

LIEUTENANT WM. E. BURNETT: NOTES ON REMOVAL
OF INDIANS FROM TEXAS TO INDIAN TERRITORY

By Raymond Estep*

PART I

Much of the pre-Civil War history of Oklahoma is the story of its Indian inhabitants, with the addition, after 1803, of the U. S. Army's operations in the area. After 1820 the Indian story is primarily that of removal to and resettlement in the Indian Territory (generally in the eastern half of present Oklahoma)—a story that has been well told by Grant Foreman and others. Although most of the Indians resettled in Oklahoma were moved from the east and north, several groups removed voluntarily or forcibly to the western part of Indian Territory from south of Red River, before the Civil War period that saw the founding of Fort Cobb.¹ Texas—as a republic, and later as a state—like states east of the Mississippi, had her problems with Indians, problems that were faced in different ways by her several chief executives. In their policies, they alternated between employment of the rifle and extension of the olive branch, between open warfare and establishment of reservations. In the end, however, the ever increasing pressure of settlement forced the removal of most of the Indians from Texas soil.²

* Dr. Raymond Estep, Professor of History in Research Studies, Air University, U.S.A.F., Maxwell Air Force Base, Montgomery, Alabama, is a former contributor to *The Chronicles* ("First Panhandle Land Land Grant," Vol. XXXVI, No. 4, pp. 358-70). His contribution here, "Removal of the Texas Indians . . .," includes letters of Lieut. William E. Burnett to his father, Hon. David G. Burnett, then president of the Republic of Texas, published with introduction and annotations. These letters present a record of events in Oklahoma that occurred in the two-year period immediately preceding the Civil War, as seen by a young lieutenant of the First Infantry Regiment, U.S.A. The length of Dr. Estep's manuscript necessitates the presentation of the Burnett letters as a series published in *The Chronicles*, of which the first appears here as Part I, the others to be continued in following numbers of the magazine. The text of the letters is given as found in the originals in the Rosenberg Library at Galveston, Texas, with the original form and spelling. Only in a few instances have simple punctuation and paragraphing been added for clearness in the printed text.—Ed.

¹ For earlier articles on Fort Cobb published in *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, see Muriel H. Wright, "A History of Fort Cobb," Vol. XXXIV (Spring, 1956), pp. 53-71; C. Ross Hume, "Historic Sites Around Anadarko," Vol. XVI (Dec. 1938), pp. 410-424; B. B. Chapman, "Establishment of the Wichita Reservation," Vol. XI (Dec. 1933), pp. 1044-1055; Grant Foreman, "Historical Background of the Kiowa-Comanche Reservation," Vol. XIX (June 1941), pp. 129-143.

² Walter P. Webb and H. Bailey Carroll (eds.), *The Handbook of Texas* (Austin, 1952), Vol. 1, pp. 879-882. The story of the Texas Indians and their removal is told at length in Anna Muehlevey, "The Indian Policy of the Re-

With the conclusion of the Mexican War a new element began to exert its influence on Indian affairs in Texas. This new element, the U. S. Army, became a key factor on the Frontier with the construction by the Government of a line of defense posts beyond the areas of settlement from Red River into southwestern Texas. The original outposts were erected in response to a joint resolution addressed to Congress by the Texas Legislature on March 20, 1848, asking the establishment of "a chain of military posts, in advance of the settlements, between Red River and the Rio Grande, and that said posts shall be removed from time to time as the settlements advance."²

In 1848-1849 the Army built and manned Fort Worth, on the Trinity; Fort Graham, on the Brazos; Fort Gates, on the Leon; Fort Croghan, on a tributary of the Colorado; Fort Martin Scott, near present Fredericksburg; and Fort Inge, on the San Antonio-Eagle Pass road. In less than two years white settlers had passed this line of forts and were again demanding protection. In response to their pleas, the Texas Legislature, in a joint resolution of January 28, 1850, petitioned Congress asking that an "adequate and sufficient force be placed upon the frontier and borders of the State . . . to protect lives, persons and property . . ." This request, like that of 1848, brought positive action by the government. In 1851 Major General Persifer F. Smith, Commanding General of the Department of Texas, with headquarters in San Antonio, personally selected sites for a new exterior chain of forts beyond the line of settlement. Beginning at its northern terminus at Fort Belknap, on the Brazos, the line extended southwestward through Fort Phantom Hill, on the Clear Fork of the Brazos; Fort Chadbourne, on a branch of the Colorado; Fort McKavett, on the San Saba; Fort Terrett, on the Llano; and reached its southern outpost at Fort Clark, on Las Moras Creek.³

public of Texas," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, Vols. XXV and XXVI (1921-1922); Lena C. Koch, "The Federal Indian Policy of Texas, 1845-1860," *ibid.*, Vol. XXVIII and XXIX (1924-1925); George D. Harman, "The United States Indian Policy in Texas, 1815-1860," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, Vol. XVII (Dec. 1930), pp. 377-403; W. P. Webb, *The Texas Rangers* (Boston-New York, 1935), pp. 151-172; Averam B. Bander, *The March of Empire: Frontier Defense in the Southwest, 1848-1860* (Lawrence, 1952), pp. 206-217.

² Hen C. ONeal, "The Beginnings of Fort Belknap," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, LXI (April 1958), p. 509, quoting H. P. N. Gammel, *The Laws of Texas* (10 Vols., Austin, 1898), Vol. III, p. 206.

³ ONeal, *loc. cit.*, 509-510, quoting Gammel, *op. cit.*, Vol. III, p. 523.

⁴ Smith to Lt. Col. Wm. C. Freeman, July 19, 1853, in M. L. Crittman (ed.), "W. C. Freeman's Report on the Eighth Military Department," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, Vol. LIV (Oct. 1950), pp. 211-216. Smith declared that General Belknap had already chosen the site for Fort Belknap when Smith reached that place.

General Smith's plan originally provided for the newer exterior line of forts to be manned by infantry units and the older interior line by cavalry troops, the latter being so located because of the desire to place them nearer settled areas where sources of forage for horses were more readily available. This plan of Smith's did not prove workable in practice, and in the late summer of 1855 the policy of maintaining a two-line system of posts was abandoned, the inner posts were closed, and personnel and equipment were moved to the new posts on the outer line.⁶

Shortly before this time another agency of the Federal government, the Indian Office, also began to exert its influence on Indian affairs in Texas. To this agency passed administrative control of all Indian tribes within the boundaries of Texas upon the admission of Texas into the Union. One of the first problems faced by Washington in the handling of its new wards was that of finding a home for them within the settled areas of Texas or along its frontier, a problem complicated by the fact that Texas had retained all of its public lands upon becoming a state. Lacking land on which to establish reservations in the area, the Federal government temporized while waiting for Texas to designate some of its public lands for the purpose. This the Texas Legislature finally did on February 6, 1854, by authorizing the establishment of two four-league (18,576-acre) reservations on the Brazos River in western Texas just to the east of the line of the newly-located Army posts.⁷ The first of these, the Brazos Indian Reservation, subsequently doubled in size, was located by General Randolph B. Marcy in the summer of 1854 some twelve miles south of Fort Belknap in three huge bends of the Brazos River. Here some 2,000 Caddo, Anadarko, Kichai, Tawaconi, Tonkawa, and Waco Indians created their villages and began farming operations.⁸ Some forty-five miles to the west Marcy located the Comanche Indian Reservation on the Clear Fork of the Brazos. To this reserve originally came some 450 Penateka ("Honey-eaters") Comanches after their signing of the treaty of August 30, 1855.⁹

The irresistible pressure of white settlement was to make these reservations only way-stops on a journey that was essentially to take the Indians to present Oklahoma. For, contrary to some expectations, concentration of the tribesmen on the Brazos reserves did not bring an end to raids by Indians, alone or in small groups, on isolated frontier farms, ranches, and vil-

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 215-216; "Freeman's Report," *Ibid.*, p. 234.

⁷ *Handbook of Texas*, Vol. I, p. 384.

⁸ *Ibid.*, Vol. I, pp. 209-210, 302, 954; II, 267; Rupert N. Richardson, *The Comanche Barrier to South Plains Settlement* (Glenade, 1933), pp. 210-232; Grant Foreman, *A History of Oklahoma* (Norman, 1912), p. 97.

⁹ *Handbook of Texas*, Vol. I, p. 384-385; Vol. II, p. 267.

rages, raids marked by theft, arson and sometimes death. Although the reservation Indians probably were largely guiltless of these activities in which the Plains Indians were known to be engaged, the reserve groups, being near at hand and easily located, bore the brunt of the accusations. Hardly had they been relocated when new pleas went forth to Austin and Washington for relief in the form of more protection from or removal of the Indians from Texas. Regardless of whether the reservation Indians were the guilty parties—and many, especially Army personnel, maintained they were not—the ultimate decision—removal—was foreordained.

In the face of mounting pressure, events reached a climax with the appearance of John R. Baylor at the Brazos Reservation on May 23, 1859, at the head of several hundred white settlers threatening to attack the Indians. In the ensuing skirmishing three persons were killed and several wounded. Although casualties had been few, Indian agents and Army officers feared the worst, and dispositions were made to defend the Lower Reserve with troops from Fort Belknap and Camp Radziminiski. Texas, for its part, moved a Ranger unit into the area.¹⁰

With rabble rousers fanning anti-reservation sentiment to a fever height in the frontier press, government representatives realized that the Indians could not be peacefully maintained in Texas and hurriedly took steps to move them north of Red River. On June 11, 1859, orders were issued for the removal of all the reservation Indians.¹¹ A week later (June 18) a site-selection party, headed by Elias Rector, Superintendent of the Southern Superintendency, set out from Fort Arbuckle in search of a suitable location for the Texas Indians. After visiting Medicine Bluff Creek in the present Fort Sill area, the group continued north to the Washita where Rector chose a reservation site near present Fort Cobb. On June 30, the party returned to Fort Arbuckle where Rector conferred with Robert S. Neighbors, Superintendent of the Texas Indians, who arrived from Fort Belknap on the same day. On July 1, with Neighbors leading the discussion, the chiefs of the Texas Indians approved Rector's designated location for their new home.¹²

Neighbors returned to Texas on July 5, and immediately took the necessary steps to move the tribes to the reservation on the Washita. The Comanches, under agent Mathew Loeper, with

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, I, p. 219; Richardson *op. cit.*, pp. 233-266.

¹¹ *Handbook of Texas*, Vol. 1, p. 384; Foreman, *A History of Oklahoma*, p. 95.

