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GLORIETA PASS / THE FORGOTTEN WAR IN THE WEST

BY WILLIAM J. BARKER

Who won the Civil War for the Union?

A regiment of green Colorado troops who met and defeated a formidable, seasoned outfit of Texans which outnumbered them.

The battle didn't take place in the South or East, but in the wildest part of the old West--the rough land of canyons and peaks below the New Mexico-Colorado border. The average history professor outside of these states never heard of La Glorieta Pass, and few of today's tourists notice the markers which symbolize the bloody, gallant, and tragic events that took place there during the three days that sealed the fate of the Confederacy. Here's how it happened....

Back in February, 1861, 25,331 frontier citizens received the news that their rugged, awesome land of plains and peaks had been (after much petitioning and delay) officially recognized as Colorado Territory.

A large number, possibly a third, of the Coloradans were for the Confederacy; many of these men were leading spirits in the hell-roaring mining towns--in fact, a party of Southerners had developed the

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first gold diggings in the Territory three years earlier. After the firing on Fort Sumter, April 12, 1861, partisanship on both sides in Denver City (pop. 3000) was vigorous.

Much loud campaigning of the saloon variety led to brawls. Duels were fought both formally and in the "slap leather" fashion of the time and place, when political discussion (always a touchy pastime) reached the insult stage.

This then was Colorado when William ("John-the-Baptist-of-the-West") Gilpin, first governor of the Territory, arrived, May 29th, '61. Gilpin, seasoned explorer and Indian fighter, was a Missourian true-blue to the North and popular in his new office. He knew that Southern military strength was great in Texas, that the Confederacy considered the Western territories fair game for the war bag, and that, with their shaky backing, the South needed gold to buy arms and materiel from Europe. And where was gold for the taking?

Utah (whose Mormons were being wooed by Confederate agents who played upon the bitterness these self-isolated pioneers felt towards the Government as a result of past altercations); California (the southern portion of which was well-known to be secessionist, as well as an excellent avenue to the Pacific for the South); New Mexico (which then included Arizona and was largely populated by Mexican peons); and Colorado--natural central stronghold and gold-studded, strategic door to the pathway West.

Colorado's pro-Southerners propagandized openly. Gilpin, in desperation, set up a semi-military form of government. Both camps bought up all available weapons in a localized armament race. Neither side gained any very useful weapons for waging war; their arsenals were polyglot, in no wise standard, therefore impossible to service with standard military loads.

And now the strange and controversial figure of John M. (for Milton) Chivington enters the picture. He was a big fellow from Ohio--six feet five and strong as a buffalo bull--possessed of a powerful voice which could be heard on Sunday morning three blocks from the

Methodist church at 14th and Lawrence Streets in Denver City where he was a preacher. He was known as a "fightin' preacher" against whom the devil was generally conceded to have mighty poor odds.

When Governor Gilpin, during the summer of '61, grimly started to recruit volunteers for the First Colorado Regiment, this 40-year-old giant applied for a commission at once. A persuasive campaigner in the mining camps who made the contagious kind of fight talk the mountain men liked, Chivington was offered a captaincy as chaplain. However, he made it clear that if there was to be war he meant to be a warrior, and thereby talked himself into the service as a major of the line.

Gilpin, incidentally, was given no Federal authority to raise, arm and equip his troops. He went ahead anyway. He issued drafts against the U.S. Treasury for what was needed, and these drafts were honored by local merchants--even passed from hand to hand as currency. After the emergency, few were able to collect, and Gilpin was removed from office for his unorthodox act despite the fact that events clearly showed his move to have been justified.

The Governor built a small fort, Camp Weld, on the outskirts of Denver City where the novice infantry companies were put in training as rapidly as they arrived from the various towns: Central City, Black Hawk, Nevada, Buckskin Joe, Empire City, and the South Clear Creek mining camps. The rank and file were a tough and cosmopolitan crew from all over the world.

