

# The Battle of Glorieta Pass: A Shattered Dream

A peaceful ranch, once a stage stop on the Santa Fe Trail, rests in a circular valley clasped by steep mountains. Spanish conquistadors named these mountains Sangre de Cristo, "blood of Christ," but in 1862, it was the blood of warring brothers that bathed the land near Pigeon's Ranch.



*(Roy Anderson, artist; Courtesy of Pecos National Historical Park)*

This battle--the Battle of Glorieta Pass--represented the high water mark for a bold Confederate offensive into Union Territory on the western frontier. Here volunteers from Colorado clashed with tough Texans intent on conquering New Mexico. Victory here would be a necessary prelude to detaching the western states from the Union and expanding the Confederacy to the Pacific Ocean. Referred to as the "Gettysburg of the West" by many historians, this running battle along canyon and ridge from March 26-28, 1862 culminated in the retreat back to Texas of the invading Confederate forces. Glorieta Pass was another great turning point in the Civil War, the battle that shattered the western dreams of the Confederate States of America.

## Overview: Putting It All Together

The following activities engage students in a number of ways that let them explore the impact of the Civil War on the people who lived through it. Students will also have an opportunity to examine the past military experience of people in their community, state, or region and be able to compare it with the events at Glorieta Pass, New Mexico.

### Activity 1: Considering Life as a Soldier

Soldiers on both sides of the western conflict in the Civil War proved themselves brave in battle and strong-willed in their respective causes. Have students assume the identity of a Civil War soldier and write a diary entry about an episode or experience the soldier thought worthy of recording in the diary. Remind students to consider all aspects of a soldier's life, and then pick one in particular they think is important. Some students might believe that food, clothing, or a warm bed to sleep in at night would be important; others may want to explore in their writing the adventure, companionship with fellow soldiers, or why this cause was worth risking their lives for.

### Activity 2: Impact of the Confederate Invasion

Have the class examine Peticolas' diary entry in Reading 2 and discuss the following questions:

1. What evidence does he include about a local residence?
2. Why do you think there were no people at the house?
3. When the people who lived at the house returned to their home after the battle how do you think they might have felt when they discovered that soldiers had broken into their home and slept there using the woman's clothes like a blanket?
4. How do you think the residents might have felt if they returned to their ranch to find bodies of dead or wounded soldiers or fresh graves?
5. Do you think that individuals holding either strong Union or Confederate views would react differently than those who held to the frontier tradition of helping out those in need? Why or why not?

### Activity 3: War Memorials in the Local Community

Explain to students that the National Park Service and other state and local organizations preserve the history of many of the country's Civil War battlefields. Monuments, military artifacts, historical markers, park interpreters, and cemeteries all help to tell the story of what happened. Ask students to research whether there was a Civil War or other historical battle that took place in their community, region, or state, locate it on a map, and determine if there are any markers, memorials, or parks commemorating the location. Have students report the information they learn in class presentations. Complete the activity by debating the value of commemorating events from our past and preserving the places where these events occurred.

## Determining the Facts

### Reading I: The Gettysburg of the West

*[Refer to Map 1 to locate places mentioned in the following account of the battle.]*

The trans-Mississippi West, New Mexico Territory in particular, was far removed from many of the passions and issues that defined the Civil War for people east of the Mississippi River. For large areas of the West that were recently won from Mexico or still organized under territorial government--where people were still struggling to survive in hostile environments--arguments over secession and states rights may have seemed rarified. Nonetheless, men answered the call to join eastern armies, so the frontier armies were drastically reduced. Indian raids began to increase as some tribes seized the chance to regain lost territory while others turned to raiding for subsistence, their U.S. treaty allotments having been disrupted by the war. Yet, the Civil War was not strictly an eastern war, and in 1862 Confederate forces invaded New Mexico Territory.