¹² W. S. Nye, *Cariboo & Lance* (Norman, 1943), pp. 26-27; Chapman, *op. cit.*, 1647; Foreman, *A History of Oklahoma*, 95-97; Foreman, "Historical Background of the Kiowa-Comanche Reservation," *loc. cit.*, p. 133.

support of one infantry company, started north on July 30. Superintendent Neighbors and Agent Shapley P. Ross, with the tribes of the Lower Reserve, got under way on August 1. The two contingents, travelling by different routes, met at the Red River crossing on August 7. On the following day this vast pilgrimage of over 1,400 Indians, with all they could transport of their worldly goods, forded Red River and headed north in flight from their Brazos reservation homes.¹³ Rejoicing at his so-far-successful beginn, Neighbors wrote his wife: "I have this day crossed all the Indians out of the heathen land of Texas and am now out of the land of the Philistines."¹⁴ Protecting the Indians from their Texas enemies in their march to the Washita were two Second Cavalry companies under Major George H. Thomas and two First Infantry Companies under Captain Joseph B. Plummer.¹⁵ Major Thomas' troops left the migrants on August 15, before they reached the Washita, and returned to Camp Cooper. Captain Plummer departed for the same post with his infantry units on the 19th.¹⁶

On August 16 the refugees reached Major Steen's crossing on the Washita. On the following day they moved about three miles up the river and camped in a "beautiful high valley," where they remained until the end of the month.¹⁷ During the

¹³ See also Burnet's letter of July 28, 1859, below. The events of the migration are briefly reported in Superintendent Robert S. Neighbors, "Memorandum of Travel from Brazos Agency Texas to False Quashita Agency, C. N.," July 31-Aug. 29, 1859. In his "Census Rolls," dated Aug. 1, 1859, Neighbors reported the following numbers of Indians migrating: An-ah-dah-ko, 218; Caddo, 244; Tah-wa-ca-nu, 209; You-kah-us, 245; and Waco, 164. Agent Leeper, in his "Census Rolls" of July 28, 1859, enumerated 370 Comanches among his charges. Neighbors, in his "Statement of Deaths," Sept. 1, 1859, revealed that the following died en route and in camp to Sept. 1: 2 Anadarko men, 1 Anadarko woman, 1 Caddo boy, and 2 Comanche women. All of the above manuscript records are in Special Case 81, Record Group 75, The National Archives, Washington, D. C.—Foreman, *A History of Oklahoma*, p. 97, and *The Last Trek of the Indians* (Chicago, 1946), p. 282, in giving 1,462 as the number of migrants, says that was the number of Indians on the reservations on March 30, 1859.

¹⁴ Neighbors to Mrs. Lizzie A. Neighbors, Aug. 8, 1859, MS, Neighbors Papers, Univ. of Texas Archives, quoted in Webb, *The Texas Rangers*, p. 171.

¹⁵ The strength of the escort force is variously given in secondary sources. Neighbors, "Memorandum," *loc. cit.*, says two companies of the 2nd Cavalry and one company of the 1st Infantry accompanied his group from the Lower Reserve and that one company of the 1st Infantry escorted the Comanches under Agent Leeper. Burnet, writing two days before the first movement began (see letter of July 28, 1859, below), believed that four cavalry and two infantry companies were to constitute the military contingent. For some reason, unknown to Burnet, it was decided to send only two of the cavalry companies.

¹⁶ Neighbors, "Memorandum," *loc. cit.* George F. Price, *Across the Continent with the Fifth Cavalry* (New York, 1883), pp. 636, 639, indicated that Companies C and H of the 2nd Cavalry arrived at Camp Cooper on August 21.

¹⁷ Neighbors, "Memorandum," *loc. cit.*; Neighbors to A. B. Greenwood, Washita Agency, Sept. 3, 1859, MS, Special Case 81, Record Group 75, The National Archives.

last two weeks of August Superintendent Neighbors and Agents Loeper and Ross scouted the area selecting locations for the different tribes. Samuel A. Blain, the Wichita agent, located the site "for his Agency on the South side of the False Washita about 4 miles above Maj. Steen's crossing on the site of the old Keechi village, and the [Texas] Indians . . . made their selections at from 3 to 10 miles from the Agency . . ." On September 1, Blain, acting under orders from Superintendent Rector, officially accepted delivery of the Texas Indians and their property from Neighbors,¹⁸ who returned to Texas where he was murdered on September 14.²⁰

To protect the Indians in their new homes, the army ordered Major William H. Emory, the commandant at Fort Arbuckle, to locate a military post in the immediate area. On October 1, he designated a site on Pond (now Cobb) Creek a few miles west of the Wichita Agency. At the new post the Army initially stationed Companies D and E of the 1st Cavalry and Companies B and C of the 1st Infantry. Regular Army units in varying numbers continued to man the post until the spring of 1861, when they, along with other troops in present Oklahoma loyal to the Union, withdrew into Kansas.²¹

An active participant in the events of 1858-1861 on the frontier in Texas and Indian Territory was Lieutenant William Este Burnet, for most of the period a member of Company C of the 1st Infantry. In almost weekly letters young Burnet sought to keep his father, David Gouverneur Burnet, informed of conditions on the frontier as they affected the Indians. Although the father's side of the correspondence is not available, it is certain that he still maintained the keen interest in the Indians he had first shown in a two years' stay with the Comanches soon after his arrival on the Texas frontier.

For more than four decades David G. Burnet had been active in Texas affairs. Born on April 4, 1788, to a prominent

¹⁸ Neighbors to Greenwood, Sep. 3, 1859, *loc. cit.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.* See also Nye, *op. cit.*, 27-28; *Handbook of Texas*, Vol. I, pp. 210, 264.

²⁰ Nye, *op. cit.*, 28; *Handbook of Texas*, Vol. II, p. 266.

²¹ Foreman, *A History of Oklahoma*, p. 96; Nye, *op. cit.*, p. 28; Wright, *loc. cit.*, 56; Hume, *loc. cit.*, p. 413; C. C. Rister, *The Southwestern Frontier, 1865-1881* (Cleveland, 1929), p. 65. Emory, in reporting his action in locating the post, wrote: "I have selected the site for Fort Cobb, west of the Texas Indian reservation, and twelve miles west of the agency at the junction of Pond creek and the Washita [*sic*] river. The Indians being allowed the first choice it is the best I could make."—36th Cong., 1st Sess., Sen. Ex. Doc., Vol. II, No. 2, p. 285. The number of units assigned to Fort Cobb is variously given by different writers. As Burnet's letters show, the number changed from time to time. On March 5, 1861, at the time of its abandonment, the post was garrisoned by Companies B, C, D, and F of the 1st Infantry. See Dean Trickett, "The Civil War in the Indian Territory," *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Vol. XVII No. 3 (Sept., 1939), p. 316.

New Jersey family,²² he had participated in Francisco Miranda's revolutionary attacks on Spain's viceregal forces in Venezuela in 1806 and 1808, before coming to Natchitoches, Louisiana, just east of the Spanish boundary, in 1813. Here he failed in a trading venture, and then, ill with tuberculosis, rode west to the headwaters of the Colorado River of Texas where he found a home among the Comanches who nursed him back to health. After studying and practicing law in Ohio and Louisiana from 1819 to 1825, he settled in Texas in 1826, and in the same year secured from the Mexican State of Coahuila y Texas a 300-family empresario contract which he disposed of to the Galveston Bay and Texas Land Company.²³ Marrying Hanna Este²⁴ in Morristown, New Jersey, on December 8, 1830, he brought her to Texas and established a home that he called "Oakland" on a bluff overlooking Burnet's Bay, one mile south of present Lynchburg. Active in Texas politics after 1833, he was named first president of the Republic by the Convention of 1836 which drafted the Declaration of Independence from Mexico and also drew up the Constitution of the Republic. He held this office until October 22 of the same year when he resigned to permit Sam Houston, newly-elected to the presidency in the popular election held in the autumn of 1836, to take charge of the government. Subsequently, he was vice president of the Republic under President Mirabeau Buonaparte Lamar from 1838 to 1841, and served from 1846 to 1848 as secretary of state in the administration of Governor James Pinckney Henderson, the first governor of the new state of Texas. Thereafter, he devoted his time to the practice of law and farming until after his wife's death in 1858, when he moved to Galveston and established his residence in the home of his friend Sidney Sherman. An opponent of secession, Burnet was elected to represent Texas in the U. S. Senate in 1866, but was not permitted to take a seat in the Senate when that body decided that Texas was still an unrecognized state and therefore not entitled to representation in Congress. He died in Galveston on December 5, 1870.²⁵

²² His mother was Gertrude Gouverneur, his father's second wife. His father, William Burnet, was a noted physician and member of the Continental Congress. An older half-brother, Ichabod, was Washington's aide-de-camp and a friend to Lafayette. Another half-brother, Jacob, was U. S. Senator from Ohio and a judge of the Ohio Supreme Court. His own brother, Isaac, was mayor of Cincinnati for 12 years.—*Dictionary of American Biography* (New York, 1929), Vol. III, pp. 292-293; Dorothy L. Fields, "David Gouverneur Burnet," *Southeastern Historical Quarterly*, Vol. XLIX (Oct. 1945), pp. 218-232; John H. Brown, *Indian Wars and Pioneer of Texas* (Austin, 1893), pp. 126-129.

²³ *Handbook of Texas*, vol. I, pp. 252-253; *Dictionary of American Biography*, Vol. III, pp. 292-293; Fields, *loc. cit.*

²⁴ Much information on the Este and Burnet families is found in Edward N. Closser, *An American Family* (Huntington, W. Va., 1950).

²⁵ *Handbook of Texas*, I, 252-253; *Dictionary of American Biography*, Vol. III, p. 293 Fields, *loc. cit.*

The son, Lieutenant William E. Burnet, one of four children, was born at "Oakland" on July 7, 1833.²⁵ Part of his boyhood was spent at "Beechwood," the home of his uncle, Joseph C. Clopper, on the outskirts of Cincinnati. He may have been tutored by the Cloppers, or perhaps attended school at the nearby Clifton District School.²⁷ His higher education was completed at Kentucky Military Institute, then located at Franklin Springs, Kentucky, a few miles out of Frankfort. From KMI he received A.B. and C.E. degrees in June 1855, and an honorary M.A. degree in 1858.²⁸ Following graduation he taught for perhaps one and one-half years at Caleb G. Forshey's year-old Texas Military Institute at Galveston.²⁹ On February 21, 1857, he was commissioned Second Lieutenant in the 1st Infantry Regiment,³⁰ and began a military career he was to follow until his death eight years later.

All of William E. Burnet's regular Army service seems to have been spent in frontier outposts in northwestern Texas and western Indian Territory.³¹ Resigning his commission in the U. S. Army on July 17, 1861,³² in St. Louis, Burnet, in order to reach the Confederacy, turned west to Fort Leavenworth and Fort Smith. Leaving the Arkansas Fort soon after August 27,³³ he journeyed to Richmond, where on September 9 he was commissioned First Lieutenant of Infantry, Confederate States Army.³⁴ In October 1862 he was promoted to Captain of Artillery on the staff of Brigadier General W. L. Cabell, U. S. A.³⁵ On April 4, 1863, he was promoted to Major of Artillery, and on August 19, 1863, was again promoted, this time to Colonel of Artillery on the staff of Major General D. H. Maury, C. S. A.³⁶ In October 1862 he led Maury's artillery with "skill and effi-

²⁵ Information located and copied by J. D. Matlock, Austin, Texas, from the Burnet family Bible, Univ. of Texas Library; Fish, *loc. cit.*; Clopper, *op. cit.*, pp. 265-266, 269, 298.

²⁷ Clopper, *op. cit.*, pp. 409 and 461.

²⁸ William T. Simpson, KMI Alumni Secretary, to the author, Oct. 27, 1959; Clopper, *op. cit.*, p. 261.

²⁹ See Burnet's letter of May 25, 1860, below.

³⁰ F. B. Heitman, *Historical Register and Dictionary of the United States Army* (Washington, 1930), Vol. I, p. 261.

³¹ Burnet's correspondence reveals a number of posts where he was stationed. Military records also show that he was on duty at Fort Mason, Texas, on June 26, 1858. See Margaret Henschwald, "Mason County, Texas, 1845-1870," *Southeastern Historical Quarterly*, Vol. LIII (April 1949), p. 326, note 15.

³² Heitman, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 261.

³³ See letter of Aug. 27, 1861, below.

³⁴ Service Record, William E. Burnet, MS, The National Archives.

³⁵ *List of Staff Officers of the Confederate States Army* (Washington, 1891), p. 24.