On August 26th, their officers were commissioned by the Army. This came about in large part through the efforts of a Denver City lawyer with political connections in Washington--John P. Slough. Slough, a man of some military experience as a former militiaman in Ohio, was jumped from Captain of Company A (Denver City) to Colonel in short order, and given command of the Regiment.

Col. Slough and his Major, Chivington, were not inclined to see the business of soldiering alike. Though Chivington had been a preacher, still his instinctive love for the hup-two-three-ready-aim-fire life had caused him to study military manuals between sermons for many months. Result: he wanted to make a well-drilled, thoroughly

by-the-numbers outfit of the regiment. Slough, on the other hand, took a dim view of the training program; felt that his men would operate as guerillas, harrying rather than attacking the superior forces of the South.

In early January, 1862, the long-feared aggression by the Texans was under way. Brig. Gen. Henry H. Sibley, brilliant West Pointer late of the U.S. Army, and now a formidable Confederate leader, moved across the New Mexico-Texas border with 3,000 troops, 15 artillery pieces, and a lengthy wagon train. He advanced up the Rio Grande Valley to U. S. Fort Thorn, 70 miles from the state line, and occupied it without resistance.

When this bad news reached Denver City, Gov. Gilpin dispatched a message to military authorities at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, begging for permission to send the restless Coloradoans southward to help the out-numbered New Mexicans who'd backed up to Fort Craig.

A slow month went by with no go-ahead from GHQ at Leavenworth. Gilpin, Slough, Chivington--right on down to the humblest private -- the Coloradoans said nasty words about Kansas in general and the Army brass there in specific. Finally, almost at the end of endurance, the following message arrived, February 14th:

Headquarters, Dept. of Kansas
Fort Leavenworth, Kan., Feb. 10, 1862

Send all available forces you can possibly spare to reinforce Colonel Canby, commanding Department of New Mexico, and to keep open his communication through Fort Wise. Act promptly and with all the discretion of your latest information as to what may be necessary and where the troops of Colorado can do most service.

D. Hunter
Major-General, Commanding

Eight days later, February 22nd, the Coloradoans hit the trail south.

Meanwhile, Sibley's Texans were on the march; things were worse than the mountain northerners and the Kansas brass realized. On the 7th of February, the 3,000 invaders had pressed onward up the Rio Grande, leaving Fort Thorn behind. On the 16th, Sibley halted them two miles below Col. Edward R.S. Canby's Union-held Fort Craig and challenged the loyalist forces to come on out and fight.

Canby's troops were green, somewhat overawed by the traditional prowess of two-gun Texans, and inclined to favor the shelter of the Fort. Col. Canby, therefore, declined the challenge; decided to sweat things out.

Sibley, in effect, shrugged his shoulders. If they wouldn't fight, he'd go 'round them, move on north. Five miles above Fort Craig, Sibley pitched camp in the pines and cottonwoods of Valverde, popular crossing-place on the Rio Grande.

That's where the first major battle in the Southwest's Civil War took place, February 21st, 1862.

Around nine in the morning, the New Mexicans moved out of their stronghold and engaged the Confederates across the river. Bitter fighting which lasted the better part of the day ensued. Canby's troops (including a well-liked officer named Kit Carson) had the edge in numbers but lost the battle to the seasoned, confident Texans and were beaten back to the Fort.

Losses on both sides were severe. It has been said that on a per capita basis, they were unparalleled by any single battle ever fought on this continent. Canby reported his casualties as 68 killed in the field, 158 wounded--and of the latter "several died" soon afterwards. Sibley's casualties (an approximate arrived at by averaging estimates given by both sides) were 95 Texans killed, 275 wounded.

The following day, Canby refused Sibley's invitation to surrender. Confederate officers, inside Fort Craig under truce, noted the seeming

strength of the New Mexicans' cannon and decided not to attack. What they failed to note in their hurried call was that many of the "cannon" were simulated--mere wooden pipes painted black.

