GARRISON LIFE OF THE MOUNTED SOLDIER ON THE GREAT
PLAINS, TEXAS, AND NEW MEXICO FRONTIERS,
1833-1861

THESIS

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CHAPTER I

THE REGIMENTS AND THE POSTS

The American cavalry, with a rich heritage of peacekeeping and combat action, depending upon the particular need in time, served the nation well as the most mobile armed force until the innovation of air power. In over a century of performance, the army branch adjusted to changing times and new technological advances from single-shot to multiple-shot hand weapons for a person on horseback, to rapid-fire rifles, and eventually to an even more mobile horseless, motor-mounted force. After that change, some Americans still longed for at least one regiment to be remounted on horses, as General John Knowles Herr, the last chief of cavalry in the United States Army, appealed in 1953. The entreaties made by General Herr and others went unheeded.

With the shift to meet changing times, the army also faced other variations of procedure, such as altering the routine of garrison life of the soldiers when isolation of frontier posts ended following the introduction of new modes of transportation and supply. The period from formation of the Regiment of Dragoons in 1833 to the beginning of the Civil War presents a definite period of study for soldier life in camp, owing to special problems caused by isolation and subsequent lack of contact with the earlier-settled regions of the country. After the Civil War, new conditions of railroad construction, Indian defeat, and economic development of the West provided a contrast to the period 1833-1861. Within those time limits the government faced problems of caring
properly for the food, health, and recreational needs of its frontier army, and encouraging enlistment and reenlistment of qualified men.

In the daily routine of the enlisted soldier in the West from 1833 to 1861, one observes a changing policy for administration, training, weaponry, and punishment, as the young army gained experience on the frontier. A life of harshness in living conditions also increased without the morale-boosting factors of sufficient and proper rations of food and issues of clothing. By present-day standards, even if sufficient in quantity, the necessities for comfortable living were most generally of inferior quality.¹

While historians have afforded relatively thorough coverage of the life and routine of the officers and their families, writers have neglected the enlisted men and their dependents. By regulations, each officer maintained a daily journal or diary of his unit's activities, particularly while on a campaign.² Subsequently, commissioned personnel, their descendants, and other writers used these daily records to produce numerous articles and books about the period. Although the accounts evolving from the use of journals and diaries are plentiful, they seldom mention the details of the life and routine of the enlisted men. Owing to a scarcity of accounts by the soldiers themselves, an assumption must

¹ Although not limited to one account, the author cites the report of the wife of an officer in the Regiment of Mounted Riflemen as the best description of the inconveniences suffered at a frontier post. Mrs. Egbert L. Viele, Following the Drum: A Glimpse of Frontier Life (New York, 1858), pp. 137-138, 140. See also Averam B. Bender, "The Soldier in the Far West, 1848-1860," Pacific Historical Review, VIII (1939), 159-178 passim.

be made that few enlisted personnel kept diaries and an even smaller number wrote memoirs in later years because of their inability or lack of interest. In addition to a lack of material, those few writings by former enlisted men are generally reminiscences recorded years from the events. In many instances the efforts are abundant with factual discrepancies; therefore, comparisons of the existing private accounts, coupled with official documents and historical studies, revealed only in a general way the life of the common soldier on frontier garrison duty.

From 1792 until 1815, as part of its organization, the United States Army included light dragoon units of varying sizes from troops to regiments. In 1815, after the peace settlement which ended the War of 1812, the army consolidated the one remaining regiment of light dragoons consisting of eight troops with artillery. For the next seventeen years, the regular military force existed without the services of a mounted unit.

3 The name dragoon evolved in medieval times. The mounted soldiers of that age wore a picture of a dragon on their helmets. Over the years the word changed to dragoon and came to connote heavy cavalry. On the contrary, the United States mounted soldiers have always been considered as light cavalrymen who fought either on foot or on horseback. Albert Gallatin Brackett, History of the United States Cavalry, from the Formation of the Federal Government to the 1st of June, 1863 (New York, 1865), p. 159. The term "troop" and "company" are relative. Until 1815, troop designated a unit of dragoons commanded by a captain. After the reactivation of the Dragoons of 1833, the term company named the unit commanded by a captain. Although soldiers referred to their "troop," such a designation became official in 1880. S. E. Whitman, The Troopers, An Informal History of the Plains Cavalry, 1865-1890 (New York, 1962), p. 38.

In 1825, a congressional committee made a survey of the feasibility of the use of volunteer gunmen to protect western settlers against Indian depredations. The mounted-gunmen idea lay dormant for a few years. Then in 1831, the Black Hawk War revealed a dire need for mounted troops to cope with the highly mobile prairie Indians. In 1832, heeding a request from President Andrew Jackson, Congress authorized the formation of a battalion of mounted rangers of eight companies of one hundred men each for use in the defense of the western frontier.

In late 1832, despite expected reaction from supporters of the mounted ranger battalion, Secretary of War Lewis Cass recommended that a Regiment of Dragoons be activated in the stead of the unconventional force. The most ardent opponent of Cass's proposal, Representative Joseph Duncan of Illinois, had been convinced several years earlier by Major General Edmund Pendleton Gaines, commander of the Army's Department of the West, that a conventional military force was unsuited for a mission of chasing marauding Indians. By 1833, Duncan had not changed his mind. The Illinois Congressman stated before a House committee that not only were conventional troops incapable of contending with the

6 American State Papers, Military Affairs, V, 19 (1832).
7 U. S. Public Statutes at Large, IV, 533 (1832).
8 American State Papers, Military Affairs, V, 18-19 (1832).
fickle prairie Indians; more important, the civilian populace on the frontier considered the very name "dragoon" unacceptable.  

During the early weeks of the Second Session of the Twenty-Second Congress, legislators argued the merits of dragoons versus rangers. In the end, the supporters of the Cass ratiocination prevailed. The Secretary's ideas, based on the more economical dragoon organization, appealed to a frugal Congress. First, the three-year enlistments proposed for the conventional unit cost much less than the one-year terms applicable to the rangers. Second, by arming the cavalrymen with rifles, one could assign them a secondary mission as infantry in time of need. Finally, Cass offered an entreatment to tradition-conscious citizens by the revival of the cavalry arm in the United States Army.  

On March 2, 1833, Congress authorized the recruitment of a Regiment of Dragoons to replace the extravagant ranger unit as requested by the Secretary of War. In filling the ranks of the new elite regular organization, the army initiated a novel method for the selection of the

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10 U. S. Congress, Representative Duncan speaking on the bill for a frontier defense force, 22d Congress, 1st Session, February 16, 1833, Register of Debates, p. 1727.

11 American State Papers, Military Affairs, V, 18-19 (1832).

12 U. S. Public Statutes at Large, IV, 652 (1833). The regiment had a total of 714 enlisted men and 33 officers. Officers in the headquarters included the colonel, a lieutenant colonel, a major, and an adjutant selected from one of the companies. The staff enlisted personnel consisted of the sergeant major, a quartermaster sergeant, and two chief buglers. Each of the ten companies commanded by a captain had two other officers, a first lieutenant and a second lieutenant. Enlisted personnel included four sergeants, of whom one acted as the first sergeant, four corporals, two buglers, a farrier and blacksmith, and sixty privates.
rank and file. Prior to 1833, unit recruiting had been sectional in nature, while the search for dragoons encompassed the entire nation. In addition, the establishment of rendezvous points in the larger eastern cities expedited the movement of the troops to the West under escort of regimental officers.13

Without an extended period of training, the Regiment of Dragoons commenced campaigning immediately after formation. In the summer of 1834, the newly constituted regiment made a dramatic march to the Rocky Mountains and returned. Although the campaign succeeded in its objective of impressing upon the indigenous Indians of the Central Great Plains the consequences of raids on white frontier settlements and the recently removed tribes from east of the Mississippi River, the exertion of the operation affected the health of the officers and men with disastrous results. 14

George Catlin, noted naturalist and author, accompanied the unit on its 1834 campaign. In his accounts of the hardships and sufferings which prevailed throughout the march, Catlin estimated that one third of the 450 troopers who departed from Fort Gibson in present-day eastern Oklahoma, died within four months. Actually, only about one half of the Dragoon Regiment completed the entire journey. 15 Most of the deaths

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14 George Catlin, North American Indians, Being Letters and Notes of Their Manners, Customs, and the Conditions, Written During Eight Years' Travel Amongst the Wildest Tribes of Indians in North America, 1832-1839 (Washington, 1913), II, 93.

15 Ibid.
resulted from what contemporary doctors termed intermittent fever, a
type of malarial infection and dysentery. On the other hand, the ac-
cepted cure for the disease probably caused as many deaths as the malady.
Upon symptoms of any illness, an individual received a large dose of
calomel, a strong purgative.16

Following the 1834 campaign, the army recruited replacements to
refill the ranks of the remnant dragoon regiment. Then, the Department
of the West at St. Louis dispersed the unit in posts along the western
frontier, from Fort Snelling on the North in present-day Minnesota, south
to Fort Gibson.17 At their new duty stations, the mounted troops con-
stantly patrolled the entire frontier line in addition to the conducting
of summer campaigns into the Great Plains.18

The relative success of the Regiment of Dragoons in maintaining
peace along the frontier encouraged Congress to sanction a second mounted
regiment in 1836.19 The Second Regiment of Dragoons served dismounted
in the Seminole War in Florida. Unfortunately, the full potential of
the unit failed to materialize in the Florida wasteland. In 1841, owing
to the insistence of Western congressmen for additional military protec-
tion on the frontier, a newly constituted infantry unit replaced the

16 Harold W. Jones, editor, "Notes and Documents: The Diary of As-
sistant Surgeon Leonard McPhail on His Journey to the Southwest in 1835,"
Chronicles of Oklahoma, XVIII (1940), 287, 290.

17 In 1819, the army located Fort Snelling on the upper Mississippi
River in present-day St. Paul, Minnesota. Other than this northernmost
post, the Dragoons established posts at present-day Des Moines, Iowa,
Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, and near Muskogee, Oklahoma, at Fort Gibson;
see American State Papers, Military Affairs, V, 151 (1833).

18 John Knowles Herr and Edward S. Wallace, The Story of the U. S.
Cavalry (Boston, 1953), pp. 27-28.

19 U. S. Public Statutes at Large, V, 32-33 (1836).
regiment in the swamps. Thereupon, the army dispatched the cavalry unit to the West, where it earned an image of "... that epitome of military impudence." With a change in administration in 1841, Congress began to search for ways to pare military spending. In 1842, President John Tyler signed a measure which ordered the reduction of the number of privates in a dragoon company from sixty to fifty. In addition to the reduction in the size of all cavalry companies, the bill directed that the Second Regiment of Dragoons revert to its secondary role as dismounted infantry. Although the act was promulgated, the unit had barely disposed of its horses before Congress repealed the curtailing legislation.

In 1842, another reorganization occurred to increase command efficiency. The army created a system of geographical divisions and departments. The change designated all of the area east of the Mississippi River as the Eastern Division, while the Western included a region to the west of the water barrier. The change further subdivided the two divisions into military departments, which received numerical designations. Military Departments Two and Three included the region west of the Mississippi River.

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20 Little Rock, Arkansas Gazette, January 30, 1839.
22 U. S. Public Statutes at Large, V, 512-513 (1842).
23 Ibid., V, 654-655 (1844).
After the Mexican War, the army re-numbered the departments. Military Department Six included Minnesota Territory on the Canadian boundary south to the present-day southern Kansas border and west from the Mississippi River to the Rocky Mountains. Department Seven consisted of Arkansas and Indian Territory in today's state of Oklahoma. The new system designated Texas and New Mexico as Departments Eight and Nine, respectively, as parts of the Western Division. In addition, the army added a Pacific Division, which included California and the Oregon Country. In this system, as new territory was added or old areas were subdivided to create another department, each recent augmentation merely received a higher numerical designation. This command structure remained in effect until the Civil War, except that after 1855, the army did not number the departments but gave them the names of their geographical locations.

In 1845, upon the annexation of Texas to the Union, Congress realized a need for additional troops in the Southwest to protect that area against predatory Indians. Of equal importance with the concern for the Southwest, the vast numbers of emigrants who moved across the continent over the trail to the Oregon Country also required military protection. To obviate the need for more troops, Congress passed a legislative measure which permitted President James K. Polk to raise a regiment of

\footnote{Senate Executive Documents, 31st Congress, 1st Session, No. 1 (Washington, 1849), pp. 179-191 \textit{passim}.}

\footnote{Senate Exec. Docs., 30th Cong., 2d Sess., No. 1, Part 1 (1848), pp. 159-166 \textit{passim}.}
mounted riflemen for use to establish and maintain a line of communication with the Far Northwest.  

Before the unit completed its mission, the President diverted the Mounted Riflemen to Texas because of the pending Mexican crisis. In the ensuing conflict, the Riflemen earned a distinguished battle record and became noted particularly for the storming of Chapultepec Castle during the struggle for Mexico City. At that engagement, the unit acquired its sobriquet, "Brave Rifles," which is part of its accolade even today.

After the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo restored peaceful relations with Mexico in 1848, the three mounted regiments returned to their missions as prior to the conflict. The First Regiment of Dragoons patrolled while scattered from Kansas and Minnesota to New Mexico and California. The Second found itself fully occupied with the Comanche Indians in Texas. The "Brave Rifles" resumed the role of establishing and maintaining a line of communication to Oregon.

The acquisition of vast stretches of territory by the Mexican Cession in 1848 added 3,000 miles of frontier and 4,000 miles of communication lines to the responsibility of an already overburdened cavalry to patrol. The number of Indians in the United States increased from an

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27U. S. Public Statutes at Large, IX, 13 (1846). Except for each company having 64 privates, a blacksmith and a farrier, the dragoon and mounted rifle units had the same organization.

28Herr, Story of the U. S. Cavalry, p. 56.

already quarter of a million by another 200,000 to 400,000.\textsuperscript{30} In 1851, Secretary of War Charles Magill Conrad asked Congress for two additional mounted regiments, even at the expense of disbanding a similar number of infantry units. He reiterated an argument of former Secretary of War Lewis Cass that infantry was of little utility on the Great Plains except to hold fixed installations.\textsuperscript{31}

During the following year, Indian depredations increased to such proportions in Texas and New Mexico that the army command concentrated the greater parts of all three mounted regiments in military Departments Seven and Eight. In fact, other than five companies of the First Regiment of Dragoons, of which two were on the Northern Plains, two in California, and one in Oregon, the entire mounted force of the regular army found itself on duty in Texas and New Mexico.\textsuperscript{32}

The situation did not improve during the following two years. In addition to the problems in the Southwest, Indians of the Central Great Plains intensified their attacks on travelers crossing the prairies. As a result of the increased depredations, at the insistence of Secretary of War Jefferson Davis, President Franklin Pierce prevailed upon Congress to provide two additional cavalry regiments to relieve 1,800 emergency volunteers then on active duty.\textsuperscript{33} On March 3, 1855, acting

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{30} Senate Exec. Docs., 33d Cong., 1st Sess., No. 1, Part 2 (1853), p. 12.
\item \textsuperscript{32} Senate Exec. Docs., 32d Cong., 2d Sess., No. 1, Part 2 (1852), pp. 33-65 passim.
\item \textsuperscript{33} Senate Exec. Docs., 33d Cong., 2d Sess., No. 22 (1855), p. 1.
\end{itemize}
on the urgency of the President's request, Congress provided for the addition of two cavalry and two infantry regiments to the military establishment.34

As opposed to the appellations of dragoon and mounted riflemen of the three older organizations, the act of 1855 designated the two new regiments as cavalry. In a short period of time, officers and politicians with Northern sympathies accused Jefferson Davis of a conspiracy to appoint his friends and fellow Southerners to high positions in a new corps.35 This censure had little basis, because in 1854 Davis had urged that all mounted units be changed into one arm. He reasoned that new weapons accuracy no longer required cavalry to be light and heavy.36 Davis made the same entreaty to Congress again in 1855.37

Until July 1861, Congress ignored the Davis design. During the summer after the beginning of the Civil War, a legislative measure provided for the reorganization and redesignation of all five mounted units as cavalry regiments. Their numbers coincided numerically with the chronology of formation. The two dragoon units became the First and Second Cavalries, while the Regiment of Mounted Riflemen changed to the Third. Last but not least, the re-numbering rendered the two 1855 regiments as

34 U. S. Public Statutes at Large, X, 639 (1855). The two cavalry regiments had the same organization as the two older dragoon regiments.

35 Brackett, History of the United States Cavalry, p. 159.


the Fourth and Fifth Cavalries.  

Many general officers, including Commander of the Army Winfield Scott, attached little significance to the appreciation that soldiers had for the records and traditions of their regiments. Initially, the redesignation had an adverse effect on the morale of the enlisted personnel, but notwithstanding time, the matter was forgotten after a few years as younger troopers replaced the older ones through attrition.

Prior to the re-designation, the basic differences among cavalry, dragoons, and mounted riflemen had been merely in individual arms and dress uniforms. The Riflemen used the 1841 model of the Hall or Mississippi percussion-lock rifle. From activation, the Dragoons employed a shorter version of an earlier model of the Hall, which would be identified as an unrifled carbine today, but in the nineteenth century, the troops referred to the weapon as a musketoon. In 1855, the two cavalry regiments carried an improved design of the dragoon musketoon; however, prior to the commencement of the Civil War all mounted units had exchanged their muzzle loaders for the breech-loading Sharp's carbine.

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38 U. S. Public Statutes at Large, XII, 280, 289 (1861). In the reorganization, the regimental staff gained a quartermaster and commissary officer. It lost a major, the sergeant major, and the quartermaster sergeant. Each regiment had at least two and not more than three battalions of eight companies each. The battalion staff consisted of a major, an adjutant from one of the companies, a sergeant major, a quartermaster sergeant, a commissary sergeant, a hospital steward, a saddler sergeant, and a veterinary sergeant. Each company had the same three officers as the earlier authorizations, but added one first sergeant, one farrier, one saddler, and one wagoner. The number of privates increased to 72.

39 George Frederick Price, compiler, Across the Continent with the Fifth Cavalry (New York, 1883), p. 13.

40 Ibid., pp. 29-30. See also Herr, Story of the U. S. Cavalry, pp. 76-78.
All units wore the same basic dress uniforms, with only a difference in trim and headwear. Prior to 1851, regulations specified yellow as the trim for both dragoons' and riflemen's attire. After 1851, a change in the regulations directed the use of an off-yellow on dragoon dress, while green faced the uniforms of the riflemen. With the activation of the two cavalry regiments in 1855, yellow returned to the array of army branch colors. Upon consolidation of all mounted regiments in 1861, the entire cavalry service adopted yellow as its branch color. As for the headgear, dragoons and riflemen wore tall-crowned, billed shakos called "Albert hats," decorated with orange and green pompons. The cavalry regiments received a broad-brimmed hat, pinned up on the right side with yellow tassels, and a black ostrich feather in the crown. In 1858, the army adopted the same hat for all troops.41

The government issue to soldiers at the numerous farflung posts changed with the capriciousness of military planners. In 1833, the army had only fifteen forts in its Western Department. Of these garrisons, troops manned only seven west of the Mississippi River.42 Two, Fort Jesup, Louisiana, and Jefferson Barracks, Missouri, had little direct significances in Indian relations.43

41 *House Miscellaneous Documents*, 35th Congress, 1st Session, No. 127 (Washington, 1858), pp. 1-2. Although one officer complained and called the cavalry hat ungainly, the troops fondly referred to it as the "Fra Diavolo" because of its resemblance to the headpiece worn by a character in a contemporary play. Brackett, *History of the United States Cavalry*, pp. 159-161.

