

# THE ROAD TO GLORIETA



## **GLORIETA BATTLEFIELD**



"The old junipers in front of the building bear the scars of rifle, grape and canister." - Tommie Greer.

In the early 1900's Pigeon's Ranch, the focus of much of the fighting at Glorieta Pass, was managed as a roadside attraction by Thomas L. Greer. "Tommie," who styled himself "a typical western cowboy," encouraged passers by to "stop and fill your jug and get a sweet cold drink of pure mountain water." The water was free, but for a small admission fee the curious were offered a chance to be "shown through and told all about the old place." Drawing on his ten years as "a contestant and manager of a wild west show," Greer would claim that an uncle was one of Sibley's Rangers, and launch into his tale. (1)

Glorieta Pass is "one of the most significant historical sites in the Southwest," but after the Tommie Greer era the battlefield was largely neglected. Located primarily on private land, the site remained much as it was during 1862. In 1961, the Civil War Centennial brought renewed interest, and the main adobe building on Pigeon's Ranch and its immediate surroundings were designated a national historical landmark. Later, as development in the area increased, it became apparent that further protection was needed. In the 1980's, concerned citizens formed the Glorieta Battlefield Preservation Society, and began a ten-year campaign for the acquisition, preservation and interpretation of the site as part of the National Park System. (2)

Those interested in protecting the battlefield included a healthy mix of Civil War enthusiasts and professional historians, many of whom visited the area time and time again. For nearly a century, researchers walked the environs of Glorieta, listening to the sound of distant trumpets and looking for bits and pieces of the past. Some mapped the terrain. More recently, others scoured the earth with metal detectors. Many were trying to solve a mystery. The "long slight depression," which once marked the final resting place of the battle's Confederate dead, had disappeared over

time. With no other marker present, the exact location of the grave site was eventually lost. Armed with an early account, which claimed the mass grave was situated "on a level spot across the arroyo," "close to a high ledge of rocks," searchers concentrated on an area just west of Pigeon's Ranch. As it turned out, the account was mistaken, and for years everyone looked in the wrong location. (3)

In June of 1987, something serendipitous happened. Kip Siler, a long-time resident of the Glorieta area, and his bride Beth decided to build themselves a new log home. On June 23, a backhoe operator, excavating the foundation, turned up bones. Digging was stopped, and Siler quickly realized that the remains were human. Within hours he was on the phone with the Museum of New Mexico. By sheer coincidence, the backhoe operator discovered Sibley's lost Confederates. (4)

Luckily, at the time of the discovery, the powerful machine was slowly scraping away a mere half inch of dirt. Almost no damage was done. Over the next four weeks, a team of Museum archaeologists and other workers, equipped with dental picks and tiny trowels, carefully removed the soldiers remains. "It's hard to explain," said Museum archaeologist Yvonne Oakes, "but seeing a single burial is not uncommon for an archaeologist. Seeing a mass grave is totally different. It almost shocks. Seeing that many men all laid side by side with their arms crossed left us in awe [...] Standing there looking at them, it did not feel as if it were 125 years ago." (5)

"Subsequent forensic and laboratory analysis provided valuable insights into the types of arms used by and against the Confederates, indicated their general good health, and showed that they were both well clothed and shod at the time of their last battle." After completion of the research, and considerable discussion about location, it was decided to reinter Sibley's men in the National Cemetery in Santa Fe. On Sunday, April 25, 1993, the thirty soldiers found in the mass grave were reburied with full Confederate honors. It was the largest reburial of Civil War remains in the 20th Century. The Sons of Confederate Veterans hosted a four day encampment, and fully outfitted reenactors accompanied the remains, through the streets on horse drawn wagons. At the grave site, reenactors lowered the coffins. There were prayers and a eulogy by Tom Livesay, Director of the Museum of New Mexico. A rifle squad fired a traditional salute, and the mournful strains of Taps bid the brave Texans a final goodbye. Only paces away lies the grave of Captain Isaac Adair, once again reunited with his comrades in arms. (6)

Although the discovery of the lost Confederate grave played no direct part in preservation efforts for the Glorieta Battlefield, it did serve to focus interest. In 1990, thanks to the tireless work of the Preservation Society, legislation was passed adding the site to the nearby Pecos National Monument.

**Footnotes** (See *The Road to Glorieta* for bibliography)

1. Greer, "Historical facts about battlegrounds...", pp.3-13.
2. Venarde, "New Mexico Civil War Site Proposed as Historic Park," p.13, Dr. Don E. Albert's testimony before Congress.
3. Mitchell, "The 2nd Battle of Glorieta," pp.26-30; Whitford, Battle of Glorieta Pass, pp.124-125.
4. Besides being in an unexpected location, the grave was deeper than usual, which may indicate why it was overlooked by searchers armed with metal detectors. Mitchell, "The 2nd Battle of Glorieta," pp.26-30; Whitford, Battle of Glorieta Pass, pp.124-125).
5. Venarde, "New Mexico Civil War Site Proposed as Historic Park," p.13, as quoted in.
6. The decision to reinter Sibley's men in the National Cemetery was not an easy one. Some parties wanted the soldiers reburied at the battlefield where they fell, others wanted them returned to Texas. The Sons of Confederate Veterans, the Glorieta Battlefield Preservation Society, the Museum of New Mexico, and even the Governor of Texas and the State Legislature waded into the discussion. The issue was so sensitive and the argument so acrimonious that Tom Livesay, Director of the Museum of New Mexico, believed that he would no longer be director by the time it was resolved. For full details see, Mitchell, "The 2nd Battle of Glorieta." Twenty-eight of Sibley's soldiers were reburied in a common crypt. Three others: Major John Shropshire, Ebenezer (Abe) Hanna, and Private S.L. Cotton were identified through the efforts of Consulting Historian, Dr. Don Alberts, and received individual burial. Hanna and Cotton were buried in the National Cemetery. The Major's remains were returned to a family cemetery near Valley Forge, Kentucky. Alberts, *Rebels on the Rio Grande*, p.167; Museum of New Mexico Preview, March/April 1993, burial announcement; "Confederate Memorial Day Ceremony Program, Remembering the Battle of Glorieta Pass." Santa Fe, NM: Santa Fe National Cemetery, April 26, 1993.



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