³⁶ Service Record, Burnet, *loc. cit.*, Cabell and Maury both USMA grad notes and Regular Army officers, resigned their commissions and joined the Confederate Army.—*Dictionary of American Biography*, Vol. III, pp. 390-391; Vol. XI, pp. 427-428.

ciency" in the battles of Corinth and Davis' Bridge. From August 1863 to the end of the war he commanded Maury's bay and river batteries around Mobile.³⁷

As the Civil War drew to its close, Union forces under General Edward Canby moved on the defenses of Mobile from Pensacola in an effort to surround or defeat the Confederate troops defending the port city. On the morning of March 31, 1865 (nine days before Lee's surrender at Appomattox), General Maury and Colonel Burnet crossed Mobile Bay to Spanish Fort to supervise the location of a new battery. While thus engaged, Burnet, whom Maury described as a "man of rare attainments, of extraordinary military capacity, and unshrinking courage," became the only Confederate "officer of rank" casualty in the Battle of Mobile when he was struck in the forehead by a rifle ball and died a few hours later.³⁸

The letters that follow, except for those of January 12, 1859, and May 9 and 26, 1859, are from the David G. Burnet Collection of Letters in the Rosenberg Library, Galveston, Texas. They reveal young Burnet's views on the frontier situation in Texas and present Oklahoma from Van Dorn's attack on the Comanches in October 1858 to August 1861, on the eve of Burnet's departure from Fort Smith to offer his services to the Confederate government at Richmond. Although these letters probably constitute no more than one-half of all those Burnet addressed to his father—those preserved are filled with his fears that many had not been delivered to their destination—still the ones remaining furnish a revealing glimpse of Indian removal from Texas and of the early days at Fort Cobb.

THE LETTERS OF 2ND LIEUTENANT WILLIAM E. BURNET,
1ST INFANTRY REGIMENT, U.S.A.

Camp at Wichita³⁹ Mountains
October 11th 1858

My Dear Parents

I have just learned that an express will leave our camp tomorrow morning & have a little time to write a few lines to let you

³⁷ *The War of the Rebellion . . . Records* (Washington), Series I, Vol. 17, Part I, pp. 384, 394, 395, 401; Vol. 26, Part II, pp. 157, 275, 403; Vol. 32, Part III pp. 32, 39.

³⁸ Maury to Davis, Dec. 25, 1867, in Dunbar Rowland (ed.) *Jefferson Davis Constitutionalists: His Letters, Papers and Speeches* (Jackson, Miss., 1923), VII, 234. In this letter, written over two years after the event, Maury erroneously gave April 4 as the date Burnet was killed. The date of Burnet's death (March 31) is given in *War of the Rebellion Records Series I, Vol. 49, pp. 226, 316.*

³⁹ The spelling found in the original, Wm. E. Burnet letters, Rosenberg Library, Galveston, Texas, is followed throughout in the text here in *The Chronicles*. Only in a few instances has simple punctuation been added, and a break in paragraphing been made for clearness in the printed text.—Ed.

know that I am quite well. There was quite a severe fight with the Comanches took place a few days ago.³⁹ in which they were completely whipped; having 60 killed on the field; how many were wounded is not known, but there must have been at least 100; the 60 were counted; but, I have no doubt that there were many more killed, as part of the fight took place in a ravine covered with brush-wood where of the dead may have escaped notice. Our loss was considerable—Lieut Van Camp⁴⁰ was killed on the spot, shot through the heart with an arrow. Three Privates were killed dead on the field and a sergeant has since died of his wounds one other man will not get well I think he is wounded in ten different places: Nine others were wounded, besides Major Van Dorn,⁴¹ who was very desperately wounded by an arrow, which passed through the lower part of his body, just above the belt and an other struck his wrist and came out at the elbow making a very sever wound. Mr. Ross⁴² who came in Command of the Indians was shot in the shoulder by a rifle

³⁹ This battle at the Wichita Village, near present Rush Springs, Oklahoma, took place at daybreak on October 1, 1858. The expedition returned to the Otter Creek camp at the foot of the Wichita Mountains on October 10. Cavalry units participating in the engagement were Companies A, F, H, and K of the 2nd Cavalry Regiment. The official reports of the campaign and engagement are found in the "Annual Report of the Secretary of War, 1858," in 35th Cong., 2d Sess., Sen. Ex. Doc., No. 1, Vol. II, pp. 26-27, 268-276. See also Nye, *op. cit.*, pp. 29-33; Price *op. cit.*, pp. 68-71, 665; W. S. Nye, "The Battle of Wichita Village," *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, XV (June 1931), pp. 226-227; Heitman, *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 464.

⁴⁰ 2nd Lt. Cornelius Van Camp, USMA 1855, saw service in Texas frontier posts from 1856 until he was killed in the Battle of the Wichita Village—site about 4½ miles east of Rush Springs, in Cady Co., Okla.—G. W. Cullum, *Biographical Register of the Officers and Graduates of the U. S. Military Academy* (Boston & New York, 1891), vol. II, p. 609; Price, *op. cit.*, pp. 546-547. Nye, *Carbine & Lance*, p. 22, describes the encounter in which Van Camp met his death.

⁴¹ Major (brevetted major, Aug. 20, 1847) Earl Van Dorn, grandnephew of Mrs. Andrew Jackson, USMA 1812, served in the Mexican War, and later on the Texas frontier. On the outbreak of the Civil War he resigned his commission, joined the Confederate Army, rose to major general, and became commander of the Trans-Mississippi Department. He was assassinated in Maury County, Tenn., May 6, 1863 (Cullum, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 149-150); *Handbook of Texas*, Vol. II, pp. 830-831; *Dictionary of American Biography*, Vol. XIX, pp. 185-186; Price, *op. cit.*, pp. 274-277). Van Dorn had started north from Fort Belknap on Sept. 15 with four companies of the 2nd Cavalry and 50 men of the 1st Infantry on an expedition designed to punish the Comanches. He was preceded by 135 Wichita, Caddo, and Tonkawa scouts, who selected a camp site on Otter Creek near present Tipton. Van Dorn reached the site, inlet named Camp Kadaminski (see below), on Sept., 23. Nye, "The Battle of Wichita Village," *loc. cit.*, pp. 226-227; Richardson, *op. cit.*, p. 238; Price, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

⁴² Lawrence Sullivan "Sul" Ross, leader of Van Dorn's party of friendly Indian scouts from the Brazos Reservation. Ross, the son of Indian agent, Shapley Prince Ross, rose from private to brigadier general in the Confederate Army, was governor of Texas from 1887 to 1891, and later was president of the Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas—*Handbook of Texas*, Vol. II, pp. 506-507.

ball, very severely but he is doing well, as are all the wounded except poor Taylor,⁴³ who has the ten wounds. The Suttler Mr. Ward got a slight scratch in the arm. There were near 500 Indians in the party encamped near the Wichita Village about 90 miles from this place. The Indians made a better stand than they do generally: They did very good fighting for a while; about 300 horses and mules were taken; these were all given to the friendly Indians as was agreed to in the first place to stimulate them to find the Comanches.

Poor Van Camp, he is greatly regretted by all, he was among the first officers I got acquainted with and I liked him very much: he was engaged to be married, but that did not amount to much, young Ladies easily console themselves in such cases, as a general thing. Major Van Dera had a very narrow escape indeed and is not yet out of danger; but, I hope, soon will be, as he is an excellent officer and a very pleasant man. I hope that this will satisfy our lying Governor,⁴⁴ who states that there has been nothing done by the troops in Texas. One mail has arrived but I got nothing, I suppose mine have not yet got around from McKavett.⁴⁵ I hope, [t]hat the next mail will bring letters from home as I am very anxious to hear from you, my dear Mother, I hope and trust that you are all quite well and that I can soon hear that such is the case. I must close: we do not know when we will return. But when we do I can get a leave for some time to come home and I look forward with great pleasure to the time when I can see you again—Remember me to those in the kitchen and write often, giving all the news.

From your affectionate son
Wm. E. Burnett

Galveston Jan 12th 1859⁴⁶

My dear Ann,⁴⁷

Your kind favour of Dec 24th has been received with much pleasure by me, never was I more in want of the sympathy of friends for it seems to me as if there was but little left in the

⁴³ Corporal Joseph P. Taylor of A Company apparently recovered. First Sergeant John W. Spangler of H Company was complimented in General Orders for having killed six of the enemy in personal combat. For names of those killed and wounded in this engagement, see "Annual Report of the Secretary of War, 1856," *loc. cit.*, pp. 269-278; Price, *op. cit.*, p. 665.

⁴⁴ Hardin Richard Runnels (1820-1875), Governor of Texas, 1857-1859. *Handbook of Texas*, Vol. II, pp. 513.

⁴⁵ Fort McKavett, Texas, Burnett's former station (see below).

⁴⁶ This letter is from the Edward N. Clopper Papers in the collections of the Historical and Philosophical Society of Ohio, Cincinnati. Much of it was printed in Clopper, *op. cit.*, pp. 465-466.

⁴⁷ Mary Este Clopper, sister of William's mother, Hannah Este Burnett. The sisters, daughters of Revolutionary War veteran Moses Este, had been born and reared at Morristown, New Jersey. Clopper, *op. cit.*, p. 120; Price, *loc. cit.*, p. 219.

world for me now, but with the hope that I have I would not call my mother back to this world which was indeed one of trial and privations to her; she is now happy if ever departed spirit was & I would not now doubt it for worlds. It was a dreadful shock to me, I did not know before that I could feel. It had been nearly four months since I had got a letter from him. The last one told me that Mother had been quite sick but was better. I had been on a distant expedition and no news had reached me for all these long months and I was very anxious to hear.—We had a camp at the Wichita Mountains and my letters were to be forwarded to that camp.—We had been out for nearly a month and were returning to our camp almost worn out by cold and exposure,⁴⁸ our only expectation that of getting news from our friends, when we were within two days march of our camp we were obliged to stop, the horses could go no further without rest; an express was sent in to camp for our mail. The ground was covered with snow and we had no shelter and but little fuel. The day the express was to get in it did not come and we had all gone to sleep around our scanty camp fires when the mail arrived. I did not hear it when it came, but soon one of my brother officers came and called me and gave me the letter.—It was the first I had got from home for months and by the moon light reflected from the snow (the fire was out) I read my Father's letter telling me of my mother's death,⁴⁹ of her long illness, of her last thoughts of me. I felt the cold no more but such a night I had never passed, it seemed as if it would last for ever, morning came at last and I started for home; five hundred miles of almost unbroken wilderness was before me ere I could get to San Antonio but I rode it in eight days I changed horses at the different Military Posts on the route six times and every one I left was broken down.

During those eight days I did not sleep at any time more than four hours out of the twenty four. I found in rapid motion some relief: At San Antonio I took the stage and soon reached home—to find it desolate indeed. I saw in a few days that it would be impossible for my Father to live there (at our place) and I set myself to work to get him to leave there and go where he could live with some comfort: There he was dependant on the servants who although they are good in their way cannot take the proper care of a house without some one to direct them, and Father knew less of such things than they did.—Then he could not live alone—without some society he could do nothing but brood over the great loss and affliction we had sustained. Considering all these things I induced Father to rent the place and

⁴⁸This would indicate that Burnet, an infantry officer, accompanied Van Dorn's cavalry companies in their fruitless search for Indians subsequent to the battle at the Wichita Village. See notes below to letter of March 25, 1859.

