

The report of Lieutenant W. H. C. Whiting's reconnaissance of the wester frontier of Texas
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REPORT
OF
THE SECRETARY OF WAR,

ENCLOSING

A report of Lieutenant W. H. C. Whiting's reconnoissance of the western frontier of Texas.

JUNE 28, 1850.

Read.

JULY 5, 1850.

Ordered to be printed.

WAR DEPARTMENT, *Washington, June 27, 1850.*

SIR: I have the honor to transmit herewith a communication from Captain Fred. A. Smith, in charge of the Engineer Department, enclosing a copy of the report of the reconnoissance of Lieutenant W. H. C. Whiting, of the Corps of Engineers, of the western frontier of Texas, with a trace of the accompanying map, in reply to a resolution of the Senate of the 25th instant calling for such report.

I am, very respectfully, your obedient servant,
GEO. W. CRAWFORD,
Secretary of War.

Hon. MILLARD FILLMORE,
President of the Senate.

ENGINEER DEPARTMENT, *Washington, June 26, 1850.*

SIR: In compliance with the call of the Senate resolution of the 25th instant, herewith I have the honor to enclose a copy of the reconnoissance of Lieutenant W. H. C. Whiting, of the Corps of Engineers, of the western frontier of Texas, with a trace of the accompanying map.

Very respectfully, sir, your most obedient

FRED. A. SMITH,
Captain Engineers, in charge.

Hon. GEO. W. CRAWFORD,
Secretary of War.

SAN ANTONIO, *March 25, 1850.*

GENERAL: I have the honor to forward a copy of my report to Major General Brooke, upon the frontier of Texas; also, a sketch of the line of posts.

I am, very respectfully, your most obedient servant,
WM. H. C. WHITING,
Lieutenant of Engineers.

Gen. J. G. TOTTEN,
Chief Engineer of the United States.

HEADQUARTERS EIGHTH MILITARY DEPARTMENT,
San Antonio, Texas, October 1, 1849.

SIR: It being very important that a military reconnaissance should be made of the western frontier of Texas indicated by the chain of posts now established, commencing at the Rio Seco and terminating on the Red river, at the mouth of the False Washita, you have been selected for that duty.

You will be pleased to embrace in your report the general character of the country, the roads to be constructed between the posts, (taking the nearest routes eligible for such roads,) timber and stone for quarters, fuel and water, and the subsistence and forage which the country adjoining the posts can supply—also noticing the amount of population and cultivation, as well as the healthiness of the country.

You will also, after consulting with the officers in command respectively, report on the military sites now established, with the necessary works and buildings applicable to each position, the number of companies in each work, (which must be proportioned to the strength of the tribe in the neighborhood,) with the passes by which the Indians are in the habit of entering the settlements, and those particularized which are the most important. You will make a report of your survey for these headquarters.

On the completion of this duty, you will return to this post, when you will receive similar orders to make a reconnaissance from the Seco to Eagle pass, on the Rio Grande, and to the mouth of that river.

Brevet Major E. B. Babbitt, assistant quartermaster, will furnish you with the necessary outfit, and the commanding officers at the different posts will furnish the proper escorts.

I am, respectfully, your obedient servant,
GEO. M. BROOKE,
Brevet Major General.

Lieut. W. H. C. WHITING,
Corps of Engineers.

True copy.

GEO. DEAS,
Assistant Adjutant General.

SAN ANTONIO, *January 21, 1850.*

MAJOR: In obedience to the instructions of the commanding general in this department, dated October 1, I have the honor to render a report of a reconnaissance of so much of the military frontier of Texas as extends from the mouth of the False Washita, on Red river, to Fort Lincoln, on Rio Seco.

The chain of posts now established reaches, in a direction generally northeast and southwest, from the Rio Grande, at Eagle pass, to Coffee's bend, on Red river—an extent covering a great variety of country. Between ten and twenty miles above the Wool road, and parallel to it, is the southern slope of a range of rugged hills. This range is the lower limit of the great limestone formation of the northwest prairie; and from its base stretch the beautiful valleys of Las Moras, the Nueces, the Rio, the Medina, and the Guadalupe. Leaving the Medina, it assumes a northeasterly direction, until, passing the Colorado, it is lost in the elevated tables of the Brazos. The country which it bounds is a succession of rolling prairie and gentle slopes, clothed with luxuriant mezquite grass, and studded with groves of live oak and post oak. Watered by numerous creeks, it is one of the most desirable tracts of western Texas, and in no distant time the vicinity of the streams will be settled. To this position the base of the limestone hills will be a permanent frontier. Far to the north and west, the vast prairie presents an unbroken, sterile, and arid plain, destitute of attraction to the squatter. As the settlements are approached, this plain is broken into innumerable ravines, bounded by steep cliffs. Here are to be found the heads of the rivers of southwest Texas. Rising in this broken and difficult region, they break through the hills, forming the noted passes known by their several names. These have long been the resort of the Comanches, Lipans, and Wacos, in their predatory excursions to the lower Rio Grande and the hamlets near San Antonio. Trails are to be found running in many directions through the rich bottoms of the Llano and the San Saba—tributaries to the Colorado. Northeast of the Guadalupe, in the direction of the line of posts, and beyond the river Pedernales, is found a country greatly different from that just described. The tameness of the limestone scenery is relieved in the rough mountains of the Colorado. The primitive rocks are everywhere met. Sienitic granite, in enormous masses, and of superior quality, and great ledges of red sandstone, through which are protruded quartz, gneiss, and felspatic rocks, form the distinguishing features of this locality. The soil is almost entirely composed of detritus from these rocks; and the indications of valuable minerals are abundant. There are many places in which silver ore is found in considerable quantity. Building stone of the finest quality and of every variety exists in inexhaustible quarries. Otherwise this section is not valuable, and, except the mountain cedar and the wood which shelter the rich and charming valley of the Pedernales to the southward, generally bare of timber. The Colorado, one of the largest rivers of Texas, waters this region. It is generally difficult to ford, and is subject to very extraordinary freshets. The lands of its valley, though confined, are remarkable for rich and productive soil; and the scenery through which the line passes is exceedingly beautiful and various. Upon leaving this river, we leave also the older formations. They gradually give place to beds of marble, and still further on to vast strata of the fossiliferous limestones. Timber begins to be scarce, and is only