Two days later, the invaders, after burying their dead, pushed north 25 miles to Socorro with their wounded. The plan now was to continue swiftly as possible; live off the towns en route; take valuable Fort Union near Santa Fe. Fort Union was known to be a treasure house of military equipage, a \$2,000,000 quarter-master's dream.

March 2nd, 1862, the Sibley column was spotted by Union scouts as it approached Albuquerque. The Federals ran for Santa Fe, destroying what they couldn't roll with them in their wagons. And the defenders' flight didn't stop at Santa Fe. There the frantic men in blue loaded a train of some 120 wagons with \$250,000-worth of GI materiel, fired and destroyed what they couldn't salvage from the onrushing Texans, and on March 5th headed northeast for Fort Union.

They arrived safely at this last ditch stand March 10th, '62, Sibley and his boot-tough Texans darkening their dreams.

The Rebel riders, their own dreams of a Western Confederacy looking brighter every colorful mile, took Albuquerque, Santa Fe and Cubero in short order. Sibley's orders to his officers now were to prepare for the decisive battle, consequently his troops stopped four days' march short of Fort Union to gather all manner of needed supplies.

Sibley planned to break Fort Union open by the use of artillery, including the Sibley Howitzer, only one of this distinguished officer's many creations in and then out of the U.S. Army. As a sidelight on his inventiveness, it has been observed that the famous (perhaps notorious is a better word) McClellan saddle was merely a modification of the Sibley saddle; that the Sibley tent is still used for some purposes by the Army; and this writer, for one, has warmed his GI boots and coffee on a Sibley stove within the past five years.

When and if Fort Union fell, with its substantial stores of artillery, saddles, leather gear, small arms, powder and ball, food and

other military essentials, the Southern forces would be equipped to take the West before Federal resistance could be organized in sufficient strength to tangle with the invaders. Sibley, who had had a hand in the grand strategy from the beginning, would capitalize on his forthcoming victories to recruit men from California, New Mexico, Arizona and Colorado, and his next stop would be San Francisco. Underground elements throughout the West were waiting for him to bring them out into the light.

With the Pacific Coast in hand, the world would be open to the Confederacy. Impossible to blockade, Western waters would swarm with Confederate ships. European recognition of the new nation would follow naturally. And western gold would solve the Secessionists' monetary problems.

But Sibley and his officers reckoned without knowledge of the Coloradoans.

The Coloradoans were on the march as of February 22nd, when their first column left Camp Weld. On March 3rd, a second contingent left Fort Wise, girded for combat.

The weather was cold--February in the Rocky Mountain country is not the most clement in the world. Most of the Colorado Regiment was on foot. When Col. Slough's troops reached Pueblo and Col. Tappan's reached Fort Bent on the Arkansas, bad news met them. Canby had sent word of the defeat at Valverde; said that the Confederates were advancing. He cried for help--fast.

Immediately, despite the arduous march they'd already had, and the several inches of snow which covered this stern country, both columns headed south at a killing pace of forty miles per day.

Near the present site of Trinidad, Colorado, at Grey's Ranch on the Purgatoire, Slough massed his two columns for the big push ahead. Perhaps this rendezvous on March 7th is a good place and time to take a closer look at Col. John P. Slough. Bearing in mind that colonels are rarely beloved by privates, note what Pvt. Ovando J. Hollister

wrote in his diary that day.....

"...We fell in and gave the Colonel three cheers and a tiger. He raised his cap but did not speak. How little some men understand human nature. He has been our Colonel six months, has never spoken to us, and on the eve of an important expedition... could not see that a few words were indispensable to a good understanding. He has a noble appearance, but the men seem to lack confidence in him....His aristocratic style savors more of eastern society than of the free-and-easy border, to which he should have become acclimated...."