42 See Figure 1. In addition to Fort Jesup and Jefferson Barracks, the other posts west of the Mississippi River were Forts Snelling, Leavenworth, Gibson, Smith, and Towson.

43 *American State Papers, Military Affairs*, V, 151 (1833).
Figure 1 -- Forts West of the Mississippi River in 1830. U. S. National Park Service, Soldier and Brave and Military Affairs in the Trans-Mississippi West, Including a Guide to Historic Sites and Landmarks, introduction by Ray Allen Billington (New York, 1963), facing p. 4.
As the need for additional bases of operations increased, Congress authorized the construction of both permanent and temporary installations. The classifications of garrisons in the West depended upon their permanence. When campaigning, time permitting, the troops built little more housing than tents or huts. If the men remained in a location for one or more seasons, they developed a semi-permanent cantonment from materials available in the area.\(^4^4\) John Russell Bartlett, the commissioner for the survey of the United States-Mexican boundary in the early 1850's, related an example of troop expediency in the construction of a semi-permanent position when a scarcity of building materials existed. Bartlett told of one cantonment in New Mexico which had been fabricated with upright sticks filled in with mud. The troops found a shortage of conventional woodlands construction material in the desolate, arid area of the Southwestern United States.\(^4^5\)

The army classified its permanent installations as forts. These structures were usually walled, well protected, and located near a water supply. In many instances, the material to build the strongholds had been hauled for long distances to insure some degree of comfort for the posts' occupants. Most generally, the army contracted civilian labor to construct its forts.\(^4^6\)

\(^4^4\) Everett Dick, Vanguards of the Frontier (New York, 1941), pp. 75-76.

\(^4^5\) John Russell Bartlett, Personal Narrative of Exploration and Incidents in Texas, New Mexico, California, Sonora, and Chihuahua, Connected with the United States and Mexican Boundary Commission, During the Years, 1850, '51, '52, and '53 (New York, 1859), II, 390-393.

\(^4^6\) Dick, Vanguards of the Frontier, p. 76.
In December 1859, on the eve of the Civil War, the army manned approximately 130 permanent installations, of which slightly more than one-third were located in the Great Plains, Texas, and New Mexico. A lack of manpower magnified the problem of garrisoning these fortifications. With an effective strength of 11,000 men, the army also had the responsibility for policing 3,000,000 square miles of area from the first tier of states west of the Mississippi River to the Pacific Ocean.47

The responsibility for patrolling the vast stretches of territory west of the Mississippi River fell to five mounted regiments. By the nature of their mobility, the cavalrymen were particularly adapted and were effectively used to patrol the miles of routes and to suppress Indian opposition to infringement upon their land by white settlers. The peculiarity of this mission led to the development of a strong sense of pride of unit by the troopers, first to company, then to regiment. Although separated from each other for years, many times when the smaller units met on the Great Plains, and even if only for a short time, the men greeted each other as if they had never been apart, simply out of allegiance to the same regiment. Owing to such a strong sense of loyalty to their units, the cavalrymen were able to accomplish their mission with far fewer men than thought necessary for the task, despite adverse conditions and hardships.48


48 Percival Green Lowe, Five Years a Dragoon ('49 to '54) and Other Adventures of the Great Plains, with an introduction by Don Russell (Norman, 1965), pp. 124-127.
CHAPTER II

RECRUITMENT

Prior to the Civil War, a small United States Army served mostly along a line of the far boundary of the first tier of states west of the Mississippi River, and in New Mexico and Texas. From 1815 until the Mexican War in 1846, the entire army never exceeded 12,000 men. In 1854, six years after the Mexican Cession, President Franklin Pierce listed the strength of the land military force as 10,745 officers and men. Of this number, 60 per cent were located in an area between the eastern edge of the Great Plains and the Rocky Mountains, and in Texas and New Mexico.

The men who filled the ranks of the regular army volunteered individually for service. They came from many walks of life and enlisted for many reasons. A few enrolled because they liked regimentation, but most accepted a term of obligation for other incentives.

In 1839, the War Department permitted a surgeon to make a survey to determine the reasons that men joined the army. Although not completely valid, his findings did reflect some of the motivations which

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1 For the locations of the military frontier from 1837 to 1861, see Figures 2 and 3.

2 Senate Executive Documents, 33d Congress, 2d Session, No. 1 (Washington, 1854), pp. 3-5, 54-63.

3 Percival Green Lowe, Five Years a Dragoon ('49 to '54) and Other Adventures of the Great Plains, introduction by Don Russell (Norman, 1965), p. 3.
Figure 2 -- Great Plains Troop Locations, 1837. Louise Barry, "The Fort Leavenworth-Fort Gibson Military Road and the Founding of Fort Scott," Kansas Historical Quarterly, XI (1942), facing 120.
caused men to turn to a military way of life. In one company of fifty-five men that the surgeon interviewed, nine out of ten subjects had enlisted because of problems over women. Forty-three were drunk or partially drunk at the time they took the oath of allegiance, and of these, thirteen had changed their names. About one-third of the entire group had been comfortable materially, with a higher than average education. Four had been lawyers, three doctors, and two ministers.  

Many of the more educated young men, who in their later lives wrote of their army experiences and the reasons that they enlisted, told of dreams of romantic adventure. One of the recruiting officers who aided to fill the ranks of the Regiment of Dragoons in 1833, Captain Philip St. George Cooke, wrote how he succeeded in gaining the attention of potential cavalrymen's imagination "... with the thought of scouring the far prairies on fine horses, amid buffalo and strange Indians; so much so, that they scarce listened to any discouraging particulars...." James Hildreth, one of the men recruited by a fellow officer of Cooke, told of having been charmed by thoughts of military life on the Plains with no idea of the degrading labor expected from soldiers.

4 Washington, Army and Navy Chronicle, June 13, 1839.
6 James Hildreth, Dragoon Campaigns to the Rocky Mountains, Being a History of the Enlistment, Organization, and First Campaigns of the Regiment of United States Dragoons; Together With Incidents of a Soldier's Life, and Sketches of Scenery and Indian Character (New York, 1836), p. 14. Although not detracting from the worth of the observations of the Hildreth book, former research editor of the Oklahoma Historical Society, Joseph Bradfield Thoburn, stated his doubts as to the authorship of Dragoon Campaigns to the Rockies. He based his assumption on the degree of military professionalism detected in the writing of a recruit, other writings with similar style, and the fact that Hildreth
Percival Green Lowe, who served as a first sergeant of Company B, First Regiment of Dragoons in the early 1850's, recalled essentially the same reason for enlisting as confessed by Hildreth. Lowe reminisced some fifty years after his military service that as a youth he had been filled with romantic notions of grandeur by the novels of James Fenimore Cooper and Sir Walter Scott. After he read about the 1832 explorations of Captain Benjamin L. E. Bonneville in the Rocky Mountains, Lowe no longer resisted the lure of adventure on the Great Plains. In 1849, he enlisted for five years in the First Regiment of Dragoons.

In 1859, another youth, John S. Kirwan, filled with similar romantic dreams as his predecessors, enlisted in the First Regiment of Cavalry at the age of eighteen without parental consent. He stated that the recruiting sergeant accepted him as twenty-two years of age while the officer in charge was inebriated.

As Kirwan had been able to do, many minors enlisted into the regular army. Once these young men found that military life was not as romantic as they dreamed, they applied for minority releases. The enlistment of minors became such a problem that in 1850 Congress revised the recruiting regulations in an attempt to exclude men under twenty-one years without parental consent. Evidently, this measure failed to was discharged because of disability prior to the 1834 campaigns narrated. See "Dragoon Campaigns to the Rocky Mountains," Chronicles of Oklahoma, VIII (1930), 45-51.

7 Lowe, Five Years a Dragoon, p. 3.


9 U. S. Public Statutes at Large, IX, 507 (1850).
bring satisfactory results, because in 1853 Secretary of War Charles Magill Conrad recommended in his annual report to Congress that violators should be forced to serve the remainder of their obligations or they would be guilty of defrauding the government.¹⁰

Over the years, the minimum and maximum ages for enlistment into the regular army varied. For example, in 1833, regulations circumscribed the limits as between twenty and thirty-five years of age.¹¹ Five years later, in 1838, Congress reduced the lower age limit to eighteen.¹² Finally, in 1850, an amendment to the regulations raised the minimum enlistment age to twenty-one without parental consent. This latter standard remained in effect until after the commencement of the Civil War in 1861. In contrast to the several changes of the minimum age for enlistment, the maximum requirement remained as established by Congress in 1833 throughout the period.¹³

Regulations permitted boys of a minimum age of fifteen years to enlist. Augustus Meyers, an army musician of the 1850's, wrote that he enlisted at the age of twelve years and nine months. According to Meyers, the recruiter accepted him after his widowed mother consented and informed the officer of her inability to support her family.¹⁴


¹¹Baltimore, Niles Weekly Register, March 23, 1833.

¹²Little Rock, Arkansas Gazette, August 29, 1838.

¹³U. S. Public Statutes at Large, IX, 507 (1850).

Many soldiers had reasons other than romantic dreams for enlisting. Sergeant Lowe told of fellow soldiers who joined the army because of failures in business. These individuals sought to lose their identity in the cavalry on the Great Plains. Lowe became quite friendly with one Kentuckian who suffered business losses in Louisville. After becoming discouraged, the man enlisted merely to hide from friends and have time to think. Others turned to the military way of life after disappointment in love or trouble with the law. Many times the law violators proved to be excellent soldiers.

An adverse attitude of the civilian population toward soldiers presented a minor barrier to the army recruiting service. This inimical civilian position posed more of a problem in the East than on the frontier. In 1833, James Hildreth, a private in Company B, Regiment of Dragoons, noted an exception to the usual adverse civilian attitude in the East. Upon activation of the Dragoons, Congress changed enlistment standards to prevent recruiters from accepting prospective soldiers who had records of convictions for any criminal offenses. Hildreth explained that as a result of the exclusion of former criminals, most of the men in his company had a higher level of education and came from higher social groups than had soldiers in older army units.

15Lowe, Five Years a Dragoon, pp. 5, 8.

16Samuel Emery Chamberlain, a dragoon of the late 1840's, categorized soldiers into three classes—the deadbeats, the old soldiers, and finally, the men who were first in a fight, kept their uniforms and equipment neat and clean, but served punishment in the guardhouse for minor infractions of regulations. He considered the latter two groups as good soldiers. See My Confessions (New York, 1956), pp. 186-187.

17U. S. Public Statutes at Large, IV, 647 (1833).

18Hildreth, Dragoon Campaigns to the Rockies, p. 45.
Pioneers on the western frontier appreciated the presence of the army regardless of the social status, educational level, or past records of its soldiers. Augustus Meyers wrote that while soldiers received little respect in the East, the appreciation shown by frontiersmen in areas threatened by wild Indians inspired men to serve well and even to reenlist.\(^\text{19}\)

Beyond the expectations of regimental officers, the Dragoons enlisted good men in 1833. Most of the troopers came from a higher social status and educational level, and possessed more moral fiber than their predecessors.\(^\text{20}\) Even the Eastern civilians appeared to have concurred with this idea. In 1835, when Captain Edwin Vose Sumner, commander of Company B, Regiment of Dragoons and later major general in the Union Army, left Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, by riverboat packet for the West, the editor of the Chronicle, a local newspaper, described the men accompanying the officer as the finest group of soldiers he had seen. The editor gave the reasons for the basis of his observations as being that the men were of sober habit and that good character was a prerequisite for enlistment into the Dragoons.\(^\text{21}\)

During periods of economic recession and resulting high unemployment, the army had little trouble finding potential candidates for enlistment. James A. Bennett, a dragoon of the 1850's, in New Mexico, wrote that he wandered around unemployed and hungry in Rochester,

\(^{19}\)Meyers, Ten Years in the Ranks, p. 22.

\(^{20}\)Hildreth, Dragoon Campaigns to the Rockies, p. 45.

\(^{21}\)Washington, Army and Navy Chronicle, April 16, 1835.
New York, until he chanced to meet a reenlisting soldier who told of the good board, clothing, pay, and medical attention offered by the army. Bennett enlisted for five years in the hope of being sent to the California gold fields, but instead he served many years in New Mexico. Upon completion of his first term of service, Bennett stayed out a few weeks and then reenlisted for another five years.  

In 1852, enlisted men from the state of New York amounted to almost one-half of the army's total strength, of which two-thirds entered the army as residents of New York City. An equally important statistic revealed that of the 5,000 recruits accepted in the year ending September, 1851, aliens totaled 3,516. Of these unnaturalized residents, men with Irish citizenship constituted 60 per cent of the aggregate. Germans ranked second in the numbers of enlistments for that one year. They comprised slightly over 17 per cent of the total number recruits accepted.  

Until 1838, the United States Army refused to enlist aliens. In July of that year, a general order amended enlistment regulations to permit the recruitment of sober, non-naturalized residents who understood the English language and were free from disease. Prior to the political unrest in the Holy Roman Empire, economic depression in Great Britain, and a potato famine in Ireland in the 1840's, only a minimal

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24 Ibid., p. 626.
number of aliens took advantage of the 1838 change to enlistment regulations. By 1852, of the approximately 16,000 men who offered themselves for enlistment, 15 per cent were rejected because of failure to understand the English language.

Sergeant Lowe told of one lawyer who left Ireland in 1848, but had been unable to find employment in New York. The nearly destitute individual turned to the military service as a means of livelihood to keep from resorting to begging. Eugene Bandel, a German immigrant living with his uncle in Washington, D.C., was lured to the West in search of employment. By the time he reached St. Louis, Missouri, Bandel had neither money nor a job. Rather than ask the uncle for help, Bandel enlisted. Although not assigned to a cavalry unit, Bandel campaigned each summer with the pony soldiers and spent the winters in the same cantonment areas with them. Many aliens who enlisted as Bandel had, later left the service and settled on the frontier.

Contrary to regulations, deserters from foreign armies enlisted but faced rejection when detected. Officials reasoned that a deserter from one army would likely desert from another one. Most foreign army deserters found in the United States Army were Englishmen who absented


27 Lowe, *Five Years a Dragoon*, p. 39.

themselves while serving in Canada. Lowe told of one who acted as senior non-commissioned officer with a recruit packet traveling from Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania, to the West. Lowe described him as resolute with the toughs but with a trait of permissiveness when offered a bottle of whiskey.

Even though aliens predominated after mid-nineteenth century, patriotism had been a guiding reason for native Americans to present themselves for enlistment during the Mexican War. For example, the Adjutant General kept no figures on the number of men who tried to enlist prior to the Mexican conflict, but in the years following the war, an average of 10,000 men tried to enlist each year. As previously shown, the majority of these men were aliens, but in 1847, of the 200,000 men who offered their services to the United States Army, the vast majority were native-born American motivated by a desire for national service.

The occupations of the recruits in the frontier cavalry are of particular interest to an observer of the period. The majority of enlistees were either farm or industrial laborers seeking adventure on the Great Plains. Other than laborers, the largest proportion of enlistees in descending order by occupations were various types of mechanics, clerks, shoemakers, musicians, carpenters, and blacksmiths. The men of these few trades, when coalesced with reenlistees, constituted the


30 Lowe, Five Years a Dragoon, p. 16.

majority of the soldiers accepted for service in the army. Although artisans, artists, and men of the professions joined the ranks of the army as enlisted men, their numbers were minimal compared with the unskilled trades. 32

Over the years the terms of enlistment varied. Commencing with March 2, 1833, Congress reduced the term of obligation to three years. 33 The short term remained the standard until 1838, at which time Congress again extended the length of obligation to five years, where it remained until after the beginning of the Civil War. 34 In the summer of 1861, Congress re-established a three-year term as the period of obligation for enlistment into the regular army. 35

The observance of set physical standards for enlistees varied with the recruiter. The regulations of 1838 stated that prospective candidates for enlistment should be men "... at least five feet five inches high, who are effective, able bodied, ... sober, [and] free from disease..." 36 P. G. Lowe told of men who measured less than the minimum height and weighed as little as one hundred pounds. He summarized recruitment with the pithy statement "Endurance was the test; all else was waived." 37

32 Ibid., pp. 630-632.
33 U. S. Public Statutes at Large, IV, 647 (1833).
34 U. S. Public Statutes at Large, V, 258 (1838).
35 U. S. Public Statutes at Large, XII, 281 (1861).
36 Washington, Army and Navy Chronicle, May 9, 1839, citing U. S. Army General Order 25, dated July 20, 1838. In 1847, the minimum height was reduced to 5 feet 3 inches. See General Regulations for the United States Army (Washington, 1847), p. 134.
37 Lowe, Five Years a Dragoon, p. 5.
In addition to the disregard of physical standards, Lowe recalled the leniency with which the recruiting officer stretched regulations concerning the sober habit requirement. An individual who was under the influence of alcohol would not be accepted; however, once he sobered no inquiry was made of his habits. \(^{38}\) James Bennett told of one man who enlisted at Rochester, New York, in the early 1850's. Despite the person's condition, which approximated delirium tremens, the recruiting officer accepted the individual. \(^{39}\) Moral character adduced no bar to enlistment. The army changed a man with properly applied discipline. \(^{40}\)

Prior to 1838, recruits were accompanied by an officer returning to duty in the West after a leave of absence, or expressly dispatched to the East for that purpose. In earlier years, immediately after the activation of the Dragoons, the new soldiers usually went to Jefferson Barracks, Missouri, where they received weapons and horses, then marched overland to their units. Recruits assigned to units stationed near water routes traveled to their destination by riverboat. This system had serious drawbacks. Frequently, the new soldiers enlisted from eastern urban areas; therefore, in addition to having little knowledge about horsemanship, they probably knew even less about the use of weapons or how to survive in the wild outdoors. \(^{41}\)

In 1838, to obviate the problems created by shipping recruits directly to the frontier, the army designated Carlisle Barracks,

\(^{38}\)Ibid.  
\(^{39}\)Bennett, *Forts and Forays*, p. 34.  
\(^{40}\)Lowe, *Five Years a Dragoon*, p. 5.  
\(^{41}\)Hildreth, *Dragoon Campaigns to the Rockies*, p. 19.
Pennsylvania, a Revolutionary War military prison camp for English soldiers, as the cavalry training depot. A cadre retained cavalry mounts at the post for use in instructing trainees in the rudiments of horsemanship.\(^{42}\) In addition to basic equestrian skills, non-commissioned officers taught the recruits in the care and use of their weapons. Organized target practice did not become a part of the orientation either for recruits or regular troops until 1858. Prior to that time, the army neglected to give its personnel formal training in one of the necessities of soldiering—marksmanship practice. Nevertheless, the 1838 innovation of recruit depots afforded the cavalry a chance to introduce new men to a completely different way of life without the hazards and hardships of earlier years.\(^{43}\)

Non-commissioned officers drilled the trainees both with and without weapons for at least one-half of the training day. Although the routine varied constantly, dismounted drill usually took place in the mornings, while in the afternoons, corporals and sergeants instructed the recruits in mounted training and basic unit formations.\(^{44}\)

As has been shown, the meager training received by the recruits at the eastern depot probably aided in assuring the safe arrival of the replacements to their units in the West. On the other hand, the quantity of a ration seemed to have been sufficient to satisfy the hunger of an average individual; but from the accounts of the enlisted men who

\(^{42}\)Lowe, *Five Years a Dragoon*, pp. 5n, 7.

