

GENERAL RICHARD BARNES MASON

BY CAROLYN THOMAS FOREMAN.

Few citizens of Oklahoma are familiar with the lives and services of the men who commanded the early army posts in the state. Some of these United States Army officers were born in states far away from this region; many of them saw their first service after graduation from West Point at a frontier post in Indian Territory. One regiment of infantry served twenty years at Fort Gibson and received graduates from the Military Academy year after year to replace men who were promoted, or, more often, to take the places of officers who died at the post then known as the "Grave Yard of the Army." Many of these men participated in the Seminole War, the war with Mexico and at the time of the Civil War held high rank.

Among these officers was Richard Barnes Mason, a native of Virginia and a descendant of Col. George Mason, English statesman and soldier during the reigns of Charles I. and Charles II., who emigrated to the Virginia colony in 1654. General Mason's grandfather, born in Virginia in 1726, was also named George Mason; author of the Declaration of Rights and the Constitution of Virginia, he was a celebrated member of the Continental Congress and of the national convention that framed the Constitution of the United States.¹

Richard Barnes Mason, born in Fairfax County, Virginia, January 16, 1797, was the son of George Mason and Elizabeth Mary Ann Barnes Hooe, who were married April 22, 1784.²

When twenty years of age Mason accepted an appointment as second lieutenant in the Eighth United States Infantry in the city of Washington on September 2, 1817.³ The same month he was promoted to a first lieutenantcy. From Camp Dorman, A. T., he wrote to General D. Parker in Washington, April 30, 1819, request-

¹ *Universal Pronouncing Dictionary of Biography*, Philadelphia, 1888.

² *The Virginia Magazine of History*, vol. XII., p. 319. According to Dumas Malone in his *Dictionary of Biography* (New York, 1928-32) Richard Barnes Mason was the son of George Mason VI. and his second wife Eleanor Patton, and a great-grandson of George Mason of Gunston. It seems reasonable to believe that he received his middle name of Barnes from his mother, Elizabeth Mary Ann Barnes Hooe. After the death of her husband Mrs. Mason married George Graham, Commissioner of the Land Office, and their son, General George Mason Graham, appointed William Tecumseh Sherman commander of the State Military College of Louisiana because he was aware of the affection his half-brother, General Mason, had for Sherman during their service in California (Lloyd Lewis, *Sherman Fighting Prophet*, New York, 1932, p. 112). Thanks are due to Mrs. Rebecca Johnston, Assistant Secretary of the Virginia Historical Society, for information concerning the Mason family.

³ Adjutant General's Office, "Old Files": Richard B. Mason, Va.; *Appleton's Cyclopaedia of American Biography*, 1888, vol. 4, p. 243.



Photo by U. S. Army Signal Corps

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ing that his commission be forwarded to him at Columbia, Tennessee.⁴ His captain's commission was dated July 31, 1819.⁵

The files of the War Department contain a letter from Col. N. Pinkney to Maj. Charles I. Nourse, Acting Assistant Adjutant General, Eastern Department, Governor's Island, concerning Mason. Pinkney's letter was dated Fort Howard, Wisconsin, April 3, 1821, and related:

"Sir . . . painful task of reporting to you, an accident which happened yesterday, to Capt. Mason of my Regiment who I had detached with a party of men to the public saw mill, on Fox river, about ten miles above this Fort, for the purpose of running the mill to a more eligible site on Duck creek.

"While at work . . . some citizens delegated to him a man who had deserted from the fort some days previous." One of the soldiers made impertinent remarks about the deserter and he was ordered to be silent. The man then refused to work and the "Captain boxed his ears with his open hand, and sent him to his business and went to his tent to write me a note on the subject of the mill. . . . Bull (the soldier) appeared at the door of his tent and shot him—pigeon shot entered the right breast, a horrible ragged wound . . . not mortal."

Given leave of absence after this unhappy affair, Captain Mason dispatched a letter from Pohick Run, Fairfax County, Virginia, April 30, 1821, to the secretary of war asking for a furlough in order that he might study military science at West Point. He was transferred to the Third Infantry June 1, 1821, and on October 23 of that year was assigned to the Fourth Infantry⁶

Early in 1830 Captain Mason was ordered to Fort Crawford to the scene of hostilities between the Sauk and Fox Indians and the Sioux.⁷ As a captain of the First Infantry he participated in the Black Hawk War and after the battle of Bad Axe accompanied General Atkinson and other officers aboard the *Warrior*, which dropped down the river to Prairie du Chien.⁸

On March 4, 1833, Mason became a major of the recently organized regiment of First Dragoons commanded by Col. Henry Dodge; Stephen Watts Kearny was the lieutenant colonel and Jefferson Davis, not long out of West Point, a first lieutenant. The regiment was assembled at Jefferson Barracks and one of the soldiers, several years later, wrote an interesting description of Major Mason:

"A few days after our arrival here, an errand brought me early in the morning to the Major's quarters. After I had twice knocked at the door, he called out in somewhat of a surly tone, 'Come in!' whereupon I obeyed the summons, and the next minute stood in the presence of Major Mason. He had not yet made his toilet, and sat at the breakfast table

⁴ Adjutant General's Office, "Old Files": Richard B. Mason, Va.

⁵ *American State Papers*, "Military Affairs," vol. 2, p. 842.

⁶ Adjutant General's Office, "Old Files": Richard B. Mason, Va.

⁷ Henry Putney Beers, *The Western Military Frontier 1815-1846*, Philadelphia, 1935, p. 82.

⁸ Frank E. Stevens, *The Black Hawk War*, Chicago, 1903, p. 225.

sans culott, surrounded by his four favorite dogs. The apartment presented a bachelor-like appearance, and my first glance gave me no very favorable impression of its inmate. I have heard that he was a man severe to a fault, and although well esteemed by his brother officers on account of his soldiery, yet not much of a favorite with those under his command."⁹

A further account by the same writer tells of desertions by enlisted men during the first month. One of these soldiers on being arrested, pretended insanity and was sent to the hospital from which he escaped to the sutler's store where he got so intoxicated that he did not recognize an officer; he was insolent and struck at him. The punishment the soldier received was characteristic of the day and age; a pyramid of muskets with fixed bayonets was made and the hands of the prisoner were tied to the top while his feet were fastened to the base. The Major, the doctor and two drummers took station in the center of the square near the deserter, and upon signal fifty lashes were laid upon his bare back with a cat-o-nine-tails. The man shrieked and fainted and when carried to the hospital his back was treated to a dose of salt and water, after which he was remanded to the guard house.¹⁰

After weeks and weeks of almost constant drills the first battalion paraded under Major Mason on November 9, 1833; the following day the inspector general pronounced soldiers, equipment and horses in excellent order.¹¹ Hildreth related that the regiment was "drilled by Major Mason, and considering the many disadvantages under which we labored, and very little practice . . . we came off with credit." The Dragoons left Jefferson Barracks for Fort Gibson November 20, 1833. Their march took them through Fayetteville, Arkansas, and they arrived at Camp Jackson, one and a quarter miles from Fort Gibson, shortly before Christmas.¹²

The position of Colonel Dodge became a most unhappy one owing to the jealousy of some of his officers. He wrote to his friend George W. Jones in Michigan Territory, April 18, 1834, that

"Davis who I appointed my adjt. was among the first to take a stand against me. Major Mason and Davis are now two of my most inveterate enemies. The desire of these gentlemen appears to be to harass me in small matters. They don't want to fight. If Mason would say fight, I would go to the field with him with great pleasure . . . to undertake an expedition with such men I should run the risk of losing what little reputation I have acquired."¹³

⁹ *Dragoon Campaign to the Rocky Mountains . . . by a Dragoon* (Hildreth), New York, 1836, pp. 37, 43; Francis B. Heitman, *Historical Register and Dictionary of the United States Army*, Washington, 1903, vol. I, p. 695.