Pocketing his diary with a sigh, Pvt. Hollister and the Regiment sloughed through the snowy Santa Fe Trail and eventually hit the tough terrain of the Raton Mountains.

A story--probably apocryphal --is told about a flight of eagles which circled over them as they reached the summit. A Dog Company GI brought up his rifle and said, "Let's shoot a couple!"

Capt. Jacob Downing is supposed to have said in the heroic manner, "No, we won't shoot them. These are the birds of liberty...they betoken victory for us." Dog Company duly gave three cheers for the eagles and saved their powder for less symbolic targets.

On March 8th, in the gathering darkness, the Colorado Regiment prepared to make camp at the southern foot of the Ratons. But the weary men suddenly stopped in the making of their camp. They could hear hoof-beats, the hard, labored breathing of a horse that's been run too far too fast. Then a courier appeared; slid from the saddle with the awful message from Fort Union.

General Sibley and his Texans had taken Albuquerque and Santa Fe where they were enlisting recruits. They were ready to attack Fort Union, which only had a small garrison of around 800 men.

The Colorado officers called their dog-tired troops out and told them. Chivington, in his strong voice and virile evangelistic style, put the matter bluntly. If Fort Union, last stand of the United States

in the plains-and-peaks country, were to be saved, they alone could save it. Would they try?

Chivington, a religious man, might not have said it in so many words even to himself, but it was a hell of a lot to ask. However, the Coloradoans agreed. We don't know exactly what these doughty doughs of 1862 said then, but in effect they said: "O.K. We're already so beat we can hardly stand, but O.K. This is it."

They discarded everything but guns, ammunition and blankets. They struck off through the bitter night over a totally unfamiliar route. They staggered along another 30 miles till bleak daylight found them at Maxwell's Ranch on the Cimarron, where they literally were asleep before they fell down to rest.

Their accomplishment is rather impressive. They'd hiked 67 miles since the previous morning--97 miles in the past 36 hours. No small part of that epic stroll had included mountain terrain. Several of their animals had dropped dead en route--too much work and too little feed. Only one or two companies were mounted.

After a few hours rest, they were trudging on again in the teeth of a howling mountain wind that sandpapered them with a fine mixture of grit and snow. That was March 9th. At dusk the following day, the squat, ugly, beautiful wood-and-'dobe objective brightened their red-rimmed, staring eyes--they'd reached Fort Union!

The garrison of New Mexican troops swarmed out to welcome them. Spirits soared--the Coloradoans had come down out of the Rockies and now the Texans would find the old fort a tough nut to crack!

Col. Canby, operating a part of his small force as a mobile defensive line in the vicinity of Las Vegas (the New Mexican emergency capital), had left Fort Union in charge of Col. Gabriel R. Paul. Slough calmly assumed senior command over Paul's garrison, and then got into an argument with Paul about what Canby wanted done.

Paul felt that Canby wanted Fort Union to be defended as long as

possible and then destroyed if necessary. Slough decided that the best defense was a good offensive--and ordered plans for harrassing the enemy. Slough, it will be recalled, liked the idea of guerrilla operations. In most accounts of this situation, it is also hinted that Major Chivington and Col. Slough were not hitting it off, either. Chivington, of course, was still the loud advocate of drill, drill and more drill. When he closed with the enemy (which he was most anxious to do), he intended to fight in the best Army Manual fashion.

The Regiment was completely re-outfitted in the next 12 days from the copious Fort stores. Chivington put the lads through their paces, too. They fired at targets for hours. They ran, fell, loaded and fired. They practiced with bayonets. And they drilled--oh my, how they drilled. By modern definition, the Colorado Regiment was an exceedingly "chicken" outfit.

The serious-minded patriot-historian, Dr. William Clarke Whitford, says earnestly of this training: "These Colorado soldiers were endowed with such rugged energy that they could not longer endure the routine of petty duties and the severity of discipline incident to garrison life." With all due respect to Dr. Whitford's formal analysis, these poor GIs were obviously just plain fed up, and would rather go to war than do one more "squads right." The situation is not without parallel in more recent army history.