\(^{43}\)Utley, *Frontiersmen in Blue*, pp. 41-42.

\(^{44}\)Lowe, *Five Years a Dragoon*, p. 6; See also Bennett, *Forts and Forays*, p. 5.
ate the food, their meals appear to have been little more than the minimum for survival. One individual recalled that poor food conveyed to him a first impression of the army. On the recruit's first day in service, stewed apples, black coffee with only sugar, and a four-ounce slice of bread composed his evening meal. For the first six weeks that he remained at the depot, the individual's evening meals continued with the same unpalatable array, with the exception that occasionally the quartermaster substituted molasses for the apples.  

John Kirwan claimed that his first meal consisted only of hardtack and cabbage soup. Augustus Meyers reminisced that a bowl of rice soup, desiccated or dehydrated vegetables, a small piece of boiled beef, and a four-ounce slice of bread constituted a typical dinner at a recruit depot. About three times a week, bean soup with boiled salt pork or bacon added to the menu's variety. At rare intervals, one or two boiled potatoes augmented the sparse diet as a delicacy.  

Although the army issued most of the authorized clothing at the depot, recruiters gave the enlistees a few necessary items. Upon receipt of the particles of military uniform, the recruits disposed of

45Meyers, Ten Years in the Ranks, p. 3.


47Meyers, Ten Years in the Ranks, pp. 6-7. The quantity of food in the army ration or one man's provisions for one day varied over the years, but the type of fare remained generally the same. In the 1850's, a ration consisted of three-quarters of a pound of pork or bacon or one and one-quarter pounds of fresh or salt beef, and eighteen ounces of bread or flour. Beans, rice, desiccated vegetables, coffee, tea, sugar, vinegar, and salt, in addition to soap and candles were issued in bulk per one hundred rations. Lowe, Five Years a Dragoon, p. 19n. See also Bandel, Frontier Life in the Army, pp. 105, 122.
their civilian clothes in any expedient way. Lowe gave his garments to
the recruiting sergeant, who engaged a tailor to outfit the young trooper
with two complete fatigue uniforms and an overcoat. Another enlistee
recalled that he sold his civilian clothing at random as he received
his articles of uniform. James Bennett noted an exception to the dis-
posal of clothing by sale. He told of one dirty and ragged individual
whose recruiting sergeant issued uniforms immediately after the oath of
allegiance. Then the non-commissioned officer ordered the lice-covered
recruit to remove his civilian clothing and burn it.

Generally, the daily routine in a recruit depot followed a similar
pattern as in a regular unit. Reveille came at daylight, signaled by
the bugler. After a short period of time to allow the troops to wash,
they assembled for roll call formation. After Reveille, the bugler
sounded Peas-Upon-a-Trencher for breakfast.

After breakfast, the soldiers cleaned their barracks and arranged
their equipment neatly on shelves in the squad bays. While the majority
of the recruits policed their barracks, the first sergeants marched
those personnel going on sick call to the dispensary. At eight o'clock
the bugler sounded Drill Call.

At the first drill call formation, the first sergeants inspected
the recruits detailed for guard duty. Upon completion of the preliminary

48Lowe, Five Years a Dragoon, p. 4.
49Meyers, Ten Years in the Ranks, p. 10.
50Bennett, Ports and Forays, p. 34.
51Meyers, Ten Years in the Ranks, p. 4.
52Ibid., pp. 5, 7.
inspection, the company top sergeants marched the trainees to the main
parade ground, where the adjutant, the officer of the day, and the ser-
geant major conducted a formal mounting of the guard. As in regular
units, the officer of the guard selected the most soldierly recruit as
orderly for the post commander. The remainder of the detail then con-
stituted the garrison guard for the next twenty-four hours.53

On Saturday, part of the trainees scrubbed and cleaned the barracks
thoroughly in preparation for a mandatory Sunday morning inspection
while the remainder of the men trained. On Sunday, the post commander
inspected the recruits both in ranks and in the barracks. After the
minute inspection, the officers encouraged the trainees to attend chapel
services. Regulations permitted free time for the recruits on Sunday
afternoon until retreat, or the flag-lowering ceremony, at which time
all personnel of the post participated in a dress parade.54

Upon arrival at the depot, a recruit's company quartermaster ser-
geant permitted the trainee to select a bed of his choice. Until 1853,
the type of cots used by the army folded together during the day, but
at night they unfolded to make a bed for two men. For obvious reasons,
the army changed to single bunking. Prior to the change and even with
the system of stacked beds after 1853, custom dictated that a soldier
select his bunk mate or "bunkie."55

53 Ibid., p. 5.

54 Army Regulation of 1847, p. 81; see also, Meyers, Ten Years in
the Ranks, pp. 7-8.

55 Martin Lalor Crimmins, editor, "Notes and Documents: Freeman's
Report on the Eighth Military Department," Southwestern Historical
Quarterly, LII (1948), 107.
Military personnel found off-post recreation limited around the locality of Carlisle Barracks. The town of Carlisle had a population of only seven thousand as late as 1850. The most used recreation facility of the town, a distillery located on the edge of the corporation's limits, sold whiskey for 12½ cents, or one bit, a quart. The men had little trouble in reaching the recreation area by crossing a footpath over a river; however, after a few drinks of refreshment, problems of navigating the narrow stream bridge plagued post-bound soldiers.  

Older soldiers constantly hazed recruits. Sergeant Lowe told of an incident with a bully whom he subdued with the edge of a dull cavalry saber which served more as a club than a cutting instrument. For this act, Lowe received no punishment, merely a verbal reprimand from the officer of the day.  

Although not at fault, recruits who became involved in such frays as the one recounted by Lowe found themselves on the next levy to the West. Only the least trouble-prone recruits who made the most soldierly appearance remained at the depot as permanent party or cadre personnel.  

Upon departure from the depot, the recruits participated in their first elaborate military ceremony. If non-commissioned officers were unavailable to accompany a packet to the West, the escort officer appointed one of the more soldierly and mature privates to act as lance corporal or sergeant, depending on the size of the levy. Usually a band

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56 Meyers, *Ten Years in the Ranks*, pp. 36-37.  
57 Lowe, *Five Years a Dragoon*, pp. 8-10.  
58 Ibid., pp. 10-11.
preceded the march off-post while a detail composed of permanent party personnel provided an honor guard. 59

The interior route used to transport the replacements to the frontier began by canal boat on the Susquehanna River at Harrisburg. Upon arrival at Hollidaysburg, a portage lifted the passengers and boats over the Allegheny Mountains. On the western side of the mountains, another canal followed the Conemough and Allegheny Rivers to Pittsburgh, where the mode of transportation changed to steamboat destined for St. Louis, Missouri. By 1861, troops made the entire trip by rail. 60

In 1846, after the annexation of Texas, troops assigned to the Southwest from the East traveled by ocean steamer to Galveston or Indianola. From these two Gulf Coast ports, military personnel and their dependents journeyed overland to their points of destination. Evidently, few well-mannered or gentle folks purchased passage on the ocean steamers. The wife of one officer who was accustomed to the cultured East wrote of her shock at the signs on the walls of her cabin. One heralded "Gents requested not to spit on the walls!" Another one demanded that men passengers "Keep their boots off the bed clothes!" 61

In traveling the interior route, replacements encountered a slight delay upon arrival at Jefferson Barracks, Missouri, a post ten miles

59 Meyers, Ten Years in the Ranks, pp. 17, 18.

60 Lowe, Five Years a Dragoon, p. 11. See Figure 4. For a description of the development of modes of transportation to the West, see George Rogers Taylor, The Transportation Revolution, 1815-1860 (New York, 1951), pp. 43-44.

Figure 4 -- Water Route to the West. George Rogers Taylor, The Transportation Revolution, 1815-1860 (New York, 1951), p. 35.
south of St. Louis on the banks of the Mississippi River. As soon as possible after arrival at the permanent post, the young soldiers continued their journey to their destination on the Great Plains either by an overland route or by steamboat. The distances the troopers rode when traveling by water depended on the river levels or conditions. For example, soldiers destined for Fort Leavenworth in present-day Kansas, walked as much as 300 miles when low temperatures froze over the Missouri River.  

Even the boat rides up the western river subjected the men to hardships. When a lack of precipitation lowered the streams' water levels, the old side-wheelers often grounded on sand bars. Sometimes the extraction of a boat took several days. While a vessel's crew conducted salvage operations, occasionally a shortage of rations occurred. At other times, a lack of clean, fresh water forced the passengers to drink muddy river water. To keep the larger pieces of sediment from entering their mouths, the people used handkerchiefs or some other cloth over the top of drinking containers to strain out the larger particles of trash. A common occurrence was for a wooden boat to strike a snag in an always changing river channel, and sink.  

Frequently, the army sent replacements unarmed across the prairies to join their units. If these men suffered danger of attack by wild 

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62 Lowe, _Five Years a Dragoon_, p. 11.  
64 Meyers, _Ten Years in the Ranks_, pp. 49-51.
Indians, an armed escort of experienced soldiers accompanied the recruits on their march. 65

Although soldiers faced constant dangers and hardships on the frontier during the period 1833 to 1861, the army never lacked sufficient applicants from which to select the most physically qualified men for its always fast dwindling ranks. 66 What lured the men to the hardships and hazards with the frontier cavalry? Probably the answer to the question can be found in several reasons as expressed by the men and contemporaneous observers, and in the Surgeon General's statistics for the period. These sources indicated that during periods of economic recession, a large portion of the soldiers sought temporary employment in the ranks of the army. 67 At other times, romantic dreams of adventure and glory in the Great Plains lured men to the recruiters. 68

65 Ibid., p. 18.


67 Ibid.

68 George Catlin, North American Indians, Being Letters and Notes of Their Manners, Customs, and the Conditions, Written During Eight Years' Travel Amongst the Wildest Tribes of Indians in North America, 1832-1839 (Philadelphia, 1913), II, 43. See also Lowe, Five Years a Dragoon; Cooke, Scenes and Adventures, p. 201.
CHAPTER III

ROUTINE AT THE WESTERN POSTS

When a recruit arrived at his new duty station in the West, most likely he found his new unit in garrison the greater part of the year. Usually, the troops went into quarters in the late fall and did not return to field duty until early summer, when the grass reached a sufficient growth stage to sustain horses. While in garrison, the daily scheduled routine of the troops varied little from that of the recruit depot in the East.¹

As in the depot of the East, bugle calls announced regularly scheduled daily formations. The number of these signals increased over the years. For example, the Cavalry Tactics Manual of 1827 gave descriptions of twenty-three bugle calls which directed the routine of the troopers both in garrison and in the field.² By 1841, the number had increased to twenty-seven, plus ten others for service as skirmishers or as directions to small unit tactics. As has been noted, the majority of the calls served as a communication technique for troops in cantonment.³

¹Eugene Bandel, Frontier Life in the Army, 1854-1861, translated by Olga Bandel and Richard Jente, edited by Ralph Bieber (Glendale, 1932), p. 115.


The importance of buglers as an essential part of the mounted units was reflected by the tables of organization, which allowed two of the musicians per company.  

One officer's wife recalled that a military signal marked each hour of the day. She thought the routine seemed to break the monotony of an extremely dull life in isolation. The regularly scheduled calls began with Reveille at daybreak and ended with Tattoo at night. The sound of the last call notified the troops to extinguish all lights and go to bed.

Between Reveille and a general work and drill call formation at eight o'clock in the morning, several other routines had been completed. Immediately after Reveille the bugler sounded two calls in sequence which signaled the men to move to the stables and water their horses. After this duty had been performed, Peas-Upon-a-Trencher summoned the troops to their "junk and hard bread," or breakfast.

After breakfast the company first sergeants addressed themselves to their two most important daily duties--sick call and guardmounting. Upon the sounding of Sick Call by the bugler, the first sergeants marched their ill personnel to the dispensary. At the medical facility the top sergeants presented the company sick books to the unit or post surgeon and surrendered responsibility for the ill personnel to dispensary

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6. Ibid.
officials. This ritual served an important purpose because later claims for disability depended upon the old sick reports. Although surgeons followed the procedure on larger posts, the practice changed as the army moved farther west where the percentage of military installation with doctors for duty decreased. At locations without physicians, a private with some intelligence and knowledge of pharmacopoeia administered medical care. His duties were to dispense the medicines and, where able, to diagnose illnesses of the sick. The troops at a post which did have a surgeon considered his presence fortunate, even if he was burdened with an additional duty of making meteorological observations when not attending the sick.

Considering the hazards of duty and the lack of qualified medical personnel, cavalry units fortunately experienced a low death rate except during the years of cholera epidemics. Although some deaths occurred each year from the dread disease, epidemics seemed to have

7 General Regulations for the United States Army (Washington, 1847), p. 69.


9 Lydia Spencer Lane, I Married a Soldier, or, Old Days in the Old Army (Albuquerque, 1964), p. 100.


11 Senate Executive Documents, 33d Congress, 2d Session, No. 1, Part 2 (Washington, 1854), p. 82. This practice began in 1819. After 1842, the observations were published as a separate part of the surgeon's medical statistics reports.
supervened in 1834, 1849, and 1855.\textsuperscript{12} According to statistics and eyewitness accounts, 1849 was probably the worst of the three epidemic years.\textsuperscript{13}

As the intensity of cholera increased, soldiers turned to their own cures and preventions.\textsuperscript{14} In 1849, Secretary of the Treasury Robert J. Walker suggested a typical cure for the fatal disease in a letter to a newspaper. The Secretary's principal point emphasized that the victim's body temperature should be aroused to cause quick passage of the germ. To abet the passage of the cholera germ from the patient's body, Walker suggested a large dose of calomel, a strong purgative, mixed with red pepper. As a means of keeping the body temperature high, a massage of the cholera victim's body with some stimulating ointment followed the ministration of the dosage of internal medication.\textsuperscript{15} Research revealed no statistics of the effect of home or accepted medical cures; however, evidence of a failure of all treatment is indicated by statistics published prior to the Civil War.\textsuperscript{16}

Other diseases to which the soldiers on the western frontier succumbed varied with the locations of service. For instance, the most

\textsuperscript{12}Senate Exec. Docs., 34th Cong., 1st Sess., No. 96 (1855), pp. 367, 368. See also Little Rock, \textit{Arkansas Gazette}, April 29, November 4, 1834. Baltimore, \textit{Niles Register}, March 15, April 12, September 20, 27, 1834.

\textsuperscript{13}Senate Exec. Docs., 34th Cong., 1st Sess., No. 96 (1855), p. 493. See also Richard W. Johnson, \textit{A Soldier's Reminiscences in Peace and War} (Philadelphia, 1886), p. 34.


\textsuperscript{15}Clarksville, Texas, \textit{Northern Standard}, February 3, 1849.

\textsuperscript{16}Senate Exec. Docs., 34th Cong., 1st Sess., No. 96 (1855), pp. 266-469 passim.
common cause of death in the New Mexico Territory occurred from disorders of the digestive organs. The Surgeon General attributed this phenomenon more to the consumption of poisonous liquor than to any other cause.\textsuperscript{17}

Although seldom fatal, scurvy prevailed as the chief ailment of troops at the more northern posts. This condition resulted from a shortage of fresh vegetables in colder climates. Once fresh vegetables became available, the scorbutic malady abated. The most readily suitable local remedy was to feed the troops wild onions, an uncultivated bulbous plant which grew wild on the prairie. In addition to onions, the men ate raw Irish potatoes when the vegetable could be shipped without freezing. By 1860, the army ration included liberal amounts of desiccated or dehydrated cake vegetables; however, only fresh plant food effectively prevented or cured scurvy.\textsuperscript{18}

Troops at northern posts suffered discomforts unrelated to diet. Other than a few light woolen items such as underwear, shirts, trousers, and a great coat, the army issued no suitable winter equipment with which an individual could withstand the extremely low temperatures of the Northern Plains. As a result of the lack of cold weather gear and the necessity of fatigue and guard details, large numbers of men experienced frostbite. Although seldom fatal, exposure to the cold did create discomfort and damage to the extremities of men's bodies.\textsuperscript{19}

Year after year, intermittent fever probably took more lives than any other one illness. More recent attempts at diagnoses of the

\textsuperscript{17}Ibid., p. 415.\textsuperscript{18}Senate Exec. Docs., 36th Cong., 1st Sess., No. 52 (1859), pp. 40, 50.\textsuperscript{19}Ibid., p. 39.
affliction have classified it as a combination of several infections such as malaria, typhoid, typhus, and dysentery. The cure used for the fever resulted in more fatalities than the disease itself. An afflicted individual already had too much bowel movement from the dysenteric inflammation. At the same time, as with most diagnoses of surgeons of the era, the cure-all for any illness prescribed a large dosage of calomel. The ministration of the purgative to a dysenteric patient resulted in the development of gangrene of the intestines, and thus, almost certain death. In 1834 over a period of four months, one-third of the 450 men of the Regiment of Dragoons succumbed to intermittent fever in their march to the Rocky Mountains and return.

Finally, although only occasionally terminal, one of the most prevalent maladies which plagued the frontier soldiers was the so-called social diseases--the various forms of venereal infections. In his report to Congress in 1860, the Surgeon General indicated that soldiers serving in the more northern Great Plains were less prone to contact venereal infections because of the "... great virtue or inaccessibility of neighboring women." In contrast to this, the susceptibility of the personnel stationed in Texas was great, while those in New Mexico had

20 Rupert Norval Richardson, The Frontier of Northwest Texas, 1846 to 1876, Advance and Defense by the Pioneer Settlers of the Cross Timbers and Prairies (Glendale, 1963), pp. 161, 162.


22 Little Rock, Arkansas Gazette, November 24, 1834.

the highest venereal disease rate of any army department. The Surgeon General attributed this phenomenon to the easier soldier contacts with Indian women in the far Southwest.\textsuperscript{24}

An observer of the period prior to the Civil War finds several interesting home cures used for various ailments suffered by the soldiers at isolated post which lacked medical personnel. As previously noted, the men dug wild onions or ate raw Irish potatoes to arrest the scurvy. The most common remedy for a snake-bite prescribed a large drink of whiskey for the victim. An individual afflicted with the measles was shut in a darkened room and then fed on a hot liquid diet. Probably the most unique treatment occurred with efforts to stop a bleeding wound. Clean clay was applied directly over the lesion. Almost as unusual as the method used to stop bleeding wounds, an individual with a skin burn received a poultice of cow dung applied to the damaged area. By the time of the Civil War, the burn treatment had changed to the use of sheep tallow, resin, and beeswax. If a person survived his injury, the shock of the cure most likely claimed his life.\textsuperscript{25}

From the description of the illnesses and of the cures, the apparent chances of survival on the frontier do not seem to have been very great; however, upon inspection of the Surgeon General's reports from 1839 through 1855, excluding the period of the Mexican War, one finds that only 2 per cent of the army's mean strength died annually.\textsuperscript{26} More

\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., pp. 198-204, 230-233, 276-279 passim. See also Senate Exec. Docs., 34th Cong., 1st Sess., No. 96 (1855), pp. 174-189, 385, 408-411 passim.