¹⁰ Hildreth, *op. cit.*, pp. 45-50.

¹¹ Louis Pelzer, *Marches of the Dragoons in the Mississippi Valley*, Iowa City, Iowa, 1917, p. 22.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 51, 52.

¹³ *Annals of Iowa*, Des Moines, Letters of Henry Dodge to Gen. George W. Jones," Dr. William Salter (ed.), vol. III, No. 3, Third Series, pp. 221-22.

In spite of the bickering among the officers of his regiment Colonel Dodge departed with the Dragoons from Fort Gibson for the plains on June 15, 1834; he was accompanied by the artist George Catlin who wrote fascinating accounts of the expedition to the villages of the Comanches and Pawnee Picts. Catlin described the beautiful location of the Comanche village and the interest he, Major Mason and some of the other officers had in investigating the immense troops of horses belonging to the Indians; they had heard reports that the Comanches were the owners of splendid Arabian horses but he found them "a medley group of all colors and shapes, the beautiful Arabian we had so often heard of at the East . . . must be a *horse of the imagination*."¹⁴ Mason was fond of hunting and this expedition across the prairies gave him and other officers an opportunity to hunt and kill buffaloes.¹⁵

After a conference with the Plains Indians the command set out on the return trip July 28 and reached Fort Gibson after many hardships caused by the excessive heat, lack of water, and illness. Major Mason sent his three companies of exhausted and ill men twenty miles up the Arkansas River in the Creek Nation, hoping the change to a healthier location would restore them. Here they built log cabins with clapboard roofs which they occupied for some time.¹⁶

"Two of the Dragoon companies now here are almost naked; they left Jefferson Barracks last spring and have had no clothing since, the unissued clothing of those companies left at that place, has not yet reached this. Many of the men have their bare feet on the ground, without even a moccasins to cover them & are wearing buckskin leggings for want of pantaloons" and have only tents to live in.

"There is I believe at this post [Fort Gibson] a large building built I believe, by the troops and occupied as a tavern which contains not less than seven good rooms besides kitchen &c. This building together with the Billiard room which of itself is large enough for half a company. . ." Lieutenant Miles wrote Mason that the buildings "outside the pickets" occupied by Stokes and Stambaugh were necessary for their convenience. "The buildings occupied by 'camp women' are in most part their *private property* having been suffered to erect them at their own expense by the present comd officer's predecessors."¹⁷

It appears that Mason and Davis were not such close friends as Colonel Dodge had thought; Mason, on December 24, 1834, charged that Acting Assistant Quartermaster Davis was absent from reveille roll-call and he reminded him that he had ordered all officers of his command to attend the roll-call of their respective companies. "Lieut. Davis did in a highly disrespectful, insubordinate, and contemptuous

¹⁴ George Catlin, *Letters and Notes on the Manners, Customs, and Condition of the North American Indians*, Philadelphia, 1857, vol. 2, pp. 489, 491.

¹⁵ Lieut. T. B. Wheelock's Journal: *American State Papers*, "Military Affairs," vol. v. pp. 373-382.

¹⁶ Quartermaster General, "Hall of Records," Fort Myers, Virginia: Mason to Jesup, August 30, 1834.

¹⁷ AGO, OFD, 245 M. 34. Mason to Jesup, Fort Gibson, October 10, 1834.

manner, abruptly turn upon his heel and walk off saying at the same time 'Hum.' " He was ordered back by Major Mason who informed him he was not in the habit of receiving such treatment and that he must consider himself under arrest and return to his quarters; Davis stared Major Mason full in the face and showed no intention of obeying the order of his superior officer. When Mason repeated his command Davis, still staring the Major in the face demanded, "Now are you done with me?" and did not go to his quarters until after Mason had repeated his order the third time. A court-martial of Davis was held at Fort Gibson February 12, 1835, and the verdict was "guilty of specifications exhibited against him, except the words 'highly disrespectful, insubordinate, and contemptuous conduct' wherever they occur in the specifications; and attach no criminality to the facts of which he is found guilty."¹⁸

The western Indians had been promised by Colonel Dodge that a council would be held in their country and on May 18, 1835, Major Mason left Fort Gibson with a detachment of Dragoons for the headwaters of Little River to establish a camp where the conference could be held. They marched southwest about one hundred fifty miles to a position near the site of Lexington, Oklahoma, where they would be in touch with Coffee's trading post on Red River. The post, in the edge of the Cross Timbers, was called Camp Holmes. Lieut. Augustine Fortunatus Seaton of the Seventh Infantry was sent from Fort Gibson June 16 with a force of soldiers to cut a wagon road through to Mason's camp. He also conveyed provisions for the troops.

About the first of July the Comanche and other plains Indians began to arrive at Mason's camp in great numbers. They established their camp eight or ten miles from Camp Holmes and one authority claimed there were seven thousand present. Major Mason became disturbed at the menacing attitude of the Indians and dispatched Osage messengers to Fort Gibson asking for reinforcements. General Arbuckle immediately sent two companies of the Seventh Infantry under Capt. Francis Lee, and a piece of ordnance. On August 6 General Arbuckle and Gov. Montfort Stokes left for Camp Holmes with two more companies of the Seventh as an escort. After the conference the dragoons reached Fort Gibson on September 5; the men were in good condition and had suffered no loss.¹⁹ The day after his return to Fort Gibson Major Mason wrote to a friend in Washington describing some of his adventures on the plains: "We lived on buffalo meat principally. I killed *some few*, as I did also bear, deer and turkeys; but caught no wild horses. The sports of the chase I enjoyed you may know; and assure you often wished for you to witness the

¹⁸ Grant Foreman, *Advancing the Frontier, 1830-1860*, Norman, 1933, pp. 46, 47.

¹⁹ Camp Holmes was sometimes called Camp Mason in honor of Major Mason. (*Chronicles of Oklahoma*, "Survey of a Wagon Road from Fort Smith to the Colorado River," Grant Foreman, vol. XII, No. I, p. 83, note 17); Grant Foreman, *Pioneer Days in the Early Southwest*, Cleveland, 1926, pp. 160-64.

immense number of buffalo that were often in full view of the camp, from within a few hundred yards to almost as far as the eye could reach.

"I saw one of our Osage hunters ride up at full speed along side of a large buffalo cow, and killed her with a single arrow. It was shot entirely through her; it went in on the right and passed out on the left side, and was lost in the prairie, breaking a rib in its passage.

"I saw another of the Osages kill a large cow with a single arrow. He shot it into her, up to within a few inches (say two or three) of the feathered end; he caught hold of it, pulled it out, and shot it into her again, when she immediately fell. This of course was at full speed."²⁰

In a letter written in Washington City, March 14, 1836, to Lewis Cass, secretary of war, Major Mason stated: "I fully agree with [Mr. Austin J. Raines] . . . in the beneficial results that would arise from, and the very favourable impression it would make upon the Comanchie and other roving bands of Indians on our South West border, to have a deputation of their Chiefs visit the Seat of Government & travel through the interior of our country, but I differ entirely from that Gentleman as to the Manner of getting a deputation of Chiefs to visit this place. There cannot be a doubt in the Mind of any disinterested man at all conversant with Indian Matters as they now stand in the South West, that if it is the wish of the Department to have some of the Chiefs of the Roving band visit the seat of Government, that instructions should be given to the officer Commanding on that frontier to take such steps to effect the object as to him might seem fit, I assure you it will then be accomplished in less time, & at less expense, than by the employment of a Special Agent for the purpose, there is not, & will not be any difficulty whatever in effecting the object.