found in the river valleys. No country can be better watered, and creeks intersect the plains at short intervals. The remarkable feature of this region is the elevated prairie, with its unbroken horizon. Through this, and at a great depth below its level, flow, in narrow and precipitous cañons, the Lampasas, the Cowhouse, the Leon, and the Bosque—large and rapid streams, with numerous tributaries. All these rivers are of the waters of the Brazos—the dividing ridge between which and the Colorado is very near to the latter. Except in times of high water, little or no impediment exists to travelling in any direction. The steep banks of the rivers require preparation for the passage of wagons; but the Indian is not, as in the lower country, confined to certain routes for water and practicable trails: he can, without difficulty, traverse the country in all directions. Here, then, that local importance of posts with respect to certain passes which obtains in the southwest country is not felt, and their disposition depends altogether upon their *relative distance* apart and the *extent of country* over which their garrisons are competent to operate.

Between the Brazos and the Red river, the same general alternation of prairie and river bottom is met with. The numerous freshets of the streams, overflowing their rich valleys, render their vicinity very unhealthy. This is particularly the case with the Trinity, whose broad lands are often entirely under water. Perhaps the most remarkable features of this section are the two great belts of forest known as the "Cross Timbers." Distant about fifty miles apart, they reach from the Brazos across Red river, and are separated by a prairie entirely destitute of wood. Throughout the lower, the settlements are rapidly increasing. Abounding in game, and containing many tracts of valuable lands, sheltered from the "northers," these belts are important as being a favorite range for many of the Texas Indians, and their usual home in the winter. About fifty miles to the north of the Trinity, in crossing the divide between it and Red river, the northern limit of the great Texas limestones is found, and the Red sandstones of Arkansas commence to appear.

Such is a brief sketch of the most remarkable characteristics of the extensive line of country upon which the troops are placed to operate. Their stations, when the nature of the enemy and of the country is considered, will be found not to depend at all upon local advantages for attack and defence—a matter of great moment in the establishment of positions against a less barbarous enemy. Regarded as starting-points and resting-places for the scouts, whose duty is to restrain and punish Indian depredation, their relative distance becomes the most important consideration. This, however, is *especially* true only of the upper part of the frontier; and as this report is properly confined to that portion, I wish to leave the account of the Seco and its vicinity until I can consider it in connexion with the remainder of the line.

The route between Fort Lincoln and Fort Martin Scott, in nearly a direct line, has generally been supposed impracticable, on account of the numerous rugged cañons which intersect the hills. A careful examination which I commenced from Fredericksburg in the direction of the Bandera pass (and which was finished by Capt. Steele, 2d dragoons) points out a road at least equal to that between San Antonio and Fort Martin Scott. This route, joining the old ranger trail about ten miles northeast of Vandenburg, crosses the Medina, and by the Bandera pass reaches the valley of the Guadalupe; thence, in nearly a straight line, it attains the Peder-

les valley near the station. This celebrated Indian pass has been known as an Indian road from the earliest history of the Spanish settlements. It has been identified with many a frontier fight and many a hostile inroad. By it the passage from the Guadalupe to the Medina is readily made, and the precipitous cliffs and difficult ravines which separate these rivers on the dividing ridge avoided. It is still used by the Indians. Their towns remain on the Guadalupe hard by it; but the establishment of the posts and of the ranging stations has rendered the vicinity unsafe for them. It is an outlet of great importance, and I consider it well that the trail of the scouts and patrols should pass through it. The general character of the route is hilly, and the distance about one hundred and ten miles. Some labor would be required to prepare a wagon-road; and, on account of the facility of communication from either post with headquarters, I consider it unnecessary that more than the trail for the scouts should be indicated.