\textsuperscript{25} Richardson, Frontier of Northwest Texas, pp. 162-163.

\textsuperscript{26} Senate Exec. Docs., 34th Cong., 1st Sess., No. 96 (1855), p. 168.
important, during the period 1855 to 1860, the ratio decreased to a figure of slightly more than 1 per cent. Although these rates included the entire army, the Departments of Texas and New Mexico had a higher percentage of deaths than the overall average. Excluding cholera, New Mexico had an annual fatality rate of 2.9 per cent, as compared to a 2.7 per cent for Texas. If the deaths from cholera were added, the number of fatalities generally doubled.

The second morning ritual prior to the summoning of all troops to drill and work call at eight o'clock was guardmounting. About the time that the first sergeants returned from escorting the "sick, lame, and lazy" to the dispensary, the bugler sounded a thirty-minute warning for the guard detail to repair to the garrison or regimental parade ground. At that time, the first sergeants, superintended by company officers, used an allotted ten minutes to make a quick check of their unit guard details.

After the brief scrutiny, the first sergeants marched their details to the parade ground, where they fell in formation to the left of any troops already there. While the officer of the guard conducted a minute inspection, the first sergeants remained in the rear of the guardmount with extra men. The top non-commissioned officers used these replacements as substitutes for any individual unfortunate enough to be rejected

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29 Meyers, Ten Years in the Ranks, pp. 5-6.
30 Army Regulations of 1847, p. 97.
by the inspection officer. The neatest and most knowledgeable individual at the guardmount was honored by selection as the colonel's orderly.31 The sergeant of the guard marched the remainder of the detail to the guardhouse for a twenty-four-hour tour of duty, while the first sergeants returned to their companies with the supernumeraries in time for the eight o'clock formation. 32

Although an arduous assignment, guard duty was considered as an honor by the troops. Men selected for the strenuous task remained under arms nearly one-half of the night, sometimes in the most adverse weather and conditions.33 In addition to general orders which applied equally to all guards on duty, each individual had special instructions about the peculiarities of his post. Very explicitly, regulations directed that sentinels know both sets of orders, and to insure compliance with these instructions, the officers of the day and of the guard inspected individuals on posts several times during a twenty-four hour period, particularly after dark.34

During the hours of darkness, guards used a countersign or oral exchange of secret words to identify personnel authorized to enter or leave a military installation. Although not a complete safeguard, the use of a challenge and password did discourage many unauthorized persons

31Meyers, Ten Years in the Ranks, pp. 5-6.
32Army Regulations of 1847, pp. 97, 99.
33Percival Green Lowe, Five Years a Dragoon ('49 to '54) and Other Adventures of the Great Plains, with an introduction by Don Russell (Norman, 1965), p. 85.
34Meyers, Ten Years in the Ranks, p. 122.
from attempting to enter or leave a military compound. Unless the danger of Indian attack threatened a containment, guards ceased to challenge after daylight.  

As with many other aspects of military life, guard duty had its lighter side. One story told in the ranks was about an unsuspecting officer of the day who went seriously about his duty inspecting guards on post. Upon questioning one sentry, the officer asked him what he would do if he saw a steamboat coming over the hill. The dutiful private replied that he would call the corporal of the guard to notify the officer of the day.

On a more serious side, sentry duty was not all pleasant, particularly in the Northern Plains, where the surgeons' meteorological observations indicated numerous extremely low temperatures during the winter. As previously mentioned, the necessity of outdoor locations of guard posts exposed men to the severe cold without benefit of suitable issued winter clothing, and even though individuals used their own purchased or fabricated items, frostbite still occurred.

By regulation each man was responsible for the rounds of ammunition issued to him for guard. Upon relief from the detail, each sentinel took the powder and ball from his musket for return to the quartermaster sergeant. Any damage to the firearms materials through neglect required monetary repayment from a careless soldier.

35 Army Regulations of 1847, pp. 109, 110.
36 Meyers, Ten Years in the Ranks, p. 122.
38 Army Regulations of 1847, p. 30.
In 1853, to improve the general marksmanship of the men on one post, an established standing operating procedure required the guards to discharge their musketoons at a distant target at the end of their tour of duty. A reward of one month's exemption from guard duty to any dragoon who placed his projectile in a three-and one-half-inch circle encouraged maximum effort. During the first three months, an average of twelve guards a day fired at the target, and, for all the effort, only four balls hit the bullseye. Even more indicative of the inaccuracy of the musketoon, the soldiers placed only eleven marks in a larger seventeen-inch circle which surrounded the smaller target. 39

At eight o'clock, the bugler sounded Drill Call for the troops to fall out for a general duty formation. A non-commissioned officer marched all men not on hard labor or fatigue detail to the company drill area. Squad corporals gave training instructions while superintended by the sergeants. 40

The Cavalry Tactics Manual of 1841 outlined an annual training cycle consisting of 250 lessons varying in length from one hour to one-half of a day. The sequence allocated three-quarters of the training time to instructions in mounted and dismounted drill for the inexperienced soldier. Once new men became accustomed to handling their horses, the training program moved to unit mounted training. Ideally, a training cycle began in the fall, when the companies moved into winter quarters,


40 Cavalry Tactics of 1841, pp. 20-22.
and was completed by the time the units returned to the Plains for their early summer campaigns. 41

In 1833, during the first few months after the creation of the Regiment of Dragoons, the officers found little printed material for instructions in cavalry drill. Captain Philip St. George Cooke, a company commander and later a major general in the Union Army, wrote that during the first drill sessions conducted for newly assigned officers, the entire regiment had only two cavalry tactics manuals. The officers had little or no previous cavalry training; therefore, while the commissioned personnel drilled, the enlisted men suffered and felt degraded on fatigue details constructing horse stables. It might be added that although the Dragoons thought the work degrading, they received an increase of fifteen cents a day in pay while on fatigue detail.42

When the troops finally began to drill, doubts of the success of those early sessions caused anxiety for the leaders of the ragged unit; however, after a few weeks the regiment shaped into a well-trained organization. As the unit became more organized, the fatigue details decreased. During the formative years of cavalry, drill consisted primarily of unit mounted training and rifle shooting, both mounted and dismounted. An individual fired his weapon for familiarization rather than to improve his marksmanship.43

41 Ibid.

42 Philip St. George Cooke, Scenes and Adventure in the Army: or, Romance of Military Life (Philadelphia, 1859), pp. 221, 224. See also U. S. Public Statutes at Large, III, 488 (1819).

43 Hildreth, Dragoon Campaigns to the Rockies, pp. 39-42, 96.
Until 1858, weapons familiarization and target practice, other than the special program previously mentioned for men coming off guard duty, consisted of a colligation of skirmish drills near the garrison. One soldier held the bridle of his and a comrade's horse while the other did the firing exercises. The firers formed a line of skirmishers, moved forward thirty or forty paces, lay down, fired, reloaded, arose and moved to the next position where they repeated the routine. The firers used anything in sight as a target, but seldom did they know if they hit the points of aim. Finally, in 1858, the War Department published a drill regulation for target practice and for the first time the army had some semblance of marksmanship training.

Men less bodily coordinated than others drilled in an "awkward squad." When non-commissioned officers considered these men to have been sufficiently conditioned to military drill, they returned the slow learners to their squads for training. Some of the awkward never adapted to military drill discipline. If possible, the first sergeants shuffled these uncoordinated individuals off to some menial task to insure their absence from the ranks at drill call. Some men deserted rather than suffer the humiliation of remaining in the awkward squad. In contrast to the treatment of the uncoordinated, any young soldier who joined a

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44 Everett Dick, Vanguards of the Frontier (New York, 1941), p. 74.
46 Hildreth, Dragoon Campaigns to the Rockies, p. 41.
48 Hildreth, Dragoon Campaigns to the Rockies, p. 41.
unit expected harassment from men with longer service. Percival Lowe reminisced that after one year in garrison and a summer campaign an individual was accepted as an old soldier.49

Similar to guard duty, drill also had its humorous side. Mrs. Egbert Viele, wife of a Mounted Rifle officer, wrote that she enjoyed watching her husband's company at mounted training. Owing to their inexperience and poor horsemanship, a common sight in the newly recruited unit disclosed several men dismounted, sprawled flat on their backs at one time. To really humiliate the hopeful equestrians, a company of the veteran Second Dragoons visited the Riflemen's Texas cantonment. From the description given by the officer's wife, the splendid array afforded by the Dragoons and their fine mounts had a most adverse effect on the Mounted Riflemen's morale. Notwithstanding the feeling of despair, after a few months the younger unit overcame its stigma of recruit and won the respect of the other mounted regiments.50

At the same time that most troops departed for drill, the first sergeants formed their fatigue details. If numerous prisoners were in the guardhouse, which was usually the case, requirements for details decreased. All privates performed general fatigue duty; however, the work performed on such tasks could not distinctly have been on fortifications or roads. The army regulation directed very specifically that only normal internal garrison housekeeping be performed as fatigue labor without monetary compensation.51 A morale problem could develop if

49Lowe, Five Years a Dragoon, p. 125.
50Viele, Following the Drum, pp. 222-223.
51Army Regulations of 1847, pp. 116-117.
troops were arbitrarily placed on laborious construction not directly connected with soldiering. Oddly enough, troopers did not seem to mind hard work of any type if it was administered as punishment for an infraction of regulations.  

In addition to the daily housekeeping chores, the quartermaster needed a detail to tend the grazing of all animals maintained by an installation, including beef cattle. During periods when Indian hostilities threatened, details gathered forage and returned it to garrison rather than chance losing all or part of the stock. In 1834, owing to a shortage of feed and forage and an unseasonably cold winter, the mounts of the Regiment of Dragoons underwent severe treatment. The unit sent daily details out of Fort Gibson to cut prairie hay in the vicinity of the post. After that first winter, the army made provisions for a daily ration of corn for cavalry mounts. Thereafter, military animals were exposed to food shortages for reasons other than neglect, as had been the case in 1833-1834.  

Owing to the dependence of the cavalry on their mounts, the care of the animals became a ritual. Although the army accepted less than the best for its weapons and equipment, the quartermaster purchased only

52 Hildreth, Dragoon Campaigns to the Rockies, pp. 44, 45. See also Meyers, Ten Years in the Ranks, pp. 116, 132.
54 Hildreth, Dragoon Campaigns to the Rockies, p. 83.
first-rate cavalry horses. Captain George H. Thomas, later major general in the Union Army, recalled that the mounts issued to the Second Regiment of Cavalry in 1855 consisted of some of the best horses in Kentucky. To give an example of the animal's durability, in 1861, after six years of constant campaigning in Texas, the regiment had 44 of approximately 500 original mounts still in service. Weak horses would not have survived the first march from Jefferson Barracks, Missouri, to Texas.56

When a unit needed new horses to replace condemned cavalry mounts, the department quartermaster advertised in local newspapers. The notification described the requisites for potential sales and where the seller should deliver the animals. When the horses finally arrived at the designated unit, non-commissioned officers had the first choice of remounts. After the sergeants and corporals selected, the privates who were in the most need of new horses had the second option. As a matter of last preference, if any horses remained unselected, any private who had reason to exchange for a new one was given the privilege.57

Upon formation of the Dragoons in 1833, Colonel Henry Dodge, the first regimental commander, designated separate color horses for each company.58 Upon the activation of subsequent regiments, this custom


57 Lowe, Five Years a Dragoon, p. 119.

58 Hildreth, Dragoon Campaigns to the Rockies, p. 51.
continued and over the years became a tradition.\textsuperscript{59}

In 1851, the quartermaster paid an average of $80 a cavalry mount.\textsuperscript{60}
In contrast to this price, in 1855, Congress appropriated funds to authorize payments as much as $150 a mount for the two new cavalry regiments.\textsuperscript{61} Evidently, even condemned cavalry horses were considered to be still serviceable by civilians. In 1860 at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, worn-out cavalry mounts sold for as much as $112 at public auction.\textsuperscript{62}

In any event, care of the horses in the cavalry developed into an exact art. Each morning the troops watered and fed the animals before breakfast. Likewise, prior to the troops' evening meal, they repaired to the stables to water and feed their mounts. The army preferred to feed corn-on-the-cob because of the ease with which an inexperienced trooper could detect spoilage. While on campaigns the troops carried shelled corn to conserve space, but seldom conveyed oats in the supply wagons. The husk on this particular grain tended to collect dust too easily in the sub-humid Great Plains climate.\textsuperscript{63}

In addition to a daily fatigue detail to care for the officers' and spare horses, each trooper groomed his own mount. If an animal were


\textsuperscript{63}\textsuperscript{Lowe, \textit{Five Years a Dragoon}, p. 75.}
ridden, the trooper washed the exercised animal's legs and rubbed them dry with strips of burlap. After caring for the animal's body, a soldier cleaned his horse's stall each day. Owing to the vast amount of attention given to cavalry horses, some soldiers bitterly complained of overcare of the animals. One officer wrote that such practice caused the horses to lack natural body protection to survive severe winter weather if perchance a unit were caught without shelter in emergency operations.

Although many other bugle calls echoed across a western garrison periodically each day, only a few pertained to the average trooper. During a routine day, Roast Beef signaled both noon and evening meals. At sunset, the final regular duty call sounded with Retreat. At this mass formation, the adjutant published the orders of the day and those men on duty for the night reported to their appointed places. From Retreat until approximately nine o'clock at night, the troops had permission to visit on post. At nine o'clock, the bugler sounded Tattoo, the final call of the day. This signal notified all men to return to their barracks.

Contrary to the usual specific signal for significant routines in garrison, no bugle call announced the company commander's inspection. In 1833, regulations designated Saturday as the day for the traditional

64 Ibid., p. 75.
66 Army Regulations of 1847, p. 69.
weekly affair. Sometimes prior to 1847, inspection day reverted to Sunday as it had been prior to 1833.67

In preparation for the commander's inspection, the troops thoroughly cleaned all articles of personal equipment, clothing, and weapons. They overhauled their bedding and dry-scrubbed the barracks floors. In addition to the living quarters, the men cleaned the kitchen and dining areas and arranged the company's cooking utensils in special wall recesses. On inspection day, the commander gave particular attention to the men's personal cleanliness and their equipment. 68

Although regulations directed commanders to diligently insist on the men's personal cleanliness, pre-Civil War soldiers lacked the standards of hygiene of an average individual today. During the summer, regulations required the troops to bathe at least once a week and to wash their feet two times during the same period.69 Evidently, commanders did not enforce the bathing requirement stringently, because in the mid-1850's, Eugene Bandel wrote that he took a bath on May 21, the first one that he had taken since the previous October.70

In contradiction to Bandel, another soldier recalled that failure of an individual to wash himself led to hygiene-conscious troops to take the laggard to the creek and scrub him with soap until his skin was raw.71 To obviate the problem of troops not bathing, many companies

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67 Benjamin Homans, editor, Military and Navy Magazine, II (September, 1833, to February, 1834), 252.
68 Army Regulations of 1847, pp. 25-28, 81.
69 Ibid., p. 28.
70 Bandel, Frontier Life in the Army, p. 134.
71 Meyers, Ten Years in the Ranks, p. 43.
cut barrels in half to be used as wash tubs. The men heated water in the kitchens and bathed in the dining rooms after the evening meals and until Tattoo.72

Generally, the same standards of personal cleanliness applied equally to all branches of the army. One exception to the regulation permitted the officers and men of cavalry regiments to wear mustaches.73 By use of their privilege to grow mustaches, cavalrmen devised a deception to circumvent punishment for appearing at inspection unshaven. When asked by the inspector about not having shaved, an individual merely informed the officer that he intended to raise a beard. No matter how apparent the deception, an inspecting officer usually took a soldier's intentions seriously, with provisions, of course, that the man let the beard grow for a satisfactory period of time.74

In brief, the routine of the western frontier cavalrmen in garrison changed little over the years. As the army moved farther west, contacts with civilization became less frequent, but daily routine of the mounted troops remained unchanged. Whereas drummers conditioned the reflexes of infantrymen, buglers performed that function in the cavalry. From the day a trooper reported for duty at some isolated outpost until his discharge, the staccato of a bugle regulated his life. This distinction,

72Lowe, Five Years a Dragoon, p. 76.


along with other differences, developed a sense of pride in the elite of the army and set them apart from the less fortunate soldiers.
CHAPTER IV

RATIONS, CLOTHING, PROMOTIONS, PAY, AND CARE OF THE DISABLED

Historians have written much criticism about the inadequacies of the frontier cavalrmen's material requisites, such as rations, clothing, pay, promotions, and provisions for the care of disabled personnel. Contrary to an assumption of insufficiencies, research by this author revealed that while the grade of excellence or quality failed to compare favorably with mid-twentieth century criteria, paradoxically, the troops of the pre-Civil War army had adequate quantities of material needs to live contentedly on while in garrison. Although this condition did not apply to the men while campaigning, their comforts equaled those of local contemporary civilian counterparts.1

In maintaining a relative standard of living for its soldiers, the army quartermaster faced many perplexing problems. Of the most unsurmountable barriers, a means to resupply the far-flung outposts in the vast prairie sea, caused the most concern. In 1818, the War Department made an attempt to improve the army's supply problems and at the same time supplement the troops' bland diet. A general order instructed military commanders to plant post kitchen gardens where at all feasible. Not only did the communication direct the planting of the small agricultural plots, it held garrison commanders accountable for any

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1 Averam B. Bender, "The Soldier in the Far West, 1848-1860," Pacific Historical Review, VIII (1939), 159-178 passim.

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deficiencies in "... cultivation, preservation, and proper distribution of the same..."  

Emphasis on gardening subsided over the years. After the acquisition of additional western territory by provisions of the Mexican Cession in 1848, concern for the cost of transportation to move needed supplies to distant outposts revived the idea but with a new aspect. In the spring of 1851, Secretary of War Charles Magill Conrad stated an interest in the planting of post gardens. More important than the tilling of the small plots of an almost inconsequential nature, however, the Secretary directed commanders to cultivate sizeable farms to relieve some of the burden on an overtaxed army quartermaster.

The program provided for the leasing of private tracts where an inadequacy of public domain existed. Whereas soldiers cultivated kitchen garden plots, under the new program commanders contracted with local laborers who received their pay from the proceeds of the sale of produce. The plan provided for commissary and quartermaster officers to purchase the crops from the military farms at St. Louis or New Orleans prices, depending upon the point of transaction. This innovation permitted the army to procure supplies at considerably lower prices than charged for the same items on local markets.

The first season after the inauguration of the military farm program, some posts cultivated extensive plots of land. For example, at

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2 American State Papers, Military Affairs, II, 265 (1818).