"No intercourse was held with these roving bands previous to the Dragoon expedition in that quarter in 1834, when they very readily sent in a deputation to Fort Gibson upon being asked to do so, at the treaty held by Gov. Stokes and Genl. Arbuckle in August last with those Indians, at Camp Holmes in the Grand prairie West of the cross timbers, they expressed the greatest desire to be permitted to visit the President of the United States, & stated they would at all times be in readiness to come into Fort Gibson, preparatory [sic] to their visit to Washington. . . .

"Nor can I agree with Mr. Raines that it is 'idle to send an armed force on those prairies to effect an object of this nature,' the result of the expedition of the Dragoons from Fort Gibson in 1834

²⁰ *Niles' Weekly Register*, October 17, 1835, p. 106. Copied from *Army and Navy Chronicle*.

& 5, proves the error of that Gentleman's opinions, for their object (& it was one 'of this Nature') was most fully accomplished in both instances, & has left those people, in my opinion, very friendly & well disposed towards us.

"Mr. Raines speaks of those Indians having 'torn up the Treaty made by the Commissioners on the part of the Government & said they had no treaty with us & those that contracted, had no right to enter into any such treaty,' he certainly must be misinformed on that subject, for a large number of the various bands of roving Indians was assembled at Camp Holmes & the treaty was entered into & signed by their *acknowledged Chiefs*.

"I was present & know the fact, it is not probable they would in a few weeks afterwards tear up the paper & deny having made a treaty, particularly when they gave up Nothing by this treaty, it being one entirely of amity & friendship entered into by themselves, the whites, & the Red People under the immediate protection of our Government, it is well known how much importance Indians attach to a written paper & how carefully they preserve it . . . If those people have torn up the copy of the treaty that was given them, I am well convinced in my own mind that they have been instigated to the act by some white man who has his own views to answer by it; that those people commit depredations upon the Texians, is altogether probable, for it was fully explained to them by the Commissioners last Summer that the Texians were not subject to, or under the control of our government."²¹

Mason became a lieutenant colonel July 4, 1836, and was sent to Fort Des Moines to relieve Kearny who had also been promoted.²² Fort Des Moines (No. 1) was located on the right bank of the Mississippi above the mouth of the Des Moines River, near the site of the present Montrose. In a letter to the war department September 18, 1836, Colonel Mason wrote: "A town has been laid off at this place and lots sold, which takes in a part of our garrison . . ." On receipt of this communication it was decided to abandon the post without delay "rather than encounter the conflict with the land-grasping element in the western section," especially as Colonel Mason reported men were putting up buildings and making arrangements to sell whisky to the soldiers and Indians.

A feeble garrison remained at Fort Des Moines during the winter; the soldiers suffered with intermittent fever and in the spring the camp was invaded by fleas. Colonel Mason, who had been on detached duty at St. Louis and elsewhere during the winter, returned to Fort Des Moines in the spring. He addressed a letter to the war department March 30, 1837, asking for information as to the probable

²¹ Office Indian Affairs, Misc. File. Washington, March 14, 1836: Major R. B. Mason.

²² *Army and Navy Chronicle*, vol. III, No. 3, p. 45.

time the post would be retained in order that he might know how to regulate his requisitions for needed supplies. Mason's last official communication from Fort Des Moines was dated June 1, 1837. He notified the department: "The post is this day abandoned, and the squadron takes up its march for Fort Leavenworth. It has been delayed until this date in order that the grass might be sufficiently high to afford grazing for the horses, as corn cannot be had on some parts of the route."²³

Gen. James C. Parrott of Keokuk, Iowa, who served as a sergeant in Company I of the United States Dragoons, described Colonel Mason as "an aristocratic Virginian, a large portly man, six feet in height. He possessed all the peculiarities of a southerner, accentuated."²⁴

Charges were preferred²⁵ by Lieut. L. B. Northrop, First Dragoons,²⁶ against Major Mason, who requested a Court of Inquiry to investigate the accusations. The court, composed of Lieut. Col. Sullivan Burbank, president, Major Clifton Wharton, Brevet Major Nathaniel Young, as members, and Lieut. S. G. Simmons, recorder, sat at Fort Gibson December 20, 1836.²⁷

"Courts of Inquiry may be ordered only upon the demand of an officer or soldier whose conduct is to be investigated, by the President or any commanding officer. It does not give opinions, except when specially ordered to do so, but simply states the facts disclosed by its investigations into the accusations or imputations against the officer or soldier who has demanded the inquiry, and its conclusions therefrom. A court of inquiry consists of one or more officers, not exceeding three and a recorder. It has the power to summon and question witnesses, and makes a full examination of all the circumstances following the form of record prescribed for the general court martial."²⁸

Three charges, which included fifteen specifications, were made against Major Mason. Charge 1 was "Disobedience of General Order and Regulations" and the specifications were to the effect that Mason had at camp near Fort Gibson, on or about December 26, 1834, in disobedience of General Order No. 37 of April 28, 1832, confined to his quarters Lieutenant Northrop although that officer had given reason to believe that no act of his was a case in which

²³ *Annals of Iowa*, Des Moines, "Fort Des Moines (No. 1), Iowa, vol. III, nos. 5-6, Third Series, pp. 359-362.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 367.

²⁵ *Army and Navy Chronicle*, October 13, 1836.

²⁶ Lucius Ballinger Northrop of South Carolina was graduated from the Military Academy July 1, 1827; he became a brevet second lieutenant in the Seventh Infantry four years later and on August 14, 1833, he was transferred to the First Dragoons. He served in that regiment until he was dropped on January 8, 1848; he was re-instated in August of that year. He resigned in 1861, and served until the close of the Civil War in the Confederate army (Heitman, *op cit.*, vol. I, p. 751).

²⁷ War Department, Office of the Judge Advocate General, December 11, 1940; *Army and Navy Chronicle*, January 26, 1837, copied from *Arkansas Gazette* (Little Rock).

²⁸ *Nelson's Encyclopaedia*, vol. III, p. 420.

close confinement was permitted; the second specification stated that on December 24, 1834, Mason had confined to his quarters First Lieut. Jefferson Davis and retained him there for three days. Davis first applied to Mason for relief from close confinement but apparently with no success, as he then appealed to General Arbuckle "for protection against the oppression under which he was suffering." This act of Mason's was also said to be in disobedience to General Order No. 37. In specification three it was stated that Major Mason on December 20, 1834, failed to report the arrest of Lieutenant Northrop at a camp near Fort Gibson to General Arbuckle until after December 21 when he offered to withdraw charges and release Lieutenant Northrop, plainly showing "his intention to arrest and release without the sanction of the commander of the Post."

Charge 2—"Arbitrary and oppressive conduct," included nine specifications which paint a picture of the time and place not otherwise to be found. It appeared that when Major Mason visited the new quarters on December 20, 1834, he did not find a single officer present with the working parties or about the buildings. Noticing only the absence of Lieutenant Northrop and Lieutenant Davis he forthwith sent Lieut. William Eustis, Acting Adjutant of the Dragoons, to arrest them, "thus making a distinction in his conduct to the officers under his command, or watching some and passing over others." Mason was next charged with confining Northrop to his tent with a view to arbitrarily punishing him without submitting his conduct to the jurisdiction of a court martial. Northrop also charged that sometime between November 24 and December 28, 1834, Mason reproved him in the usual manner of that officer for not attending to the proper discharge of the duty of a man in his company detailed for duty in the quartermaster department, although the lieutenant had received no previous order. Moreover, he had no reason to believe that such duties were expected of him or required of any other officer.