Henry Sibley, who resigned his commission in the U.S. Army to join the Confederate Army, realized that the void created in the West could be an opportunity for the South. After raising a brigade of mounted Texas riflemen during the summer of 1861, Sibley led his 2,500 men to Fort Bliss and launched a winter invasion up the Rio Grande Valley.

Colonel Edward Canby, who had been appointed the Union Commander of the Department of New Mexico in June 1861, anticipated the invasion and had already begun to consolidate his 2,500 regular army troops. By early 1862, Canby had almost 4,000 soldiers he could put into the field.

Sibley's Brigade approached Canby's Union forces near Fort Craig in south-central New Mexico. Threatening to cut off the fort by controlling a nearby ford, Sibley drew Canby's soldiers out from the fort and engaged them in a closely contested battle at Valverde on February 21, 1862. The smaller Confederate force prevailed against Canby's troops, who retreated to the security of nearby Fort Craig. Sibley believed the U.S. forces had been defeated too soundly to present a rear-guard threat, so he advanced north. The Confederates occupied Albuquerque on March 2. Sibley then sent the Fifth Texas Regiment, commanded by Major Charles Pyron, to the unprotected territorial capital of Santa Fe. The few Union troops retreated to Fort Union, destroying ammunition and supplies.

The only thing that appeared to be standing between Sibley's Confederate Brigade and Colorado was Fort Union, the major army depot on the Santa Fe Trail. By seizing the supplies

and weapons kept at Fort Union, the Confederates would be able to continue their march north through Raton Pass to Denver, the territorial capital of Colorado.

The First Colorado Volunteers, an infantry brigade of 950 miners, were quickly organized under the command of Colonel John P. Slough. They marched the 400 miles from Denver through the deep snow of Raton Pass to Fort Union in only 13 days, arriving at the fort on March 10. After a brief rest and re-supply, Slough defied orders to remain at Fort Union. Joined by some regular army troops and New Mexico volunteers, Slough's 1,350 soldiers departed Fort Union on March 22, and they followed the Santa Fe Trail westward to meet the enemy. By March 25, the Union advance troops, under the command of Major John M. Chivington, set up Camp Lewis at Kozlowski's Stage Stop east of Glorieta Pass, a gap in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains.

Meanwhile, Pyron's Fifth Texas Regiment had left Santa Fe, following the Santa Fe Trail eastward, marching on Fort Union. After following a southward swing through Glorieta Pass, he intended to join with other Confederate troops. Pyron's Texans camped at Johnson's Ranch in Apache Canyon, just west of Glorieta Pass, unaware of the Union troops only nine miles away.

On the morning of March 26, 1862, a scouting party of Colorado Volunteers led by Chivington left Camp Lewis to locate the Texans. They discovered and captured a Confederate scouting party in Glorieta Pass, then ran into the main body of the Confederate force in Apache Canyon, about 16 miles east of Santa Fe. A two-hour scrimmage, known as the Battle of Apache Canyon, ensued. Although Chivington captured 70 Confederate soldiers, he fell back to Pigeon's Ranch. By evening, both sides called a truce to tend to their wounded.

The following day, when Union spies notified Colonel Slough that the Confederates had been reinforced, Slough decided to divide his forces. Slough's 900 soldiers would proceed west along the Santa Fe Trail and block Glorieta Pass, while Chivington and Lieutenant Colonel Manuel Chavez of the New Mexico Volunteers would take 450 men over Glorieta Mesa to attack the Confederate right flank or rearguard. Colonel Scurry decided to leave his supply train at Johnson's Ranch and march his 900 men eastward along the Santa Fe Trail the next morning to force the battle where he wanted it.

On the morning of March 28, Slough's men broke ranks near Pigeon's Ranch to fill their canteens at Glorieta Creek. Scurry's quickly advancing Confederates came upon the Union troops and opened fire on them. The Union soldiers quickly formed a defensive line along Windmill Hill, but an hour later, fell back to Pigeon's Ranch.