Fort Leavenworth in present-day Kansas, soldiers planted 1,332 acres of corn, oats, wheat, barley, and potatoes. From that acreage, the post earned an estimated $7,000 profit; however, contrary to the War Department directive, soldiers provided the labor for the cultivation. ⁵

In contrast to the size of the Fort Leavenworth operation, a scarcity of arable land in northern New Mexico restricted cultivation efforts at Fort Union. After an extensive search, the quartermaster obtained a lease on fifty acres of land twenty-five miles north of the fort. Although small in size, the New Mexican post realized a $300 profit, but again, the utilization of a detachment of troops provided the labor. ⁶

In 1852, the posts which realized profits in the previous year failed to yield sufficient produce to pay for the money expended for seeds. Two primary causes attributed to the failure. A drought supervened in the second year of the farm program. Equally important with the lack of precipitation, increased activity by the hostiles throughout the Great Plains, Texas, and New Mexico, required the utilization of all available troops in pursuit of the marauding Indians. ⁷

The wife of an officer of the Mounted Rifle Regiment wrote that the area around Ringgold Barracks, Texas, on the lower Rio Grande suffered from unseasonably dry weather in 1852. Not only did the lack of

⁵Ibid., p. 292.
⁶Robert W. Frazer, editor, Mansfield on the Condition of the Western Forts, 1843-1854 (Norman, 1963), p. 34.
rainfall retard the growth of plant life, the boat that delivered monthly supplies up the river grounded in the unusually shallow water. Before supplies could be moved overland, the quartermaster had only moldy flour and rancid pork in stock. The residents of the post failed to find necessities such as butter, milk, and bread in the small nearby village of Rio Grande City. 8

After observing the inconsistency of the military farm program, John Russell Bartlett, commissioner of the survey of the boundary between the United States and Mexico, recommended that the army cease its agricultural endeavors. Bartlett wrote that only constant pursuit offered the possibility of forcing the Comanches and the Apaches to desist in their depredations. Therefore, the commissioner of the boundary survey favored maximum utilization of the frontier cavalry even if the cost of transportation of supplies from the East doubled. 9

In a similar manner to Bartlett, one soldier complained that the troops at his post ate vegetables from the military garden only once or twice a week. He claimed that the amount of produce fed to the enlisted personnel amounted to only small proportion of the total gathered. On the other hand, the private claimed that officers and their families benefited most from the garden. 10

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9 John Russell Bartlett, Personal Narrative of Explorations and Incidents in Texas, New Mexico, California, Sonora, and Chihuahua, Connected with the United States and Mexican Boundary Commission, During the Years, 1850, '51, '52, and '53, II (New York, 1859), 388.

The kitchen gardens, and later the farms, furnished only a small portion of the supplies needed by the frontier army. To replenish the stock of rations, wood for fuel, and forage for the animals at a post, the Commissary General for Subsistence advertised in area newspapers to indicate the quantity of various items desired, the date of expected delivery, and the address for contractors to send their bids. \(^{11}\)

Although the prices of locally procured supplies remained relative to seasonal availability, most generally they exceeded those at the St. Louis and New Orleans markets. For example, in 1837, ear corn sold for $1.25 a bushel at the Gulf port city, whereas the army paid slightly less than $2.00 for the same quantity at Fort Gibson. \(^{12}\) Similarly, in 1852, corn sold for 44 cents a bushel at St. Louis while the same measure cost the army $1.20 in New Mexico. \(^{13}\)

In addition to the variations in the market prices according to location, seasonal availability also had an effect on the cost of forage. At Fort Crawford, in July, 1840, hay sold for $2.98 a ton. The following February, the price increased to approximately $9.00 a ton for the same quality fodder. \(^{14}\)

To its advantage, the army made the bulk of its purchases on the local market. In cases where the local market failed to provide sufficient quantities of supplies, the quartermaster transported from the

\(^{11}\) Little Rock, Arkansas Gazette, August 25, 1835.


\(^{14}\) Senate Docs., 26th Cong., 2d Sess., No. 97 (1840), p. 27.
more eastern markets. Prior to the annexation of Texas in 1845, because of the location of most frontier installations near navigable water, transportation costs remained minimal. The permanent post most distant from water was Fort Scott, located in present-day southeast Kansas, a distance of ninety miles north of Fort Gibson.  

By 1846, the distance to the installation farthest from navigable water increased to 800 miles. After the Texas annexation, the military shipped supplies other than those bought on local markets by water to Indianola on Matagorda Bay. At that point, wagons carried the goods overland to places as distant as El Paso and later southern New Mexico. Equally perplexing to an overtaxed supply system with the extended distances and numbers of landlocked posts added by the Mexican Cession, Congress authorized the establishment of several new cantonments in the western reaches of the old Louisiana Purchase Territory to provide protection for travelers on the Oregon Trail.  

The extended distances and added posts caused transportation costs to soar. In 1851, the Quartermaster General reported to Congress the rates paid to ship freight from Fort Leavenworth to posts farther west. Civilian contractors charged $7.75 for each one hundred pounds of goods carried to Fort Laramie, a distance of 637 miles overland. At the same time, the rate for the same quantity of supplies freighted to Santa Fe,


New Mexico, increased by slightly more than one dollar. Incidentally, the rates applied equally to all types of supplies. As a means to slash costs, the quartermaster shipped items destined for southern New Mexico overland from Indianola, Texas. 18

By 1859, the army had reduced overall transportation expenditures by two means. First, local producers provided most of the military's need. Second, the routes to formerly isolated posts had been improved, thereby reducing the previous inherent risks. 19 During the 1850's, the army conducted experiments with camels in an attempt to find more efficient means of transportation. Although the animals proved satisfactory, the Civil War interrupted further experimentation. After the war, the extension of the railroad across the continent discouraged any further suggestions for the use of dromedaries. 20

Contrary to the declining total cost for transportation of supplies in general, the individual food ration increased in price over the years. For example, in 1845, the subsistence officer estimated an army ration, or the issue of the daily food for one soldier, to have cost 12½ cents. Ten years later the cost of the same quantity of food increased to twice that amount, a point at which it remained until the Civil War. 21


In contrast to the always increasing cost of the army ration, the type and quantity of food changed little except as temporary necessity dictated. Each allocation of food contained three-quarters of a pound of pork or bacon. Occasionally the subsistence officer added variety to the soldiers' diet by substituting one and one-quarter pounds of fresh or salted beef for the pork products. 22

In addition to an apportionment of meat, each individual trooper received eighteen ounces of flour or soft bread, for which one pound of "hardtack" was sometimes substituted. A post fortunate enough to have a bakery saved and sold one-third of its authorized flour issue. The sutler handled the sale of the part of the ration. He deposited the money in a post fund for use to buy such things as cooking utensils, dishes, and other items needed for general housekeeping not issued by the army supply system. Other components of the daily issue or the so-called "small rations" included coffee, sugar, beans, peas, rice, salt, vinegar, desiccated vegetables, soap, and candles. The subsistence officer issued these items in bulk per one hundred troops. 24

Not only did the army fail to issue kitchen and dining equipment in which to prepare and to serve the soldiers' food, it made no provisions in the tables of organization for cooks. The daily details to prepare the meals came from the privates selected at random by the first sergeants. In addition to their work in the mess halls, the detailed men

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22 Meyers, Ten Years in the Ranks, p. 20.
23 Ibid.
fulfilled all of their regular duties and training.\textsuperscript{25}

As previously mentioned, conditions sometimes dictated temporary changes in the soldiers' diets. These modifications served two purposes. First, as a means of relief on an overburdened quartermaster, commanders permitted increases, reductions, supplementations, and substitutions of ration components as compelled by local availability. One instance of such a modification occurred in 1858. Colonel Albert Sidney Johnston, commander of an expedition to the Utah Territory, ordered that the flour and dried meat portions of the ration be decreased, whereas, owing to an availability of a supply of cattle locally, he permitted an increase in the amount of fresh beef by one-quarter of a pound daily.\textsuperscript{26}

A second reason which caused the army to modify its food components of the ration resulted from efforts to improve or protect the health of the troops. Between 1855 and 1860, in attempts to prevent scurvy, the War Department directed a supplementation of the rations with molasses and dried fruit at Northern Plains posts. This addition occurred after much urging by the Surgeon General.\textsuperscript{27}

Generally, during the late spring and summer months the troops had few problems in satisfying their hunger. The local farmers sometimes gave the men vegetables.\textsuperscript{28} More often the men donated a couple of


\textsuperscript{27}Senate Exec. Docs., 36th Cong., 1st Sess., No. 52 (1859), p. 37.

\textsuperscript{28}Meyers, \textit{Ten Years in the Ranks}, p. 36.
dollars each to buy extras for the mess hall tables. At other times after payday, the soldiers simply refused to eat the army rations, but depended upon the post sutler to supply their needs until the depletion of their money.

The troops easily supplemented their diets at most western installations by hunting wild game and buffalo, by fishing, and by gathering wild fruits and berries. Buffalo abounded on the Great Plains in particular. In 1855, at Fort Riley, Kansas Territory, soldiers left post on foot to shoot the animals. Once a kill was made, the hunter kept only the tongue, liver, heart, and "... cut a piece off the back. ..." The hunter then carried the delicacies back to camp to be cooked, while he left the remainder of the carcass on the prairie to rot.

In all areas of the Great Plains, Texas, and New Mexico, the streams seemed to have been well stocked with fish. One individual told of the men in his company catching catfish daily that weighed as much as fifty pounds.

An officer's wife wrote of the enjoyment of fishing for bass at her husband's New Mexico place of assignment. Although the woman did

29 Percival Green Lowe, *Five Years a Dragoon ('49 to '54) and Other Adventures of the Great Plains*, with an introduction by Don Russell (Norman, 1965), pp. 21, 76-77.

30 Bandel, *Frontier Life in the Army*, p. 105. Every military post had a sutler, or a civilian merchant with a monopoly. In return for his preferred status, the sutler paid twelve cents a month to the Post Fund for each officer and enlisted man present. The post commander established the sutler's prices and retained authority over him. See General Regulations for the United States Army (Washington, 1847), pp. 55-56.

31 Ibid., p. 79.

little more than bait the fishermen's hooks, she stated that a bass of usual size weighed six pounds. More important than entertainment from the sport, fishing also provided food for a change from the bland army ration.\(^{33}\)

When wild geese flew south for the winter and returned north in the spring, expedient soldiers devised means for killing the high flyers. They made shot pellets by pouring molded lead through a ladle into a container of cold water. When the lead cooled, hunters used the varying sized pellets like the scatter shot of a shotgun, but in a military rifle. One soldier wrote that he effectively used this method to kill geese by firing into large flocks of the birds.\(^{34}\)

On other occasions the troops resorted to malicious devices not only as a means to supplement their diets but also as a form of amusement. To find food, the men made raids on outlaying farms. In 1834, one private told of a foraging expedition that he and his two friends made on a local farmer's pigsty. After snatching three sucklings, the thieves butchered and hid the meat until nightfall. After they were sure that danger of detection had passed, the culprits brought their delicacies into the barracks for a feast.\(^{35}\)

\(^{33}\) Lydia Spencer (Blaney) Lane, *I Married a Soldier, or, Old Days in the Old Army* (Albuquerque, 1964), p. 31.

\(^{34}\) Meyers, *Ten Years in the Ranks*, p. 123.

Another soldier told of a trap used by the men of his company to lure unsuspecting pigs into camp. Augustus Meyers reminisced that while his unit bivouaced in a temporary camp in southeast Kansas, pigs wandered into the cantonment from nearby Fort Scott, in search of garbage. The men devised a lure whereby they tossed a large baited fish hook into the company street. As a porker chased the decoy into a tent, one soldier threw a blanket over the animal to suppress any squeal. Such ingenious contrivances rewarded a fortunate hunter and his friends with fresh pork that night.  

Although garrisons may have been located on the banks of streams, obtaining drinking water almost always presented a problem in the sub-humid West. In the Northern Plains, the streams froze over in severe winter weather and the men obtained water by cutting through the ice. Terrain barriers presented another hardship. The constructors of military posts generally located the fortifications on high river banks to avoid floods and pestilence found in lower, more marshy areas. When troops hauled filled water containers to a post from a nearby stream, steep inclines sometimes served as formidable obstacles to fatigue details.  

Equally perplexing with the difficulty of negotiating the river banks, the mud content of the water made it difficult to drink. To clear the water, troopers cut a prickly pear branch, burnt the stickers off for ease of handling, split the cactus open, and threw it into a container of the muddy liquid. Within a matter of a few minutes, the cactus

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36 Meyers, Ten Years in the Ranks, pp. 142-143.

37 Everett Dick, Vanguards of the Frontier (New York, 1941), p. 77.
absorbed the sediment and left the water clear and pure. In a more simple method, soldiers filled a jar stone with river water and placed it in an open, shady area where the breeze cooled the liquid by evaporation. Not only did the process cool the water to a low enough temperature to provide a refreshing drink, the procedure also permitted any mud to settle to the bottom of the jar. By such efforts, troops and the army quartermaster overcame ever-increasing difficulties in sustaining adequate food and water supplies.

At the same time that the troops experienced problems in their food and drink, their clothing issue proved no more satisfactory. In 1833, Congress left the Dragoon commander with the responsibility to decide the types of articles of uniform that best suited the needs of his regiment, with only one restriction. Lawmakers imposed the same $30.93 limitation on the Dragoon clothing allowance as already applied to the artillery and infantry soldiers.

Owing to Congressional limits on the amount of money authorized to be spent on uniforms, the quartermaster did not issue winter clothing other than flannel underwear, woolen overalls, and an overcoat. Many men fabricated their own outer garments from wolfskins, deer and buffalo hides, and calf leather. Troops managed to keep warm in extremely cold climates but only because commanders seldom enforced rigid uniform

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40 American State Papers, Military Affairs, V, 235-236 (1833).
41 Washington, Army and Navy Chronicle, March 26, 1835.
regulations. In addition to a lack of warm body clothing, each man received only two blankets, without regard to the extreme variations of temperatures between locations. Frequently, the men purchased buffalo robes from the Indians at prices as high as three dollars, in efforts to insure comfortable sleep.

Twenty buttons faced the 1833 dragoon dress uniform, while the field cotton tunic had seventeen. A soldier shined these brass ornaments for each of five daily formations. The trousers of the fatigue uniform were impractical white pantaloons. After the first year of campaigning, dragoon leaders realized the inappropriateness of the colorful uniforms. They began to search for different and more practical clothing suitable for wear on the western frontier.

By 1855, a field uniform which was also used for daily garrison wear had evolved. The troops of all five mounted regiments generally used similar components. Practicability and protection of the wearer against frontier pestilence served as the primary consideration, rather than neat or colorful appearances. The work uniform consisted of a blue cotton fatigue jacket, a broadbrimmed slouched hat, corduroy pants, and a pair of high-top cavalry boots. When units moved out of garrison on

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46 Wormser, *Yellowlegs*, p. 46.
a campaign, as a matter of frugality, many men substituted a hickory or blue cotton flannel shirt for the more expensive dragoon jacket. The "Old Hickories" cost fifteen cents each, whereas, the issue jacket cost approximately one dollar.48

Another example of practicality of the frontier cavalrymen's articles of dress developed in geographical areas where units conducted campaigns in heavy underbrush. In these locations, the men devised a sheath of leather similar to *chaparajos* to cover their legs from the tops of their boots to the waist for protection.49

Over the years, soldiers made numerous complaints over the lack of a variety of sizes of uniform issue and the restrictions against alterations. Regulations limited the coats, jackets, and trousers to four sizes with reference only to an individual's height. The width of all parts of the uniform was enough to fit the heaviest of men.50 Contrary to regulations, commanders permitted the alterations of overly large clothing items and deducted the costs from the soldiers' pay.51

The differences in the uniforms of the mounted regiments created as perplexing a problem to historians as the varied names applied to the units. What seemed to have been dissimilarities were in reality only minor differences of individual arms and uniforms; therefore, an unknowing observer readily detected contrarieties in the three types of mounted

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49 Ibid.
51 *Army Regulations of 1847*, p. 31.
In a similar false evaluation, one critic claimed that ". . . enlisted pay could only appeal to men who wanted to leave real responsibility behind with their civilian clothes."  

Although such statements are probably true in relation to present-day wage standards, the pre-Civil War cavalry troopers' pay compared favorably with that of their contemporary civilian counterparts. From 1833 until 1854, a Dragoon private received eight dollars a month base pay. In the latter of these two dates, Congress effected a four dollar pay raise for all enlisted grades. The 1854 pay scales remained the standard until after the commencement of the Civil War. 

In computing the soldiers' pay, the importance and material worth of medical care and subsistence must be considered. At the same time that civilian workers may have received board in addition to monetary compensation for their labors, they provided for their own medical care. Other important factors which gave added advantage to a premise that soldiers' total wages equaled that of their civilian counterparts included provisions for compensation for fatigue duty, care of clothing, reenlistment, and acts of merit. 

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53 Wormser, Yellowlegs, p. 47.
54 U. S. Public Statutes at Large, IV, 647 (1833). Privates and corporals in mounted units were paid two dollars more a month than the same enlisted grades in the infantry and artillery.
55 U. S. Public Statutes at Large, X, 575 (1854).
56 U. S. Public Statutes at Large, III, 488 (1819); ibid., IV, 652 (1833); ibid., V, 258 (1838); ibid., IX, 14 (1846); ibid., IX, 436 (1850); ibid., X, 576 (1854).
In order to determine the living standard of frontier soldiers in contrast with that of other similarly unskilled occupations, the author compared the livelihood of general laborers and farm workers to military men. Such choices resulted because these two civilian occupations employed the vast majority of the labor force in mid-nineteenth-century United States and the army recruited the largest number of its enlistees from such unskilled persons. To make the comparison more valid, the examination considered only the wage scale of the civilian labor force on basis of proximity to troop concentrations in the Great Plains, Texas, and New Mexico.57

With the above conditions in mind, the researcher found that road construction laborers in Arkansas Territory earned a wage of sixteen dollars a month in 1833. This sum did not include board, and it guaranteed only six to eight months employment.58 In 1850, the average wage of farm workers with board in all areas west of the Mississippi River to the Rocky Mountains varied from a six dollars monthly low in New Mexico to a high of seventeen in Minnesota. During the same period, a more highly trained journeyman expected a monthly wage of approximately fifty-five dollars with board, in the same geographical locations.59

58 Little Rock, Arkansas Gazette, February 6, 1833.
As previously mentioned, the difference between civilian and military wage decreased to the advantage of the soldier, with the addition of various compensations. Beginning in 1819, Congress passed legislation to permit an increase in pay for soldiers employed in the building of fortifications. Although not specifically encouraging the utilization of enlisted men on construction projects except during the times of emergencies, the measure provided for troops so employed for ten consecutive days to receive ". . . fifteen cents and an extra gill of whiskey or spirits each, per day. . . ." In 1854, Congress increased the allowance to twenty-five cents a day for military laborers and forty cents for men utilized as teamsters.

In addition to fatigue labor, soldiers occasionally supplemented their pay through reenlistment. Beginning in 1833, a private received a bounty of twelve dollars for a three-year reenlistment. In 1838, when Congress extended the regular army term to five years, the lawmakers permitted non-commissioned officers to collect the additional pay. Although repealed during the same session that Congress enacted it, the 1838 statute included a provision which granted 160-acre patents to any soldier who served faithfully for ten consecutive years. In 1854, Congress established an additional monetary incentive for enlisted men.