The next specification depicts the arbitrary attitude of Mason and the bad effects of the closely restricted life of these men without any distractions from the outer world to break the deadly monotony of their existence. On or about December 7, 1834, at the Dragoon stables, Mason directed Lieutenant Jefferson Davis in command of E Company of the Dragoons to send Corporal Harrison and Bugler Reid of his company to the officer of the day to be put upon the wooden horse. This was a ridged or studded device with long wooden pegs for legs on which soldiers were condemned to sit astride as a military punishment. Davis had previously ascertained that the breaking loose of the horse which Corporal Harrison was leading was unavoidable but Mason had ordered him under guard and directed Lieutenant Northrop, officer of the day, to place both Harrison and Reid on the wooden horse. Upon Northrop's inquiring if the non-commissioned officer should be thus punished Mason replied yes,

thus violating paragraph 129, General Army Regulations and subjecting Corporal Harrison, one of the best non-commissioned officers in the squadron, to a degrading punishment without a trial.

On or about December 21, 1834, Major Mason ordered privates Parker, Dickerson, Reynolds and Fielding of the Dragoon regiment on the wooden horse to remain there until midnight and until two o'clock the following day. This punishment was decreed because a pair of hand-cuffs were missing and the men were to be kept on the wooden horse until they were accounted for. In about an hour the prisoner who had secreted the hand-cuffs produced them and when Lieutenant Northrop reported the fact to Major Mason he remarked the prisoner should be whipped; when the lieutenant had walked away Mason called the corporal of the guard and authorized him to deliver up the prisoner to the four Dragoons in order that they might whip him as satisfaction for the humiliating punishment they had unjustly received.

According to specification six, Major Mason, near Fort Gibson, confined Private Hammond of H. Company, Dragoons, under guard from or about January 10 to the first of February, 1835. During the days of the period he caused the private to walk under charge of Sentinel No. 1 with a pair of saddle bags weighted with stone regardless of the fact that Private Hammond had been neither charged nor tried.²⁹ Similar punishment was decreed by Mason for Private Geurley of K. Company from April 9 to April 12, 1835, when he was compelled to walk under charge of sentinel with a pair of saddle bags weighted with sixty pounds of stone from "revelee until totor" the first day and from "revelee until guard mounting" the next. Mason refused the prisoner permission to cease walking to attend to eating and other necessary wants; Geurley being small and young became lame after the first day and remained so after his release—all without charge against him or a trial.

In the light of present day opinion Mason appears to have acted in a most arbitrary manner and to have overreached his authority when he refused permission to Private Corbit, Company F, Dragoons, to leave his post and go in search of a thief who had his watch. Corbit, with a detail of the squadron had been ordered to report from the camp in the Creek Nation to Fort Gibson to assist in erecting the Dragoon quarters, which apparently put him under the immediate command of Lieutenant Colonel Burbank, then commandant of Fort Gibson. Private Corbit, when informed that he was under the sole control of Lieutenant Carter, quartermaster of the post, related the facts to that officer who lent him a horse and granted him a permit countersigned by Colonel Burbank. On the return of Corbit Major Mason sent for him, threatened to tie him

²⁹ For similar punishments at military posts in the Indian Territory see *Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Vol. VI, No. 2, "Military Discipline in Early Oklahoma" by Carolyn Thomas Foreman, pp. 140-44.

up and whip him and he had the private put in irons and kept him there even after Lieutenant Carter applied to the Major for his release. The following day when Carter found the man still in irons he applied to Colonel Burbank, who found upon inquiry that the prisoner had been freed after being in irons from October 22 to October 24, 1834.

Specification nine is quoted in full as it gives an enlightening account of matters at Fort Gibson during the regime of Mason: " . . . 2nd Lieut. L. B. Northrop of the Regiment of Dragoons U. S. A. having on or about the 17th or 18th of March 1835 invited the officers and visitors of the post to a party, the said Lieut. Northrop having been informed on or about the morning of the 11th March 1835 that Major Mason as aforesaid had remarked that he no longer would permit parties in the camp the aforesaid Lieut. Northrop in order that the amusements of the evening should not be interrupted and to avoid collision with the said Major Mason's views procured a room at the Settlers [sutler] store, above two hundred yards from the nearest quarters, and entirely without the precincts of camp, about 9 or 10 o'clock the aforesaid Major Mason sent the officer of the day to direct the Settler to close his doors and to order all present to retire, the officer of the day, Capt. [Jesse] Bean U. S. Dragoons informed the said Major Mason that it was not a casual meeting of young men but that there were visitors of age and high public standing or words to that effect. Major Mason as aforesaid directed him to do as ordered. Thus affronting Lieut. Northrop and Company, this after Major Mason had on several occasions a short time previous permitted parties immediately in camp, being present at one or two himself and had never given any order previous forbidding them or had interfered with any other officers, but had sanctioned parties in Camp, and when at Camp Jackson in 1834 in charge of the entire police of camp in the widest sence [sic] on or about the month of Jan. got drunk and taken an active part in one of the most noisy parties which ever occurred in the vicinity of Fort Gibson."

Charge 3, "Conduct unbecoming a gentleman and a Commanding Officer," contained six specifications, most of which show Mason in a bad light. He was accused of taking advantage of his rank to make insulting remarks about Lieutenant Northrop to an officer of another corps; this not being enough he repeated his insult in evidence before the court on the trial of Northrop, "thus publicly insulting a prisoner without any necessity who by his particular position there, and the general relative position with the aforesaid Major Mason had no redress."

When General Arbuckle, in January, 1835, wished Mason to renew the arrest of Lieutenant Northrop which had been suspended, he evaded carrying into effect this direction which would have frustrated the object for which Mason had been watching the lieutenant; he was also charged with equivocation to Arbuckle and inconsistency

in his evidence during the trial of Northrop. Mason was said to have placed his charges against his junior officer in an aggravated light when giving evidence against him "and conducted himself as an individual persecuter and not as an official prosecutor" when he testified that he had seen Northrop in the sutler's shop by day and night; also by "testifying under oath to what was untrue, namely that he Major Mason saw the aforesaid Lieut. Northrop out in the snow at a wolf fight, the 2nd of the only two which ever occurred at the Dragoon Camp."

Major Mason, while in conversation with the commanders of two of the companies of Dragoons of his squadron on the deficiencies of clothing, suggested, as a method which he had employed, the appropriation of the effects of dead men and deserters who frequently left new articles which could be turned into the item "worn" and thus supply the needs of men during the winter.

A charge against Major Mason that puts him in a bad light was the statement that he "did in the vicinity of Fort Gibson in the Month of Dec. 1834 open a Faro Bank, and deal, being prepared with a quantity of new 10 cent pieces, used as counters by the said Major Mason and issued and redeemed as dollars." A similar charge was made that during the winter of 1835, Mason, "when in full charge of the interior police of the Dragoon Camp in the vicinity of Fort Gibson which constituted him the immediate commanding officer of Camp, was engaged in an association with one or more individuals and established a Faro Bank or joint stock of which the said Major Mason was generally dealer, and counters being prepared and notice given when the bank would open. The aforesaid Major Mason did deal in the months of Jan. and Feb. 1835, both within the garrison and at the public house attached to Fort Gibson."