Fort Martin Scott is pleasantly situated on the west bank of Barron's creek, a small tributary of the Pedernales, about two miles from the town of Fredericksburg, and seventy-five from San Antonio. Its site is healthy, convenient, and judiciously chosen. Placed in a section of country which is part of the rich valley of the Pedernales, clothed with a plentiful growth of post oak and cypress, with abundance of building stone, lime, and sand hard by, and among settlements rapidly increasing, it has almost all the requisites for the quarters and subsistence of troops. It has a central position with respect to the upper and lower settlements of the Pedernales, and to the towns of the Germans and the Mormons. The latter are thriving, its mills supply the neighborhood with lumber and meal, and ample crops furnish the forage required by the troops. Fredericksburg is a healthy position: the garrison appeared to advantage, and I have heard of no endemic disease existing there. As to buildings and quarters required, the fine barracks of hewn logs already put up are ample for all present purposes, and other than these no defensive works are necessary; but, for complete security against horse-stealing by the Indians, I would recommend that all public stables be enclosed by a high and strong picket fence.

Fort Croghan, the next station on the line, is situated at the head-spring of Hamilton's creek, a small tributary of the Colorado. In a pretty valley, sheltered from the northers by the neighboring hills and groves of post oak, the position, in point of health and comfort of the troops, is found to be a good one. I examined with great care the country lying between this and Fredericksburg. As before mentioned, this section is very rugged and difficult, and in its formation is distinct from other portions of Texas. Leaving Fort Martin Scott in a course nearly north-east by east, the connecting road will pass from the Pedernales valley through Connor's gap, and thence continue to the Colorado, crossing it just below the mouth of the "Sandy." A continuous valley lies between the rough mountains which enclose that creek and the hills to the eastward, which are the divide between the Pedernales and the Colorado. The passage of the latter river is difficult. The ford has been much used by the Indians, but is scarcely practicable for wagon communication. Should that be deemed essential, a ferry must be placed near this point, which involves the establishment of a settlement or a guard. Certainly the valley and the lands in the vicinity are exceedingly rich and beautiful, and well adapted to attract settlers; but, for the purposes of scouting and express, the

obstacle is not great enough to require this. Fifteen miles from the crossing is the station of Fort Croghan; and the whole distance is not greater than sixty miles. The troops at this post had already constructed their shelters for the winter in a very substantial and creditable manner. They are well laid out in suitable arrangement. The marble and common limestone abounding in the vicinity have supplied good building material, and chimneys, ovens, and other necessary structures of masonry have been put up, not only with rapidity, but neatness. Four miles below the fort, upon Hamilton's creek, was the cantonment of the rangers known as "McCulloch's station." This was the point originally selected for the troops. Some disagreement with the owners of the land caused their removal to their present locality—a fortunate thing; for the ranger camp, from the miasma arising from the sinkholes of the neighboring prairie, is found to be unhealthy. The valley of the Colorado is open to the same objection; otherwise, it would be expedient to occupy that. No such complaint is made of Fort Croghan; and the medical officer of the post informed me that the men had been uniformly healthy since its first establishment. This station is about fifty miles distant by the road from Austin, and receives its supplies from that point. The resources of the vicinity, particularly on the Brushy and the San Gabriel, are ample for the supply of the forage and the market of the garrison. No settlement exists to the westward. While the rangers occupied this section, a guard was detailed, which held the points at the Sandy crossing and at the mouth of the Llano, (where is also a ford,) with a view to prevent the passage of the lower Brazos Indians to the country south of the Colorado.

Communication between this post and that on the river Leon, the next on the line, is very easy. Distant about seventy-five miles, the latter is placed on the left bank of the stream, in one of the finest valleys occurring upon the route. No other labor is required to make a fair wagon-road between the stations than to slope the banks of the rivers at the fords. As observed in noticing the general characteristics of the country, these rivers are remarkable for the deep channels through the prairies by which they make their way to the lower country. The valleys are formed in several plateaux, which, like great steps, render the descent to the water less difficult. Covered with a heavy growth of timber, and comprising a great deal of fine land, this section holds out many inducements for settlers, who already are beginning, assured of the protection of the troops, to take advantage of it. Here is found the southern limit of that enormous bed of marine fossils which stretches far away to the territory north of Red river. Few tracts are more interesting to the geologist. The precipitous cliffs of the rivers display the various strata, perfectly defined by their remains, from the lower fossiliferous limestones to the last beds of the sandstones, which lie exposed on the surface of the prairie.

Owing to the lateness of the season when Fort Gates was established, the barracks and buildings of the post were not quite so forward as elsewhere on the line. Fine timber is found abundantly in the vicinity, and the garrison may depend upon the settlements within fifty miles on the Austin road for supplies of forage and beef.

Fort Graham, on the left bank of the Brazos, occupies the position known as José Maria village. No place on the line is more remarkable for its beauty and fitness in every respect for a garrison. A clear creek passing the camp gives water to the post. The fertile lands of the Brazos

spread out before it. It is healthy—the late sickness so prevalent among a portion of the troops having been due to their stay in the pestilential region of the Trinity. A substantial building has been put up as a hospital, and the shelter for the men nearly completed. To Fort Gates the distance is about fifty-five miles—the route between the two posts lying to the eastward of a direct line, forced in that course by the rough country of Coryell's creek and the upper Bosques. Wagons have already passed over it, and it is in all respects a good one. At the post a ferry has been established, which in time of high water keeps up communication. Timber of cedar and oak abounds in the vicinity; and the settlements to the eastward and lower down on the Brazos afford forage and a market ample for the wants of the post. It is greatly frequented by Indians of all tribes. Most of the Texas bands live upon the upper Brazos; and the vicinity of the trading-house about fifty miles above Fort Graham renders it a place of great importance. A direct road to Austin, one hundred and fifty miles long, is much travelled, and is now the route for supplies.