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60 U. S. Public Statutes at Large, III, 488 (1819).
61 U. S. Public Statutes at Large, X, 576 (1854).
62 U. S. Public Statutes at Large, IV, 647 (1833).
63 U. S. Public Statutes at Large, V, 256 (1838).
to remain in the army through a provision for longevity pay. Each reenlisting soldier's pay increased two dollars a month for his first five years of service and one dollar for each subsequent period of obligation completed. 64

Congress made other efforts which did not directly promise monetary compensation, to encourage intelligent personnel of high character to remain in military service. In 1847, the national lawmaking body completed legislation which served an additional purpose of suppressing criticism of the army's promotion system by providing for the appointment of qualified non-commissioned officers as brevet second lieutenants. Despite the provisions for such enlisted promotions, until the Secretary of War applied additional pressure in 1854, no enlisted men received brevet appointments. Both acts entitled privates a two-dollar-a-month pay increase for distinguished service; therefore, these lowest ranking personnel probably benefited more than did non-commissioned officers. 65

Of all the methods by which enlisted men could supplement their pay, they found the conservation of items of their clothing issue as the most profitable with the least effort. Although not begun until 1859, compensation for items of the uniform not issued by the quartermaster

64 U. S. Public Statutes at Large, X, 575 (1858).

65 U. S. Public Statutes at Large, IX, 186 (1847). See also U. S. Public Statutes at Large, X, 575 (1854). Don Russell, editor of the New Standard Encyclopedia, in the introduction to Lowe, Five Years a Dragoon, gives a definition of brevet rank as "... a commission conferring upon an officer a grade in the army additional to and higher than that which he holds by virtue of his commission in a particular corps of a legally established military organization." This definition has its weaknesses; however, without a detailed explanation it was the best found, p. xvi.
entitled an individual to as much as fifty dollars a year. However, as with the reenlistment bonus, a soldier did not receive the rebate for care of his clothing until the termination of his term of service.\(^6\)

Regulations prescribed regular pay calls to be conducted bimonthly. Contrary to regulations, paymasters seldom made their appearances on schedule. On occasions when troops remained on extended campaigns, as much as eight months lapsed between pay calls. In 1853, one paymaster in Texas, to the dissatisfaction of the inspector general, reported an average of four months between pay formations. Not only did the long periods of time between pay day violate regulations, the adverse effect of the delay on the soldiers most concerned unit commanders. When men received large sums of money, problems of desertion and excessive drunkenness multiplied.\(^6\) In 1854, to the chagrin of Major Albert Sidney Johnston, a paymaster in Texas, the inspector general directed that he desist from his four-month pay cycle and liquidate the soldiers' accounts as prescribed by army regulations.\(^6\)

Other than fines for courts-martial and pay stoppages, Congress permitted deductions from soldiers' emoluments for two reasons. First, beginning in 1833 to discourage desertion, paymasters retained one dollar from each private's monthly entitlement. After an individual completed two years' honorable service, he received his withheld money in a lump

\(^6\)\(\text{U. S. Public Statutes at Large, XI, 431 (1859).}\)

\(^6\)\(\text{Martin Lalor Crimmins, editor, "Notes and Documents: Freeman's Report of the Eighth Military Department," Southwestern Historical Quarterly, LIV (1950), 207.}\)

\(^6\)\(\text{William Preston Johnston, The Life of General Albert Sidney Johnston; Embracing His Service in the Armies of the United States, the Republic of Texas, and the Confederate States (New York, 1878), p. 170.}\)
In 1838, Congress increased the amount of retained pay to two dollars a month, but after several years, the lawmakers reduced the requirement to one dollar, where it remained until after the commencement of the Civil War. 70

A second reason for pay deductions did not start until 1851. Prior to that date, the army had no plan for the retirement or care of aged and disabled enlisted personnel. One officer told of a sergeant who served over fifty years of continuous active duty. When the old soldier became totally unable to perform his daily duties, his regimental commander obtained him a gratuitous commission as a second lieutenant. Immediately after the promotion, the army placed the disabled trooper on the officers' retired list. 71

In 1851, at the insistence of General Winfield Scott, the general-in-chief of the army, Congress enacted a statute which provided for an asylum for the support of invalid and disabled soldiers. The law made any individual who served twenty years faithfully or had been disabled as a result of military duty eligible for admittance. Funds for support of the asylum came from "... all stoppages of pay or fines ... of [enlisted] courts martial, ... of the post fund of each military station after ... necessary expenses, ... [and] estates of deceased soldiers. ..." In addition to these sources, paymasters deducted twenty-five cents a month from each enlisted man's pay. 72

69 U. S. Public Statutes at Large, IV, 647 (1833).

70 U. S. Public Statutes at Large, V, 258 (1838). See also ibid., XII, 288-289 (1861).

71 Johnson, Soldier's Reminiscence, pp. 80-81.

72 U. S. Public Statutes at Large, IX, 595-597 (1851).
In addition to reducing the enlisted contributions to one-half, Congress changed the name of the asylum to "Soldiers' Home" in 1859. Secretary of War Charles Magill Conrad initially selected sites for the permanent homes at East Pascagoula, Mississippi, Harrodsburg, Kentucky, and the District of Columbia. By 1861, the facilities in Mississippi and Kentucky no longer existed, while the one remaining home in Washington city met the nation's needs.

The few enlisted men who married supported their families on army pay. As a method of obtaining additional funds, a soldier sometimes sought to have his wife appointed as one of the four laundresses authorized by regulations for duty with each company. Although the pay varied, the approximate fee charged by the women, as approved by the Council of Administration, was generally fifty cents a month for each soldier. By such minimal charges the women possibly earned a monthly salary equivalent to that of a private, but in addition they received a daily food ration. The job had one other enticing aspect. Upon a change of station by a unit, the government furnished or paid for the laundresses' transportation the same as any soldier.

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73 U. S. Public Statutes at Large, XI, 434 (1859).
75 Army Regulations of 1847, pp. 34, 49, 50. See also Meyers, Ten Years in the Ranks, p. 38.
76 Dick, Vanguards of the Frontier, p. 91.
77 Senate Documents, 26th Cong., 2d Sess., No. 97 (Washington, 1840), p. 27.
In contrast to the adequacy of army pay, one of the harshest justified criticisms directed toward the army regarded the immutability from enlisted to commissioned ranks. In 1834, James Hildreth, a private in Company B, Regiment of Dragoons, reproached army policy rather severely for selecting only political or West Point appointees for the commissioned ranks. He further reflected that such practice tended only to attract vagrants into the military service. 78

In 1836, the general-in-chief of the army, Alexander Macomb, made an effort to appease opposition of the officer selection methods. Rather than appoint enlisted men to the commissioned ranks, Macomb suggested the creation of a sub-adjutant position in each unit to be filled by a non-commissioned officer. 79

As previously discussed in reference to soldiers' pay, Congress made a way possible for non-commissioned officer appointments as brevet second lieutenant for distinguished service in 1847. 80 In 1853 and 1854, owing to a total disregard of the statute, Secretary of War Jefferson Davis asked that the President be authorized to grant brevet second lieutenancies upon meritorious sergeants and corporals. 81

In the spring of 1854, with this object in mind, Congress authorized the President, with the advice and consent of the Senate, "... to confer the brevet of second lieutenant upon meritorious non-commissioned

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78 Hildreth, Dragoon Campaigns to the Rockies, pp. 110, 111.

79 Little Rock, Arkansas Gazette, April 5, 1836.

80 U. S. Public Statutes at Large, IX, 186 (1847).

officers, . . . brought before an army board and found qualified. . . ."

For the first time since the formation of the army, enlisted men had a chance for selection to the regular commissioned ranks without benefit of political influence. 82

A conception that promotions within the enlisted ranks occurred only by a slow process and that one succeeded to the next grade only by attrition is erroneous. Percival Green Lowe of the First Dragoons made sergeant in slightly less than three years and first sergeant one month after his third year of service. He stated that his apparently rapid rise to the second highest enlisted grade was not exceptional. Lowe emphasized that any sober and intelligent individual could have accomplished the same and that many did. 83 Another enlisted man, Eugene Bandel, made sergeant in two years. He attributed his promotions merely to attention to duty and sober habit. 84 Augustus Meyers, a musician and later commissioned as an officer, also reported the relative ease that intelligent men in his regiment advanced in rank if they kept themselves clean and took pride in soldiering. 85

Paradoxically, although the quartermaster faced seemingly unsurmountable obstacles in the resupply of frontier garrisons in the pre-Civil War army, soldiers seldom suffered from a dearth of food. Except on rare occasions or while campaigning, troops found the ration of sufficient

82U. S. Public Statutes at Large, X, 575-576 (1854). See also Meyers, Ten Years in the Ranks, p. 44.

83Lowe, Five Years a Dragoon, p. 37.

84Bandel, Frontier Life in the Army, p. 72.

85Meyers, Ten Years in the Ranks, p. 43.
quantity but scanty in variety and bland in taste. In a like manner with food: the authorized clothing allocations may have been inadequate to insure warmth for a human-being in extremely cold temperatures; nevertheless, by individual expediency and a relaxation of uniform regulations, frontier cavalrymen lived in comfort that compared favorably with that of local civilians. In comparison with unskilled labor, by including additional pay and provided benefits, the cavalrymen's earnings equaled that of civilians. Finally, with the exception of promotion to the officers ranks, enlisted men advanced rapidly within the non-commissioned grades, restricted only by the individual's soldiering ability.
CHAPTER V

DISCIPLINE AND RELATED PROBLEMS

Discipline is an essential ingredient of the continued success of any military force. During the period from 1833 until 1861, cavalry commanders in the United States faced a most perplexing problem in maintaining a high state of discipline in their units. Owing to the deployment of units over vast areas of the Great Plains, Texas, and New Mexico, in many instances the responsibility for the training and the maintenance of good order fell to inexperienced officers. Consequently, punishments for breaches of discipline of a felonious nature, or for that matter, even minor infractions of regulations, were extremely harsh when measured by present-day standards. On the other hand, some justification for the firm application of the punishment inflicted on enlisted troopers by way of correction and training may be found. Military leaders thought of rigid discipline as a necessity to insure prompt obedience in combating an enemy who based the highest rewards in all aspects of his society upon success in war. In the type of warfare conducted by the hostiles, the loser found defeat final—only death for a second best.

In a similar manner to the harsh discipline applied by young officers, even courts-martial awarded degrading punishments, each arbitrarily devised as a new invention by the administering authority. Participants and contemporary observers of the period reported the severity of military correction and training from varying points of view. James Hildreth, a private in B Company of the Regiment of Dragoons in the early
1830's, complained that the guard house at Jefferson Barracks, Missouri, constantly overflowed with men court-martialed for neglect of duty. Hildreth felt that the physical punishments meted out to the prisoners lacked commensuration with the trifling charges against them.\(^1\) Equally critical of the arbitrary manner in which regimentation was applied, James Bennett of the First Dragoons told of an incident which occurred in New Mexico in the 1850's. While his and an attached infantry unit made a forced march, one of the accompanying "walk-a-heaps" collapsed from the effects of heat exhaustion and fatigue. After the individual refused an order from a colonel to continue the march, the officer struck the private with a sword. Bennett claimed that the man died of wounds inflicted by the officer's action. The failure of a subsequent investigation board to find evidence of any wrongdoing on the part of the colonel brought only expressions of disgust from Bennett.\(^2\)

Although most of the complaints of mistreatment came from enlisted men or their dependents, some officers and their wives indicated compassion for the plight of non-commissioned personnel. One such person, Eliza Johnston, wife of Albert Sidney Johnston, commander of the newly constituted Second Regiment of Cavalry, expressed mortification at the

\(^1\) James Hildreth, Dragoon Campaigns to the Rocky Mountains, Being a History of the Enlistment, Organization, and First Campaigns of the Regiment of United States Dragoons; Together with Incidents of a Soldier's Life, and Sketches of Scenery and Indian Character (New York, 1836), p. 46.

cruel punishment dispensed to six soldiers convicted for desertion. Following a whipping, the men paraded around the garrison with shaven heads, in uniforms stripped of all accouterments, to the music of the Rogue's March. Finally, after the degrading exhibition, a relief of the post guard marched the victims to the garrison entrance and released them.3 In later years, William Preston Johnston, the colonel's son, defended the actions of his father as necessary discipline for a slovenly unit.4

Contrary to Eliza's comments on overzealous administration of degrading punishment in application of discipline, Eugene Bandel, a German immigrant in an infantry unit in almost constant contact with the cavalry, reported that during his first two years in the United States Army, no officer had spoken a harsh word to him. The immigrant found that the army of his new land had less caste than he had experienced in the Prussian military service. Bandel wrote that he could talk freely with the officers in his regiment, including his colonel.5

In a similar context, Mrs. Egbert Viele, wife of an officer in the Mounted Rifle Regiment, reminisced that the "... strict discipline and subordination in which men in the ranks are kept by their officers is


truly wonderful to a civilian..."6 This same lady also thought that soldiers should learn prompt obedience to orders as their first lesson.7

As an opposing force to a high level of discipline, violations of regulations created many problems for leaders. A good relationship between a young officer and his corporals and sergeants eased the burden of troop-leading immensely, and created the most effective deterrent to flagrant disregard for the Articles of War. The manner in which an officer afforded respect for his corporals and sergeants served as an essential in developing and retaining an affinity between the commissioned and enlisted leaders. Regulations cautioned officers against re-proving non-commissioned personnel in the presence or hearing of privates. In addition to the urging of prudence in redressing enlisted leaders, the army directive forbade the mixing of these personnel with privates, even during confinement while one may have been awaiting court-martial.8

The "Rules and Articles for the Government of the Armies of the United States," established by Congress in 1806, catalogued almost every imaginable offense "...prejudice of good order and military discipline..."9 Although a great variety of crimes and lesser infractions of these Articles of War occurred, desertion and varying immoralities resulting from drunkenness comprised the two most prevalent

7Ibid., p. 43.
9U. S. Public Statutes at Large, II, 359-372 (1806).
violations. Of these two transgressions, the unrealistic number of desertions which supervened almost daily created the most pressing problem. 10

In 1834, James Hildreth estimated that over one hundred men had sneaked away from the Regiment of Dragoons before the end of one year. 11 A few years later, Percival Green Lowe, first sergeant of Company B, First Dragoons, reported that many men, including non-commissioned officers, departed without authorization almost daily. The men who left were not always misfits. Lowe stated that in one month, four men whom he considered to have been good soldiers deserted. 12 While surveying the southern boundary of Kansas Territory in 1857, another company lost nine men in two months. 13

In 1853, the Secretary of War reported to the President and Congress that from 1826 until the Mexican War, desertions depleted the average annual army strength by almost 13 per cent. This average increased to 16 per cent during the years immediately following the war with Mexico. 14

The reasons for the wholesale departures almost equaled the number of troopers who left. Probably the principal cause in the early years

12 Percival Green Lowe, *Five Years a Dragoon* ('49 to '54) and Other Adventures of the Great Plains, with an introduction by Don Russell (Norman, 1965), p. 80.
after the formation of the Regiment of Dragoons developed from an attitude of deep chagrin that arose from the difference between the actual life of the enlisted men and that promised by recruiters. Many persons had been promised that they would be treated like West Point cadets and that they would ride the prairies all the time. The expected and the reality often clashed drastically. The troopers faced harsh discipline, hard work in stable construction, and various other hardships which frequently defied justification.¹⁵

Some individuals left because of a condition that can be described as military custom. The older soldiers refused to accept a recruit until he had spent at least a year in a unit. Prior to the 1838 establishment of a training center at Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania, non-commissioned officers drilled recruits in the companies to which assigned. When the young soldiers gained sufficient knowledge of drill, they joined a regular squad. If an individual failed to progress satisfactorily, he remained in an "awkward squad." One clumsy man who could not overcome his handicap finally deserted to halt harassment.¹⁶

In 1849, after the discovery of gold in California, the number of soldiers who quit their obligation not only increased; some even rode off on issue mounts. Searchers found most of the horses and equipment, but seldom returned the fugitives to service.¹⁷ One sergeant wrote in

¹⁵ Hildreth, Dragoon Campaigns to the Rockies, pp. 44-45. See also Letter to the Editor, Washington, Army and Navy Chronicle, May 17, 1838.

¹⁶ Hildreth, Dragoon Campaigns to the Rockies, p. 41.

¹⁷ Lowe, Five Years a Dragoon, p. 36.
his diary that authorities failed to return more than one of one hundred deserters to duty. 18 Incidentally, during the 1849 gold rush, units in California suffered higher desertion losses than regiments east of the Rocky Mountains. During the first eight months of the year, over 40 per cent of the entire force in California deserted. 19

Generally, the economic conditions of the nation related to the army desertion rate. During the years of financial recession, desertions greatly decreased in comparison to periods of prosperity. 20 Although Congress provided monetary persuasions to discourage unauthorized absences in the army, military officials relied most on corporal punishment to dissuade desertions. 21

When soldiers deserted from their companies, the commanding officers sent the departed individuals' description to the superintendent of the recruiting service. The army offered a thirty-dollar reward for the apprehension of each of the absent soldiers. 22 Upon return to military control, an offender found guilty by a general court-martial suffered punishment as the officer tribunal directed--up to death. 23

18 Bandel, Frontier Life in the Army, p. 106.
20 Utley, Frontiersmen in Blue, p. 41.
21 Everett Dick, Vanguards of the Frontier (New York, 1941), pp. 87-88.
22 Army Regulations of 1847, pp. 39-41. See also Little Rock, Arkansas Gazette, December 31, 1832, January 2 and 3, 1833; and Washington, Army and Navy Chronicle, April 4, 1839. These papers have offers of rewards for the return of deserters.
23 Courts-martial were of three types. For serious offenses, of which desertion was one, a general court was ordered. Regimental and garrison courts were used to punish petty military misdeeds. Army Regulations of 1847, pp. 60-62.
Authorities administering punishment to a convicted trooper marked the outcast with a four-inch indelible "D" on the left hip. This action insured that no former deserter reenlisted. In addition to the marking, a convicted man's head and eyebrows were shaved. The regimental or post adjutant read notification of the order of a dishonorable discharge before the mustered troops of a garrison. After publication of the discharge order, the officer administering the punishment removed the dishonored soldier's uniform accouterments. Then a relief of the post guard marched the victim around the parade ground and out the main gate to the beat of the Rogue's March. In addition to this degrading exhibition, many times a convicted deserter suffered up to fifty lashes with a knotted rawhide thong on his bared back. The length of an absence seemed to have been immaterial for a conviction for desertion. James Bennett told of one soldier who was drummed out of the First Regiment of Dragoons after only eight days' absence.

Disciplinary corrective measures seemed to have been more severe in the 1830's than in the years immediately preceding the Civil War. When the Regiment of Dragoons moved from Jefferson Barracks, Missouri, to Fort Gibson, in present-day Oklahoma, the unit removed eighteen prisoners from the post stockade and marched them on foot to the new place of duty. To insure that the law-breakers did not escape, Colonel Henry Dodge, the regimental commander, ordered the men fitted with leg


25 Bennett, Forts and Forays, p. 38.
irons and handcuffs. The mileage marched each day varied with the terrain; however, the prisoners maintained the pace of the mounted troops, who averaged twenty miles a day.  

A few military posts had built-in safeguards against desertions. Those located in territory surrounded by unfriendly hostiles seldom experienced difficulty with men absenting themselves. Equally effective as the fear of wild Indians, the extremely low temperatures at Northern Great Plains garrisons discouraged many potential deserters. The thought of freezing to death in the vast prairie sea served as an effective deterrent to unauthorized departures during the winter months.