Scurry's Confederate soldiers faced the Union artillery at Pigeon's Ranch and Artillery Hill for three hours, and finally outflanked the Union right. From Sharpshooter's Ridge they could fire down on the Union troops, so Slough ordered another retreat, setting up a third battle line a short distance east of Pigeon's Ranch. The Texans charged the line shortly before sunset. Slough ordered his soldiers back to Camp Lewis leaving the Confederates in possession of the field. Both sides were exhausted after six hours of fighting, each having sustained more than 30 killed and 80 wounded or missing.

Believing he had won the battle, Scurry soon received devastating news. After a 16-mile march through the mountains, the Union force led by Major Chivington had come upon the Confederate supply train at Johnson's Ranch. They had driven off the few guards, slaughtered 30 horses and mules, spiked an artillery piece, taken 17 prisoners, and burned 80 wagons containing ammunition, food, clothing, and forage. Scurry was forced to ask for a cease-fire.

Lacking vital supplies, Scurry could no longer continue his march on Fort Union so he retreated to Santa Fe. Two weeks later, General Sibley ordered his army to retreat from Santa Fe and relinquished control of Albuquerque. There was no further Confederate attempt to invade the western territories. The Battle of Glorieta Pass had decided conclusively that the West would remain with the Union.

### **Questions for Reading 1**

1. Identify the issues that concerned residents of the western territories at the time of the Civil War. How were they different from or similar to issues that interested easterners and why?
2. What developments convinced General Sibley that a Confederate campaign through the far West could be successful?
3. Approximately how many soldiers were involved in the fights at Valverde and Glorieta Pass? Compare these numbers with those of battles farther east, which occurred at nearly the same time, in the Shenandoah Valley at the Battle of Kernstown or at Shiloh (Pittsburg Landing.)
4. What role did geography play in determining that Glorieta Pass would be the site of a battle? How did Scurry and Slough adapt their battle plans to the geography of the area?
5. Why was the destruction of the Confederate supply train at Johnson's Ranch an insurmountable problem for the Confederate invasion? What additional hardships would it have created during the long retreat from New Mexico?

*Reading 1 was adapted from Richard Greenwood, "Glorieta Battlefield" (Santa Fe County, NM) National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1978; and U.S. War Department, The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies. Four series, 128 vols. (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1880-1901).*

### **Determining the Facts**

#### **Reading 2: Combatants' Accounts**

Alfred B. Peticolas, a young lawyer, enlisted in the Fourth Texas Mounted Volunteers in Victoria, Texas in May 1861. Sergeant Peticolas recorded the call Colonel Scurry's troops answered to march to the support of Major Pyron at Apache Canyon the evening of Wednesday, March 26, 1862.

Laid over today and waited for the 3rd Regt. Towards evening it came in and two or three hours after, an express from Major Pyron came in informing us that he had been attacked by a

large body of Pike's Peak men during the day; that he had gotten the best of the engagement and had fallen back to wood and water, which he would hold till we came up to him. The order was immediately given, and in an hour after we received the express, we were all under way. This, however, made it about 8 o'clock when we started, and we were told that the distance we had to go was 12 miles, but before it was walked we found it to be at least 15. Pyron had two men killed and 3 wounded.

The forces were about 350 on our side, 3 or 4 companies of the 2nd Regt, and from 600 to 1000 of the enemy. We started off at a brisk gait and made the first six miles of our journey in a very little time, but footsore and weary we did not travel from that point so fast as we had been doing, but there was no murmuring at our suffering, and on the want of comfort on this our forced march, but every man marched bravely along and did not complain at the length of the road, the coldness of the weather, or the necessity that compelled the march.

We passed over a very steep pass in the mountains not far from a ranch buried in a circular valley in the bosom of the mountains, and as the ascent and descent was extremely difficult, we were nearly two hours crossing, and while the command was waiting for the artillery and ammunition wagons to cross over, they made large fires at the foot of the pass and warmed chilled hands and feet. About ½ past 3 we reached a ranch down the canon [sic] and were directed to get wood wherever we could and make fires. Now we had not blankets, and Jones proposed to me to go and try and get into a house to sleep, which I succeeded in doing. He and I slept together on the floor with no bedding, and only a few articles of women's wearing apparel which we found scattered round the house.'