Fifty-four miles above Fort Graham, in nearly a north direction, at the junction of the Clear and West forks of the Trinity river, is Fort Worth. An excellent road, skirting the western edge of the Lower Cross Timbers, is already made between the posts. The latter is the most northerly of the chain, and is the most objectionable in its position. The Trinity, a rapid stream, to which belong many tributaries, is subject to very sudden rises. Unlike the rivers to the southwest, its valley is a level flat, between which and the Great Prairie there is but one descent. From two to three miles wide, and covered with a dense growth of trees and underwood, this is by the freshets converted into soft mud; and when the water subsides, it leaves to the sun a mass of rotted vegetable matter and half-dried mud, whence the constant sickness in the country is engendered. Fever and ague prevail through the whole year, and the troops have suffered from it very much. The timber which exists at all westward of the "Cross Timbers" is only found in these valleys of the streams, and there it is impossible to live. The garrison is therefore forced to the high plain, exposed all winter to the northers and sleets of the country, and in summer to scorching heats. The fort has been laid out on a scale rather contracted—probably as designed originally but for one company. And the arrangement of the stables I cannot commend: they are much too near the quarters of both officers and men, and, however thorough the police may be, cannot but be offensive in summer. The question of security or defence is readily settled. A picketing with a guard, considering the nature and mode of warfare of the probable enemy, is ample. To place the stables within shot from the barracks, in such wise that its approach, in event of a *coup de main*, is commanded, I think is all that is required.

A mill, worked by horse-power, hard by the post, and the thickly-wooded bottom of the Trinity, furnish cheap and abundant supplies of lumber and fuel. A coarse-grained marble, making excellent building material, and plenty of lime and sand, are found in the neighborhood. No post is so plentifully supplied as to forage and subsistence. Within forty miles are the little villages of Dallas and Alton; and numerous hamlets are found through the Cross Timbers, which afford nearly everything that is required for consumption by the troops.

The route between Fort Smith and the Red river is already practicable,

and skirts the western edge of the Cross Timbers for about eighty miles. After crossing Hickory creek, thirty miles from the post, the houses of squatters are to be seen at short intervals all along the road, as far as the little village of Preston, in Coffee's bend. The distance between Fort Washita and Fort Worth is one hundred and twenty miles, and entirely too great for their small garrisons to scout over effectually. An extensive line of country is exposed to the incursions of the Wichitas—a wild tribe with which, as yet, no relations have been established. They live upon the Red river, some fifty miles west of the line, and are hostile. Should it be deemed sufficiently important to establish another post between Fort Washita and Worth, I recommend the position at the Elm fork of Trinity—formerly a ranger station, and about midway on the road—as satisfying a requisite conditions.

From this brief notice of the different stations, to avoid repetition, proceed to some general remarks applicable to them all. The building required at present are such as are in process of erection—comfortable houses; and, besides the recommendation that capacious hospitals, with suitable accommodation for attendants, be made, I have nothing to add upon this matter. I might say that great expense would be saved to the government, as well in money as in time and labor, while the efficiency of garrisons would be consequently increased, if each post were supplied with a circular saw and its apparatus, to be worked by horse-power. All of them are a number of mules: many of these are pack mules, and when not used in the scouting parties, could be applied to this without additional cost. The advantages resulting are so obvious, that it is unnecessary to enter into the details of expense. All the lumber required could be supplied by three or four men; and not only would the building be neater, more comfortable and convenient, than those of rough-hewn material, but the effective force of the garrisons be put to their appropriate duty and discipline. The weight of Texas lumber, and the distance of posts from places where mills are worked, render it extremely expensive while, by this means, all that is incurred is the original cost of machinery—an outlay, in consequent saving to government, many times covered.

I have to urge that the garrisons occupying this line, with the companies as at present organized, are far from strong enough to be effective and this is a matter of such moment as cannot be too forcibly represented. Certainly, occupied with building, charged with scouting over an extensive line and protecting a great frontier exposed to a restless and active enemy, this command, even when not disturbed, must be considered as in a state of war. It is expected to be always ready; and this, with the skeleton organization, is impossible. This is especially true of the lower posts, including that at Fredericksburg; for above a different state of things exists. Most of the Indians of Texas find a home upon the upper Brazos, within a few days' march of the more northerly posts. There are their cornfields, their women and children—there the pasturage of their horses. In the Upper Cross Timbers, and about the head of the Leon, is the range of the lands of the Ionis, Keechis, Caddos, Tahuanos, Tancahuas, and Wacos. The Wichitas live on Red river. These people are naturally cautious of depredating on settlements protected by posts so near to themselves, and whence they may meet a severe retribution. Accordingly, we hear of but few disturbances in that quarter. Occasionally a horse or a beef is taken, but murders are of rare occurrence.