The Court of Inquiry in conclusion stated that "all the charges, and specifications which were laid before it for examination had their origin in a *spirit of recrimination*, a motive of action which, although in certain instances it may lead to disclosures of official delinquencies, in much more numerous cases only terminates in personal controversies prejudicial to the best interests of the service, furnishing evidence of temper far from creditable to the party who indulges in it."³⁰

In compliance with a request of the Cherokees, Governor Stokes, Cherokee agent, sent invitations to ten Indian tribes to meet at Taktoka on September 15, 1838. Mason, at Fort Leavenworth, learned of the meeting and sent a letter to Gen. Edmund P. Gaines at St. Louis, telling him that the Indians from the Red River to the upper Mississippi planned an attack upon the white people. Indian Superintendent William Armstrong did not attend the council because of illness, but he assured the war department there was no foundation

³⁰ War Department, Office of the Judge Advocate General.

for the reports. General Gaines had ordered troops from Fort Leavenworth and Jefferson Barracks and even asked the governors of Tennessee and Arkansas to call out the militia of their states. Mason's absurd letter was widely copied in newspapers of the country.³¹

A site was selected for a new army post in 1838, by Capt. John Stuart and Maj. Charles Thomas; it was called Camp Illinois but the name was later changed to Fort Wayne. This post was designed for a dragoon station and in the spring of 1839 Colonel Mason, with four troops of dragoons was ordered to the place to build the barracks.³² There was much anxiety among the citizens of Arkansas who anticipated disturbances among the Indians and this fort was built to relieve their fear.

On August 25, 1840, work was suspended at Fort Wayne and Colonel Mason and the Dragoons were sent back to Fort Gibson.³³

In his diary Col. Ethan Allen Hitchcock noted, November 26, 1841, at Fort Gibson: ". . . spent the evening with Mason, who was formerly a Captain in the old 8th Infantry with me in 1820-21 at Bay of St. Louis. He thinks [John] Ross a rascal, i. e., an artful, cunning, shrewd, managing, ambitious man . . . I am inclined to think that Ross is merely ambitious of elevating his nation into perfect independence. It is known that he [Ross] wishes all the U. S. troops withdrawn. Mason thinks that Fort Wayne (Beatty's Prairie) should be continued if it be designed to establish the cordon of posts projected along the frontier." Mason was in command of Fort Gibson at this time and he was greatly astonished at facts told him by Hitchcock "tending to the proof of great frauds having been committed in this country in feeding Indians."³⁴

Continuing his journal at Fort Gibson, January 19, 1842, Hitchcock related that Colonel Mason "looks to his ice house and prays for cold weather . . . some years the ice is not to be had in sufficient quantities to fill the ice house, or it is bad, not solid and clear." Five days later Hitchcock wrote: I also urged Col. Mason to send a quantity of damaged provisions, of which he has a large quantity on hand, as a gratuity to the Seminole band under Coacooche over the Arkansas near the mouth of Grand River. He told me he thought he would do it."

³¹ Grant Foreman, *Pioneer Days in the Early Southwest*, p. 276; *ibid.*, *Advancing the Frontier*, Norman, 1933, p. 199; *ibid.*, *The Five Civilized Tribes*, Norman, 1934, p. 289.

³² Foreman, *Pioneer Days in the Early Southwest*, p. 277; *Army and Navy Chronicle*, vol. VIII, no. 18, p. 287. *The Arkansas Gazette*, May 29, 1839, reported that Lieutenant Colonel Mason had passed aboard the steamboat *De Kalb* on his way to superintend the building of Fort Wayne.

³³ Adjutant General's Office, Washington. General Orders, No. 43, August 25, 1840.

³⁴ Grant Foreman (ed.) *A Traveler in Indian Territory. The Journal of Ethan Allen Hitchcock*, Cedar Rapids, Iowa, 1930, pp. 27, 28.

"Two or three days ago I spoke to Col. Mason of the gambling carried on here and described some of the things I had seen and more I had heard of—alluding to the dissipations at the post generally . . . expressed apprehension that the attention of the public might be particularly called to the moral condition and character of the Post."³⁵

Colonel Mason showed Hitchcock an order he was about to issue prohibiting all gambling and card playing within Fort Gibson and announcing his intention to punish cases of violation of his order "without respect to persons." Mason's notice stated he intended to remove from the garrison all persons known to be blacklegs, gamblers and loafers; he would not allow persons from other states to run horse races at the fort; all arrivals at McDermott's tavern must register, giving their name, residence, and business; to complete the matter he ordered the tavern closed in June.³⁶

Colonel Mason wrote Cherokee Agent P. M. Butler on June 14, 1842, stating: ". . . there are now many gamblers in the Cherokee Nation, particularly in the vicinity of Mrs. Coody's & John Drew's on the Bayou Manard, I do not know all of their names but I believe I can give you some of them viz: Smith (*commonly called big Smith or goggle-eyed Smith*), Davis, McMilland, Willison, the latter has settled and lives between this and the Verdigris river & was once arrested as a notorious gambler by the troops at this Fort at the instance of Capt. Armstrong the Superintendent of Indian Affairs in this quarter, but was let off, upon a promise to good behaviour, and at the instance of some of the Cherokees, he has again been playing at Faro & gambling in this vicinity . . ."

In *Letters From the Frontier* Major General George A. McCall³⁷ related that Colonel Mason had two squadrons of dragoons hutted half a mile from Fort Gibson. He described him as an ardent sportsman who owned some fine dogs. They often hunted together and in a spirit of rivalry agreed that when they stopped shooting at the end of the day, they would empty from their pockets the birds they had shot. They each brought in from twenty to thirty birds a day and never differed more than two and generally they had the same number of birds. McCall wrote his brother in great glee that he had a "high-bred imported stock" dog named Blue, a pup of Mason's celebrated setter Nell, by an imported pointer.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 90, 98.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 99 and note 58. *Arkansas Gazette*, July 6, 1842. In his *History of Fort Leavenworth 1827-1927*, Maj. Elvid Hunt reports Lieutenant Colonel Mason as commanding officer at Fort Leavenworth from 1841 to 1843 (Appendix A, p. 223). The adjutant general's office reports this officer as commandant at Fort Gibson from June 20, 1841, to August, 1842; from July 4, 1842, to October 7, 1842; from September 18, 1843, to December 17, 1843, and from June 20, 1844, to February 27, 1846.

³⁷ Philadelphia, 1868, pp. 374, 416.

Coacooche (Wild Cat) and Alligator, a Seminole chief, with a delegation of their people went to Washington late in 1843, to interview the heads of the Indian Office to try to learn the status of affairs of their tribe. On their return to the Indian Territory they found their people destitute. They were encamped around Fort Gibson and the great flood in the Arkansas and Grand rivers in 1844 had destroyed all of their supplies; they were reduced to begging and Colonel Mason issued rations to prevent them from starving.³⁸

Colonel Mason became ill and a wordy controversy as to which of two captains succeeded to command of the fort, and the records of attempted arrest of each by the other became amusing and consumed many pages before Mason left his sick bed again to assume command and end the quarrel. Mason at that time reported the building of a house twenty-two by forty feet to be used as a church and school room. Church services had formerly been held in the post library which was too small for the congregation.

The Commandant and Gov. Pierce M. Butler, Cherokee agent, were bitter enemies and Mason ordered Butler to remove his office from the reservation, claiming that his Indian charges were objectionable to the army officers. He also ordered the sutler in the post not to trade with the Indians or sell them goods but he afterwards relaxed this command. The Fort Gibson Jockey Club was organized in July, 1844, and Governor Butler was made the president; races were run on a track laid out many years before by the Seventh Infantry—This was also frowned upon by Colonel Mason.³⁹

Secretary of War Wilkins, in the autumn of 1844, sent a commission to the Cherokee Nation to investigate conditions and learn if the laws were equably enforced; President Tyler had appointed as members of the commission Roger Jones, Adjutant General of the army, Cherokee Agent Butler and Colonel Mason. The commission was organized November 15 and the investigation was commenced December 4 at Tahlontuskee, the council ground of the Old Settlers on the Illinois River near the home of John Jolly.⁴⁰ Hearings were held at Tahlequah from the first to the sixteenth of January, 1845, when the commission returned to Fort Gibson. In Tahlequah the members of the commission were treated with the greatest respect and they left the town with the good wishes of the citizens.⁴¹

"The thoroughness of their investigation, the lucidity of their report, the personnel of the board—all men of high standing—preclude the idea of a partial investigation or a report determined by

³⁸ Grant Foreman, *The Five Civilized Tribes*, p. 237.

