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Photographs / Images: Captain Charles and Annie Ruff with their daughter Mary about 1849; Colonel Benjamin H Grierson; Lieutenant Mason Marion Maxon; Grierson's Spring Valley Ranch (Grierson is seated in the buckboard); Lieutenant John R Bullis; Colonel Samuel P Heintzelman; General Samuel D Sturgis; General Nelson A Miles; John C Frémont as a Civil War officer; Lieutenant George A Forsyth about 1884; General William R Shafter about 1898; Fifth US Cavalry veteran Christian Madsen; Ninth and Tenth US Cavalry veteran Caleb Benson; Tenth Cavalry Band in a July 4, 1905, parade in Crawford

# Life Beyond Soldiering

## ENTREPRENEURS, INVESTORS, & RETIREES

*By Michael L. Tate*

Many nineteenth-century Americans perceived the frontier army as an institution filled with drifters, men who served Uncle Sam for a brief time and then moved into oblivion as hired hands and laborers. Except for a handful of senior commanders and a smaller number of junior officers who had gained fame in combat, the leadership corps seemed to follow a similar anonymous pattern. Accordingly, the public often took them for granted and ignored their accomplishments. Sgt. H. H. McConnell of the Sixth Cavalry would later assail this spirit of benign neglect when he sarcastically observed, "The loss of one soldier, however, more or less, is not of much importance to anybody, . . . and is hardly worth recording."<sup>1</sup>

Society's myopia about the army's importance in frontier settlement also failed to grasp the nonmilitary contributions of these men and their families while on active duty and in the years beyond government service. Especially overlooked were the great number of ex-soldiers who remained in the West after their separations from the army. As land speculators, investors, bankers, railroad executives, merchants, homesteaders, ranchers, freighters, peace officers, doctors, and in other capacities, they remained a vital part of the communities they once had protected as soldiers of the line. A very few made fortunes, slightly more discovered

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**Capt. Charles and Annie Ruff with their daughter, Mary, about 1849.**  
Courtesy Greg and Colleen Ruff and Mark W. Kelly

affluence, many made comfortable lives, and a significant percentage failed in their ventures, only to redirect themselves and try again.

To understand why they undertook these speculative enterprises, one must

comprehend financial realities. Officers always considered themselves to be badly underpaid, with second lieutenants earning only \$1,400 annually and colonels only \$3,500 in 1880. Yet they were forced to live in frontier conditions

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where the cost of scarce goods was high. Furthermore, the burden of sending their children to distant boarding schools drained their resources in the prime years of their earning power. Likewise, government pensions were inadequate to maintain a comfortable standard of living in their declining years. For enlisted men, the situation was even more unpromising because by 1880, monthly pay had only risen to seventeen dollars for sergeants and thirteen dollars for privates.<sup>2</sup>

To attain financial security, officers found ways to connect themselves with prominent businessmen and politicians. Sometimes, as in the case of Capt. Charles Ruff, this connection came through marriage. Repeatedly during 1849, Ruff beseeched his powerful father-in-law, John Dougherty, to use his considerable influence with Robert Campbell to create a partnership for him. As two powerful magnates in the fur trade and the Indian Department, Dougherty and Campbell supposedly could secure Ruff a percentage of the government supplies that flowed to the recently-constructed Fort Kearny, Nebraska. Ruff proposed himself for a full share in the company, whereby he would be responsible for one-third of the profits and losses of the enterprise. He anticipated the annual sale of at least 10,000 bushels of grain and a huge beef contract for the post and the civilian wagon trains that stopped off there.<sup>3</sup>

In addition to providing capital for his share, Captain Ruff promised to remain at Fort Kearny for at least three years to oversee the operation. Ironically, he made this commitment at the same time he was serving in the Regiment of Mounted Riflemen, a special unit assigned to duty along the Oregon Trail. Dougherty and Campbell understood the hollowness of this pledge to remain at the post for three years because this highly mobile regiment would surely be transferred within that time. Ruff's attempt to win part of the lucrative supply contract failed, and he was soon ordered to Oregon Territory. His persis-

tence, however, did pay off seven years later when he was promoted to major and received a pay raise. In the meantime, Ruff entered into other Dougherty family investments, including Missouri land speculation, and his brother-in-law, Lewis Bissell Dougherty, received the coveted sutlership at Fort Kearny.<sup>4</sup>



Col. Benjamin H. Grierson. Courtesy Fort Davis National Historic Site

By the time of the Mexican War, the eastern frontier had already provided numerous precedents for high stakes officer speculation, especially in the acquisition of land. During the 1830s Lt. Martin Scott bought four parcels amounting to more than 800 acres near and beyond Fort Howard, Wisconsin. When offered \$5,000 for these plots, he declined, saying that he could double that price within six months, Dr. William Beaumont, who had already gained fame for his unique medical work on human digestion, also purchased land near Fort Crawford, Wisconsin, as a financial hedge against retirement. Likewise, Lts. Simon Bolivar Buckner and Winfield Scott Hancock invested heavily in strategic lands near Fort Snelling,

Minnesota, lands that ultimately became part of the Minneapolis and St. Paul communities. Gen. Zachary Taylor spent forty years in military service, all the time acquiring larger land holdings. The centerpiece of his efforts was a 1,923-acre Louisiana plantation worked by eighty-one slaves. By the time he became President in 1849, the value of his estate had risen to at least \$135,000. Taylor's success well-testified to the fact that he had followed his own maxim i.e., always have a financial escape route from military life.<sup>5</sup>