The case is different below; and while the old men and the chiefs are raising the upper posts in good faith and amity, and their hunters carry on an active trade in game, their young men are almost continually on the war-path against the settlements of the lower country. For such reasons, great activity and efficiency are required of the garrisons bound to their protection there. I cannot recommend less than two mounted companies of one hundred men each at Fort Martin Scott. With a force large enough to allow the detail of strong and frequent scouts, its position is such as to render great service in punishing, as well as restraining, Indian depredation. Within one hundred miles, in a westerly direction, pass all the great trails, at known points, by the rivers of the lower country. Differing from the northerly parts of Texas, this is rugged and difficult, and there are certain passes by which the enemy is forced to move. The fort, from its situation, may be said, by active scouting, to command them. On the Llano, the San Saba, and the Concho, is much valuable land. Already the Germans are pushing their settlements into the sections, and from it must be furnished the protection they need.

Posts Croghan and Gates are of less general importance. They serve for the protection of their immediate neighborhood; and their situation is dependent upon the distance over which their forces are competent to operate with effect. For garrisons of two companies, (the least I could recommend,) this distance appears to be about sixty or seventy miles; and while the nature of the country is such that the Indian can move in all directions, from the same cause the news of his approach flies rapidly, and he is readily pursued.

At Fort Graham, on the other hand, I attach great importance, for reasons which apply to it peculiarly, on the upper frontier. In the immediate neighborhood of the various Indian tribes, in whose camps may be heard the wails of the garrison, it is regarded by them as a council-spot—a place where they will make their treaties, and receive their presents. To seem to feel the power of the country directly at their own homes, has upon them a great effect. Its proof is, that, while hundreds, perhaps thousands, of them are ranging through the woods and up the creeks, it seems perfectly safe to travel, and the numerous animals of the post graze on the broad valley of the Brazos, month in and out, without disturbance or hurt. The relations which exist at this fort with the Indians satisfy me that the nearer to them garrisons of force are established the better the results. In time of general hostilities, active operations may be conducted from Fort Graham with signal effect. Striking by the line of the Brazos, in the winter time, when the cold winds make the great prairies uninhabitable, and when grass is to be found only upon the creeks and in the river valley, its troops have a formidable position. The tribes cannot or will not understand why, one day, this post may be called upon to chastise them for outrages committed many hundred miles away. Should that time come, it would be well that the work be done with vigor; and I think, therefore, that about two hundred men should be stationed here.

Perhaps more complete protection to the extreme north of the line, now quite exposed, and rapidly being settled, might be afforded by dividing the force at Fort Worth, and placing one wing, say, at the Elm fork of Trinity. One hundred and twenty miles is too great a distance to be covered by one small post. But, in this disposition, I consider it necessary that the single companies be increased to the war numbers.

Such is a cursory view of the line, as now fixed; and I believe that a *disposition* better suited to the nature of the country, the enemy, and the *present* exigencies of the settlements, cannot be made. Certainly, with such numerous and active tribes on the border, the frontier from Hamilton's valley to Red river has been remarkably free from disturbance. Be it understood that I allude to the *upper country alone*. But it is easy to perceive that the present condition of things here cannot long be maintained; and, though now the line of posts is at the proper distance in advance of the settlements, the latter are in rapid progress. The stations themselves induce them; and many will be speedily pushed into the rich districts of the upper Colorado, Leon, and Brazos. A more extensive system will be required, and one which must bear, not only upon the people of Texas, but on those of Mexico. Unable, then, to regard the present line as permanently established as an Indian limit, I have not made such particular recommendations as fixed garrisons require.

The natural frontier—that is, the boundary between the sterile plains of the northwest and the arable lands—will probably be the future permanent line; and excellent positions might be established between the mouth of the little Wichita and the head of navigation on the Rio Grande—the chain of posts following the valley of the Palo Pinto to the old San Saba fort, and thence by the heads of the Nueces and Las Moras. Such a line penetrates the very heart of the Indian country. The wild tribes see, not small garrisons many hundred miles away, but large and powerful posts, which, upon the news of outrage, retaliate with terrible effect. Such a command distributed upon this line will impress the savage with an idea of the power and resources of the great republic which he has never before entertained, or has regarded as fabulous. To know us, they must be made to feel us; and I can conceive of no better plan for this end than the disposition of two thousand mounted men upon the frontier, of which a garrison of two hundred may be placed on Red river, five hundred on the Brazos, three hundred at the old San Saba fort, (a locality peculiarly eligible,) three hundred at Las Moras, and seven hundred at Presidio del Norte. Here are five positions which I wish to be understood as recommending—not at all for their advantages as to their moral effect upon an enemy of the kind considered, but simply as places by which the force is availably distributed, strong action provided, and depot and refuge secured. From these points, where the force is concentrated, and ample provision for active service supposed to be made, the *moving camps* of the cavalry diverge, scouring the country to and from the settlements, preventing the passage of Indians, compelling them to remain in their own land, and, if forced to that extremity, capable of exterminating them. These commands, remaining in the field in *constant motion* for the proper length of time, return to the large forts, whose garrison is ample to relieve them, and thus keep the men in a state of sufficient activity, with sufficient rest.

Independent of the well-known fact that a concentration of force is the greatest promotion of discipline and efficiency, and that the great principle of war is the same whether the enemy be civilized or barbarous, and that by such services the troops become daily more inured to the country, and better acquainted with the manner of warfare of the Indians, I believe such a system to be far less costly than the distribution in small and numerous fixed garrisons. I believe that it is the speediest and the surest mode

operating against those wild nomadic bands of many thousands of
 bers who infest our enormous frontier, and against whose incursions
 government is bound to protect its own people and that of the neighbor-
 ing country, blighted for so many years. And, while conscientiously
 advocating such a system, I hope I may be understood simply as suggest-
 ing, in the belief that, even in the crude ideas of the inexperienced, abler
 and wiser heads may find something which they may improve to most
 salutary effect.