So it was that, almost like kids going to a picnic, the Regiment sallied forth on March 22nd, south for Las Vegas. Objective: Santa Fe. The total column strength: 1,342 men. Three detachments were cavalry, the rest were afoot. Their artillery consisted of eight small cannon. Col. Paul and a skeleton garrison watched them leave; stayed behind to hold the fort.

Now here again, accounts vary about Chivington and the main Slough column. Either the hymn-shouter and his command of 418 men deliberately pulled out ahead of the main body without orders, or they didn't. Anyway, on March 25th, they were headed for Bernal Springs, 20-odd miles southeast of Las Vegas, quite on their own. That night they camped at Kozlowski's Ranch at the eastern mouth of La Glorieta Pass near the old Pecos Mission.

Kozlowski's place was a way-station on the Santa Fe trail, and Kozlowski was a hospitable Polish immigrant who'd served his time in the U.S. Army--five years with the First Dragoons, fighting Indians in New Mexico. He'd been discharged in '58, and it was like old times for him, having these young bucks in blue around.

Probably he felt rather important when he told Chivington about the Texas rangers that had questioned him earlier that day.

Those Texans, they'd wanted to know if Kozlowski'd seen any yankees around, and Kozlowski, well, he'd just told 'em, no sir-ee!

No doubt Chivington took into consideration that Kozlowski could hardly have said otherwise since the yankees had just now arrived.

In later years, Martin Kozlowski was fond of telling his friends about the Coloradoans. Either his memory was short and generous, or GIs have changed a lot, because the old Indian fighter said, "When they camped on my place, and while they made my tavern their hospital for over two months after their battles in the canyon, they never robbed me of anything--not even a chicken."

When Chivington heard about the scouting Texans, he promptly sent a detail of 20 men to catch them. Before sun-up the following morning, the Coloradoans surprised the enemy riders near Pigeon's Ranch, just inside the pass, and took them without firing a shot.

Two of the alleged Texans were officers. One, a Lt. McIntyre, had actually been a member of Col. Canby's staff at the battle of Valverde, and had deserted to the Confederate side. The other, a Captain Hall, was a Denverite well-known to the Colorado soldiers. From these gentry, Chivington learned for the first time that Sibley's army was at the western end of the pass and would march for Fort Union the following day.

Chivington made his decision. Sibley was headed east through Glorieta--Chivington would take the same trail west.... And a lot of good men wouldn't see the sunset.

Eight o'clock the morning of March 26th, 1862, the Colorado column rolled their packs beside the cedar bushes and under the bare cottonwoods, and filled their canteens at Kozlowski's sweet spring. Then, in good marching order, they advanced into the wide mouth of the pass which gradually narrowed until they reached Pigeon's Ranch, the largest hostelry on the route from Las Vegas to Santa Fe.

They were welcomed enthusiastically by the Pigeon himself--a Frenchman named Alexandre Valle who had acquired his interesting nickname as a result of his highly individual style of dancing at parties. The detachment continued on into the forbidding canyon, scouts riding in the vanguard. They reached the summit of the divide, about a mile and a half from Pigeon's, around 2:00 o'clock and proceeded to descend the trail through a narrow gulch. As they turned the corner through a thick stand of trees and brush, a leisurely party of mounted men in grey rode right into their gunsights.

I have said, rather glibly, that Chivington won the War between the States. If that is true, then it is equally true that the Confederate lieutenant in command of this party of 30 scouts lost the war. They hadn't expected, of course, to run into any resistance at all along the trail, but then scouts are supposed to expect trouble anywhere and all the time. That's what scouts are for.

This Confederate unit was riding only a short distance in advance of Sibley's lead column under Confederate Major Pyron. They were taken to the rear after questioning, and then Chivington pressed forward, excited, eager, anxious to strike without warning.

