonard McPhail on his Journey to the Southwest in 1835," 287.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 290.

they concluded a treaty in 1837.⁴⁸

The signing of this treaty marked the end of the first phase of American settlement of the southern Great Plains. The United States had formally made contact with the Plains Indians and secured their promises to live at peace with the white man and the civilized Indians.

Despite the optimism of the commissioners and Indian representatives for lasting peace, sporadic hostilities continued for over half a century following the Treaty of Camp Holmes. Matthew Wright Martin's uncle, Travis Wright, claimed the treaty was "not worth the paper it was scribbled on."⁴⁹ Ray Allen Billington, noted Western historian wrote, "the ink was scarcely dry on the four pages of marks made by chiefs on the Treaty of Camp Holmes before the Plains Indians grumbled that they had not understood its meaning, that the presents given them were inferior, and that their hunting grounds must remain their own."⁵⁰ The hundreds of treaty violations committed by the Plains Indians are convincing proof that the expedition of the dragoons and efforts of the peace commissioners failed to produce lasting peace.

Yet, the treaty should not be dismissed as unimportant or valueless because it was often violated. The Treaty of Camp Holmes laid the legal base for removal of the Eastern Indians to Indian Territory. If the warlike nature of the Plains Indians is taken into

⁴⁸ Howard F. Van Zandt, "The History of Camp Holmes and Chouteau's Trading Post," Chronicles of Oklahoma, XIII (September 1935), 319-20.

⁴⁹ James D. Morrison, "Travis G. Wright and the Leavenworth Expedition in Oklahoma," Chronicles of Oklahoma, XXV (Spring 1947), 12.

⁵⁰ Ray Allen Billington, Westward Expansion: A History of the American Frontier (2nd Ed.; New York c1960), 474.

consideration it is valid to conclude that the treaty "held fairly well among the Indians till the Civil War."⁵¹ In fact, Grant Foreman, an authority on the history of Oklahoma, believed "that it was the most important treaty [made] with the wild Indians in Oklahoma." He explained "it was essential to the realization of the plans of the government for the location of the eastern Indians west of the Mississippi and necessary to the peace and security of the west."⁵²

Whether the treaty is considered as a success or failure, it is one of the landmarks in the history of the Southwest. A landmark made possible by the determination and courage of the First Dragoon Regiment during their summer campaign in 1834.

⁵¹William Brown Morrison, Military Posts and Camps in Oklahoma (Oklahoma City, 1936), 79.

⁵²Daily Oklahoman, 25 August, 1935, p.16-C.

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