I have the honor to be, major, your most obedient servant,

WM. H. C. WHITING,
Lieutenant of Engineers.

Major GEORGE DEAS,

Assistant Adjutant General Eighth Military Department.

SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS, *March 14, 1850.*

MAJOR: I have the honor to continue my report of a reconnaissance of
 the military frontier of this department.

The post at Rio Seco, called Fort Lincoln, is situated on the Wool road,
 five miles west of San Antonio, thirteen from Vandenburg, and two
 from Dhanis, the extreme western settlements of the Germans. It is im-
 portant as furnishing protection to these hamlets, but chiefly as a post of
 fort and refuge for the extensive travel of the road. Its supplies are
 generally and readily obtained from San Antonio and the German set-
 tlements. The position is healthy, the water good, the grazing of fine
 quality; but otherwise, from the general dryness of the country around it,
 and the want of suitable building timber in the vicinity, it does not pre-
 sent so many attractions as most of the other posts in Texas. I think
 that the temporary quarters may be much more readily and cheaply erected
 of stone than of wood. Ample quarries are at hand, and the buildings
 required may be put up of limestone with much greater rapidity than with
 logs. It has been found necessary to haul the timber of which a few
 houses have been already built six or seven miles—a cause of great delay.
 The Wool road, the route of communication between San Antonio and
 the Rio Grande, is so far excellent, and a great deal of travelling is made
 upon it. Thirty-four miles west of Fort Lincoln is Fort Inge. This
 post, near the head of the beautiful Leona, is justly regarded as one of the
 most important and desirable positions in Texas. No station on the line
 possesses so many peculiar advantages as this. On a great inland route
 of commerce, at the point where the great military road to El Paso del
 Norte leaves the road to Eagle pass, in a country celebrated as the richest
 and most desirable, in point of wood, water, and soil, west of the Colorado,
 and surrounded by beautiful scenery, capable of supplying the wants of the
 troops many times over, it is pre-eminent as a military site. In a state of
 constant warfare and constant service, its garrison has onerous duties,
 and, on the present line, above all others, demands strong forces and con-
 stant supplies.

The arrangement of the quarters and other public buildings about the
 place, for security, stability, comfort, and neatness, reflects great credit
 upon the officers and men. Capacious barracks have been put up, at but
 small expense; large and fine gardens have been laid out and cultivated,

promising ample supply for the inhabitants. The grazing in the vicinity, through the rich mezquite flats of the Leona, is unrivalled.

It possesses the great additional advantage of health: the reports of the medical officers show that but little disease of any kind has ever visited the station. Supplies have been chiefly obtained from San Antonio. The establishment of the post, and the consequent security in its immediate vicinity, have invited several corn-planters on the Leona; and it is presumed that forage, vegetables, and beef may soon be abundant in the neighborhood. Shingles are readily procured from the cypress of the Sabinal and of the Frio, the rivers next the Leona, where parties of citizens are engaged in their manufacture. The forests of mezquite which clothe the Leona bottom afford abundance of fuel.

The present road between Fort Inge and Fort Duncan, at Eagle pass, is mostly by the route taken by General Wool in his invasion of Texas, through Presidio Rio Grande. It followed an old smuggling trail, and is very circuitous in its course. I was instructed to examine the intermediate country, with a view to ascertain the practicability of a shorter route. This I succeeded in, finding that the distance travelled may be shortened about twenty miles by following a straight course between the posts—a fact of great importance, when the amount of supplies passing the road is considered, and the great danger incurred by trains now compelled to be more than one night out in reaching Eagle pass. Between the Nueces, the Mina, and the Muela, it will be necessary to cut through the chaparral. This might employ from ten to twenty axes between six and ten days. Other than that, nothing is required for the road but log bridges over the Mina and the Chicon, such as are seen on the present road. These little streams are very narrow and easy to bridge, but boggy and difficult to ford. More water, and at generally shorter intervals, may be found on the proposed direction than on the other. By the latter, the distance travelled is nearly eighty miles, while the two forts are but little more than fifty miles apart.

Eagle pass is a name given by the Mexicans to a cañon through the hills on the other side of the river, and near the mouth of the Escondido, by which passes the road to San Fernando. A mile or two above this is situated Fort Duncan. The river bottom is here, like the valleys of upper Texas, found in three plateaus, on the highest of which is the encampment. But, unlike them, it is destitute of timber and of shade-trees—so desirable here: mezquite alone is found. A range of rough sandstone hills, of no great elevation, limits the valley, and overlooks the camp. The site is healthy, and pleasant breezes render it desirable in summer; but the great drought which prevails during nearly all the year makes it compare unfavorably with many other posts.

There is a great deal of passing both of California emigration and of inland and of Mexican commerce by this place; and it may from this, and its position as the probable head of all navigation on the Rio Grande, become an important point. Above the post, and close by, an American settlement has been commenced. Corn, beef, and lumber are supplied from Mexico. The cheapest and best building material is stone, the quarries and quality of which are fine. *Adobe* is likewise much used, and found to answer very well.