³⁹ Grant Foreman, *Pioneer Days in the Early Southwest*, p. 175.

⁴⁰ *Cherokee Advocate*, November 21, 1844, p. 3, col. 1; *ibid.*, December 4, 1844, p. 3, col. 2; Grant Foreman, *The Five Civilized Tribes*, p. 332; Morris L. Wardell, *A Political History of the Cherokee Nation 1838-1907*, Norman, 1938, pp. 56, 57.

⁴¹ *Cherokee Advocate*, January 2, 1845, p. 3, col. 1; *ibid.*, January 16, 1845, p. 3, col. 1.

partisan bias. To show that there was ample opportunity for the Old Settlers and Treaty party to present their grievances, as well as for the Ross party, the committee reported that on December 4, 5, 6, 1844, a council of the Cherokees met the commission near Fort Gibson. There was an attendance of 485, of whom 286 were Old Settlers, and 195 of the Treaty party . . .⁴²

Colonel Mason, greatly exasperated by the conduct of the enlisted men in frequenting disorderly houses outside the reservation, ordered the guard doubled, the gates of the post closed at retreat, and the rolls called at unexpected hours.⁴³ These restrictions were probably the result of a disgraceful affair between the soldiers and some Cherokees at the house of the notorious Polly Spaniard. The *Cherokee Advocate* of March 27, 1845, published a letter Mason had written in 1843 objecting to testimony of Indians being accepted in court against that of the military. He said one half barrel of whiskey would buy oaths enough to swear away the commissions of all of the officer's at the post. Indian testimony was not accepted in Arkansas or Missouri so why should it be in Indian Territory.

Bill Conner, a Delaware Indian, brought to the Cherokee agency in March, 1845, a white boy who said his name was Gillis or Giles. He lived in Texas when stolen by the Comanches. Connor claimed he bought the boy from a Comanche chief, paying for him a gun and a horse worth \$300. Cherokee Agent Butler, who paid the Indian one hundred dollars, was to retain possession of the lad until the wishes of the Indian department were learned. Colonel Mason wrote that he fully concurred in Butler's views and earnestly recommended that the boy "be ransomed, & the Indian be promptly paid, liberally and in full."⁴⁴

The Indian Commission reported January 17, 1845; the full report was printed in the *Cherokee Advocate*, June 12. It was recommended that the Cherokee authorities be heard in support of claims against the United States and that a new treaty be concluded based on promises of President Tyler in his letter of September 20, 1841.

Authority was given the sutler at Fort Gibson to sell liquor to the soldiers under regulations issued by Colonel Mason, who reported that drunkenness had greatly decreased and disorderly houses in the vicinity had been abandoned.⁴⁵

In the journal kept by Lieut. James William Abert, topographical engineer, on his trip from Bent's Fort on the Arkansas River

⁴² Thomas Valentine Parker, Ph. D., *The Cherokee Indians*, New York, 1907, pp. 59, 60.

⁴³ Adjutant General's Office, "Old Records Division," 134 A 45: Arbuckle to Cooper, March 19, 1845.

⁴⁴ Office of Indian Affairs; Misc. File B 2420-2508-2532. Cherokee Agency—27th March, 1845.

⁴⁵ Grant Foreman, *Pioneer Days in the Early Southwest*, p. 174.

to St. Louis in the autumn of 1845⁴⁶ he reported that he and his party laughed at the hardships they had endured on the way when they were seated within the hospitable walls of Fort Gibson on October 21. They were delighted to meet "with gentlemen and ladies, and [to be] participating with them those comforts and elegancies from which we had for so long been banished." They found at Fort Gibson several companies of infantry, and one of the First Dragoons. Of Colonel Mason he wrote: "It would be presumption in me to speak of so accomplished and well known an officer; but I cannot refrain from expressing my grateful sense of the kindness and hospitality with which we were received and treated by himself and his amiable lady, and indeed, by all the officers and ladies attached to the command."

Abert well deserved his cordial treatment at Fort Gibson, as his expedition was the first to make the journey of six hundred miles with wagons from Bent's Fort to the settlements by way of the Canadian River. Added glory was his because he had accomplished his mission without a battle or loss of life.⁴⁷

When, early in the spring of 1846, Colonel Mason was ordered to New York on recruiting duty, he was succeeded by Col. Gustavus Loomis as commandant of Fort Gibson.⁴⁸

In his memoirs Gen. William Tecumseh Sherman wrote that he reported for recruiting service in May, 1846, to the general superintendent for that duty, Col. Richard B. Mason, at Governor's Island. In the summer the U. S. store-ship *Lexington* was preparing to go to California; she sailed July 14, 1846, carrying Sherman and several other officers who became famous in the years to come. Among them were Halleck, Ord and Loeser. Colonel Mason boarded the ship and sailed down the bay and out to sea with his friends, returning to New York with the tug.⁴⁹ Colonel Mason was still in New York in November preparing to proceed to California to supersede Col. J. D. Stevenson in the command of the California expedition.⁵⁰ "He designs to charter a vessel to take him to Chagres immediately; from thence he will cross to the Pacific, and take one of the government vessels for San Francisco. It is also said that Col. Stevenson was notified by telegraph of the intention to supersede him, and that this was the cause of his hasty departure."⁵¹ The following day *The Sun* contained an item to the effect that Colonel

⁴⁶ Senate Document, 438, Twenty-ninth Congress, first session, p. 74.

⁴⁷ Leroy R. Hafen and W. J. Ghent, *Broken Hand the Life Story of Thomas Fitzpatrick, Chief of the Mountain Men*, Denver, 1931, p. 177.

⁴⁸ *Cherokee Advocate*, February 26, 1846, p. 3, col. 1; *ibid.*, March 5, 1846, p. 3, col. 1; *ibid.*, April 9, 1846, p. 3, col. 1.

⁴⁹ *Memoirs of General William T. Sherman by Himself*, New York, 1875, vol. 1, pp. 9-12.

⁵⁰ *The Sun* (Baltimore, Md.) Thursday, November 12, 1846.

⁵¹ *Louisville* (Ky.) *Daily Democrat*, November 16, 1846, p. 3, col. 2.

Stevenson had not been superseded; he was ranked by Mason who would take command until the arrival of General Kearny.

The *New York Morning Express*, Saturday, November 14, 1846, quoted from the *Union* that Colonel Mason ranked Stevenson; that he deserved "all of the compliments which the *New York Courier* pays him, if we may judge from the character he has already attained, and from the impressions which every one who sees him, derives from the amiable as well as manly bearing of the man." Colonel Mason and Lieutenant Watson, of the Navy, sailed from New York on the tenth, in a fast sailing vessel for Chagres, intending to go from there to the Pacific. Colonel Mason was to have military command in California until the arrival of General Kearny and Watson carried dispatches to the commanding officer of the United States squadron in the Pacific.⁵²

Mason arrived in California aboard the store-ship *Erie* in March. Col. Philip St. George Cooke with his battalion of Mormons had reached California and all of the troops considered General Kearny as the rightful commander, although Fremont was still at Los Angeles, calling himself the governor, issuing orders and holding his California Volunteers in defiance of General Kearny. Colonel Mason and Major Turner went to Los Angeles by sea with a paymaster and muster rolls with orders to muster this battalion out of the service. General Fremont refused to consent and the controversy became so acute that a challenge was thought to have passed between Mason and Fremont, although a duel was not fought.⁵³

General Kearny left for the East the last of May and with him went Fremont; "with him departed all cause of confusion and disorder in the country . . . no one could dispute the authority of Mason as in command of all United States forces on shore."⁵⁴ On June 1, 1847, Mason succeeded Stephen Watts Kearny as colonel of the First Dragoons. An authority wrote that the dragoons, during fifteen years, had done more duty and marched farther than any other body of men; the first regiment had gone three times to the mountains, it had been almost to the head waters of the Mississippi and to the far Northwest along the Canadian border. "From Texas to the extreme point of the western frontier this regiment has marched, always sustaining every expectation formed of it . . ."⁵⁵

⁵² *New York Morning Express*, Thursday, November 19, 1846.

