

Author's Note

Trading caravans and the fur-trapping Mountain Men found their way to Santa Fe early in its history, but when the War with Mexico in 1845 added the vast Southwest to the territory of the United States, that land was virtually unknown to the majority of Americans. A skeleton force of the army occupied a string of forts and posts across desert and mountain, holding as best it could the unposted borders against Apache, Ute, and Navaho.

Between the end of the Mexican War and the beginning of the War Between the States, this pitifully small force was forgotten by the people of the civilized East. Undermanned, criminally underpaid, with poor supplies or none at all for long stretches of time, they did their duty and were wardens of an empire their fellow countrymen did not really want.

It was largely an army of the foreign born. Irish escaping from the famine which devastated that land in the 1840's and Germans eager for a freedom lost at home poured into the United States and readily found their way into the frontier army. The business failures of 1857 and 1858 brought into the ranks native-born Americans who enlisted to eat and to get a new start.

And it was not an ignorant army. Buried in regimental

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histories or in small privately issued books and in state historical journals are the diaries and letters of these men. Not only the officers but also the privates and the sergeants kept careful accounts of their daily lives, the raiding forays which they accepted as a matter of course, and descriptions of the wild land they had made their own. Many of them after serving one or two hitches in the army settled down on the frontier and helped to build the western nation.

Captain Bourke's memoirs, Sergeant Bennett's journal, Sergeant Bieber's diary, and Private Lowe's account are all rich reading for the one lucky enough to find them in reports of state historical societies, regimental histories, and university publications. Some of the stories set down so matter-of-factly in these pages seem like the wildest romance—yet they are true.

The author wishes to express appreciation for the help of Miss Root and Miss Lybarger of the History Division of the Cleveland Public Library, since it was through their efforts that many of these long overlooked accounts of frontier warfare were unearthed for use.

All the incidents in *Stand to Horse* are based on actual experiences of army men who have left their records to astonish the modern reader.