Among the legion of active senior officers who became involved in wildly speculative schemes during the late nineteenth century, probably none surpassed Col. Benjamin H. Grierson in diversity of business interests. This hero of the Civil War and postwar commander of the celebrated Tenth Cavalry's Buffalo Soldiers made West Texas his financial bailiwick because he spent much of the 1870s and early 1880s at Forts Concho and Davis. During those years he participated in numerous field assignments, and each patrol or inspection improved his intimate knowledge of the land, its people, and its economic potential. Grierson purchased 5,843 acres near Fort Concho, intending that it would provide a ranch for the financial security of the family. Later his son Charles, who was a lieutenant in the Tenth Cavalry, also bought 1,417 acres in the vicinity of the post and intended to secure a sizable herd of cattle. Neither venture produced the anticipated windfall because during that same spring of 1882, all units of the Tenth Cavalry were consolidated farther west at the new regimental headquarters of Fort Davis.<sup>6</sup>

The Fort Davis area seemed to be a dream assignment for the military speculator of the early 1880s. The Indian wars were all but over, ranches were springing up amid the rich grazing lands, two railroads were pushing into the area, and the adjoining civilian town was already established as a commercial center. Grierson quickly secured 3,840 acres and an additional acreage on



Lt. Mason Marion Maxon, who was married to Col. Grierson's niece, also speculated in land and town lots near Fort Davis.  
Courtesy Fort Davis National Historic Site

Limpia Creek even nearer the fort. This became the nucleus for the Grierson Brothers Spring Valley Ranch, which underwent improvements each year. Estimates made in 1906 showed that the family had at one time claimed approximately 45,000 acres in Jeff Davis, Brewster, and Presidio counties. They also owned 126 town lots in the unincorporated town of Valentine, and 2,573 acres near old Fort Concho.<sup>7</sup>

Col. Grierson was not above overtly using his considerable influence to cash in on a real estate deal. Throughout the early 1880s, he tried to persuade the War Department to enlarge Fort Davis by purchasing more land around its perimeters. What he did not say in his communiqués was that some of this land was owned by his friends and relatives, who were riding his investment coat-tails. Likewise, he sent a troop of cavalry to Viejo Pass, forty miles west of Fort Davis, to establish a subpost there. Grierson owned 2,500 acres of flat land at that location and hoped to sell it to the government for a handsome profit. Unfortunately for him, the War Department turned down the plan.<sup>8</sup>

But this was only a minor setback since the possibilities for making a small fortune appeared inexhaustible. In early

1884, while Grierson was in Washington, D.C., to strengthen his promotion chances, he made a side trip to New York City to seek advice from railroad moguls Collis P. Huntington and Thomas Pierce. He asked for their advice on building a shortline railroad from Fort Davis to Marfa, where it would intersect the mainline Southern Pacific Railroad. Again, bad luck undermined his innovative plan, which might have paid off over the long run. On February 14, 1885, Grierson's Tenth Cavalry was ordered to transfer to Arizona, and the railroad deal fell through before construction could begin.<sup>9</sup>

Because Benjamin Grierson was loyal to his friends and extended family, some of his fellow officers were able to profit from his Fort Davis investment schemes. Lt. Mason Marion Maxon, who was married to Grierson's niece, became the chief beneficiary of this close association. Grierson appointed him regimental quartermaster in 1882, and in that capacity Maxon sometimes detailed soldiers to undertake repair projects on Grierson's ranch. In addition to a sizable ranch near the post, Maxon also owned Fort Davis town lots, some of which he deeded to Grierson. Although the two ranches did not cause



Grierson's Spring Valley Ranch. Col. Grierson is seated in the buckboard. Courtesy Fort Davis National Historic Site

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much controversy, civilian residents of the community resented the growing monopoly of town lots by the Grierson clique. Capt. William Wedemeyer later recorded that some of these residents worked to secure Grierson's transfer out of the region because of his tight grip on the town and its future. Besides Colonel Grierson and Lieutenant Maxon, at least five other members of the Tenth Cavalry purchased significant numbers of town lots during that era—Lt. Charles Grierson, Lt. Samuel Woodward, Lt. Charles Nordstrom, Bandmaster George M. Brenner and Ord. Sgt. Charles Mulhern.<sup>10</sup>

Following his retirement from military service in 1890, Benjamin Grierson returned to his Spring Valley Ranch at Fort Davis. From there he also operated a telegraph service and employed family friend John L. Jones to handle the business. Even after Grierson's death in 1911, his sons continued to manage the cattle operation, and the youngest two, Harry and George, remained in the area as ranchers for more than forty years. Despite all his efforts to provide a comfortable life for his family, Benjamin Grierson left a tangled web of debts and financial confusion because he had overextended himself and taken on too many high interest loans. His dream of creating a family dynasty remained but a fleeting memory for the second generation.<sup>11</sup>

The Trans-Pecos River area of Texas attracted three other officers to its potential riches during the same era that Grierson was seeking his fortune. Lt. John R. Bullis, commander of the Seminole-Negro Scout detachment, knew the area from his frequent patrols and from guarding Southern Pacific Railroad surveying crews. Between 1882 and 1884 he claimed more than 53,000 acres in Pecos County alone, although much of it was desert land with little commercial value. More lucrative was the partnership he formed in 1880 with Col. William R. Shafter, Lt. Louis Wilhelmi, and rancher John W. Spencer. Following Spencer's discovery of silver ore, the men purchased four sections of