⁴⁹Mrs. Burnet died Oct. 30, 1858. *Fields, loc. cit.*, p. 232.

hire the servants out and move to Galveston. we are now boarding with Genl Sherman⁵⁰ who has been a warm Friend of Father's for years—I can see a great change for the better in Father, here he can meet many of his old friends and has something to divert his mind from grief. It is a great relief to me to have him here where he can be comfortable and cheerful. As for myself, although I thank you for your good wishes in my behalf, I cannot profit by your advice. I am too poor to think of a wife—I would not wish to take one except from the refined walks of life and I would not wish to make such a one share my hard fortune. I might accumulate wealth but it would take years of toil and perhaps at the end I might not enjoy it. As I have now but few ties I can well afford to risk my life in the service of the country, few will suffer less loss than I can now. Father does not wish me to leave the Army⁵¹ I may rise in it and I may not, the future alone can tell I hope you will write often—I do not know where I shall be when this reaches you—I shall leave here to join my Company about the 25. Direct here to the care of Father, he will know where to send the letter as soon as I can let him know where I will be. give love to all from your affectionate nephew
Wm E Burnet

San Antonio Texas
January 30th 1859

My dear Father

I arrived here last night safe but very tired. The Ship did not leave Galveston until near daylight on Wednesday, at [but] got to Powderhorn⁵² the same evening: the sea was rather rough and the Mexico is so much out of water that she rolls very badly: so we had rather an unpleasant trip. I left Powderhorn on the stage for this place on Thursday morning. The road from Powderhorn to Victoria is the worst I ever saw on one part of it we were nine hours going twelve miles, we were obliged to take of(f) all the load and lift the stage out of the mud three

⁵⁰ General Sidney Sherman, commander of the 2nd Texas Regiment in the Battle of San Jacinto, and a major general of Texas militia from 1843 to 1845. *Handbook of Texas*, Vol. II, pp. 603-604; Clopper, *op. cit.*, p. 264.

⁵¹ Father and son apparently were not wholly in agreement as to which was most interested in the son's remaining in the Army. Writing about William to his sister-in-law, Mary E. Clopper, on March 9, 1859, D. G. Burnet stated: "I sometimes think his fatigues and exposures and privations will eventually wean him from all his fondness for military life, but early attachments are hard to be overcome—if I had the means of placing him in some good business I should be most happy to do so, but I have not, and must yield to circumstances however trying." Clopper, *op. cit.*, p. 466.

⁵² Original name for Indianola, Texas, a port on the western shore of Matagorda Bay, through which passed military supplies for many of the U.S. Army posts in Texas.—*Handbook of Texas*, vol. I p. 683.

times that night: it was the worst road I ever saw.⁵³ Above Victoria the road was better and we got on faster, but it was a very long tedious trip; we had no sleep until we got here, at nine O'clock last night.

I reported to genl Twiggs⁵⁴ this morning and I am ordered to go to Fort McKavett to take Command there until Capt Plummer⁵⁵ returns, he is at Fort Belknap⁵⁶ attending a Court Martial held on a Lieutenant up there. I shall be there until the last of next month, or some time in March, when I will go on to join Major Van Dorn, if nothing happens out of the proposed order of things. I do not know whether McKavett will be broken up, or not, it has not been determined yet; but, I think, it is likely that it will be, some time in the summer. I am rather tired and as I must get off in the morning I cannot write much: but as soon as I get to the Fort will write by every opportunity and you will, I hope, write often and long letters, giving me the news of the day and any little items about those I know in Galveston which you can find. I hope you will visit about some and try to pass your time as pleasantly as possible.

I shall go from here to Fort McKavett on horse-back. I met Lt. Major⁵⁷ here he has just got down from the Wichita Mountains, he came down with orders. He tells me the winter has been very severe many horses and mules have died & there can be nothing more done until April; so I am rather fortunate in

⁵³The distance from Posedethum (Indianola) to Victoria was 42 miles. "Freeman's Report on the Eighth Military Department," *loc. cit.*, LIII (April 1859), pp. 469-473. Other distances between Texas posts given in these footnotes are from this source. Lt. Col. W. C. Freeman, who travelled the route in May 1853, stated that the 40-odd miles to Victoria ran over a "hog-wallow" prairie almost impassable in wet weather *Ibid.*, Vol. LI (July 1847), p. 58.

⁵⁴Brig. Gen. David Emanuel Twiggs, veteran of the Mexican War, was named commander of the Department of Texas in 1857. He surrendered Federal forces and stores to Texas authorities in Feb. 1861, and in May 1861 was commissioned a major general in the Confederate Army. He died in July 1862. *Handbook of Texas*, Vol. II, p. 812; *Dictionary of American Biography*, Vol. XIX, p. 63.

⁵⁵Capt. Joseph Bennett Plummer, USMA 1841, served in the Mexican War. Promoted captain, 1st Infantry, May 1, 1852, he was stationed at Fort McKavett, Texas, 1855-57, 1858-59. He was assigned to Fort Cobb, 1859-61. In the Civil War he served as colonel in the 11th Missouri Volunteers and later was named brigadier general of U. S. Volunteers. He died Aug. 9, 1862, at Corinth, Miss. Cullum, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 85-86.

⁵⁶Fort Belknap was located in present Young County, Texas, some 60 miles southwest of Wichita Falls and some 130 miles northeast of Fort Chadbourne. For details on the establishment of Fort Belknap, see Oneal, *loc. cit.*, pp. 508-521.

⁵⁷2nd Lt. James P. Major, USMA 1856, served in the 2d Cavalry from Dec. 1856 until his resignation on March 21, 1861, to enter the Confederate Army, where he rose to the rank of brigadier general. In the battle at the Wichita Village, Oct. 1, 1858, he killed three Indians with his own hands. Cullum, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 655-656; Price, *op. cit.*, pp. 548-549. Nye, *Carbine & Lance*, 22, describes his shooting of Mohce in this battle.

being sent to McKavett for a month or so. I shall have to close and I hope, my dear Father, that this will find you in good health. Write soon and direct to "Fort McKavett." Remember me to Gen Sherman and the family & to others. Write soon. I shall have rather a lonesome time at McKavett and letters will be looked for with earnestness and received with pleasure.

From your affectionate Son

Wm E Burnet

P.S. Jan 31st I will get off this morning and will be about a week going to McKavett I will write as soon after getting there as possible—I am quite well

your affectionate son

Wm E Burnet

Fort McKavett⁵⁸ Tex. Feb. 25th/59

My Dear Father

Capt Plummer returned day before yesterday, something sooner than was expected on account of the movements to be made. I will leave here for the Camp at the Wichita Mountains tomorrow morning and it will take me from 15 to 20 days to get there as I take a train of wagons as far as Ft Chadbourne and they make short marches. This Post will be abandoned about the 20th of March. I do not know whether I will remain at the Wichita or come back to the Camp on the Brazos. The wether is very fine for traveling now and I hope it will continue so, as I have a long ride to make. I am very busy getting ready and have but little time to write. I will write every chance I get and give you all the particulars of any interest. And I hope you will write often giving the local and general news. We get a mail tomorrow and I hope to get a letter. Do you learn how Mr Mason⁵⁹ is getting on at the place and how Pass and Em⁶⁰ are doing?

Your affectionate Son

Wm E. Burnet

⁵⁸ Located in present Menard County, Texas, southeast of San Angelo. Fort McKavett was some 160 miles northwest of San Antonio.

⁵⁹ A native of Maryland to whom D. G. Burnet tested Oakland after the death of Mrs. Burnet. D. G. Burnet to Mary E. Clopper, Oakland, Jan. 1, 1859, in Clopper, *op. cit.*, pp. 464-465.

⁶⁰ Negro slaves. D. G. Burnet left Pass and her family at Oakland for one year with the Mason family who had rented the farm. Of the Masons, he wrote: "They appear to be a moral and well organized family and I think will treat them well." With regard to Em, he added: "Em I have hired at Lynchburg to a decent family where she will be well cared for" (D. G. Burnet to Mary E. Clopper, Oakland, Jan. 1, 1859, in Clopper, *op. cit.*, pp. 464-465). Burnet later took the two slaves to his place of residence in Galveston (D. G. Burnet to Mary E. Clopper, Galveston, March 9, 1860, in Clopper, *op. cit.*, pp. 466-467).

Fort Chadbourne⁴¹ Texas
March 6th 1859

My dear Father

In my last I told you that I was about to leave Fort McKavett on my way to join Major Van Dorn's Expedition at the Wichita Mountains. I left McKavett as I expected and arrived here on the fourth day, after rather an unpleasant march, as there came up a storm which made the traveling rather bad. It cleared off before I got here: but I was obliged to stop here for an Escort as the Indians enfest the road between here and Fort Belknap and it is not considered safe for a small party. The Surgeon, Dr. Babcock,⁴² of this Post has been ordered to the Camp at the Wichita and he was only waiting to be relieved here by the Medical Officer who is to replace him; he arrived yesterday morning and we expected to have started this morning, but yesterday there came up a most singular storm, a very strong wind and a most tremendous cloud of dust: about four O'Clock in the afternoon it became dark enough to have lights, the sun was entirely obscured: this dust must come from Llano Estacado. The wind continued all night and [is] still blowing very hard; if it continues this way to-morrow I shall not start as it is very disagreeable to be out in such weather. The dust is so fine it sifts through every thing, it comes in the houses although they are quite secure against rain. I never say any thing like it before and don't want to see the like again soon for it is the most unpleasant storm I have seen for a long time. Now it is snowing quite fast and the dust has stoped flying, which is some improvement, but still it is not pleasant by any means and unless it improves I will remain here tomorrow, but I hope the storm will abate as I have been here long enough and should be getting on as fast as possible. Dr. Babcock goes up with me which makes it much more pleasant than going alone would be, as he appears to be a very pleasant man. When I left McKavett Capt Plummer expected to leave about the 17th of this month I am sorry we have to abandon Fort McKavett for there had been a great deal of work done by the troops there; good quarters had been built for all. The garden had cost much labor and had well repaid it, but it is all to be left and, I think, to repeat the movement of the French Army, when "The King of France, with a thousand men, marched up the hill and then marched down again."

⁴¹ Located in present Coke County, Texas (some 50 miles southwest of present Abilene), approximately 95 miles northwest of Fort McKavett.

⁴² Dr. William H. Babcock, appointed Assistant Surgeon, Aug. 29, 1856; died of disease, Oct. 3, 1859 (Heitman, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 178). Babcock was on the staff of Major Van Dorn in his 1859 campaign against the Comanches that culminated in the battle on the Nescotungas (see below).—A. G. Brackett, *History of the United States Cavalry* (New York, 1865), p. 261.

For I do not think this move will amount to much more. We will be scattered along the route of the Overland Mail, I think between Belknap and El Paso: The Indians have given great trouble to the line of late and the agent told me this morning that it would be impossible for the line to go on unless there was more protection given to them. Now there are no troops on the rout between here and El Paso. I think the line should be protected and helped on as it is certainly a good thing, the opening of a Pacific Rail Road. One can go from this Post to St Louis in ten days, to El Paso in four and to San Francisco in about 18. That is doing very well and is of great advantage for mail facilities. It will take a large force to protect them though: for it is a long rout and in some places very much Exposed to the Indians: there are several passes among the mountains where the Indians can hide very easily and do mischief and be hard to get at or dislodge. The mail of yesterday brought news of a fight in the Pass of the Guadalupe Mountains between Lt Lazell⁸³ and a large body of Apaches, in which Lazell was very badly wounded and lost some of his men and could not drive the Indians out; they held the Pass, which is long and very narrow, and maid it good against him. It is thought that Lazell will not recover from his wounds. The fight was within thirty miles of El Paso. I did not hear how many Indians there were, or how many men Lazell had; but it was a very severe fight and an unfortunate one. I do not know Lazell, but have heard him highly spoken of and it will be a pity if he should die in such a way.