While desertion recurred most frequently of the serious breaches of discipline, intemperance contributed more to other violations of regulations. Critics made many comments about the men who composed the frontier cavalry and their propensity for intoxicating spirits. Percival Lowe estimated that 10 per cent of the men in his company spent their winters in the guardhouse for offenses resulting from drunkenness.

Generally, soldiers considered drunkenness on duty as an unpardonable violation of military custom, but as one author commented, "... one of the infeasible rights of man" permitted them to indulge to the point

26 Hildreth, Dragoon Campaigns to the Rockies, p. 60.


29 Bandel, Frontier Life in the Army, p. 111. See also Lowe, Five Years a Dragoon, p. 23; and, Utley, Frontiersmen in Blue, pp. 30-31.

30 Lowe, Five Years a Dragoon, p. 97.
of excess once the duty day had ended. Some accounts claimed that while the majority of the enlisted personnel took pride in soldiering and remained sober, many did violate regulations against drunkenness during duty. One former sergeant wrote that the "... greater part of the army consists of men who either do not care to work, or who because of being addicted to drink cannot find employment."

Temperance seems to have been the exception rather than the rule at most installations, but contrary to accusations of prohibitionists, not every military garrison suffered from total intemperance. In 1853, the Inspector General reported that all soldiers at Fort Worth, Texas, belonged to a temperance society. Another indication that troops at all posts did not overindulge appeared as part of the Surgeon General's report in 1859. The medical statistic had a statement from the doctor at Fort Randall in present-day South Dakota, on the Missouri River. The officer reported that the Northern Plains post had not experienced a case of delirium tremens in five years. The surgeon declared the enlisted men at Fort Randall the most temperate men he had ever observed.

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33 Bandel, Frontier Life in the Army, p. 114.
On the other extreme, Percival Lowe told of soldiers at Fort Leavenworth, in Kansas Territory, who sold their overcoats in the severest winter weather to buy whiskey. Even then still unsatisfied, these same individuals stole the equipment of fellow soldiers to trade for alcohol from a local bootlegger. Lowe reminisced that in 1852 three men died in one month from delirium tremens at Fort Leavenworth.

Availability of alcoholic drink varied with location. In the early years after the activation of the Regiment of Dragoons, commanders more easily excluded whiskey drummers from Indian Territory than after the 1848 acquisition of vast areas of land with the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. In the 1830's and early 1840's, Indian women caused the greatest problem in the vicinity of Fort Gibson. They bootlegged locally concocted intoxicants to the spectators at frequent horse races and other sporting events held outside the posts. These saleswomen carried a small bottle of whiskey under shawls and sold the homemade liquor for as much as twenty-five cents a quarter pint. Considering that whiskey cost from twenty-five to forty-five cents a gallon in New Orleans prior to the Mexican War, the Indian women exacted usurious rates.

36 Lowe, Five Years a Dragoon, pp. 20, 79. A report of the Surgeon General disagrees with Lowe. In a period of six years and nine months preceding 1855, only one death resulting from delirium tremens was recorded in the Surgeon's statistics from posts located in the Middle Great Plains, of which Fort Leavenworth was one. Senate Exec. Doks., 34th Cong., 1st Sess., No. 96 (1855), p. 160.

37 Grant Foreman, editor, A Traveler in Indian Territory, The Journal of Ethan Allen Hitchcock, Late Major-General in the United States Army (Cedar Rapids, Iowa, 1930), pp. 96-97.

38 Whiskey prices in New Orleans varied from year to year. In 1835, the price was 31½ cents a gallon; in 1836, 45 cents; in 1838, 29½ cents; in 1845, 25 cents. Little Rock, Arkansas Gazette, May 12, 1835; April 5, 1836; January 2, 1838; November 17, 1845.
More amazing than the willingness of soldiers to pay exorbitant prices for whiskey, they considered the best quality liquor as one which burned while being swallowed. To oblige such blindness, whiskey peddlers used various additives to spice their wares. Many drummers flavored their liquor with chewing tobacco and red pepper. Some few included snake heads in their concoctions.39

In 1856, at one isolated post in the Northern Great Plains, in accordance with regulations, the commander prohibited the sutler from selling whiskey to enlisted personnel. The authorized beer was sold at such high prices that the soldiers turned to their own expedients for intoxicants. One of the favorite drinks consisted of a pinch of Jamaica ginger in bay rum. The soldiers bought both of the ingredients at the sutler's store. One trooper recalled that the aftershave lotion mixed with ginger made a passable drink. In another instance, the wife of one private built her own still, but the contraption was destroyed upon detection by an officer. The woman suffered even greater distress than the loss of her additional source of income when the post commander revoked her daily ration because of her misconduct.40

On occasion soldiers created their own intoxicants from wild plants and fruit. One individual wrote that the men in his unit made wine by adding sugar and water to wild grapes. The same soldier told of an incident in which his company commander attempted to appease his and the men's thirst for a drink while at a remote cantonment. When the officer

40Meyers, Ten Years in the Ranks, pp. 125, 128-129.
recalled a receipt for spruce beer, he employed his entire company to gather cacti, wild hops, spruce sprigs, and other plants for the brew. The men mashed the cacti into a pulp and then boiled it. As prescribed by the receipt, the brewmasters diligently added water, molasses, and vinegar to the mess to accelerate fermentation. After a few days, the soldiers strained the liquid off the decomposed concoction into barrels. To his and the men's chagrin, the officer found the brew so unsavory that he had no need to ration the sickly-smelling, vile-tasting results.41

In 1819, Congress authorized the issuance of a gill of whiskey to troops utilized in building fortifications, surveys, road construction, and other laborious duties.42 In addition to the ration of whiskey for fatigue duty, the subsistence officer issued alcohol as a component of the regular food ration when troops performed duty under adverse conditions. In November, 1832, however, a general order directed that additional rations of coffee and sugar be substituted for the ardent spirits issue, but Congress refused to permit the curtailment of the fatigue allowance.43 Several Secretaries of War and numerous army officers continued efforts to have the fatigue spirits eliminated in lieu of additional pay, but none succeeded.44 Incidentally, Congress restored the whiskey component to the army ration in 1858.45

41Ibid., pp. 76, 120.
42U. S. Public Statutes at Large, III, 488 (1819).
43Little Rock, Arkansas Gazette, December 12, 1832. The army substituted eight pounds of sugar and four pounds of coffee per one hundred rations for the whiskey.
44U. S. Public Statutes at Large, X, 576 (1854).
The punishment for drunkenness varied from post to post. Usually, when a soldier committed no other serious violation of regulations, officers left the matter to non-commissioned officer to correct. Although not specifically permitted by regulations, commanders condoned a practice of locking a drunk in the company store room. When the man sobered, the first sergeant offered him a chance of penance by performing extra fatigue duty. The offender found the detail outlined by a non-commissioned officer far from easy, but the severity of the usual punishment expected from a court-martial always surpassed the unofficial corrective measures. On rare occasions, officers punished enlisted men with novel innovations rather than allow blemishes on the records of individuals considered as good soldiers.

Leaders tailored their punishment without the benefit of a court-martial to conform to the mission of their unit. For example, while on escort duty in New Mexico, four dragoons sneaked into a nearby village. When they neared their capacity of intoxicating beverages, the officer in charge of the detail found the delinquents. To insure that the inebriated men did not fall from their saddles and do bodily harm to government property, the officer forced the culprits to walk thirty miles while the remainder of the column rode. In a similar situation, another officer ordered a detail to administer cold water to the heads of several drunks. After this treatment sobered the men enough for them

46 Lowe, Five Years a Dragoon, pp. 97-98.
48 Bennett, Forts and Forays, p. 79.
to realize their plight, the officer then directed several enlisted men
to tie the potential dipsomaniacs to the rear of a supply wagon with
ropes under their arms and around their chests. The forward movement
of the vehicle forced the men to walk or to be dragged over some rough
terrain.49

Punishment after a conviction of habitual drunkenness and neglect
of duty subjected an individual to drumming out of the army.50 If a
convicted man were retained in service after a court-martial and sen-
tenced to work at hard labor, such work consisted of twelve hours of
daily fatigue-type drudgery. In addition to hard work, the prisoner re-
ceived only bread-and-water one out of three days of a sentence. The
bread-and-water portion of a sentence usually came during the middle
third of a confinement.51

James Hildreth best described the severity of condoned standards
of punishment for a combination of offenses. One private, who voluntarily
returned to duty after an absence of ten months, successfully pretended
mental incompetence to escape punishment. Authorities hospitalized the
malingering; however, he soon grew tired of his monotonous life in the
dispensary and sneaked over to the sutler's store, where he drank him-
self into a stupor. Later, when the regimental surgeon found him, the
incompetent soldier refused an order to return to the hospital. Not
satisfied with mere defiance of the doctor, the drunk struck him. For

49Aurora Hunt, James Henry Carleton, 1814-1873, Western Frontier
50Little Rock, Arkansas Gazette, June 12, 1839.
51Meyers, Ten Years in the Ranks, pp. 131-132.
punishment the incompetent suffered fifty lashes before the mustered Regiment of Dragoons. After the whipping, surgeons' mates washed the man's wounds with salt water to prevent infection, and then escorted him to the guardhouse for the remainder of his enlistment. 52

Intemperance and any violation of regulations warranted trial by court-martial. The tribunals not only meted out harsh punishment, but each seems to have been a completely new innovation for disciplining convicted men. For example, in the 1830's, a court-martial at Fort Gibson imposed a sentence of thirty days' hard labor and a forfeiture of three dollars pay on one unfortunate private for drunkenness and unsoldier-like conduct. In addition to this customary punishment, the presiding officer directed that the convicted soldier be immersed in a nearby river at fifteen minutes before breakfast for ten successive mornings. To insure that the offender received the full benefit of his sentence, the court also provided that the sinner make good each day he might be ill. 53

Another court-martial at the same post sentenced a private to thirty days' punishment for charges of unsoldierly conduct arising from the sale of bootleg whiskey. Although the individual received a usual sentence length for the charges, the court ordered rather unorthodox punishment. The private stood on the head of a barrel in front of the guardhouse, at alternating two-hour intervals, during his first eight days of punishment. In order to advertize his wrongdoing, the prisoner

52 Hildreth, Dragoon Campaigns to the Rockies, pp. 47-50.
53 Carolyn Thomas Foreman, "Military Discipline in Early Oklahoma," Chronicles of Oklahoma, VI (1928), 143.
held an empty whiskey bottle in each hand, with a heavy board hung around his neck lettered "Whiskey Seller." During the second eight days of his punishment, the trooper marched around the flag pole with thirty pounds of rocks on his back at two-hour intervals, from Reveille until Retreat. After sixteen days of such degrading exhibitions, the prisoner happily completed his final fourteen days of punishment performing fatigue-type labor under the supervision of the post guard. 54

Some posts used the services of a duty sergeant to insure that sentences directed by courts-martial received proper applications. The sergeant major selected the non-commissioned officer for this unpleasant detail from a roster, for a thirty-day period. 55 In addition to a duty sergeant, the garrison commander ordered the establishment of a sentry post to guard prisoners. Special orders usually located the post at the flag pole. 56

Although corporal punishment could be applied with the imposition of any sentence ordered by a court-martial, the tribunals usually reserved flogging for such violations of the Articles of War as drunkenness compounded with some other breach of the standards of good discipline. For offenses stemming from desertion in time of war, mutiny, an attack on an officer, murder, and rape, the Articles permitted a sentence

54 Ibid.

55 Lowe, Five Years a Dragoon, p. 79.

of death by a firing squad. In 1861, the army abolished flogging as a punishment.

A soldier found the punishment for desertion and drunkenness no more severe in relation to the severity of that expected for minor violations of regulations. During a change-of-station march, one private forgot his weapon by a tree after an overnight bivouac. His company commander ordered the trooper to walk, leading his horse, in front of the mounted regiment for the entire day in retribution for the error. The trooper felt that his punishment had been more than commensurate with his misdeed, by the end of a twenty-three-mile march. Other than quietly complaining of the punishment in the presence of his friends, the private had little recourse.

In contrast to the privates' general disregard of drunkenness and desertion, barracks thievery caused an extremely adverse effect on the morale of a unit. Although the Articles of War permitted punishment at the descretion of a court-martial for a sneak thief, individuals caught stealing in the barracks seldom had the benefit of a trial. A culprit's barracks mates assumed a mission of vindication as self-appointed vigilantes. They threw a blanket over the thief's head to prevent any identifications. With the sneak under the wrap, the vindicators pommeled him unmercifully. The troops seldom found a second application of the treatment necessary to convince a thief to leave the

57U. S. Public Statutes at Large, III, 359-372 (1806).
58U. S. Public Statutes at Large, XII, 292 (1861).
59Hildreth, Dragoon Campaigns to the Rockies, p. 74.
property of his barracks mates alone. In 1856, barracks thievery became so bad at several Texas installations that the Inspector General recommended to each post quartermaster to maintain a depository for soldiers' valuables.

Although they detested barracks thievery, the men in the ranks apparently condoned raids on nearby civilian farmers for articles of food. The soldiers seemed particularly prone to steal from farms along a route of march when a unit changed station. Eliza Johnston told of her husband ordering one entire company to march while the remainder of the regiment rode. The punishment had resulted after a farmer complained of soldiers stealing his turkeys, and a subsequent search of the column revealed three of the birds in one company's rations. Similarly, one private told of slipping away from a bivouac to steal three pigs from a nearby farm. This individual stated that the act had been more from boredom than for the need of food.

Another vice that caused commanders concern was gambling. Although participants in dice or card games expected punishment and confiscation of any visible stakes, on detection by an officer, the threat did not deter men who wanted to gamble. On pay day one found card and dice games

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60 Meyers, Ten Years in the Ranks, p. 43.


63 Hildreth, Dragoon Campaigns to the Rockies, pp. 97-98.
in any secluded location. Gamblers used the post graveyard as one of the favorite places to hide the games of chance.64

In 1842, gambling became such a problem around Fort Gibson that the new commander, Colonel Stephen Watts Kearny, of the First Dragoons, issued an order for all persons not directly connected with the army to leave the federally administered Indian Territory.65 The officer reported that horse races at the fort encouraged bets for as much as five hundred dollars on one animal.66 Kearny's concern for the moral welfare of the soldiery and the Indian wards of the national government had warranted his actions.67 Army regulations very specifically prohibited gambling on any camp, post, station, or barracks.68

Soldier gamblers usually fell into two categories--those who won and those who lost. The winners went to town to spend their winnings, while the losers stayed in the barracks, reading and lounging on their bunks.69

For the winners, the nearby towns usually had their saloons and houses of prostitution. Although detection in one of the places of ill repute subjected a soldier to days of punishment, the threat dissuaded few soldiers from visiting the houses. For example, in the early 1840's,

64Meyers, Ten Years in the Ranks, p. 21.
65Little Rock, Arkansas Gazette, June 13, 1842.
66Foreman, ed., Traveler in Indian Territory, p. 96.
67Little Rock, Arkansas Gazette, June 13, 1842.
68Army Regulations of 1847, p. 158.
the standing punishment for visiting the cribs of nearby Fort Gibson insured a guilty soldier of fifteen days' hard labor and a pay stoppage of four dollars. Once the ruffians who loitered at one brothel killed two dragoons. The next night, the comrades of the slain troopers attacked the women and burned their house. Apparently such retaliation pleased the men's commanding officer, as he failed to file charges against the vindicators. 70

In 1852, the commanding officer at Fort Union, New Mexico Territory, used an unorthodox approach to curtail prostitution in the rocks and caves near that post. Instead of punishing his soldiers, the officer threatened the immoral women with twenty-five lashes if caught in the vicinity of Fort Union a third time. In further attempts to drive the prostitutes from the vicinity of the post, he threatened the women's pimps with thirty lashes. Besides the flogging, the army officer expressed an assurance to the panders that they would suffer the humiliation of riding a donkey down the streets of the nearest village on a feast day, with their occupation announced by the town crier. 71

The next commanding officer of Fort Union ordered two harlots arrested and confined to the post guardhouse. The following day, the officer ordered the prostitutes' hair cut before drumming the scarlet ladies from the post. Owing to numerous civilian complaints, a court-martial tried the captain for conduct unbecoming to an officer and a gentleman. These charges were finally dropped altogether. 72

70 Foreman, "Military Discipline," Chronicles of Oklahoma, VI, 141-142, 144.
71 Hunt, Frontier Dragoon, pp. 125, 127.
72 Ibid., pp. 122-123.
Although little evidence exists that the soldiers admitted to associating with the prostitutes, the Surgeon General's report indicated that the frontier troopers promiscuously fraternized with women infected with venereal diseases. During a ten-year period from 1849 to 1859, an annual average of 5 per cent of the men stationed in Texas contacted and received treatment for venereal diseases of all types. During the same period almost one of every three soldiers stationed in New Mexico received treatment for the social maladies.\textsuperscript{73} The Surgeon General's report seems to attest to the validity of James Bennett's observations of the morals of the New Mexican natives:

\textbf{... [A]ttended a fandango. Never seen the ladies of this place before but in fifteen minutes I was acquainted with at least two thirds ... on as free and easy terms as if we were old school mates. ... That night's proceedings led me to form anything but a favorable opinion of the morals ... of the women and men.}\textsuperscript{74}

The medical statistics indicated that the remainder of the Great Plains were not plagued with the problem of venereal diseases. The Surgeon General thought this condition resulted from the inaccessibility of the Indian women of the wilder northern tribes.\textsuperscript{75}

In contrast to the information available in regard to soldiers and their associations with prostitutes, not one source mentioned homosexuality. As a matter of fact, research revealed only one inference that sexual deviation existed in the army. In 1854, the Inspector

\textsuperscript{74}Bennett, \textit{Forts and Forays}, p. 20.
\textsuperscript{75}\textit{Senate Exec. Docs.}, 36th Cong., 1st Sess., No. 52 (1859), p. 36.
General criticized one commander in Texas rather severely for not having made the change-over to single bunking, as directed the previous year. The Inspector emphasized the necessity of single bunking as obvious. 76

By mid-twentieth century of military correction and training, leaders in the mounted regiments of the pre-Civil War era harshly applied discipline to the enlisted ranks. Although rigid, the corrections inflicted by way of punishment did not eliminate violations of regulations. Of the transgressions, desertion and drunkenness caused the most concern to commanders. In 1859, an explanation offered by the Surgeon General probably best explained the phenomenal rate of desertion and drunkenness found in the enlisted ranks of the frontier cavalry. The medical officer rationalized that upon completion of a monotonous routine day after day, the idle soldiers had little to do except lie on their bunks, hunt and fish, or participate in limited sports activities. Soon, the average soldier became bored and turned to one of two outlets. Some men relied on a hidden cask of booze, while others merely deserted. 77


CHAPTER VI

ENTERTAINMENT, MORAL GUIDANCE, AND BURIAL OF THE FRONTIER TROOPERS

When an individual reported to a new duty station in the Great Plains, Texas, or New Mexico, he usually found a military post, whether permanent or temporary, to be a self-contained community, economically and socially. Civilians settled at some of the more remote garrisons in Indian Territory only because of their affiliations with the army. These persons moved with the military frontier and earned their livelihoods by supplying food and services to the soldiers. Accordingly, the fort developed as the central social institution on the frontier. From this centralization, a pyramid of society evolved, with the privates and laundresses at the lowest level and the officers and their women at the highest stratum of the caste. Official and social life varied little from one post to the next, with an invisible wall separating the commissioned personnel and their families from the enlisted men and their unrecognized dependents of "soapsuds row."¹

Although this military system differentiation created an almost unchangeable social stratification based on rank, a search for entertainment to escape boredom in isolation engaged the off-duty attention of both

enlisted and commissioned personnel. For the greater portion of each year, the western frontier cavalrymen remained in garrison. They moved into winter quarters in the late fall and did not return to their campaigns until the prairie grass again had sufficient nourishment to sustain their mounts. The subsequent off-duty idleness left the men with the problem of combating boredom. As previously mentioned, many turned to alcohol for a solution, while others merely departed the army by deserting. Those who faced reality searched for entertainment and relaxation within the simple social and religious institutions found on the posts or in the occasional nearby towns.