⁵³ Sherman, *op. cit.*, p. 25. According to one writer Mason reached San Francisco February 12, 1847 (*Z. S. Eldredge, The Beginnings of San Francisco*, San Francisco, 1912, vol. 2, pp. 688-691).

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 28; John T. Hughes, A. B., *Doniphan's Expedition*, Cincinnati, 1848, pp. 253-54; *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, vol. V, p. 256; Albert G. Brackett, *History of the United States Cavalry*, New York, 1865, p. 77.

⁵⁵ Fayette Robinson, *An Account of the Organization of the Army of the United States*, Philadelphia, 1848, vol. 2, p. 157.

No mention has been found that Colonel Mason was accompanied to California by his family and he lived in Monterey with Captain Lanman of the United States Navy in a house "not far from the Custom House." Mason chose as secretary of state for California, Lieutenant Henry W. Halleck of the Engineers; this was a fortunate selection, as he was of great assistance to the Governor in dealing with land titles. Having observed young Sherman's executive ability Mason appointed him his adjutant general,⁵⁶ and one writer states that Mason and Sherman held the fate of California in their hands.⁵⁷ They first established the governor's headquarters in the office of Consul Thomas O. Larkin that had been used by General Kearny, but they soon had a broad stairway built, rising from California Street, to the upper front porch of the barracks; a large door was cut through the adobe wall and the center room on the second floor became the office. Governor Mason's private office was in a side room.⁵⁸

An interesting visitor made his appearance in Monterey in October, 1847, when Kit Carson arrived there to deliver dispatches to Governor Mason. He had no sooner corralled his horse at a public-house in the town than he was visited by "a gaunt, red-headed first lieutenant of artillery, William Tecumseh Sherman, who introduced himself as adjutant-general to the commander-in-chief and governor, Colonel Mason." Sherman gave a vivid description of Carson as a "small, stoop-shouldered man, with reddish hair, freckled face, soft blue eyes, and nothing to indicate extraordinary courage or daring." Carson delivered his package into the hands of the Governor and Mason ordered that for the time being he should be assigned to duty with A. J. Smith's company of the First Dragoons of Los Angeles.⁵⁹

In the spring of 1848 Governor Mason and Sherman visited Santa Barbara in the sloop-of-war, *Dale*. Sherman and other officers supplied the commissary at Monterey with game from the abundance of deer, elk and wild fowl which they killed; Mason made a record of killing eleven geese by one discharge of small shot.⁶⁰

Two men arrived at Sherman's office one day early in 1848, bearing a letter to Governor Mason from John A. Sutter, asking to be allowed to preempt land on which gold had been discovered. Cap-

⁵⁶ Eldredge, *op. cit.*, Lloyd Lewis, *Sherman Fighting Prophet*, New York, 1932, p. 76.

⁵⁷ James P. Boyd, A. M., *The Life of General William T. Sherman* (place not given), 1891, p. 28.

⁵⁸ Laura B. Powers, *Old Monterey, California's Adobe Capitol*, San Francisco 1934, p. 199; H. Liddell Hart, *Sherman, Soldier-Realist-American*, New York, 1929, p. 22.

⁵⁹ Milo Milton Quaife (ed.) *Kit Carson's Autobiography*, Chicago, 1935, p. 122; Edwin L. Sabin, *Kit Carson Days 1809-1868, "Adventures in the Path of Empire,"* New York, 1935, vol. 2, p. 577; Sherman, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, pp. 46, 47; Blanche C. Grant, (ed.) *Kit Carson's Own Story of His Life, Taos, New Mexico, 1826, p. 87.*

⁶⁰ Sherman, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

tain Sutter's messengers also brought half an ounce of placer-gold from a deposit near a saw-mill he owned in the Sierra Nevada Mountains. Sherman, who had seen gold in Georgia in 1844, was excited about the find in California. Mason ordered Sherman to write Sutter that California was still under Mexican law and would remain so until the United States set up a civil government. The Governor was not interested in the discovery of gold until Sherman urged him to make an investigation.⁶¹

Governor Mason finally decided to send his adjutant general to visit Captain Sutter's discovery in order that he might report the truth to the government. Towards the end of June Sherman set out with four soldiers and Mason's Negro servant, Aaron, for Yerba Buena. They were supplied with a good outfit of horses and pack mules. At Yerba Buena the party was joined by Captain Folsom and two citizens of the town. Their first difficulty was to cross the bay at Sausalito. Quartermaster Folsom had a scow with a large sail in which they crossed, but because of shallow water it took almost a whole day to get the old craft up to the only wharf. Their way led to San Rafael Mission where they stopped with Don Timoteo Murphy. The next day they went to Bodega and on to Sanoma where they spent the day with General Vallejo. Their route beyond Sanoma was by way of Napa, Suisun and Vaca's ranch to the Puta.⁶²

Sherman's report finally convinced Mason, although he had been reluctant to believe the reports circulating as to the prodigious amount of gold being taken out of the mines; he and the other army officers were "disgusted with the crass commercialism and wealth hunger that were stampeding soldiers into desertion." When Governor Mason visited the mining district in July he found four thousand persons hunting for and collecting gold.⁶³

San Francisco and Monterey were almost deserted by gold seekers; Mason's soldiers left with the rest, and it is said that fifteen minutes after he had ordered a sentry on duty the man had disappeared and the soldiers sent to bring him back followed the deserter. Mason was obliged to cook his own meals and his salary was not sufficient to support him in the style in which he should have lived, as prices of all commodities had soared.⁶⁴

Mason, who had been made a brigadier general May 30 for meritorious conduct, spent the Fourth of July at Fort Sutter before making an inspection trip to the mines. Sherman wrote that the

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 46; Hart, *op cit.*, p. 24; Lewis, *op. cit.*, pp. 78, 79.

⁶² Sherman, *op. cit.*, pp. 47, 48.

⁶³ Lewis, *op. cit.*, p. 80; James D. Richardson, *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents 1789-1902*, 1903, President James K. Polk in his Fourth Annual Message to Congress, December 7, 1848, vol. IV, p. 363.

⁶⁴ James Peter Zollinger, *Sutter the Man and his Empire*, New York, London, Toronto, 1939, p. 248.

dinner to celebrate the national holiday would have done credit to any frontier town. Captain Sutter presided and Governor Mason sat at his right.⁶⁵

General Mason and his party visited the Mormon Diggings before returning to Monterey on July 17. Mason heard the story of the discovery of gold first hand from Marshall, who guided him to various diggings in the district where he got samples of coarse gold and some nuggets. The Governor recommended that a mint be established at some place on San Francisco Bay and he described a quick-silver mine he had visited in the spring at "Tepic twelve miles south of Pueblo de San Jose."