I think that the wind is going down and the snow does not fall as fast as it did a few hours ago. We will be able to get off in the morning: I hope it will do, for I want to get on. We will go very comfortably as we have an ambulance and four good mules. I came from McKavett to this place on horseback. I shall not be able to get any letter from you for some time as the Express has been stoped from McKavett and my letters directed to that place cannot come on until the Companies move and it will be the last of this month before they get to the Clear Fork of the Brazos which will be the first place that an Express will be established. But you must write regularly and give all the news, it will be acceptable when it does come to hand. Dr. Carswell⁸⁴

⁸³ 2nd Lt. Henry M. Lazell, USMA, 1855, assigned 8th Infantry, Oct. 9, 1855, was shot through the lungs in a skirmish with Mescalero Apaches in the Sacramento Mountains, Feb. 6, 1859. He survived to become colonel of the 16th New York Volunteers, Oct. 23, 1863.—Cullum, *op. cit.*, vol. II, pp. 636-637.

⁸⁴ Dr. William A. Carswell, appointed Assistant Surgeon, Nov. 29, 1858, resigned March 25, 1861, and served in the Confederate Army as a Surgeon from 1861 to 1865.—Heitman, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 387.

tells me that the Camp on Otter Creek⁶⁵ at the Wichita is to be moved some sixty miles west of the present location to a point on the North Fork of Red River. I hope it will be a better place than Otter Creek. I shall not be able to go very fast and it will not be much before the last of this month when I get to the Camp: I will go on as fast as I can, but Dr. Babcock is obliged to go by Camp Colorado,⁶⁶ and that is nearly one hundred miles out of the direct rout. Remember me to Gen Sherman and his family and to any others who take the trouble to ask. Write soon and direct to the "Care of the Quarter Master at San Antonio." In your letters give me all the local news and any political news of any interest. I hope your time passes more pleasantly than it did; do try to get on as well as possible. I am quite well and hope your health is good. I must close for the present: I will write again as soon as possible.

Your affectionate Son
Wm E. Burtet

Camp, near the Wichita Mountains,
I. T. March 25th 1859

My dear Father

My last letter to you was written from Fort Belknap, about the 13th of this month. I hope you have, or will, receive it as it will show how we get along. I arrived here on the 20th ult. [inst.] We had a great deal of high wind and dust, which made the trip from Belknap to this place very uncomfortable; and here it is not much better; the wind blows constantly and keeps clouds of dust flying all the time. This dust is so fine that a tent is very little protection against it for it sifts through and will even find its way into a trunk. Things are in rather a bad state up here. Since I left, more than a hundred horses have died and about fifty mules;⁶⁷ the rest look as if they might go at any time. There has been no rain since I left but a good deal of snow: The grass has not begun to sprout and there is very little of the old

⁶⁵The original location of Camp Radzinski (see fn. 71 below). (This location of Van Dorn's first camp in 1858 was at the Otter Creek crossing on what was later known as the "Old Radzinski Trail," about 5 miles northeast of present Tippin in Tillman County, Oklahoma. This approximate location was that of the "Otter Creek Camp," an outpost of Fort Sill in 1873, visited by Col. R. S. Mackenzie, Fourth U.S. Cavalry.—Ed.)

⁶⁶Located in present Coleman County, Texas, about 26 miles north of the Colorado River on Jim Ned Creek.—*Handbook of Texas*, Vol. I, p. 279.

⁶⁷After the battle at the Wichita Village in the previous October (see above), the cavalry companies of the expedition had marched from 1200 to 1500 miles acrossing all of the Wichita Mountain area and the region considerably to the west bounded by the Antelope Hills on the north and the Brazos River on the south. In the process the horses and mules had been so broken down that proposed winter campaign had to be called off.—Price, *op. cit.*, pp. 71-74.

grass left; to take advantage of what was left, the Camp has been scattered, and now extends for about six miles along the Creek. Unless we move from here soon or the grass begins to come out we shall not have a horse left or a mule; but if we could find good grass now it would not take long to put the animals we have left in pretty good order. Major Van Dorn is out now looking for a place and I think we will move in a short time to some point on the North Fork of the Red River. I do not know that it will be much of an improvement for this country as far as I have seen is very much alike and all as poor as it can be. I think it would be as well to let the Indians have it for white men can never make a living here unless at the cost of great labor and money. The land is very poor, without timber, except a very little on a few creeks. There is but little water and that is generally unfit for use: The climate is too cold for stock. They could not live through the winter: The country is only fit for Buffalo and wolves. These are found in abundance. So many horses having died the wolves have collected in great numbers around our camp and at night they make so much noise that it is troublesome. There are a great many Buffalo here. When we were coming up, about ten miles below here on the road, a large herd came across the Road and we were obliged to stop the Ambulance to let them pass. There must have been several thousand of them.

Congress has adjourned some time since: has Mr. Bryan⁸⁸ done any thing? His term is out, is it not? I fear there is not much chance of getting any thing from that quarter for some time but it appears to me that they cannot overlook such a claim so well proved as that is, but it is hard to tell what they will do. And now they are doing everything they can to reduce the Expenses cutting down every thing except their own pay: so it is a bad time to try to get any thing out of them. Who has the best chance of being elected in Mr. Bryan's place, do you think? I hope it will be some one who you know and will do more than he has done, he might have got that thing through session before last, but I don't think he could this last. There is nothing new here but as this cannot go for several days I will not close as something may happen worth notice in that time.

[P.S.]

March 27th

The mail will leave this morning and there is nothing new to tell. Since I wrote the above the Express has got in but I did not get any letter. They must have gone around to McKavett and have not had time to get here. I hope I shall hear soon that you are quite well and comfortable. The Express brought word

⁸⁸ Representative Guy Morrison Bryan, nephew of Stephen F. Austin, represented the Western District of Texas in the Thirty-fifth Congress, 1857-1859.—*Handbook of Texas*, vol. 1, pp. 233.

that there was still some prospect of a difficulty at the Indian Reserves. I hope nothing of the kind will take place, but there is no telling what fools may do. We will leave this Camp in a few days for a place about 20 miles north of this and among the Mountains, good grass and water has been found there. Write often, my dear Father, for I am very anxious to hear how you get on. I am quite well and trust you are in good health.

From your affectionate Son
W. E. Burnet

Camp Cooper⁴⁸ Texas
May 2nd 1859

My dear Father

I arrived here yesterday and found two letters from you: one dated March 1st and the other April 5th. As these were the first I had received from you for a long time; they gave me much pleasure. I am indeed happy to learn that your health has improved since you came to Galveston and I trust as Spring advances and the weather gets pleasant that you will derive even more benefit from the change. I have not written to you for a much longer time than usual, as I have been so situated that writing was out of the question. We went out on a short scout, along the "North Fork of Red River"; but found no sign of Indians. When we got back, I found that Lieut Reynolds⁴⁹ had been sent to Camp Radziminiski,⁵¹ to relieve me, and that I was to join my Company at this place. I left the Wichita Mountains on the 22nd of April, with my detachment of fifty men, and a train of sixteen wagons. The route by which we first went to the Wichita Mountains was through Fort Belknap and since that has been abandoned and the troops stationed at

⁴⁸ Located in present Throckmorton County, Texas, some 80 miles southwest of present Wichita Falls.

⁴⁹ 1st Lt. Samuel H. Reynolds, USMA 1839, promoted 1st Lt., 1st Infantry, Dec. 8, 1855, served on the Texas frontier, 1856-59, and was on duty at Fort Colida, 1859-61. Resigning his commission, July 28, 1861, he served the CSA as a colonel of 31st Virginia Infantry.—Cullum, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 399-400; Heitman, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 825.

⁵¹ Occupied in 1858 by the Van Dorn Expedition. The first Camp Radziminiski was located on the southern bank of Otter Creek in present Tillman County as an outpost of Fort Belknap. It was named for 1st Lt. Charles Radziminiski of K Company, 2d Cavalry, a Polish-born veteran of the Mexican War, who had served as an engineer on the American-Mexican Boundary Commission before joining the 2d Cavalry. He had recently died (Aug. 18) of tuberculosis while on sick leave in Memphis (*Handbook of Texas*, Vol. I, p. 283; Price, *op. cit.*, pp. 24, 35, 351, 460, 507, 615). Nye "The Battle of Washita Village," *loc. cit.*, pp. 226-227, says the first camp was located near present Tipton, that the camp was twice moved, and that the last site was at the Narrows about four miles northwest of present Mountain Park, Kiowa County.

this point fifty miles almost due west from Belknap: the old route became very circuitous: and when I started down Major Van Dorn requested me to try and strike a direct course from his camp to this place I did so and came out within five miles of this Camp: but the Country is very rough, but up by small creeks with steep banks and deep ravines and some high hills. The route crosses all those streams the Brazos the big and little Wichita and several creeks, so high up that they are broken into small streams and the Country is very rough but as it saves about seventy miles it can afford to be a little rough. We were obliged to do a good deal of work cutting down the banks of the creeks and ravines and at the Crossing of the Big Wichita we had a good deal of trouble: Where we struck the river it was so boggy that it was impossible to cross and we were obliged to hunt for an other place. We found one after some trouble and by going about three miles out of our course.

Just on the other side of the Brazos we came to a large tract of Post Oak the only Post Oak that I know of between Belknap and 'Cash Creek'⁷² in the Choctaw Nation. This timber was very thick and some of it very good, it was so thick that I concluded to go around it rather than cut a road through it especially as I thought we were near the western end of the tract; by going about three miles out of the way we got around it. We were obliged to change our course so often that I believe all the men thought I was lost and I was almost of the same opinion myself but I went on just as if I knew exactly where we were going & fortunately for my reputation with the men, I came out right—Such things are of very little importance in themselves but they help to give the men that confidence in an officer which is so necessary in military life. When I last wrote I expected to go on a long scout along the Arkansaw, but Major Van Dorn did not start as soon as he expected to on account of the condition of the horses. He will start about the 5th of this month.⁷³ When I got here I found that Capt. Plummer had gone with the

⁷² Cache Creek. (This is the Cache Creek of present Cottes and Comanche counties, the region a part of the Choctaw Nation until 1866.—Ed.)

⁷³ Van Dorn started north on April 30 with Companies A, B, C, F, G, and H of the 2d Cavalry and some 50 Indian scouts from the Drane Agency. On May 13, in the valley of the Nescutunga, a tributary of the Arkansas, some 15 miles south of old Fort Atkinson, Kansas he inflicted severe punishment on Buffalo Hump's Comanche band. The expedition returned to camp Radzinski in two different groups at the end of May. For a detailed account of this expedition, see Joseph B. Tholurn, "Indian Fight in Ford County is 1859," *Collections*, Kansas State Historical Society, Vol. XII, Part 7 (1911-1912), pp. 312-329. For Van Dorn's description of the battle of Nescutunga and the names of the officers of the expedition see Brackett, *op. cit.*, pp. 197-201. See also Price, *op. cit.*, pp. 79-80, 665-666; Richardson *op. cit.*, 242; Heitman, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 404; Grant Foreman, *Advancing the Frontier* (Norman, 1933), p. 297.