The country lying between San Antonio and Leona has already been often described; that between the Nueces and the Rio Grande, on the

ool road, compares with the former unfavorably. Subject to almost constant drought, badly watered, clothed with cactus and thorny chaparral, it presents an aspect dreary and desolate in the extreme. This defect is increased as the Rio Grande is approached. But in the vicinity of the Nueces, and about the heads and along the banks of the creeks which uniting form the Espantosa, is found excellent grazing. No country is better adapted than this to the Indian in his purposes of depredation, escape, and concealment. Lurking in the thick screens which line the road, he observes all that pass. From strong and well-armed parties he lies hidden; the weak and careless are almost invariably attacked. From the Las Moras to the Leona, hundreds of trails attest his presence. The late events along this route show that a settled disposition to war on the part of the Texas Indians is arising.

Hard by Fort Inge passes the Indian high-road of the Frio. Next are the trails of the Blanco and the Sabinal. Within nine miles of Fort Lincoln is Rancho's creek, sometimes called the Maucinal.

Here, in the thickets which grow about the crossing, eight new graves bear witness to its dangerous vicinity. It is by the passes of these several ranges that the Indians in general come from the upper country and come to it. Hard pressed, however, they will forsake the trails and pursue their flight over such rugged country as almost to defy pursuit. Beyond, it is equally difficult. Once in the chaparral of the great plain between the Nueces and the Rio Grande, a country through which thread in every direction the trails of countless wild horses, baffling the most skillful woodsmen, pursuit is well-nigh hopeless. Here they are central with respect to the settlements of Goliad, Refugio, Corpus Christi, the towns on the Rio Grande, the ranchos about the old roads, and the route of the Eagle pass. Should the troops fall in with them, if hard pressed, and unable to reach the upper country, a retreat into Mexico is open to them. The most *unremitting* and *active motion* through this large section of country, by a force *strong enough* to keep it up, and properly armed and hunted and *disciplined*, would seem to be the only means of prevention. When then punishment is difficult. That, I think, is *summed* in the word *evolution*.

That portion of the present military frontier which extends from San Antonio to Eagle pass is, then, to be regarded in a very different light from the upper line, both as to its relation to the country it protects and to the enemy. But few of the observations made upon the posts to the northward apply to Forts Lincoln, Inge, and Duncan. With limited means and force, the garrisons of these three posts are in a state of continual warfare. The escort duty, upon which they are likewise constantly engaged, is severe upon men and animals, and often cripples their efficiency in time of emergency. Two great military and commercial routes pass by them, upon which, for security, demands are always being made. A large amount of property, both public and private, peculiarly exposed to depredation, is always in motion along the road. Hence, it is plain to see that, if the necessity for not only a *change*, but an *increase* of *force*, exists anywhere, it does here. Each of these posts requires, at the very least, two hundred well-mounted men, with extra horses. The well-known fact that for years this section of country has been the most dangerous in Texas; the late events—the audacious attacks upon government trains, heretofore in general

respected by the Indians—while they show a settled purpose of host on their part, are the strongest arguments in favor of the views offered.

Doubts have arisen as to what tribes have been chiefly concerned in these outrages. It is my belief that all take their part. At any rate, there is strong evidence against Comanches, Wacos, Wichitas, Lipans, and Tahuacanos.

The vicinity of Corpus Christi, until the employment of the range has been particularly exposed, and has, from the numerous horses and cattle owned there, been a favorite point of attack. The post of two companies on the Nueces lately established, acting in concert with the garrisons, will afford much greater security.

Taking a general view of the line as established, and of the various events which have occurred, I must believe that the system of small garrisons of infantry and of skeleton organizations of regiments on any part of the frontier is *powerless*, or nearly so. And so long as the Texas Indians, from the great Comanche tribe to the Apaches and Navajoes to the west, are looked upon as a people whose rulers possess the power to keep them to treaties and stipulations; so long as the troops upon the frontier are forced by their circumstances of numbers and equipment to maintain a defensive instead of offensive operations,—the state of unhappy affairs often alluded to and often represented must exist. With me it is a conviction which the experience of each day serves only to strengthen, that the country will continue to hear of murders and robberies in southern Texas, and its citizens to suffer, until authority and force be given to the government at the heart of this people.

The two reports rendered show a view of the line of posts and of the present condition. It is now established, apparently, regarding the present state of the Texas population. That is rapidly increasing; and doubtless reference will soon be had to this progress, and to the not less important stipulations of the treaty with Mexico. There are some general remarks to be made which I believe are not inappropriate in this paper.

In the previous report, the comparative quiet which has marked the upper portion for the past year was noticed. This should not be mistaken as applicable to the remaining portion of the line. It is believed that a sufficient reason for this apparent discrepancy was there advanced.