The narrow trail continues for three-fourths of a mile westward, angles to the right and opens up into a long, wide sector -- Apache Canyon. As the Coloradoans rushed into the canyon on the upper right, Pyron and his Texans moved into view, low on the horizon to the extreme left and at the opposite end of the canyon.

A third of a mile separated the blue and the grey. Imagine the shock Major Pyron must have felt when the opening shots told him the awful truth! The Coloradoans had taken quick cover along a traverse ridge. They had no artillery with them, but the Texans did--and

promptly got it into action.

And now for Dr. Whitford's classic quote on the Battle of Apache Canyon, which every reference on the subject repeats. Whitford says, "Then were exhibited the superb push, daring and hardiness of the frontiersmen who constituted the bulk of both commands. On this spot began the armed conflict--brief, fearless and decisive--between these detachments.... The issue at stake was the immediate mastery and the future civil control of... the West and Southwest."

The Texans planted the Lone Star flag near their two howitzers in the road, guarded by mounted infantry. They slammed round after round of shell and grape at short range into the Coloradoans, who, for the moment stampeded, took cover to the left.

Now Chivington, bull-roaring his orders above the cannonade, got his green troops to spread out; sent his little cavalry to the rear under command of Capt. George W. Howland with orders to charge the Rebel artillery if the Texans let up on their barrage in the slightest.

Captains Wyncoop, Anthony and Walker, with their companies, were sent running as skirmishers high along the canyon slope on the left to lay a flanking fire from above on the Texans. Captain Downing's men were dispatched to similar action on the mountainous right. The Texans had been out-maneuvered, and the fire from both elevated sides soon made their position untenable. They retired quickly, firing from behind pines and rocks as they went.

The canyon, further west, turns right and narrows considerably. The Texans re-formed here in a much better position for defense. An arroyo cuts across this upper part of Apache Canyon, and in itself is a formidable barrier. It ranged at the time from 20 to 25 feet deep and was spanned at only one point by a log bridge 16 feet long.

The Texans pulled the bridge down behind them, and set up their two howitzers in a defile just beyond. Their infantry took up positions on both mountainsides. It looked like unbeatable strategy.

Chivington's troops had followed as closely as possible, but now

were receiving a heavy concentration of fire and cannon balls.

The hymn-shouter, yelling his orders, on horseback and dressed in full regimentals, had pistols in both hands and one or two more about his person. We can be sure that he had just chewed Capt. Howland out royally for having failed to bring up the cavalry charge ordered for the first sign of retreat on the Texans' part. Chivington dismounted Howland's horsemen and sent them with Downing's company to climb the steep, rugged slope to the right. His orders were to get above the Confederates--climb even higher than they, and pour it on 'em. Wyncoop and Anthony were given the same assignment for the steep terrain on the left.

The rest of the Coloradoans were spread thin in a frontal line while Captain Cook's cavalry was sent to the rear, out of cannon shot, with orders to charge the arroyo when Chivington gave the signal.

Let a Confederate soldier describe the subsequent action for you as he did in a letter to his family:

"...When they (the Coloradoans) saw us ready to receive them, they stopped, but only for a short time, for in a few minutes they could be seen on the mountains jumping from rock to rock like so many mountain sheep. They had no sooner got within shooting distance of us than up came a company of cavalry at full charge, with swords and revolvers drawn, looking like so many flying devils. On they came to what I supposed was destruction; but nothing like lead or iron seemed to stop them, for we were pouring it into them from every side like hail in a storm. In a moment these devils had run the gauntlet for half a mile, and were fighting hand to hand with out men in the road...."

Chivington, astride his great horse, firing revolvers with both hands, had given the signal to Captain Cook and the cavalry as soon as the infantry had driven the Texans down from the heights. The mounted Coloradoans, came down the road in a thunder of hoofs at a full gallop, and with a long wild yell, jumped the arroyo en masse. Of the 103 horsemen who put their mounts to the chasm, all but one sailed over it and rode on through the invaders, back and forth, cutting them to ribbons.