Company to the lower Indian reserve¹⁴ which is about 18 miles below Belknap and if the Mail tomorrow does not bring some order in regard to my movements or those of the Company I shall start next day to join him there. This is quite a pleasant Camp and Capt. King¹⁵ who is in Command, is a very pleasant Gentleman and a fine officer; he is the one I went on with, when I first joined, from San Antonio to Fort McKavett. I am very glad you saw Lt. Major and his wife— I like him very much. We have been together a good deal and I have had a chance to know him very well: I hope he will find his change in life for the better and that his better half will merit the name. The Mail gets in tomorrow and I will not close this until it comes as I hope it will bring a letter from you. I trust that I shall not be disappointed.

Camp at the Lower Reserve¹⁶

May 9, 1859

[My dear Father]

When I closed my last letter, we had reason to expect from all accounts, there would be a fight in a day or two, with some white men who had organized to drive the Indians from this and the Upper Reserve. I mentioned something of this in a letter from Belknap some time ago. At that time, there were more troops here than they cared to meet, and they did nothing. But the troops being nearly all removed, they appeared to think it would be a good time for them to make their attack. As there will be a good deal said about it, if there should be a collision, I will try to give you some account of matters as they now stand, and the causes which have led to the difficulty.

The people in the border counties have lost some horses in the last year, and one or two persons have been killed by Indians. These people profess to believe it was done by the Indians of this

¹⁴The Brazos Indian Reservation located some 12 miles south of Fort Belknap in the bend of the Brazos River, and so designated because it was located farther down the river than the Penatoka Comanche Reservation (Upper Reserve) to the west. In the Lower Reserve were located between 1,000 and 2,000 Cadito, Anadarko, Waco and Tenkawa Indians in their own villages under the direction of Agent Shopley P. Ross.—*Handbook of Texas*, Vol. 1, pp. 209-210.

¹⁵John Haskell King was commanding officer of Fort Clark, Texas, and also of Company I of the 1st Infantry at that station on Aug. 1, 1853. He became a major general of volunteers in the Union Army during the Civil War.—"Freeman's Report," *loc. cit.*, I:111 (July 1949), pp. 71-72; Heilman, *op. cit.*, Vol. 1, p. 599.

¹⁶This letter appeared in the *Galveston Weekly News*, May 31, 1859, p. 2, cols. 2-3, under the heading: "Extract of a letter from Lieutenant Wm. E. Burnet, U. S. A., in Major Van Dorn's Command, to his Father in this City." It was located and copied by J. D. Matlock, Austin, Texas, from the University of Texas Library collections.

Reserve, and without a shadow of proof that this is the case, they are threatening the destruction of all the Indians in the two Reserves, who are settled on lands given to them, and under a solemn treaty that they shall be protected by the government. They say that the Indians are a set of murdering thieves, and should be exterminated. But when the conduct of the agents, Major Neighbors,⁷⁷ Capt. Ross,⁷⁸ and Mr. Leeper,⁷⁹ was investigated by a Commission appointed for that purpose last Fall, not only nothing was proved against them, but even those who preferred the charges, failed to appear before the Board, although it remained in session more than three weeks, expecting them. When the trouble began, early in the Spring, Major Neighbors represented the matter at Washington, D.C., and an order was issued by the Department of the Interior, to remove the Indians beyond Red River, to us barren and inhospitable a region as can be found in the United States. But this order did not satisfy the people below, who, giving as an excuse, that Uncle Sam is too slow, have again attempted to destroy the Indians; at least they have talked much to that effect.

The people say they have lost a thousand head of horses in the last year. This Reserve consists of only eight leagues; and as they have the right to come and look for their horses at any time, it would be easy to find some of them within so small a space, if there were any there; but none have ever been found. These are facts to show that these Indians have not been guilty of the charges made against them. Some of them have always been friendly to the Whites. You will remember Old Placido⁸⁰ in Austin. He has fought for Texas for twenty-nine years. The Shawnees, Caddos, Delawares and one or two remnants of tribes, are of great service as guides in the war against the Comanches. In fact, it would almost be useless to go out without some of them.—If it had not been for them, Major Van Dorn would not

⁷⁷ Robert S. Neighbors, veteran Texas and U. S. Indian Agent, served as General Supervisor of all Indians in Texas from 1854 until his assassination by Edward Cornett at Fort Belknap. Sep. 14, 1859.—*Handbook of Texas*, Vol. I, p. 210; Vol. II, pp. 267-268. The story of Neighbors' work as an Indian agent is told at great length by Kenneth F. Neighbors in "Robert S. Neighbors in Texas, 1836-1859: A Quarter Century of Frontier Problems" (Ph. D. Dissertation, Univ. of Texas, 1955).

⁷⁸ Shapley P. Ross, Indian agent on the Brazos Indian Reservation (Lower Reserve from 1855 to 1859).—*Handbook of Texas*, Vol. I, p. 210; Vol. II, pp. 507-508.

⁷⁹ Matthew Leeper, agent for the Penateka Comanches, and later Confederate agent at the Wichita Agency at Fort Cobb.—Nye, *Carbine & Lance*, pp. 25, 28-29.

⁸⁰ For more on the role of this Tonkawa Indian Scout's cooperation with the Texans in their wars with the Indians, see *Handbook of Texas*, Vol. II, p. 383. Nye tells how Placido met his death at the hands of a raiding party of Kansas Indians southeast of present Anadarko on Oct. 24, 1862.—See *Carbine & Lance*, p. 53.

have seen a Comanche, nor would Captain Ford.⁸¹ Every fight that has taken place, within the last two years, has been had through their knowledge of the country and skill in following a trail. On several occasions they have taken horses from the Comanches, and returned them to these very people below, from whom the Comanches had stolen them. They have never refused to go out, alone or with citizens or troops, against the hostile Indians and have received no compensation, except a share of the spoils, and in some cases, where one had been employed as a guide at a post.

The Whites, without any proof that these Indians have done wrong, and with many well known facts, showing that they have done much good to the frontier, have determined to exterminate them; and they say, all connected with them, agents, with their families, etc. Their first attempt was committed last December, and was worthy of them and their cause. A party of Indians, consisting of two men, a boy and four women, being the family of an old Indian,⁸² well known through the country, were out, with a pass from the Agent, to look for some of their cattle. They were attacked by a party of men from Palo Pinto County, while asleep at night, and one man, the boy and three women were killed in their beds. The others escaped. No resistance was made. One white man was shot accidentally by one of his own party. In this cowardly and murderous act, they were sustained by the community, and by the press of these upper counties. Since that time, they have contented themselves with boasts and threats, until about the first of this month, when word was brought that they were assembling in some force, intending to make an attack. Capt. Plummer was here with a part of his company. I had just returned with the rest of the company from Wichita and was waiting for orders.

About twelve o'clock, on the night of the third inst., an express arrived from Capt. Plummer for reinforcements. Capt. King sent for me immediately, and some time before day-light, I was on the march, and got here before nine o'clock the next morning. I expected to be attacked on the road as it was reported these people would try to cut off all supplies coming into the Reserve, but they allowed me to pass without trouble. I saw no one on the road until I got within twelve miles of this post, when I came to a house where I was told that a party of fifty men was camped a few miles below the road, and would be

⁸¹ John Salmon (Rip) Ford, leader of Texas Ranger force that fought the Comanches on the Canadian in 1858.—Wehr, *The Texas Rangers*, pp. 151-161; *Handbook of Texas*, Vol. I, pp. 617-618.

⁸² Burnett probably refers to the incident involving 27 Indians under Chectaw Tom who were attacked on the night of Dec. 26, 1858, while on a hunting expedition in Palo Pinto County. Seven of the Party were killed in their blankets by white men from Erath County.—*Handbook of Texas*, Vol. I, p. 210; *Neighbors*, op. cit., p. 563 ff.

likely to give me a fight; but they did not see fit to do so or to show themselves, if they were there. When I got here, I found the Indians had abandoned their houses and fields and were encamped close around the house of the Agent, Capt. Ross and Capt. Plummer also in camp close by. We kept on our guard, but nothing happened until the day before yesterday, when a party of Indians (who had been carrying an "express" from this to Fort Arbuckle, and were returning with despatches from that Fort,) came into camp very much excited and stated that they had been attacked by about 20 men (there were seven Indians in the party) some nine miles from here; and that one of their horses had been killed and five led horses stolen from them, and one of their party was missing. The missing Indian was the Chief of the party, and had the saddle bags with the letters, etc.

At about half-past three o'clock, P. M., I started with one hundred Indians and two soldiers and a Dr. Sturm,⁵³ who is living here, to see if I could find the missing Indian and the papers and the horses.⁵⁴ We went to the place where the attack had been made; found the dead horse, but not the Indian. After some time spent in the search, we found his tracks and concluded they had taken him off a prisoner. We followed their trail at a gallop about a mile and a half when we came to a house, one of the stations of the mail route to California. There I learned that a party of men from Jack County, calling themselves the Jacksborough⁵⁵ Rangers, numbering fifteen men, had been there about twelve o'clock, and were eating and grazing their horses, when they saw the Indians about half a mile off, on what is called the Arbuckle trail, which leads directly to this camp. As soon as these men saw the Indians, they caught up their horses and started after them. The Indians, not knowing of these troubles, and thinking themselves safe, as they were carrying the government express, did not attempt to escape until the men fired upon them. The first shot did no harm, and the Indians turned off from the trail into the post oaks, but not

⁵³ Dr. J. J. Sturm, the farmer for the Lower Reserve.—Neighbors, *op. cit.*, pp. 563, 567.

⁵⁴ Richardson, *op. cit.*, p. 225, writes as follows in describing this event: "In May, an army officer acted in a very indiscreet fashion by leading a large party of Brazos reservation Indians into the town of Jacksboro, whether they had gone in search of a party who had killed in brutal fashion an Indian named Fox (. . . a dispatch bearer from Fort Arbuckle, killed by a party of Jack County rangers.) This incident furnished the radical party an excellent torch with which they now set the whole frontier aflame with excitement." Neighbors, *op. cit.*, pp. 606-607, 651-652, briefly describes the events recounted by Burnett, and quotes Major Neighbors on the character of Fox, the Caddo Indian dispatch bearer who had served as a scout with the Ford and Van Dorn expeditions.

⁵⁵ County seat of present Jack County, Texas, some 24 miles east of the Brazos Agency, redesignated Jacksboro in 1899.—*Handbook of Texas*, Vol. 5, p. 900.

quick enough to get clear, as a second shot brought down one of their horses. They then abandoned their led horses and scattered; the one whose horse was shot, going on foot. They all got in safe, except the one we were looking for. The man at the station told me [me] that the Rangers returned to his place, bringing the Indian and six horses, two rifles and a Colt's pistol, with the saddle bags and the mail, which they broke open and read some public documents and a letter from the Agent in the Indian Territory (Mr. Blair)⁹⁹ to Capt. Ross, he remembered were among them. He told me they had cursed and abused the Indian, telling him he had no business with the papers and no right to be there. After reading the papers, they started on the road to Jacksborough, which is the California mail road. The party had been gone nearly three hours when I got to the station and as soon as I got the facts as above, I started after them, having sent a runner to report progress at the Agency. We followed their trail on the road for twelve miles, when we found the body of the Indian shot through the breast and scalped, lying about twenty steps from the road. The sun had just set. The Indians gathered around the dead man, and each looked at him, but no one spoke a word. There was a brother and a cousin of the murdered man in the party. They wrapped him in a blanket, and carried him to a small ravine hard by and covered him with boughs—the others stood by their horses but said nothing. When the two came back, they gathered around me and I spoke to them. While they were disposing of the body, I was reflecting on what it was my duty to do, and had determined to follow these mail robbers and murderers as long as possible, and if I overtook them, to arrest or put them to death. I did not tell this to the Indians, but that I wanted to follow the men and get the papers and the horses. We were detained about a quarter of an hour with the corpse, and then pushed on. It was thirteen miles farther to the town, and I expected to find the party there, perhaps drinking and merry making over their 'victory'.