**Lt. John R. Bullis claimed thousands of acres of land in Pecos County, Texas, and was a partner in a silver mining company.** Courtesy Fort Davis National Historic Site

state school lands in the rugged Chinati Mountains, and these proved to contain the silver deposits they had been seeking. Wealthy San Francisco mining speculator Daniel Cook joined the partnership, which became known as the Presidio Mining Company.<sup>12</sup>

Despite contentiousness among the partners and Bullis's loss of a key property case in the Texas Supreme Court, the company prospered, even showing a profit in its first full year of operation. The adjoining town of Shafter housed several hundred miners and supported a thriving economy. It developed into a "company town" where the Presidio Mining Company provided everything, including the stores, residences, and even the doctor. Between 1883 and 1942 the mine produced 32.6 million ounces of silver, valued at well over \$120 million, and helped stimulate the previously dormant economy of the larger region. Unfortunately, as so often happened in hard rock mining, which required considerable technology,

capital, and a trained work force, most of the profits flowed to California investors.<sup>13</sup>

Especially noteworthy were the mining operations of Samuel Peter Heintzelman, who began service in the Second Infantry in 1826 and performed meritoriously during the Mexican War. While stationed in California during the early phases of the Gold Rush, he demonstrated his acumen by buying valuable town lots in the port of San Diego. After being transferred to Fort Yuma, Arizona, in 1850, he created a partnership with important local residents such as Charles Poston, and became president of the Sonora Exploring and



**By the time of the Civil War, when this photograph was taken, Col. Samuel P. Heintzelman had already made numerous investments in Western mining and business ventures.** Courtesy U.S. Army Military History Institute, RG98S-CWPAB1-1.23



**Gen. Samuel D. Sturgis speculated in mining and real estate in the Black Hills.**  
Courtesy The Denver Public Library, Western History Collection, D. F. Barry Photo from a painting, B-530

Mining Company, capitalized at more than two million dollars. Although he never cashed in on a big bonanza, Heintzelman maintained a sizable income and a comfortable lifestyle exceeding that provided by his army pay. Always one to maintain a policy of diversity in his investments, he owned or held stock in a ferry company, a grocery business, a ranch, and a railroad. Despite his numerous business associations, Heintzelman was never accused of slighting his military duties.<sup>14</sup>

Another senior officer satisfied his mining and land speculation ambitions in the newly opened Black Hills of Dakota Territory. Col. Samuel D. Sturgis served during the late 1870s as com-

mander of the military post that would eventually become known as Fort Meade. Established along the northeastern edge of the Black Hills, the fort was close to the numerous gold field camps that were opening around Deadwood. Each of the small townsites competed with the others for dominance, and one of them, Sturgis City, received not only the commander's blessing but also his investments. In association with Jeremiah C. Wilcox, his wife's cousin, Sturgis purchased several blocks of town lots. Sensing greater potential



**Gen. Nelson A. Miles was among the most successful soldier-investors.**  
Courtesy Jerome A. Greene

wealth beneath the ground, he joined a group of expectant capitalists to form the Fort Meade Hydraulic Gold Mining Company and became the president. Associated with the enterprise were Capt. Henry Jackson of the Seventh Cavalry and territorial delegate Granville Bennett. Together they built a mammoth tunnel along Rapid Creek to "obtain access and drainage of that extremely rich auriferous stream." The company was valued at half a million dollars, sold

stock for five dollars a share, and marketed milled timber as a supplementary business.<sup>15</sup>

While most senior officers specialized in a certain type of investment and often in a region where they served for an extended period, some spread their holdings throughout the country. Gen. Nelson Miles, husband to the niece of powerful Ohio Senator John Sherman and Gen. William Tecumseh Sherman, utilized his familial relationships to enhance his military career and to engage in lucrative financial activities. When he finally reached the exalted position as Commander-in-Chief of the Army in 1895, he had accumulated a long list of influential friends and business associates. As early as 1867 he found opportunities under Southern Reconstruction to speculate in timber. Two years later, upon being transferred to the Great Plains, Miles utilized his savings and his wife's dowry to purchase land in Kansas and Colorado, partly in association with Senator Sherman. Powerful political friends also brought him into the Columbia Heights Association in 1883 to develop exclusive rental properties in that section of Washington, D.C. By the time of his death in 1925, Miles's financial empire included extensive western lands, western timber holdings, properties in Washington, D.C., mineral interests on Puget Sound, Texas oil interests, and an insider stock trading position through his brother-in-law, Colgate Hoyt, who was a Wall Street broker. Miles had wisely constructed a financial hedge against any decline in one part of his empire by backing it up with the profits of his other investments.<sup>16</sup>

Not everyone who turned to the lure of investments possessed the Midas touch. Some played the game for such big stakes that their financial empires perpetually tottered on the brink of disaster. No example of ego, ambition, greed, and bad luck better personified the problem than did John C. Frémont. Because of his various explorations in the West during the 1840s and his highly visible role in the conquest of California,

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Frémont became something of a household name by the following decade.