The Texans retreated in what was almost a rout, but had the presence of mind to withdraw their two deadly howitzers also.

Dusk was slipping into the Apache now, and the Coloradoans, hurt and exhausted, abandoned the fight.

Both sides had suffered heavy casualties, the exact number of which is not known. Between 70 and 80 Texans were taken prisoner, and Chivington pulled them back with him to Pigeon's Ranch where a hospital was set up. It was a grim if victorious night as the Coloradoans buried their dead.

Their baptism of fire had been a costly one, but they had proved themselves first-class fighters. They had had the advantage of surprise, of course. One Texas private reported that when they first sighted the Coloradoans, they felt the Union forces were only some 400-odd Mexicans. The Texans, he wrote, numbered around 600 experienced soldiers, and they had two cannon. There you have the comparison: elements of surprise and spirit favored the blue side; elements of superior strength and experience defended the grey.

The following morning, March 27th, 1862, both sides were girding themselves for a decisive engagement. A truce until 8:00 AM had been arranged to allow for the removal of the dead and wounded.

Meanwhile, Pyron's outfit had been reinforced by Lt. Col. Scurry at Johnson's Ranch in the western, or Confederate end of the pass. The fresh Rebel troops had made a fast all-night march from Galisteo and were in considerable strength with a large wagon train of materiel to back them up. Meanwhile, Chivington, at the eastern end of the pass, had been reinforced by Slough and his entire force which arrived on the double from Bernal Springs.

The truce wore on, throughout the day. Both sides were on the alert--scouts played a nervous game of hide-and-peek with each other; reports were many and confused. The day came to a close with the candles burning over the twilight council tables at both ends of Glorieta Pass.

Col. Scurry, Sibley's right-hand man, came to a confident decision. He still entertained memories of Valverde. He was strong as the enemy, maybe stronger. His men had know-how. Scurry resolved to attack this time, on his own choice of fields.

Soon after sunrise of fateful March 28th, Scurry, with about 1,100 men and three cannon, marched eastward: cool, fearless-- and ready.

About the same time, Chivington, with one-third of the Coloradoans, set out by a circuitous southern route to scout the Confederate stronghold in the vicinity of Johnson's Ranch. This left Slough with around 700 men and two small batteries of artillery. Slough advanced from Kozlowski's to Pigeon's Ranch with a still-green outfit, fatigued from the 35-mile dash made to back up Chivington during the previous 16 hours. Once again it might be pointed out that the men had no confidence in Slough. Some even accused him--without reason, surely--of disloyalty. One of his captains, years later, admitted: "I watched him closely... and if I had discovered any movement or order of his intended to be favorable at any time to the enemy, I would have shot him on the spot."

Around 10:00 AM, Slough made camp at Pigeon's Ranch. He had some hundred wagons along, and the going had been tiring. His troops broke ranks and stacked arms to rest and fill canteens at the small well. This would be the last chance to get water between here and the western end of the pass.....

The Coloradoans were very nearly caught with their pants down. Pickets suddenly dashed into the relaxed camp, shouting that Scurry was a scant 800 yards away and coming fast. Confusion was instantaneous. Bugles shattered the quite. A babble of voices filled the air. Confederate grape-shot rained in while Colorado's officers exhorted their men to form for combat.

In a matter of minutes the battle was joined. It was, of course, a bedlam. Cannon and small-arms fire made an overwhelming din. The Coloradoans were pressed back by the vigorous Confederates. It was a hundred deadly little contests in one. Incredible feats of marksmanship

and bravery distinguished both sides--heroics too numerous to warrant detailing here. Both sides knew that this was it--the battle for the richest prize--the West--that beautiful, incredible, fierce Jezebel who was somehow mother to them all.