After riding about eight miles, I came to a house in the timber, and got quite near it before I saw it. I scattered the Indians to surround it, and advanced by a rail fence, enclosing a small yard, and the moon gave light enough to see very well beyond the shade of the trees. Just as I rode up to the fence, the lights in the house were put out, and a man called out, "who's there?" I replied "Come and see." He answered "No, you don't." "Very well," said I, "I'll come to you," and dismounted and got over the fence, followed by the Doctor and the two soldiers. As I came up, I saw 3 men standing on the porch with guns. The man who had spoken, asked who I was and what I wanted. I said I was an officer looking for a party of men called

⁹⁹ S. A. Blair.

the Jacksborough Rangers. The men then put aside their guns, and the spokesman told me to come in and he would tell me what he knew about them. He said they had passed just after sundown—that one of them had a scalp tied to his saddle and said they had had a fight, killed an Indian and taken 6 horses. He said they had the saddle bags but did not tell who the Indian was nor where the fight took place. They stopped but a few minutes and went on towards town. He told me I had better not follow them—that we were not strong enough—that they were desperate men and would hurt us. I told him I thought he was mistaken, and gave the signal for the Indians to advance peaceably. Silently and as spectres, they came from behind every tree and brush, and great was the man's astonishment, to find his yard filled in less than a minute, with well armed Indians. They all carried rifles and bows and some had Colt's six-shooters. Our host said he had a son-in-law in the town who had been opposed to all the proceedings against the Reserve Indians; and he hoped, if there was a fight, I would not hurt him or his family. I told him I could make no promise, but if he would go with me or send someone to let me know his son and where he lived, I would try to keep him out of danger. One of the men with him, volunteered to go and in a few minutes had a horse ready. Just as I was starting, two men rode up. I asked them if they had seen a party on the road. They said no; no one. It was five miles to the town and when I got to it, I was surprised to find it quiet. I stopped within about one hundred yards of the first house. There are about twenty-five houses in the place - there may be thirty.

I left the Indians there, telling them I was going to look for the men, and if they heard a shot fired, to give the war whoop and charge to where they heard the firing. The man who joined me at the house we had passed, said if I would go with him to the house of his friend, he would tell me where the men were, if they had been in town. So I went with him, and as his friend lived nearly at the opposite end of the town, we went around, not to give any alarm. When we reached the house, I told the man to go in and bring his friend out quietly. He did so, and I inquired if any party of men had been in town that evening from an Indian fight. He said there had been none that he knew of, and he thought he should have known it if any had come in. Just then I heard a shot fired in the town—for an instant I listened, expecting to hear the wild yells of the Indians, and to see the quiet town a scene of confusion; but all was quiet. I sent the Doctor to the Indians to keep them back until I should sound the whoop myself.

I then went in the direction of the shot, but seeing a light and hearing voices, I turned off to them, and found three men,

one of them just coming out of his house in his drawers, and the other two appeared to have just arrived on horseback. I asked them if any party had come to town that evening. The man in his drawers said none had been in. I asked if he was certain. He said he was—that he kept a public house, and if any party had come in, some of them would have been with him. The others I recognized as the two men I had seen at the house on the road, the two who had come in just as we were starting from the house on the road. I asked them why they had come back so soon. (they had said at the house they had come out to fish,) and they replied, the creek was too high for fishing—but I expect they had come in to give the alarm. I then asked if they knew who fired the shot just before. They said they did not; but they lied, as I afterwards learned. I went all over the town and satisfied myself the party was not there and then returned to the Indians. The Doctor had moved them up nearer the town, and they were all ready to charge. The Chief told me that two men had passed them and one of the men fired his pistol up in the air just after they passed—that he saw him fire and therefore knew it was not me, and therefore they did not advance. I told the Indians I had been all over the town—that the men we were seeking were not there, and I wanted them to go back to a creek about four miles, and camp and rest their horses, and in the morning we would find the trail and go on after them. I had some fear they would not want to leave the town in peace, but they marched off as quietly as disciplined veterans could have done. I learned afterwards that many of the young men were for taking the town anyhow, and having revenge; but the Chief and the older men had restrained them, telling them they had all promised to obey me, and that they must do so and they did in everything.

We went to the creek and camped. It had been clouding up for some time and soon after we laid down, it began to rain very hard. In the morning I found the trail was entirely washed out, and after looking in vain for a while for some traces of the Rangers, I concluded to abandon the chase as our horses were badly worn down, and ourselves in a poor condition. I had eaten nothing since breakfast the day before and had ridden at least fifty miles since half-past 3 o'clock A. [P]M. the previous day. We got back to the Agency without any further occurrence of interest. The Indians are very much exasperated and will have revenge for these things some time or other. The people of this frontier have done nothing but abuse the army, and now say they will scalp us; they are murdering women in their beds, and violating every law of God and man—equalling the atrocities of the Comanches of the Plains, and still cry for sympathy and help.

Camp at the
Brazos Agency,⁸⁷ May 23rd 1859

My dear Father

I was not able to write by the last mail as we were very busy getting ready to receive the visit of our friends from below who have made very unkind promises in regard to our future condition; viz—that they will hang us all.

I wrote near two weeks ago giving you a detailed account of my movements since the date of the previous letter and also of the outrages enacted by the people of the adjoining Counties. Soon after the date of my last letter we heard that quite a force was collecting at Jacksborough for the purpose of attacking this place and a few days after we learned that they had moved up within eight miles of here and the same day we got that news a man came in and told us they were within half a mile, five hundred of them. There was a great deal of confusion among the women and children at this news, more running and screaming than I had ever saw before. It proved to be a false alarm, but one woman has died from the effects of the fright. We learned that there were about five hundred men camped about eight miles below us and they said that they were going to attack us. As we did not have force enough to protect so many women and children against so many we went to work making some works of defence; and, by working hard two days and one night, we put up a picket work, large enough to hold all hands, arranged with flanking bastions & traverses; and strong enough for our force to hold against 800 to 1000 men w[h]o have no Artillery; we got one six pds gun from Camp Cooper with scirapnal [sic] shells and cannon shot. If nothing but a fight will do those fools we can give them such a one as they will not soon forget. They are still camped at the same place stealing cattle from the Indians and such of the people around as are not with them in their mad adventure. They have stoped a train of Wagons loaded with flour for this place and they say that they will starve us out, but when they get us reduced to short rations we will go to their Camp and whip them but they cannot reduce us for our supplies come from Cooper and below and from Belknap and they have not force enough to invest the place. I have never heard of such outrageous doings. They are led by a man named Baylor⁸⁸ who was once local agent for the Co-

⁸⁷ Headquarters for the Drums Indian Reservation. It was located a few miles southeast of Fort Belknap, and about 3 miles east of present Graham, Texas. *Handbook of Texas*, Vol. I, p. 210.

⁸⁸ John Robert Baylor, agent to the Penateka Comanches on their reservation near Camp Cooper until dismissed following a disagreement with Indian Superintendent for Texas, Robert S. Neighbors.—*Handbook of Texas*, Vol. I, p. 124.

manche reserve and was discharged for stealing public money; that is the cause of his hostility. I hope they will come here—They have deserved hanging for the outrages they have already done and the law will never reach them; but if they come here a good many of them [will] find their reward in swift destruction. The poor fools don't know much about war or they would not have made some of the moves they have or some of the idle boasts.

It is a disgrace to the state that such things are permitted, if the Governor²⁹ was worth the powder that would kill him he would do something to stop such proceedings. You need not be anxious on my account. I have not the most distant idea that they will come here or they would have done so before this and if they do come they can't hurt us. I will write as often as I can but, as they beset the road, my letters may not reach you. They would as soon rob the mail as any thing else. I have not had any letters since I wrote to you and do not know any news except what I have given. Write often and give all the local news: The news papers come very regular and are very welcome—The War in Europe seems to be almost certain. I got the Texas Almanac³⁰ with the map: The map of the upper portion of the country is not very correct but will do very well. Write soon. I hope you are quite well. My health is good—Some of your letters must be lost, I think. your affectionate son

W. E. B.

Camp at the Brazos Agency³¹
May 26, 1859

[My dear Father]

The war has opened now in good earnest. On the morning of the 24th {23rd} we had another stampede of all the women & children. It was the third one & they had got a little accustomed to it—they all went in to the picket work in pretty good order. In ten minutes after the report, which caused the stampede, came in, we were ready for Mr. Baylor: the women & children under care; the works manned & skirmishers thrown well forward to hold the outhouses & all available points & combustibles ready to fire the houses as they were abandoned. All was fixed "secundum artem", besides a reserve of mounted Indians under cover in case Baylor was obliged to retire, to show him the pleas

²⁹ H. E. Runnels.

³⁰ An annual publication, first issued by the *Galveston News* in Jan. 1857. for the purpose of serving as a "compendium and report on Texas."—Stuart McGregor, "The Texas Almanac, 1857-1873," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, Vol. L (April 1947), pp. 419-430.

³¹ This letter appeared in the *Galveston Weekly News*, June 21, 1859, p. 3, col. 3, under the heading: "Extracts of a Letter from Lieut. W. E. Burnet to his Father". It was located and copied by J. D. Matlock, Austin, Texas, from the Univ. of Texas Library collections.

ures of a light cavalry pursuit. No troops make better "chasseurs" or would annoy a retreating enemy more than these Indians.

Another company of the First Infantry had arrived under Capt. Gilbert²² & Lt. Farran[d].²³ Less than a thousand men without artillery could not have forced our position, if all our own had done their duty; & I expect they would, as it was to be a "combat a mort;" for Mr. Baylor had said he would take no prisoners. Baylor had been camped some 8 miles south of us. The spies reported he was approaching in that direction & was within a mile & a half. Just as we finished our preparation more of our spies came in & said Baylor had turned off to the left—others soon came in, saying he had halted & drawn up his men in about half a mile of us, but out of sight, a high rocky ridge covered with scrub postoaks, running between us & the plain he occupied. We waited some time for him to make a demonstration, & the soldiers concluded, as it was very warm & had rained hard the night before, Baylor had drawn up his men in the sun to let them dry. Capt. Plummer got tired of waiting & sent Capt. Gilbert with 50 men to ask him what he wanted. I went along to get a look at them. We found as the Indians had reported that they were drawn up just beyond the ridge. If he had tried, Mr. Baylor could hardly have taken a worse position for a fight. His men were all mounted & in single rank. He had five companies, averaging I think, 57 men each. He evidently knew nothing of the range of the Minnie rifle, for his line was within 200 yards of the foot of the ridge where the rocks & trees gave perfect cover, & the plain in which he stood, was not more than half a mile wide & three quarters long, & bounded one side by a deep creek with timbered banks, on the other side was the ridge which ran down to the creek, & the other side was narrow & much obstructed by timber, thus making three sides difficult to pass. We posted our men in cover & I took command, while Capt. Gilbert went to see Baylor. I did not know what he might do to Capt. Gilbert when he had him alone but I knew we could empty about 30 of his saddles the first fire, & as many more before he could get out of the sack he had run into. Capt. Gilbert went out on foot & as he came up to the line a man rode out to meet him & they talked for some time, when the Captain came back.