Ovando J. Hollister was living in the mining district of South Clear Creek, Colorado, in the summer of 1861, and enlisted in Captain Sam H. Cook's company of mounted volunteers. He served with the First Colorado Volunteers from the time of its organization through its campaign in New Mexico and return to Denver. Hollister sustained injuries during the campaign that rendered him an invalid unfit for military duty in January 1863. He described the forced winter march by the Colorado Volunteers from Denver to Fort Union to meet the advancing Confederate forces.

The teams, relieved of their loads, took aboard a full complement of passengers, leaving, however, between three and four hundred to foot it. Away into the wee hours of morning did we tramp, tramp, tramp, --the gay song, the gibe, the story, the boisterous cheer, all died a natural death. Nothing broke the stillness of night but the steady tramp of the men and the rattle of the wagons. We were now to prove the sincerity of those patriotic oaths so often sworn, and right nobly was it done. At length the animals began to drop and die in harness, from overwork and underfeed, which forced us to stop. But for this, we would doubtless have made Union without a halt. Col. Slough rode in the coach. That never stops between Red River and Union. Why should we?

Thirty miles would not more than measure this night's march, in which the men proved their willingness to put forth every exertion on demand. But feeling as they did, that there was no call for it but the Colonel's caprice, their 'curses were not loud but deep.' During the halt, they hovered over the willow brush fires or shivered under their scanty blankets, nursing their

indignation by the most outrageous abuse of everything and everybody. A soldier would grumble in heaven. As it is all the solace they have for their numerous privations and vexations, and is very harmless, let them growl.

At the first sign of daylight "Assembly" sounded as shrilly as if waking to renewed exertion the iron sinews of a steam engine, instead of a weary mass of human energy scarcely composed to rest. But it was none the less inexorable, and satisfying nature with a crust of hard bread, we were on the road again. <sup>2</sup>

## Questions for Reading 2

1. Who gives a better description of the land through which he marched, Hollister or Peticolas? Why?
2. How did their patriotic oaths, made when the volunteers enlisted, help Hollister's companions to continue their 30-mile night march towards Fort Union? Why did Colonel Slough's actions cause them to complain?
3. Peticolas' companions made a forced march of 15 miles. Why did they not complain?
4. In what ways were both soldiers' experiences similar? In what ways were they different?

<sup>1</sup> Don E. Alberts, ed., *Rebels on the Rio Grande: The Civil War Journals of A. B. Peticolas* (Albuquerque: Merit Press, 1993).

<sup>2</sup>Ovando J. Hollister, *History of the First Regiment of Colorado Volunteers* (Denver: Thomas Gibson & Co., 1863).

## Determining the Facts

### Reading 3: Reports of the Battle of Glorieta Pass

Colonel John P. Slough, a Denver attorney turned soldier, was commanding officer of the First Colorado Infantry. He dispatched his battle report to Colonel Edward S. Canby the day after the fight at Pigeon's Ranch.

Kozlowski's Ranch, March 29, 1862

COLONEL: Learning from our spies that the enemy, about 1000 strong, were in the Apache Canon [sic] and at Johnson's Ranch beyond, I concluded to reconnoiter in force, with a view of ascertaining the position of the enemy and of harassing them as much as possible; hence left this place with my command, nearly 1,300 strong, at 8 o'clock yesterday morning. To facilitate the reconnaissance I sent Maj. J.M. Chivington...with about 430 officers and picked men, with instructions to push forward to Johnson's. With the remainder of the command I entered the canon, and had attained but a short distance when our pickets announced that the enemy was near and had taken position in a thick grove of trees, with their line extending from mesa to mesa across the canon, and their battery, consisting of four pieces, placed in position. I at once

detailed a considerable force of flankers, placed the batteries in position, and placed the cavalry--nearly all dismounted--and the remainder of the infantry in position to support the batteries.