His political and business associations came through his powerful father-in-law, Missouri Senator Thomas Hart Benton, who had long been active in expanding America's borders to the Pacific Ocean. During the California Gold Rush, and following the resignation of his commission, Frémont purchased extensive land and mining interests in the Mariposa District. Unfortunately for him, the large estate required constant infusions of developmental capital, and he spent considerable time in the East and in Europe seeking wealthy investors. Adding to the problem was the fact that he did not have clear title to the land, and in the end, the lengthy court battles all but ruined him. His own lack of business skill hastened the demise of his seventy-square-mile holdings, which passed out of his hands in 1864 just as his military and political dreams were on the wane.<sup>17</sup>

Trying to regain his lost fortune, Frémont became involved in a flurry of railroad investments, on which he staked the remainder of his money. He briefly held the Kansas Pacific franchise, acquired part interest in the Memphis and Little Rock Railroad, and became president of the Memphis and El Paso Railway. By 1871, however, he was virtually bankrupt and his name had been sullied by the latter railroad's fraudulent business practices. Only the writings of his wife, Jessie, and help from friends kept the family solvent until Frémont received appointment as Arizona's territorial governor in 1878. By 1890 friends finally were successful in getting him restored to the army as a major general so he could receive a pension and partially repay his creditors. Frémont's death that same year marked the end of a long history of personal triumphs and failures for this wildly ambitious American soldier, politician, and businessman.<sup>18</sup>

In the era of Gilded Age politics, when conflicts of interest clouded many economic associations, some military officers tempted the ethical limits more than others. Beginning with his 1857



John C. Frémont, as a Civil War officer.  
NSHS-RG2411-1694(2)

entry into West Point, George Custer seemed more motivated by the monthly payments of twenty-eight dollars and the free education than by a desire to serve the country. At that early date he wrote to his sister about how other West Point graduates had gone on to make

fortunes through their associations with powerful men, and he hoped to do the same. Following his graduation and his gaining fame in the Civil War, young Custer eagerly sought a means to attain financial security. When representatives of Benito Juárez's Mexican government-in-exile offered him \$16,000 a year to serve as adjutant general in its war against Emperor Maximilian, he happily agreed. Yet, when he applied for a year's leave of absence from the United States Army to accomplish this task, Secretary of State William Seward dashed his hopes by blocking the request on the grounds that it would upset American and French diplomatic relations.<sup>19</sup>

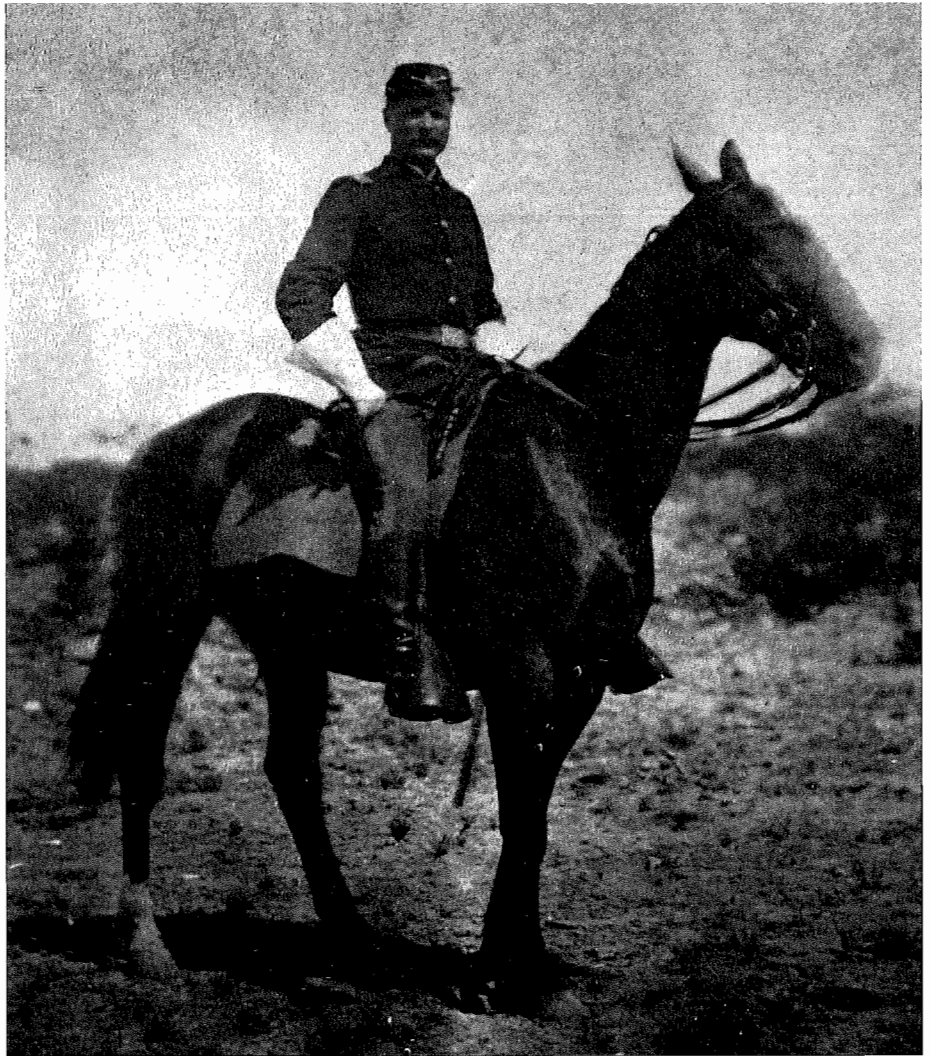
What Custer sought in his relationship with the Juárez government was not illegal but clearly was self-serving. During his subsequent fifteen years of duty on the frontier his financial chicanery became more evident. In 1873 Lt. George D. Wallace accused Custer of taking kickbacks from the captain of the steamboat that was accompanying the Seventh Cavalry up the Missouri River. Within two years, Custer also seemed to be working with transportation king Ben Holladay in a secretive effort to establish coaching and freighting operations into the recently opened gold fields of the Black Hills. His need for quick money was readily apparent in 1875, because he had become involved in a wild stock market scheme that cost him \$8,500. Later litigation in the District of Columbia Supreme Court revealed to the justices that he had indeed been involved in an illicit business.<sup>20</sup>