²² Charles C. Gilbert, USMA 1816, participated in the Mexican War, served on the faculty at USMA, 1850-55, promoted captain, 1st Infantry, Dec. 8, 1855, saw service on the Texas frontier, 1855-59, stationed at Fort Cobb, 1859-61, and participated in the march of loyal units from Fort Cobb to Fort Leavenworth in 1861. He rose to brigadier general in the Union Army. —Cullum, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 272-273.

²³ 2nd Lt. Charles E. Farrand, USMA 1857, assigned 7th Infantry, Jan. 2, 1858, transferred to 1st Infantry, June 24, 1858, stationed at Fort Cobb, 1859-61. —Cullum, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 698.

Capt. Plummer had sent to demand why Mr. Baylor was in the Government Reserve with an armed force? Baylor replied that he was there for the purpose of attacking & destroying certain bands of Indians, but that he did not wish to come in collision with the United States troops—& that if Capt. Plummer would draw off his men, none of them should be hurt! When this message was delivered to Capt. Plummer, he sent back to tell Mr. Baylor that he (Capt. Plummer) had been sent there with the troops under his command to protect the Indians on the Reserve against the attacks of armed bands of citizens & that he would do so to the best of his ability & with the arms in his possession. Baylor replied that this message did not alter his determination to attack the Reserve & that he would destroy the Indians if it cost him the life of every man in his command. One of his men then spoke up, saying: "Yes, we will all die but what we wipe them out."

Baylor asked me if we knew the civil authority was far beyond the military & that we were all liable to be tried & hanged if a citizen was killed by a soldier. I told him I did not pretend to know much about the civil law, & could not say how much Capt. Plummer knew, but I would take the risk of being hanged. He went on to talk about the law but I cut him off by telling him I had said all I came to say & got his answer & would return. I left him & his men in the place where I found them. I reported his answer to Capt. Plummer who said it was about what he expected.

We waited some time expecting him to make his attack but he did not come. We had Indians watching his movements & some of them came in & said Baylor had taken an old Indian & was moving off. At this all the Indians who were mounted, started after him & the others began to get their horses. In a short time another came in & reported that Baylor had killed the Indian & scalped him & that a woman was found killed & scalped. This made the Indians furious & away they went. The Indians who were watching Baylor & saw them kill the old man, began the attack by firing on them from every available point, & as others joined, they continued the attack with more effect. Baylor retreated for 6 or 7 miles keeping up a running fight until he came to the place of Mr. Wm. Marlin, a very worthy man, whom Baylor had threatened to hang some time ago. When Marlin saw Baylor's party coming, he mounted his horse & took to flight leaving the family to take care of the house. Baylor took possession of the house, out-houses & pens & a deep ravine near by & there made a stand. He had near 300 men, & I don't think more than 60 or 70 Indians went out from here. Capt. Ross kept all back he could to guard the women & children; thinking that Baylor's move was a feint to draw the Indians off. The Indians annoyed Baylor until night & then returned to this place. They

reported that they had killed 5 or 6 of the party; & they lost one man killed & 5 wounded, one very badly. We have since heard that only two of Baylor's men were killed & six wounded. Eight or ten of his horses were killed or lost.

Mr. Baylor reports that he was fired on by the troops. This is false. The troops had nothing to do with the affair & if he had not killed the old man & the woman, he would not have been molested by any one. The old Indian whom they took & murdered on the Reserve was about 90 years of age. Old Placido (this Placido is a Tonkawa Chief who fought bravely with us in the Cherokee campaign of 1837.) D.[avid] G. B.[urnet] says it is the first time he ever fought against the white people, but he has often fought with them against the wild Indians.

We learned that Major Van Dorn has had another fight with the Comanches & killed 50 of them & taken 30 odd prisoners.⁸⁴

He had two men killed & several wounded. Capt. Smith⁸⁵ was wounded, & Lieut. Lee⁸⁶ reported mortally. I hope not—he was a very good young officer & a pleasant companion. Major Van Dorn had fifty of the best warriors from this Reserve with him, & says he is indebted to them for his fight with the Comanches. It is the last service of the kind they will render the people of this frontier, who repay them by trying to murder their women & children. We have sent runners to them & they will be here in a few days. The fools in this country have opened a sore that will bleed for years. Operations against the Comanches cannot be carried on with any effect, without the help of the friendly Indians as guides & spies. It is their own work & they can blame no one justly but themselves. We don't know what Mr. Baylor's next move will be; but I think he has seen enough.

⁸⁴ References to sources of information on this engagement are given in note 73 above.

⁸⁵ Capt. Edmund Kirby Smith, USMA 1845, served in the Mexican War. Promoted capt., 2nd Cavalry, March 3, 1855, he served on the Texas frontier, 1856-61. He resigned his commission on March 3, 1861, was commissioned colonel, C. S. A. and rose to full general. —*Dictionary of American Biography*, Vol. X, pp. 424-426; *Handbook of Texas*, II, 622; *Callum, op. cit.*, pp. 229-230.

⁸⁶ 2nd Lt. Fitzhugh Lee, nephew of Gen. Robert E. Lee, USMA 1856, assigned to 2nd Cavalry, Jan. 1, 1858, served in Texas frontier posts, 1858-60. Recovering from wounds suffered at Nacutunga, Lt. Lee continued to serve on the Texas frontier until he resigned his commission, May 3, 1861. Joining the C. S. A., he rose to major general. From 1866 through 1869 he was governor of Virginia. Named U. S. Consul General in Havana in 1896, he was commissioned major general of U. S. Volunteers in 1898, and retired as a brigadier general in 1901. —*Dictionary of American Biography*, Vol. XI, pp. 103-106; *Handbook of Texas*, Vol. II, p. 43; *Callum, op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 671-72.

Camp at the Brazos Reserve
June 12th 1859

My dear Father

I received your letter, dated May 20th, but our last mail; and it gave me much pleasure to hear that you were in good health. I see you have not got my letters dated from this place; I hope you will get them, as they give some account of the affairs of this upper Country; which have been the cause of much excitement on the frontier; and it may have extended to the lower Country. When my last was written, I could not exactly tell what was the state of affairs, and did not say much about it: But now, I think, I may safely say, that the war is over; for some time, at any rate.

After the little brush on the 29th of May, Baylor scattered his men, holding them under a pledge to return in six days with all the recruits they could muster. Many of them returned and their force amounted to between six and seven hundred men; they report 860. They were camped about eight miles from us and had their parties scouting in every direction, so that it was not safe for the Indians to go out of sight of our camp, except at night. We were obliged to keep the Indians camped very close around the steade, as we expected a night attack. Having so many camped in so small a space and the Indian camp not being very clean, caused a great deal of sickness: a disease, something like the Cholera, broke out among the Indians first and then among the soldiers. The Indians died very fast. The disease appeared very suddenly and in five or six days about forty Indians had died but many of them were very sick and the list was increasing very rapidly. It was evident this could not last much longer; four or five more days, of such Confinement, would get us all down; and Baylor & his party could have an easy time with us. We all talked the matter over and, though nothing definite was said, it was generally understood that, unless some move was made the next day, we would rouse their Camp the next night in a way which would be more interesting than pleasant. This conclusion was reached in the after-noon: and that night I took two Indians and Capt Ross' son and went to their Camp to reconnoitre. We went pretty near and waited until just before day light, when we went to the top of a high and rocky hill, which overlooked their Camp: from this hill, when it became day, we could see every thing; and I went to work to make a Topographical sketch of the Camp, and the ways of approach, &c. to serve as a guide. The top of the hill was not more than three hundred yards from the Camp of their main guard and their Picket Guard was out side of us, but the hill was very rough & covered with bushes, so that it made very good cover and there was not much danger of their seeing us. I used

a very fine Opera Glass, belonging to Capt Gilbert, to make my observations. We staid there nearly an hour after sunrise and then left: having got all the information we wished. We found our horses safe, where we had left them (in a deep ravine) the night before, and returned to the Agency without being molested. At one time I thought we would have the Camp at our heels, one of their Videttes came so near that I thought he would see us: but he passed on, fortunately for us, and certainly so for him. I had written to Major Van Dorn, at the request of Capt Ross, (the Agent), to send down all the Indians (about 60) belonging to this reserve and asking him to give them such assistance as he could: for we heard that Baylor expected to cut them off. As soon as Major Van Dorn got the letter he started the Indians and five companies of his Command to our assistance: Three of the Companies came here and two went to the upper Reserve. The report go out in Bayers Camp that Van Dorn was coming with all his forces and the he would attack them wherever he found them. This was more than they could stand and they scattered: On the same morning I was at their Camp they broke up and the Indians we had watching their Camp, came in and reported that they were all gone: and the next day we learned that they had all left. I don't know where they have gone, but they are not near enough to give us any trouble. We have scattered the Indians along the Creek and the progress of the disease has been stoped among them and the Soldiers; none of the latter have died and the sick are getting well and the Camp will soon be healthy again, I think. My health has been good, all the time: The weather has been very hot, the Thermometer standing at 95° & 100° in the shade; this, and the close camp and diet of so much fresh beef, as we were obliged to have, was enough to kill any one. Baylor left in time to save the lives of a good many men—if we had attacked his Camp about an hour before day light, with the men we had (about 300) his 700 would have had as much as the[y] wished to attend to; fortunately the issue was not made. I hope they will stay away, as a civil war is not pleasant. The war in Europe has begun and bids fair to be a severe one: it will involve all Europe and perhaps the United States before it ends. Our Government should make some preparations to meet it. I am under orders to go to Fort Smith Arkansas, but the orders have been suspended on account of the troubles here: and now I do [not] much expect to go, but cannot tell yet. Write often and give me all the news about town. I hope you will find it agreeable to visit Mr. Hughes' occasionally, remember me to them when you do. I hope you are quite well. Your letter saying that you had been sick did not reach me. Your affectionate son

Wm. E B—

Camp at Brazos Agency

June 19th 1859

My Dear Father

A few days ago I wrote to you; explaining what I wished done in relation to my letter giving an account of the killing of that Indian, and my pursuit. I wished you to make a statement of the facts relating to the killing of the Indian; but had no idea, that you would understand me as wishing to have my letter published. The details of such matters had better be left out; and besides, I do not wish my private letters put in the papers—my letters to you, even though they may treat on general subjects, I wish to be considered as private in each and every case. I write them for your information but not for publication: it is strictly prohibited for an officer to publish the operations of forces in war, except officially.

I hope, my dear Father, you have not put any more of my letters in print: The results may be disastrous to me and to others concerned in this unfortunate affair. I do not remember exactly what I have written; but, I know much has been written which I would very much dislike to see in print. In such affairs, as we have had here, no Officer can gain credit: and any one is unfortunate who becomes, in any way, identified with such doings. I hope you will consider the details of my letters as strictly private or at any rate never put any of my writing in print.

We have been quiet here for some time and, I think, will remain so. The Gentleman sent out by the Governor left satisfied, I believe, that things were conducted properly here and had been so. But it is hard to tell what sort of a report they will make, as they are all Politicians and the movements against us are very popular through the upper part of the state. I don't know how far it extends: not very far, I hope, for the credit of the Country.

The mail will be here soon from Belknap and I want to get this off. I am uneasy about the publication of those letters. Please send me a copy of all that you have published: so that I may know what I have to meet, in case any issue is made in the matter. I hope you are quite well—my health is good. If any more of those letters are published—why "it's no use to cry over spilt milk"—what's done is past and can't be mended. They may do no harm; but I had much rather not trust them. Write as soon as you get this and send me all that has been published.

Your affectionate son
Wm E. Burnet

(Continued in Part II)