Mason's report, dated August 17, 1848, was sent east by Lieut. Lucien Loeser, Third Artillery, who sailed from Monterey August 30, 1848, aboard the schooner *Lambayecana*. Loeser, in addition to Governor Mason's letter, carried a tea-caddy containing two hundred and thirty ounces, fifteen pennyweight and nine grains of gold as a fair sample of the gold from Sacramento; he also took east specimens of gold sent by thirteen prospectors.⁶⁶

Rumors of the discovery of gold floated back to Indian Territory and Arkansas, but made little impression until Governor Mason's report was read. Mason was well known at Fort Gibson and Fort Smith and when news of his report reached that part of the country the citizens realized there was no doubt of the truth of previous accounts. Hundreds of emigrants rendezvoused at Fort Smith to make the perilous trip and many Indians joined the exodus; these people followed the route traveled by Mason's Dragoons in 1835, and the Indians camped around Camp Mason (or Fort Holmes) established by Major Mason and named for him.⁶⁷

When Governor Mason received official news in September, 1848, of the treaty with Mexico, he at once mustered out all of the volunteer soldiers, retaining in California only a company of artillery at Monterey and one of dragoons at Los Angeles.⁶⁸

A high tribute was paid to Mason's report by Joseph Warren Revere.⁶⁹ "I could have written nothing so complete and graphic as the account furnished by the accomplished temporary governor, Col. R. B. Mason. His admirable report has been copied all over the world—published in every newspaper, and reprinted in ten thousand catch-penny pamphlets. But it still remains the most ac-

⁶⁵ *Idem.*, p. 251.

⁶⁶ J. C. Fremont, *The Exploring Expedition to the Rocky Mountains, Oregon and California* . . . Buffalo, 1851, pp. 427, 433, 449, 454; Eldredge, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, pp. 688-91.

⁶⁷ Grant Foreman, *Marcy and the Gold Seekers*, Norman, 1939, pp. xi, 9, 59, 60, note 29.

⁶⁸ Boyd, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

⁶⁹ *A Tour of Duty in California*, New York, 1849, p. 228.

curate and authentic history of the discovery of the gold deposits and of the early operations of the gold collectors . . . the standard authority—the celebrated report of Col. Mason."⁷⁰

At his request Governor Mason was relieved by Lieutenant Colonel Bennet Riley, Second Dragoons, on April 13, 1849; he sailed on the first of May for Washington and St. Louis where he was given command of Jefferson Barracks.⁷¹

Bancroft wrote that Mason "performed most satisfactorily the duties of a difficult position, and though by his strict discipline and apparent harshness of manner he made an unfavorable impression in some quarters and inspired bitter enmities, yet his record is that of an honest, faithful, and able soldier."⁷²

Sherman, who from his close association with Mason probably knew him better than his other army comrades, describes him as "an officer of great experience, of stern character, deemed by some harsh and severe, but in all my intercourse with him he was kind and agreeable. He had a large fund of good sense, and during our long period of service together, I enjoyed his unlimited confidence."⁷³ He also wrote: "I parted with my old commander, Colonel Mason, with sincere regret. To me he had ever been kind and considerate, and while stern, honest to a fault, he was the very embodiment of the principle of fidelity to the interests of the General Government. He possessed a strong native intellect, and far more knowledge of the principles of civil government and law than he got credit for . . ."⁷⁴

Rodney Glisan wrote at Jefferson Barracks, July 23, 1850, of having paid his respects, as required by the army regulations, to the commanding officer, Gen. Richard B. Mason; on August 17 he noted: "On arriving here, we found this pestilence [Asiatic cholera] in full force, and have just heard the sad news of the death, at Jefferson Barracks, of Brevet Brig.-General Richard B. Mason, Colonel of the First Dragoons, and commandant of the post, from cholera. He died on the twenty-fifth ultimo. Only three weeks ago I saw him surrounded by a doting and happy family, all unconscious that the angel of death was hovering near."⁷⁵

The St. Louis Intelligencer,⁷⁶ in its account of the death of General Mason, stated that he discharged the duties of governor of California in a most satisfactory manner. "He enjoyed a high

⁷⁰ Mason's report is noted in *The Emigrants' Guide to Oregon and California* by Lansford W. Hastings, Princeton, 1932, as appearing in *A New Description of Oregon and California . . .* by L. W. Hastings, a Resident of California . . . Cincinnati, 1856.

⁷¹ Hubert Howe Bancroft, *History of California*, vol. 4, p. 734; Eldredge, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, pp. 688-91; Sherman, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 65.

⁷² *Idem.*, vol. 1, p. 29.

⁷³ *Idem.*, p. 64.

⁷⁴ *Journal of Army Life*, San Francisco, 1874, pp. 15, 17, 22, 23.

⁷⁵ Saturday, July 27, 1850, p. 3, cols. 1, 4.

reputation in the army, as a brave, generous and intelligent officer, and as a just and honorable gentleman." Occasional cases of cholera had occurred at Jefferson Barracks among troops that had recently arrived there and it is probable that in this manner the distinguished officer fell a victim to the scourge. General Mason's funeral was held at Jefferson Barracks, at eleven o'clock in the morning, Saturday, July 27, 1850, and his body was laid to rest in Belle Fontaine Cemetery.

General Mason's widow, Margaret (Turner) Mason, was married on November 19, 1851, to General Don Carlos Buell; she died in Airdrie, the home of General Buell in Muhlenburg County, Kentucky, August 10, 1881. On the death of General Buell, November 19, 1898, his estate went to Miss Nannie Mason, the daughter of his wife. Miss Mason afterwards made her home in Louisville, where she died November 19, 1912.⁷⁶ Other authorities state that General Mason was survived by his widow Margaret (Hunter) Mason of Mobile, Alabama, and two daughters.⁷⁷

An honor was paid to General Mason in General Orders No. 133, November 25, 1882, which read in part: "By direction of the President the military post at Black Point, San Francisco Harbor, California, now known as 'Fort Point San Jose,' shall hereafter be known and designated as 'Fort Mason,' in honor of the late Brevet Brigadier General *Richard B. Mason*, colonel 1st U. S. Dragoons, military governor of California."⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Otto A. Rothert, *History of Muhlenburg County*, Louisville, 1913, p. 236; Mrs. Jouett Taylor Cannon, Secretary-Treasurer, Kentucky State Historical Society, Frankfort, September 13, 1940.

⁷⁷ *Dictionary of American Biography*, vol 3, p. 241 (*Courier-Journal*, Louisville, September 4, and November 20, 1898); *The Filson Club Historical Quarterly*, "The Battle of Perryville, 1862," by Hambleton Tapp, vol. 9, no. 3, p. 161, note 12.

⁷⁸ The National Archives, P. M. Hamer, Division of Reference, September 10, 1940. Sincere thanks are due to Miss Mabel R. Gillis, State Librarian, California State Library, Sacramento, for much valuable material concerning Governor Mason; the following interesting bibliography was also furnished by her: Newspaper References:

The Californian, San Francisco, June 19, 1847, p. 2, col. 2, Notice signed by Mason, of his appointment as Military Governor of California. Printed in English and Spanish.

The Californian, August 14, 1848, p. 2, col. 3, Book of Laws of California, printed in English and Spanish, announcement of.

California Star, San Francisco, November 25, 1848, p. 2, col. 1, Interview between Governor Mason and Commander Jones.

San Francisco Alta California, January 11, 1849, p. 2, col. 3, Letter from Thomas H. Benton to the people of California (mentions Col. R. B. Mason).

San Francisco Alta California, May 3, 1849, p. 1, col. 3, Letter from Mason answering letter of Benton.

Sacramento Union, January 24, 1887, p. 2, col. 4, Threatened duel between Mason and Fremont (review article).