Even before the Black Hills scheme unfolded, Custer had already shown a compulsion to invest in risky mining ventures. In 1871 he received a leave of absence while the Seventh Cavalry was stationed on Reconstruction duty in the South. He utilized the time to promote the Stevens silver mine near Georgetown, Colorado, and he wrote to wife Libbie, "If I succeed in this operation as now seems certain, it is to be but the stepping stone to large and more profitable

undertakings.” He made the rounds of New York City, enlisting the aid of powerful financiers, but the highly speculative and “watered” stock proved weak from the beginning, and resulted in economic disaster for everyone concerned.<sup>21</sup>

Equally questioned was the reputation of Col. George Forsyth, who had experienced a moment of glory when his civilian scouts held off a large Cheyenne force in the 1868 defense of Beecher’s Island. Twenty years later he faced a general court-martial at Fort Huachuca, Arizona, on the claim that he had signed two months of his pay vouchers over to a local merchant. Then he allegedly drafted similar vouchers for the same two months and signed them over to Capt. William Tisdall. Added to this serious offense were separate charges that he had borrowed money from enlisted men and had appropriated a buggy from a sergeant without paying just compensation.<sup>22</sup>

Forsyth’s financial problems stemmed from years of losses on the stock market. He fell into a cycle of increasing debt, which he tried to shore up with even more speculative ventures in manufacturing and mining. Even after his transfer to the relatively isolated border post of Fort Huachuca, he continued to borrow money from individuals to cover previous loans. Drawing upon his earlier legal training, Forsyth ably defended himself before the thirteen members of the court-martial board, but was found guilty on the main charge. The final sentence came directly from President Grover Cleveland, who labeled the offenses as “reprehensible” and “subversive of the honor and integrity of the service.” He ordered the guilty officer suspended from the army for three years at half pay and that he be reprimanded in general orders. Col. Forsyth’s fall from grace elicited a stern warning to other military personnel from Gen. John Schofield, who was serving as acting secretary of war. In executing the president’s orders, he especially directed young officers “to



**Lt. Col. George A. Forsyth, about 1884, a few years before his court-martial for financial improprieties.** Courtesy Arizona Historical Society, Tucson. AHS#24727a

live modestly on the sufficient means provided for their support,” and thereby avoid “the disasters which so often follow a greedy pursuit of money.”<sup>23</sup>

Despite his personal tragedy, Forsyth maintained his dignity and received support from powerful military friends. Within a year after his punishment was issued, they successfully requested a hearing based upon new information about his health. Private doctors who had examined Forsyth had concluded that a head wound suffered in the Battle of Beecher’s Island had created a condi-

tion known as hypomania. This malady supposedly worsened over time, and produced behavioral problems that resulted in his indebtedness. This medical evidence led in January 1890 to his restoration to active duty, but also to a simultaneous retirement because of disability. With pension and reputation restored, Forsyth had weathered the worst of the storm, but his financial problems remained.<sup>24</sup>

Although the frontier army was filled with officers who sought big stakes investments that would provide them

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with financial independence, most were content to supplement their military pay and seek a comfortable retirement. Fort Belknap, Texas, provided a haven for just such small stakes land purchases during the 1850s. Col. Albert Sidney Johnston and six other officers bought land in the vicinity of the post. Lt. Edward F. Abbott later deeded fifty acres of his holdings for the county seat of Young County. Likewise, a number of enlisted men bought land and retired there to raise crops on contract to the army. Several of the ex-soldiers, as well as Maj. James Duff, even remained in the area long enough to help organize the county government.<sup>25</sup>

Another officer destined to gain fame in the Civil War also considered early exit from the army and possible plantation life in antebellum Texas. While stationed at Fort Mason, Lt. James Longstreet purchased fifty acres of choice land for future sale or possibly on which to settle. Exactly two decades later Col. Ranald S. Mackenzie acquired 960 acres near San Antonio, Texas, in the hopes of marrying Florida Tunstall and ultimately retiring to the estate. With an even more determined eye fixed on retirement, Maj. Frank Baldwin purchased a farm near Denver, Colorado. Even a speculative gambler such as Gen. William Shafter was content to seek a farm in Kern County, California, as he neared retirement.<sup>26</sup>

The record of enlisted men and their lives after military service is, of course, incomplete. Yet the anecdotal evidence that survives indicates that a significant number of veterans found productive careers as civilians, Sgt. James A. Richardson retired after thirty-five years in the army to become a successful contractor for the New England Telephone Company. Pvt. Walter C. Harrington resigned from service in the mid-1890s, acquired a business education, and eventually established his own building supply company. At about the same time, Pvt. George Whitaker and Pvt. James G. Morrison became guides and rangers in Yellowstone National Park.