Owing to restrictions caused by military routine and a lack of entertainment facilities on posts, most soldiers necessarily expended their efforts around the barracks in search of pastimes. Such diversions took the form of singing, story-telling, games and horse-play, reading, and outside sports such as football, foot-racing, wrestling, and even throwing stones. When the military situation permitted, the men sought their relaxation off-post by fishing, hunting, horse-racing, and visiting the nearby towns.


4 Although many accounts related the off-post activity of the frontier troopers, James Hildreth gave a vivid description of the subject during the 1830's. See ibid., pp. 86-87. Several narratives of the period after the Mexican War were found in Eugene Bandel, Frontier Life
Barracks-singing was one of the troops' favored pastimes. Entertainment in this form most commonly tended to group harmonizing with accompaniment by a string instrument, harmonica, or an occasional note from a bugle. James Hildreth, a private in B Company of the Regiment of Dragoons in the early 1830's, remarked that nearly all of the men from Tennessee had fiddles or other string instruments. Even the Indians who loitered around the barracks as scouts or in hopes of a hand-out joined the groups by patting their hands on their knees in accompaniment.\(^5\) In addition to singing for their own pleasure, soldiers readily encouraged outside groups or individuals to perform. For example, in the 1850's, work sometimes lagged at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas Territory, because the enlisted men constantly gathered around Negro workers employed by the post quartermaster, to hear them sing plantation songs.\(^6\)

Almost as popular as listening and participating in singing, the telling of "war stories" or just plain lies attracted many soldiers. The participants engaged in simple conversation which did not need to be sophisticated to hold the interest of bored men.\(^7\) One typical lie involved a dog which captured a wild Indian. After the almost human

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\(^5\) Hildreth, Dragoon Campaigns to the Rockies, pp. 87-88.

\(^6\) Bandel, Frontier Life in the Army, p. 22.

\(^7\) Ibid., p. 225.
actions of the animal, the post commander ordered the same treatment for the canine as accorded the soldiers of the garrison. Threat of court-martial insured that no jealous soldier mistreated the personified mongrel.8

Although regulations prohibited their gambling, most troops on pay day sought out games of chance with cards and dice and remained thus engaged until only a few experts held all the money.9 To escape detection and subsequent disciplinary action, the gamblers hid in the most unlikely locations. The favorite hide-out to shoot dice seems to have been the post graveyard. Other places of concealment for the illicit pastimes included areas not often frequented by officers, such as the horse stables or the brushy clusters immediately outside the post.10

Reading provided a favored diversion for the literate. No statistics exist to indicate the number of men who could not read or write; however, James Hildreth bragged of the high literacy rate of the men in his company. He further stated that his unit compared favorably with the remainder of the Regiment of Dragoons, when recruited in 1833.11 Eugene Bandel, a German immigrant with a good education, estimated that only


10Everett Dick, Vanguards of the Frontier (New York, 1941), p. 90.

one in every two men in his organization knew how to read. Although
Bandel remarked adversely on the literacy of his fellow soldiers, he
did state that no lack of books existed. 12

The troops probably preferred Robinson Crusoe as the most popular
single book. In addition to this novel, the other favorite books among
the soldiers included the writings of the contemporary American James
Fenimore Cooper and Britons Sir Walter Scott and Frederick Marryat.
The accounts of the western explorations of United States army officers
John Charles Fremont and Benjamin L. E. Bonneville equally enticed the
imaginative younger soldiers. 14

Whether Hildreth or Bandel more accurately estimated the percentage
of literacy is indefinite; however, an analysis of the matter is more
propitious to a figure between the two estimates. In 1838, the army
amended its regulations to provide for the after-duty education of
illiterate soldiers. The Post Fund at each garrison provided the money
for the employment of a schoolteacher. In addition to the teachers,
the change in regulations permitted the establishment of a library on
each post from the Fund. 15

The money provided by the Post Fund for employment of a teacher and
the purchase of books for a library accumulated from two sources. First,

12 Bandel, Frontier Life in the Army, pp. 114, 234.
13 Hildreth, Dragoon Campaigns to the Rockies, p. 88.
14 Percival Green Lowe, Five Years a Dragoon ('49 to '54) and Other
Adventures of the Great Plains, with an introduction by Don Russell.
15 Little Rock, Arkansas Gazette, August 22, 1838. The education
program of 1838 also provided for the schooling of the children of en-
listed personnel as well as the men themselves.
when the situation permitted, a bakery prepared bread for the troops rather than the quartermaster issuing a flour ration. By the consolidation of a post’s baking needs, an excess of one-third of the flour ration resulted. The quartermaster officer transferred the excess to the sutler, who sold the flour and deposited the money from the transactions in the Post Fund. 16

The second source of money for the Fund came from a prorated assessment on the sutler for the privilege of exclusive right to sell his products on post. For the right of a monopoly, the sutler paid as much as twelve cents a month for each officer and enlisted man present on a post. A Council of Administration determined the assessment rate and the sutler’s store prices. 17

In addition to a post library, commanders sometimes encouraged men to donate money for the purchase of books within a company. 18 Usually each company maintained its own library in addition to the one provided by the Post Fund. 19


17Ibid. A Post Council of Administration consisted of three officers appointed by the garrison commander. It met every two months and resolved administrative and supply problems for the post. In addition to the establishment of procedures, the Council assumed the responsibility for the safekeeping of money collected for the Post Fund.

18Lowe, Five Years a Dragoon, pp. 98-99.

Nineteenth-century naturalist and Indian authority George Catlin told of the loneliness and boredom of the troops at Fort Gibson in the early 1830's. To break the monotony, the men rode horseback over the surrounding countryside to pick wild fruit and berries. Sometimes they even chased deer. Horse racing with issued mounts developed into strong rivalries between companies.  

In 1842, horse racing off-post became so competitive and attracted so many of "... the worst black guards of the country ..." that the commanding officer at Fort Gibson ordered all events cancelled to prevent gambling. In a situation similar to the one at Fort Gibson, but with the exclusion of civilian participants, one trooper wrote that the only real excitement at his isolated cantonment resulted from horse racing between squadrons. The competition grew so keen that the post commander ordered the events halted, to prevent gambling and fisticuffs. 

The more northern Great Plains posts afforded a different type of excitement from that found in warmer climates. In the winters, the men organized sleigh rides to hunt rabbits on the frozen prairies. In


warmer weather, the troops passed their idle hours chasing wolves which roamed the nearby countryside.  

Visits to a town or village near a post sometimes offered the soldiers entertainment. If nothing more than a chance to sleep in a clean bed with sheets, the visits to a town allowed the men to relax in luxury, as compared to barracks living.

A local "hop" or dance provided the largest social event for soldiers. Ordinarily even the officers and their women also attended the affairs in town, but the caste of the military social system disallowed fraternization between enlisted and commissioned personnel.

Eugene Bandel reminisced that although he did not dance, he never missed a chance to attend one of the expensive social affairs in town. Bandel grumbled that cost for renting a costume and the admission to a masked ball totaled eight dollars. This same frugal individual complained that twenty-five cents charged for a game of billiards and five cents for a cigar tended toward usury.

Percival Green Lowe, a dragoon of the 1850's, explained one reason for the exorbitant cost of a dance. He wrote that while a good teamster received only $30 a month for risking his life crossing the prairies under all kinds of conditions, a fiddler earned $100 for the same period of time.

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24 Bennett, Forts and Forays, p. 18.
26 Dick, Vanguards of the Frontier, pp. 90-91.
27 Bandel, Frontier Life in the Army, p. 113.
28 Lowe, Five Years a Dragoon, p. 243.
Not all of the local dances provided entertainment for polite social gatherings. Rowdiness and even danger lurked in some of the saloons and dance halls frequented by the troopers, particularly in Texas and New Mexico. James Bennett, a dragoon of the 1850's, told of one such dance hall located in Las Vegas, New Mexican Territory, near Fort Union. One night a man came into the cabaret and ordered a glass of brandy. Soon after the bartender placed the drink before him, the stranger began to fire his pistol indiscriminately into the crowded room. The man's odd action took the life of a lawyer standing at the bar. Bennett wrote that before friends of the slain attorney lynched the pistol-wielding man, he admitted firing into the crowded bar out of desire for revenge for the death of his friend, who had been murdered in the saloon earlier in the week.29

The fandango, or fiesta-type dance, in a town square, afforded one of the chief attractions for troops in Texas or the New Mexican Territory. At one of these gay celebrations, dancing, drinking, and gaming continued through the greater part of a night.30 The easy familiarity of the Mexican and Indian girls at the dances on the square amazed James Bennett.31

The soldiers also had their own dances on post. The advent of an enlisted men's ball became a popular annual event soon after the Mexican War.32 At some of the more isolated posts, a soldier caterer planned

29Bennett, Forts and Forays, pp. 15-16, 27.
30Viele, Following the Drum, pp. 148-149.
31Bennett, Forts and Forays, p. 20.
32Lowe, Five Years a Dragoon, pp. 99, 115.
and prepared these affairs. A Scotsman in one of the infantry companies at Fort Abercrombie in present-day North Dakota sponsored one of the more elaborate balls in 1860. Although the infantry company cook catered the affair, he invited troops from all of the units on the post.33

The Scotsman collected money from potential customers in advance. He then sent all the way to St. Paul, Minnesota Territory, for china dishes and such foods as "... ham, tongues, sardines, pickles, preserves, lemons ... " and other delicacies. 34 In addition to the food and dishes, the caterer also procured drinks of all sort, including champagne and ale. For days prior to the event, he baked pies and cakes. He engaged two fiddlers and a flute player with the money remaining after all the purchases of food, drinks, and decorations. For all the elaborate and careful preparations, a fight erupted before the ball had barely gotten underway. The officer of the day needed the entire post guard to quell the fray. Punishments resulting from the fiasco retained the troops' attention for several weeks afterward. Needless to say, the ball was a social flop. 35

Besides annual balls, enlisted men at several posts formed Thespian Societies. In 1851, at Fort Leavenworth, the enlisted men from the Dragoons formed such a society and invited other troops to participate. The actors gave a performance once a week at the post theater, at which the officers and their wives attended regularly. 36

33Meyers, Ten Years in the Ranks, pp. 167-169.
34Ibid., p. 167.
36Lowe, Five Years a Dragoon, pp. 23, 79.
As previously mentioned, each post had a sutler, who maintained a store similar to a variety store. The President of the United States warranted the civilians who operated these monopolies to sell items of food, clothing, beverages, and notions not issued by the army quartermaster. For the exclusive right to sell to the troops of a post, the sutler paid a fee as established by the three officers of the Post Council of Administration. The assessment could not exceed twelve cents a month for each officer and soldier present at a garrison. In addition to selling to the troops, the sutler traded with local Indians.

Although the Articles of War governed the conduct of the sutler, he received no monetary compensation from the government. His only military-type function related to the protection of his property or person. Socially, the sutler and his wife fraternized with the officers.

Owing to distances of transportation, the sutler's goods sold at extremely high prices. In 1853, the Inspector General reported that sutlers' wares in most of Texas cost 80 per cent above New York prices. He attributed the exorbitant prices to shipping and overland transportation.

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38 Army Regulations of 1847, pp. 55-57.

39 Ibid.

40 Meyers, Ten Years in the Ranks, p. 73.

Regulations permitted post merchants to extend credit to enlisted men not to exceed one-half of an individual's monthly pay. This privilege was contingent upon approval by a soldier's commanding officer. Although sutlers sold beer and ale by the glass, regulations did not permit them to keep whiskey in stock, under threat of losing their franchises. The frontier sutler thus afforded a means for soldiers to vary their drab ration with a few expensive delicacies.\(^{42}\)

Prior to 1838, the army made no provisions for the moral guidance of its soldiery. Troops at isolated posts in Indian territory did not even have the benefit of a local civilian clergyman to administer to their religious needs. Early petitioners to Congress for army chaplains based their concern on soldier intemperance rather than on cultural or spiritual needs of the military men.\(^{43}\)

By 1835, several religious denominations began to dispatch missionaries to frontier posts. For example, the Presbyterians organized a church at Fort Snelling, at present-day St. Paul, Minnesota. To encourage attendance, the post commander completed his mandatory Sunday morning inspection one hour prior to church services. Those personnel who refused to attend church listened to the reading of the Articles of War long past the completion of religious services. In a very short time, church attendance reached 100 per cent of the personnel not on duty.\(^{44}\)

\(^{42}\)Army Regulations of 1847, p. 57. See also Bender, "Soldiers of the Far West," \textit{Pacific Historical Review}, VIII, 173.


\(^{44}\)Dick, \textit{Vanguards of the Frontier}, p. 91.
In March, 1836, after requests from numerous lobbyists, the Senate instructed its Military Affairs Committee to "... inquire into the expediency of providing for the appointment of chaplains for the army ... ."\(^{45}\) Two years later, Congress heeded the urging of concerned citizens and passed a measure allowing any post to employ a chaplain from local clergymen from time to time. The provision authorized Councils of Administration to pay up to forty dollars a month, issue four rations, and provide a captain's quarters and fuel to anyone employed as a chaplain.\(^{46}\) In addition to their ministrations to the moral guidance of the troops, the clergymen also performed the duties of schoolmaster.\(^{47}\)

Death on the frontier occurred so frequently that burials seldom required more than a minimum of time or attention. If an individual died on the prairies, only men close to the deceased participated in a simple ceremony, which ended with the grave being covered with stones or logs to prevent wild animals from digging up the remains. In garrison, time and conditions permitting, fellow soldiers gave more attention to ceremony. In cases of an epidemic or large battle losses, the army curtailed formality at funeral services.\(^{48}\)

After a brief memorial service in the post chapel, the men of a deceased soldier's unit escorted the body to the post graveyard. The

\(^{45}\)American State Papers, Military Affairs, VII, 119-120, 148 (1836). See also Washington, Army and Navy Chronicles, December 29, 1836.

\(^{46}\)U.S. Public Statutes at Large, V, 259 (1838).

\(^{47}\)Little Rock, Arkansas Gazette, August 22, 1838.

band preceded the entire burial procession, marching with drums muffled and covered in black, to the slow cadence of the Dead March. Six pallbearers of the same rank as the deceased carried the casket immediately behind the band. Behind the first two elements, a fully equipped horse with boots reversed in the saddle stirrups added solemnity to the occasion. An honor escort or firing squad whose size depended on the rank of the person being rendered homage marched behind the horse. The deceased's company, trailed by the other units of a garrison, completed the procession.49 After a brief ceremony at the graveside, the honor guard fired a three-round salute. Before a detail began to cover the casket with sod, the participating troops marched back to their normal places of duty at "quick time."50

Western frontier posts lacked sufficient entertainment facilities to alleviate boredom and loneliness in the life of the cavalrmen. Many of the problems such as drunkenness and desertion which plagued commanders resulted from this lack of entertainment for idle soldiers who spent most of their year in garrison. Although Congress and the army provided some off-duty diversions, they insufficiently curtailed disciplinary problems resulting from the lack of social life and recreation. Many of the amusements created by the soldiers merely presented further problems with violations of regulations. In reality, the frontier cavalrymen became victims of an environment which provided few means to escape boredom.

49 Bennett, Forts and Forays, pp. 6, 82. A private's honor guard consisted of eight men commanded by a corporal, while a sergeant received one of fourteen men directed by a non-commissioned officer of the same rank as the deceased.

50 Ibid. See also Army Regulations of 1847, pp. 78-81.
In the twenty-eight years preceding the Civil War, the United States cavalry evolved from an inexperienced and uncoordinated force to one capable of providing the mobility, firepower, and shock action necessary for decisive military success. Beginning with the activation of the Regiment of Dragoons in 1833, by hard work and dedication to duty the officers and men accomplished a seemingly impossible task without the benefit of precedents. Although never allocated a large number of units, the small group of devoted soldiers somehow successfully performed a mission of patrolling and maintaining law and order in a vast stretch of territory dominated by wild Indians, from the Mississippi River to the Pacific Ocean.  

Owing to the relatively short duration that officers remained present for duty with their units, they seldom developed deep affection for them. On the other hand, although most enlisted personnel returned to civilian life upon completion of their terms of service, a few remained and became professional soldiers. Approximately 5 per cent of the enlisted personnel accepted a second term of obligation and developed as a nucleus of professionalism necessary to create an effective military force. These old soldiers consumed their share of liquor off-duty  

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1Averam B. Bender, "The Soldiers in the Far West, 1848-1860," Pacific Historical Review, VIII (1939), 159-163, 178.  
2Senate Executive Documents, 34th Congress, 1st Session, No. 96 (Washington, 1855), pp. 624-633 passim.
and ably participated in the petty vices found on military reservations on paydays; however, their officers generally considered them self-reliant and resourceful when performing a mission. ³

Many general officers attached more significance to the officer corps than to units, but they failed to recognize the appreciation that soldiers held for the records and traditions of individual regiments. This trait of enlisted personnel can be added as an influential factor to explain the high morale of the small military force that garrisoned western posts.⁴

While the army quartermaster failed to supply consistently all needs of food and clothing to far-flung frontier garrisons, troops still existed in relative comfort because commanders generally exercised discretion in the enforcement of regulations allowing individual expedience. Even the meager pay of the soldiers equaled or bettered that of local contemporary laborers and farm workers.⁵

In contrast to a sufficiency of food and clothing for survival, the men at frontier garrisons lacked entertainment to break a monotonous routine in isolation. As victims of their environment, many men turned to alcohol as a means of escape. Intemperance contributed to most problems caused by infractions of regulations and the subsequent application of harsh disciplinary corrective measures. The punishment inflicted


⁵Bender, "Soldier in the Far West," Pacific Historical Review, VIII, 159-178 passim.
merely increased the desire of men to escape oppression, and thus, throughout the pre-Civil War period, desertion rates remained unrealistically high.6

Upon commencement of the Civil War in 1861, regular army mounted units moved to the eastern United States to form the nucleus of the Union cavalry. Preparation for this cadre responsibility had evolved gradually in the transformation of policy for administration, training, and weaponry, as newly-constituted regiments gained experience on the frontier. During the fratricidal conflict, procedures arduously developed at frontier posts provided the basis for concepts of re-supply and administration necessary to the effective employment of cavalry.

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