Before the arrangement of my forces was completed the enemy opened fire upon us. The action began about 10 o'clock and continued until after 4 p.m. The character of the country was such as to make the engagement of the bushwhacking kind. Hearing of the success of Major Chivington's command, and the object of our movement being successful, we fell back in order to our camp. Our loss in killed is probably 20...; in wounded probably 50...; in missing probably over 100. In addition we took some 25 prisoners and rendered unfit for service three pieces of their artillery. We took and destroyed their train of about 60 wagons, with their contents, consisting of ammunition, subsistence, forage, clothing, officers' baggage, etc.... During the engagements the enemy made three attempts to take our batteries and were repelled in each with severe loss.

The strength of the enemy, as received from spies and prisoners, in the canon was altogether some 1,200 or 1,300, some 200 of whom were at or near Johnson's Ranch, and were engaged by Major Chivington's command. The officers and men behaved nobly. My thanks are due to my staff officers for the courage and ability with which they assisted me in conducting the engagement. As soon as all the details are ascertained I will send an official report of the engagement.'

After the retreat of his army to Santa Fe from the battlefield at Glorieta Pass, Colonel Scurry reported what he considered a Confederate victory to General Sibley.  
Santa Fe, N. Mex., March 30, 1862

GENERAL: I arrived here this morning with my command and have taken quarters for the present in this city. I will in a short time give you an official account of the battle of Glorieta, which occurred on day before yesterday, in the Canon [sic] Glorieta, about 22 miles from this city, ...when another victory was added to the long list of Confederate triumphs.

The action commenced at about 11 o'clock and ended at 5:30, and, although every inch of the ground was well contested, we steadily drove them back until they were in full retreat our men pursuing until from sheer exhaustion we were compelled to stop.

Our loss was 33 killed and I believe, 35 wounded. ...Major Pyron had his horse shot under him, and my own cheek was twice brushed by a Minie ball, each time drawing blood, and my clothes torn in two places. I mentioned 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....

Our train was burned by a party who succeeded in passing undiscovered around the mountains to our rear. ...The loss of the enemy was very severe, being over 75 killed and a large number wounded.

The loss of my supplies so crippled me that after burying my dead I was unable to follow up the victory. My men for two days went unfed and blanketless unmurmuringly. I was compelled to come here for something to eat. At last accounts the Federalists were still retiring towards

Fort Union. The men at the train blew up the limber-box and spiked the 6-pounder I had left at the train, so that it was rendered useless, and the cart-burners left it.

...From three sources, all believed to be reliable, Canby left Craig on the 24th. Yours in haste,  
W.R. SCURRY

P.S. I do not know if I write intelligently. I have not slept for three nights, and can scarcely hold my eyes open. W.R.S.<sup>2</sup>

### **Questions for Reading 3**

- 1.** Of the two reports filed by Slough and Scurry following the battle, which provides the most complete information? Which is more clearly written? Which one is written under more difficult conditions? In your opinion, which is the more valuable report to a historian and why?
- 2.** Based on the reports alone, from the description of the fighting and casualties listed, was either side a victor at Glorieta Pass? Explain your answer.
- 3.** How did each commander recognize the efforts of the men who fought under him in these battle reports?
- 4.** Slough and Scurry filed these reports to their superior officers. What incidents from the battle might each have included to impress a supervisor? Do you think either of the officers' evaluations of the outcome of the battle was written to impress a supervisor? Why?
- 5.** How do these reports of a battle differ from the personal accounts of soldiers like Peticolas and Hollister?

<sup>1</sup>*U.S. War Department, The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies. Vol. 9 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1883) 533-34.*

<sup>2</sup>*U.S. War Department, The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies. Vol. 9 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1883) 541-42.*