**Gen. William R. Shafter, about 1898. In 1880 he had joined John R. Bullis and others in a lucrative silver mining partnership.**  
Courtesy Fort Davis National Historic Site

Jacob Homer mustered out of the Seventh Cavalry and took employment as a butcher in Bismarck, North Dakota. Jacob Sobel, also of the Seventh Cavalry, experimented with even more diverse jobs after leaving the army in 1882. He first homesteaded near Billings, Montana, then opened a business college in the town, and eventually became a major contractor who built roads and bridges throughout Montana, and especially in Yellowstone National Park. While Pvt. John Duke found success as a cattleman, dairyman, and hotel owner in Arizona, Pvt. Frank Heidelberger made a new life as a skilled blacksmith in the Black Hills mines. Sgt. Maj. W. H. Pickens, who had been a journeyman carpenter in Chicago before his 1873 enlistment, excelled in military life, but mustered out within five years. He moved to Plattsmouth, Nebraska, where he became a highly sought after contractor.<sup>27</sup>

While many of these ex-servicemen found some measure of economic success in their new careers, a smaller number also discovered social and political prominence. George Eaton left the military in 1883, was elected to the first and second constitutional conventions of Montana Territory, and served five years as surveyor general. Former surgeon Henry H. Ruger and enlisted man Henry Hale both served in the North Dakota state legislature.<sup>28</sup> Danish-born Christian Madsen of the Fifth Cavalry gained fame as a United States deputy marshal in Indian Territory and as Oklahoma City's chief of police. The same regiment also produced Medal of Honor recipient Sgt. Clay Beauford, who commanded the Apache police force at San Carlos Agency and who later was elected to Arizona's territorial legislature. William F. Morris, veteran of the 1876 Battle of the Little Bighorn, rose to prominence as justice of the New York City Municipal Court. Following his military service, Chap. Winfield Scott became chairman of the Scottsdale [Arizona] School Board and Maricopa County representative to the territorial legislature. The town itself carried his name in deference to his popularity and importance as a pioneer of the region.<sup>29</sup>

Perhaps the most successful of the ex-soldiers to operate as a military supplier on the Southern Plains was former quartermaster William McDole Lee. As early as 1869 he and civilian partner Albert E. Reynolds had begun to provide food to Camp Supply and the nearby Cheyenne and Arapaho Agency. They also expanded into trade with cowboys on the Western Trail from Texas to Dodge City. Profits from these ventures then went toward purchase of a half interest in the huge LS Ranch of the Texas Panhandle. Lee and Reynolds were notorious for using their money and influence to undermine competitors as they established the largest freighting operations out of Dodge City. Ultimately known as "the boss traders of the Southwest," they diversified their investments wisely. Just as the buffalo



Fifth U.S. Cavalry veteran Christian Madsen during a visit to the 1879 battlefield at Milk Creek, Colorado. Madsen was U.S. deputy marshal in Indian Territory following his retirement from the army. NSHS-RG2411-7155

hide trade began its decline on the Southern Plains by 1878, Lee shifted much of his assets into ranching, and later into oil and ships.<sup>30</sup>

While other veterans did not attain fame or riches, they did preserve their military ties by settling near the forts to cater to soldiers and to compete for government contracts. Former soldier Ephraim Polly and his wife operated the stage station known as the Polly Hotel between Fort Elliott and Camp Supply from 1874 to 1884. Travelers considered their food and accommodations to be far superior to that of other establishments along the military road through

present-day western Oklahoma. When Sgt. Charles Mulhern retired at Fort Davis in 1885, he owned thirty sections of grazing land and was a major supplier of local beef to the post. Likewise, when Francis Rooney retired, he settled at Fort Stockton, Texas, where he developed an expansive irrigation project on Comanche Creek. He raised corn, barley, and oats that were contracted to the fort, sometimes as many as twenty to forty wagons full at a time. Sgt. Frederick William Young also remained at Fort Stockton to become post trader and ultimately to establish the prosperous Diamond Y Ranch. He was elected the

first county surveyor of Pecos County, was an early postmaster, and held the position of county judge.<sup>31</sup>

Some military posts provided better long term opportunities for ex-servicemen than did others. Certainly, Fort Robinson, Nebraska, made a likely magnet for continued interest among veterans who had served there during its glory days of the late 1870s. Because it continued as an active post well into the twentieth century, and because it helped create a lively economy for Crawford and the surrounding area, some retirees stayed beyond their term of duty. A relatively recent microcosmic social study indicates how white soldiers took up farms, started ranches, opened feed stores, started barbershops, organized a traveling orchestra, worked as clerks, created a restaurant, hired out as teamsters, and worked for the railroad. Some of these also served on the Crawford school board, city council, and fire department, as well as holding county offices.<sup>32</sup>

Black veterans also found the area suitable for life beyond military service. Some maintained civilian jobs at the fort as cooks, bartenders, and attendants in the Post Exchange. The tasks and pay were menial, but for many black veterans the lack of an advanced education and the presence of a strongly racist society precluded opportunities elsewhere. Preston Brooks, formerly of the Ninth Cavalry, held a skilled and responsible civilian position as post engineer for eleven years. He managed the sawmill and waterworks, earning sixty dollars a month, until he lost his job after striking a white employee.<sup>33</sup>

Other black veterans worked on neighboring ranches. The most celebrated of these was Sgt. John Butler, a broncobuster for the famed 04 Ranch. He became a favorite employee of the Cook family and stayed on long after he had reached an advanced age. Butler lived the remainder of his life amid poverty in Crawford after he was robbed of his life savings. Also employed by the 04 Ranch was Alex Stepney, who

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worked as a bunkhouse cook for many years after his 1891 discharge from the military. Following his ranch years, he moved to Crawford with his wife Fannie and worked as a mail carrier between the fort and the railroad depot.<sup>34</sup>

Information on other black veterans who remained in the area is incomplete, but, as with white soldiers, their experiences varied. Henry McClain and Rufus Slaughter established homesteads, while William Howard and his wife hired out as farm laborers. James Williams opened a restaurant, but had to close its doors about a year later. George Wilson trained horses for Dawes County residents until he died at age sixty-seven. Sandy Tournage worked for a livery stable until he was killed in 1897 by an unknown assailant. Among all the black soldiers who remained near Fort