Scurry, writing his report of the action two days later to Sibley who was en route from Albuquerque to Santa Fe, said, in part: "Major Pyron had his horse shot under him, and my own cheek was twice brushed by a minie ball, each time just drawing blood, and my clothes torn in two places. I mention this simply to show how hot was the fire of the enemy when all of the field officers upon the ground were either killed or touched." He added in a later report that the conflict was terrible and that the men who opposed him were the flower of the U.S. Army.

At five o'clock in the afternoon, both sides were staggering with battle fatigue. Both were retiring slowly, and on both sides soldiers were in tears, damning their officers for not leading them forward into final victory.

An ambulance wagon bearing a flag of truce suddenly entered the arena from the western, Confederate side. Major Alexander M. Jackson, secessionist, former secretary of New Mexico and close personal friend of Jefferson Davis, was aboard. Capt. Downing led him to Slough at the rear, blindfolded, where an armistice until noon of the following day was arranged. It was subsequently extended still another day. Neither side was capable of prolonging the conflict at that time.

But the real Union victory--the real decisive and crushing blow to the Confederate cause--did not occur in this seven-hour hell just completed.

Chivington, with Lt. Col. Manuel Chavis of the New Mexico volunteers as guide, and about 430 officers and men, had reached the high, forested level above Sibley's wagon train near Johnson's Ranch. They reached this eminence between one and two o'clock in the afternoon after five hours marching and climbing through scrub pinion, cedar, and jagged boulders. They met and overcame a Texas sentry before he could raise the alarm.

Chavis, his memories bitterly full of the defeat at Valverde, gestured towards the Confederate train below, a thinly-guarded camp of some 85 loaded wagons.

"Chivington," he said, "you're right on top of them."

The bull-roarer ordered a reconnaissance which took an hour. He had no definite idea of the Texans' strength, (later estimated at 200 men), but he knew that he could surprise them by acting swiftly.

"In single file," he suddenly shouted. "Double-quick! CHARGE!"

And the Coloradoans went over the bluff, falling, running, sliding, --using guns as ropes, letting each other down by harness straps, crashing down on the camp in little avalanches of rock and small trees. The Texan got a six-pounder into action hurriedly, but without telling effect. The engagement was short and final. Those Confederate teamsters and infantrymen who could, jumped horses and rode bareback for their lives toward Santa Fe.

Wyncoop and thirty men silenced and spiked the one defensive cannon. Then, after throwing a protective column around the ranch and train, all the wagons were burned. Many exploded and sent wheels and tattered frames 200 feet in the air. A Confederate runner escaped to tell the tragic news to Scurry at the front. This may well have brought about the Confederate truce up there.

Another tragedy, no less demoralizing, was inflicted on the Texans, who, of course, were horsemen first, last and always. Between 500 and 600 horses and mules were at Johnson's Ranch--the mounts of the Confederates fighting Slough on foot at that moment. The Coloradoans put them all to the bayonet. As one Union GI said, "It seemed a pity to kill them, but we could do nothing else."

There was no way to get the animals back north, and if left there, there was the excellent chance that Scurry's men would retake them. After all, Chivington did not know how Slough's battle was going. Reports on the losses of both sides are so various, even from so-called official sources, as to be valueless. Let's sum it up this way: Sibley,

heartbroken, had no choice but to order a retreat all the way to Texas. And Canby, overly cautious, immediately after the battle ordered the Coloradoans back to Fort Union posthaste.

Slough was outraged at this order, and resigned his commission, although he was later appointed Brigadier-General by Lincoln and put in charge of the military district of Alexandria, Va.

Fortunately, it is not within the scope of this rambling paper to discuss Col. Chivington's later feats of arms. I refer, of course, to the Sand Creek Massacre.

And what of Sibley? One account, possibly fictional, tells of the great soldier's self-exile to Egypt, where he and his wife frequented Shepheard's Hotel in later years, always hoping to meet some Americans who possibly might have news of the West.