The early history of our western posts, from Council Bluffs to the mouth of the Mississippi and the lakes; the policy of the British government toward her Indians; and, above all, the practice of those sagacious and enterprising soldiers, the old Spanish adventurers,—all teach that the most effective system with such an enemy is the establishment of a powerful garrison *in their midst*; and the *surest*, and, in the end, the *most humane*, prevention of such is *retaliation*, not only on the offenders in person, but upon the *tribe to which they belong*. The same state of things which long ago obtained on the western frontier of New York, Pennsylvania, and Virginia, and which afterwards in Georgia and Alabama, is to be seen here now, and calls for the same effective and terrible remedy then and there applied. I have already at the distribution of a large force upon this frontier, in such a manner as seems available. It may not be improper to say something of the peculiar fitness of the positions recommended.

The line stretching from the mouth of the Little Wichita to the mouth of the Rio Grande rarely approaches the natural division between the lands, and in course of time will be settled, and the wild plains, which offer

to the Indian alone. It has a bearing not only upon the citizens of Texas, but upon those of Mexico, equally entitled to protection. It affects the numerous and powerful tribe of Comanches only, with the small bands of roving plunderers, generally known as Texas Indians, who inhabit the upper Brazos and the forks of the Red river, but also the scarcely numerous or less warlike bands of the Apaches, dwelling in the rugged region west of the Pecos. Those who have witnessed the stagnation of every branch of industry which pervades Chihuahua and the neighboring States can form an adequate idea of the terrible desolation by these savages. Facts heretofore but little known, and less thought of, appeal early.

The proposed camp at the mouth of the Little Wichita should hold in check the fierce bands of northern Comanches—the destroyers of Bent's, the pest of the western routes, and the fiercest and most intractable plunderers of Mexico known. It will be able to extinguish at once the Wichitas—a remnant of the once numerous Wacos, and the constant trouble of both northwest and southwest Texas—not more than two or three hundred in number: they dwell in that vicinity.

Of still greater importance would be the post upon the Brazos—as placed among greater numbers, requiring larger garrisons, as regarded by the Indians as their place of appeal and as their place of punishment, and that place, when circumstances require, may be struck the severest blows.

The old San Saba fort, in the beautiful and luxuriant valley of the river that name, is particularly eligible. One of the emigrant routes to California passes by it. It is situated with peculiar advantages for scouting to and from the settlements, and detecting the advance or retreat of predatory bands. It is the point once occupied by the Spanish garrison, whose work remains, at once a lesson and a warning. From this point the scouts scour the country traversed by the Indians in their descents to the Texas country. To the westward pass those large bands of Comanches, secure in the recesses of the Sierra Madre and the Bolson de Mapache, carry on such extensive forays in the Mexican States, returning with incredible numbers of horses and mules.

The “Las Moras” mound, in the beautiful country through which passes the military road to El Paso, is important as an extreme point on the road, and as commanding the country crossed by the Indians en route to Coahuila and to southwest Texas. But of more local interest, perhaps, than any other point, is the vicinity of Presidio del Norte, not occupied by our troops. Hard by passes that great highway, the Santa Fe, which are the wonder of every traveller who crosses them; their length and dusty length, and the vast number of bones which are scattered along the course, bear witness of their constant use. I have been credibly informed that as many as five thousand head of animals have been taken at one time by this route, and have more than once passed it myself. It gave every indication of having been travelled by great numbers. At a striking distance are the homes of the warlike Apache, now at enmity with the United States. His towns are found, of many kinds, upon the Rio Grande, between Presidio and El Paso. In the fall and summer he recruits his horses on the rich mezquite which grows in the sheltered valleys of the great Sierra. The importance of the route has been more than once urged; and, in connexion with its occupation, and as an important element of the military system, I would

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again earnestly call attention to the construction of the road by the river between this place and El Paso.

Considering the numbers of the enemy and the nature of the duties called for, I cannot regard the garrison recommended as too large. The force should be sufficient for the detail of ample parties to meet any contingency.

But while I have thus dwelt on these positions, of far greater interest do I deem the nature, numbers, and especially the mode of operating, of the troops proposed for their occupation. So that the force is sufficiently large, and available *distributed, and strongly concentrated*, the matter of positions alone becomes in general one of mere local moment, and decisive by the fitness for garrison purposes. It is then thought that, with a disciplined mounted force, lightly equipped, of not less than two thousand men, acting *continually* by a system of *moving camps*, the great ends in view may be accomplished. The duty is active, the facility of motion of starting expeditions incalculably increased, and the skill and courage of the soldier brought to bear more effectually upon an enemy of the kind considered. It seems unnecessary to enter into detailed arguments upon assertions of this nature. They involve but the substitution of strong bodies for weak, of light cavalry for heavy armed infantry, of active field operations for garrison service. The two great points may be shortly stated. The posts should be where the *Indians live*, instead of where the *citizens* live; and the first news of the departure of any party should be followed, not only by their pursuit, but by *punishment of the remainder of the tribe*. Collateral are other advantages, which, while distinct from the effect upon the Indian, are conducive to it: the increase of skill, discipline, and efficiency of the soldiers, and the decreased expenses.

The troops of the United States upon this frontier are expected to perform, as at present organized, what I sincerely believe to be impossible and brave officers and soldiers of infantry, with no superiors on their own fields, are powerless here.

Accompanying this will be found a sketch of the frontier, as correct, I believe, as my imperfect instruments allowed me to make.

I am, major, your most obedient servant,

W. H. C. WHITING,
Lieutenant of Engineers.

Major GEORGE DEAS,
Assistant Adjutant General Eighth Military Department.