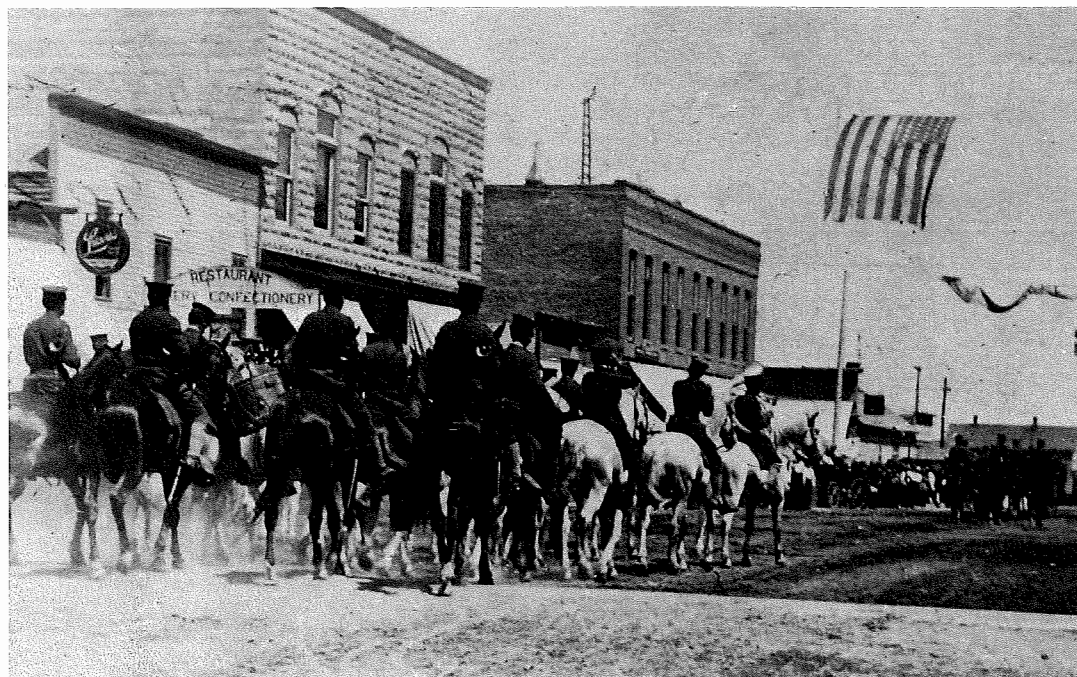
**Caleb Benson, shown here later in life, served for twenty-four years in the Ninth and Tenth U.S. Cavalry before retiring at Crawford, Nebraska, in 1908. He claimed a homestead, and also worked for various officers at Fort Robinson.**

NSHS-RG1517:93-27

Robinson, Charles Price emerged as the most financially successful. In 1916 he had personal property valued at \$1,000, much of it earned through gambling and bootlegging.<sup>35</sup>

Although blacks found limited job opportunities in northwestern Nebraska and none ever held public office during the frontier era, they did create a viable community within the broader population. The black families helped each other through tough times, intermarried with each other, and formed their own social organizations to promote their unique identity. In 1895 they established a chapter of the Regular Army and Navy Union. They held their own masquerade balls, and in 1913, opened their own church. The latter served not only as a religious institution, but also provided numerous socials, dinners, and fund raisers. White residents of Crawford sometimes attended these interracial functions, but the organizations primarily addressed black needs.<sup>36</sup>

The varied experiences of black and white soldiers at Fort Robinson and throughout the West help dispel the



**The Tenth Cavalry Band marches in the July 4, 1905, parade in Crawford.**  
NSHS-RG1517:93-7

popular image of frontier army veterans as being unimportant elements in civilian society. On the contrary, large numbers found suitable employment and made comfortable lives for themselves and their families. Many of the officers invested in western lands, mines, railroads, and commercial enterprises, and a significant number of them remained in the western states and territories following their retirements. Enlisted men also seem to have speculated as far as their financial resources would allow, and an even higher percentage than the officers apparently remained in the West. As farmers, ranchers, skilled tradesmen, clerks, freighters, small businessmen, and in a host of other vocations, they continued to seek their futures in the lands they once had sworn to protect. They truly proved that there was a life beyond soldiering.

## Notes

This essay was adapted from my book, *The Frontier Army in the Settlement of the West* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999).

<sup>1</sup> H. H. McConnell, *Five Years a Cavalryman; or, Sketches of Regular Army Life on the Texas Frontier, 1866–1871* (Jacksboro, Tex.: J. N. Rogers and Co., 1889), 101.

<sup>2</sup> Robert A. Murray, "Prices and Wages at Fort Laramie, 1881–1885," *Annals of Wyoming* 36 (April 1964): 19–21; Harry A. Anderson, "A History of the Cheyenne River Indian Agency and Its Military Post, Fort Bennett, 1868–1891," *South Dakota Historical Collections* 28 (1956): 525–26; Cornelia Crook and Garland Crook, "Fort Lincoln, Texas," *Texas Military History* 4 (Fall 1964): 153.

<sup>3</sup> Charles Ruff to John Dougherty, [?] 1849, and June 24, 1849, Charles and Annie Ruff Papers, Merrill Mattes Collection, National Frontier Trails Center, Independence, Missouri.

<sup>4</sup> Ruff to Dougherty, Dec. 8, 1849, and Feb. 7, 1850, Ruff Papers.

<sup>5</sup> Edward M. Coffman, *The Old Army: A Portrait of the American Army in Peacetime, 1784–1898* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 84–85.

<sup>6</sup> Bruce J. Dinges, "Colonel Grierson Invests on the West Texas Frontier," *Fort Concho Report* 16 (1984): 6–7.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 7–8.

<sup>8</sup> Mary L. Williams, "Empire Building: Colonel Benjamin H. Grierson at Fort Davis, 1882–1885," *West Texas Historical Association Year Book* 61 (1985): 61–64.

<sup>9</sup> Dinges, "Colonel Grierson Invests," 7–8.

<sup>10</sup> Douglas C. McChristian, ed., *Garrison Tangles in the Friendless Tenth: The Journal of First Lieutenant John Bigelow, Jr., Fort Davis, Texas* (Bryan, Tex.: J. M. Carroll and Co., 1984), 8–14; Williams, "Empire Building," 68–69; Dinges, "Colonel Grierson Invests," 5, 12.

<sup>11</sup> Barry Scobee, *Fort Davis, Texas 1583–1960* (El Paso: Hill Printing Co., 1963), 90; Williams, "Empire Building," 70; William H. Leckie, and Shirley A. Leckie, *Unlikely Warriors: General Benjamin H. Grierson and His Family* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1984), 305–8.

<sup>12</sup> Dinges, "Colonel Grierson Invests," 5; Julia Cauble Smith, "The Shafter Mining District," *Permian Historical Annual* 28 (December 1988): 76–77.

<sup>13</sup> Smith, "Shafter Mining District," 77–82; Paul H. Carlson, "The Discovery of Silver in West Texas," *West Texas Historical Association Year Book* 54 (1978): 60–63.

<sup>14</sup> Diane M. T. North, *Samuel Peter Heintzelman and the Sonora Exploring and Mining Company* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1980), 8–45.

<sup>15</sup> Robert Lee, *Fort Meade and the Black Hills* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991), 34, 48–49.

<sup>16</sup> Robert Wooster, *Nelson A. Miles and the Twilight of the Frontier Army* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993), 50, 59–60, 137–38, 249–50.

<sup>17</sup> Mary Lee Spence, ed., *The Expeditions of John Charles Frémont*, vol. 3, *Travels from 1848 to 1854* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984), xli–lxxvii.

<sup>18</sup> Allan Nevins, *Frémont: Pathmarker of the West* (New York: Longman's, Green and Co., 1955), 594–610.

<sup>19</sup> Robert M. Utley, *Cavalier in Buckskin: George Armstrong Custer and the Western Military Frontier* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988), 14–15, and 39.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 153–55.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 109; Duane A. Smith, "Where a Bird Could Hardly Obtain a Footing: George Armstrong Custer and the Stevens Mine," *Colorado Heritage* (1997): 25–37.

<sup>22</sup> David Dixon, *Hero of Beecher Island: The Life and Military Career of George A. Forsyth* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), 168–69.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 170–82.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 183–87.

<sup>25</sup> Barbara A. Neal Ledbetter, *Fort Belknap Frontier Saga: Indians, Negroes, and Anglo-Americans on the Texas Frontier* (Burnet, Tex.: Eakin Press, 1982), 41, 47.

<sup>26</sup> William Garrett Piston, "Petticoats, Promotions, and Military Assignments: Favoritism and the Antebellum Career of James Longstreet," *Military History of the Southwest* 22 (Spring 1992): 27; Soren W. Nielsen, "Ranald S. Mackenzie: The Man and His Battle," *West Texas Historical Association Year Book* 64 (1988): 150; Robert H. Steinbach, *A Long March: The Lives of Frank and Alice Baldwin* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), 186–87; Paul H. Carlson, "Pecos Bill": *A Military Biography of William R. Shafter* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1989), 158.

<sup>27</sup> Don Rickey, Jr., *Forty Miles a Day on Beans and Hay: The Enlisted Soldier Fighting the Indian Wars* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1963), 344–48.

<sup>28</sup> Don Russell, *Campaigning with King: Charles King, Chronicler of the Old Army*, Paul L. Hedren, ed. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991), 147; Mildred Wertenberger, comp., "Fort Totten, Dakota Territory, 1867," *North Dakota History* 34 (Spring 1967): 142.

<sup>29</sup> Homer Croy, *Trigger Marshal: The Story of Chris Madsen* (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1958), 44–215; William A. Dobak, "Yellow-Leg Journalists: Enlisted Men as Newspaper Reporters in the Sioux Campaign, 1876," *Journal of the West* 13 (January 1974): 95; Richard K. Smith, "For God . . . For Country . . . For the Territory," *Arizona Highways* 49 (April 1973): 12.

<sup>30</sup> Donald F. Schofield, "The Making of a West Texas Ghost Town: Tascosa vs. W. M. D. Lee," *West Texas Historical Association Year Book* 61 (1985): 31–37; Donald F. Schofield, "W. M. D. Lee, Indian Trader," *Panhandle-Plains Historical Review* 54 (1981): 3–39 and 101–7.

<sup>31</sup> C. Robert Haywood, *Trails South: The Wagon-Road Economy in the Dodge City-Panhandle Region* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1986), 52; Scobee, *Fort Davis*, 102–3; Clayton Williams, *Texas' Last Frontier: Fort Stockton and the Trans-Pecos, 1861–1895*, Ernest Wallace, ed. (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1982), 140–42, 193–94.

<sup>32</sup> Frank N. Schubert, *Buffalo Soldiers, Braves and the Brass: The Story of Fort Robinson, Nebraska* (Shippensburg, Pa.: White Mane Publishing Co., 1993), 158–60.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 149–53.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 153.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 153–54.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 156–58.