

# Timeline

## Guardians of the Pass: The Story of the U.S. Army in El Paso

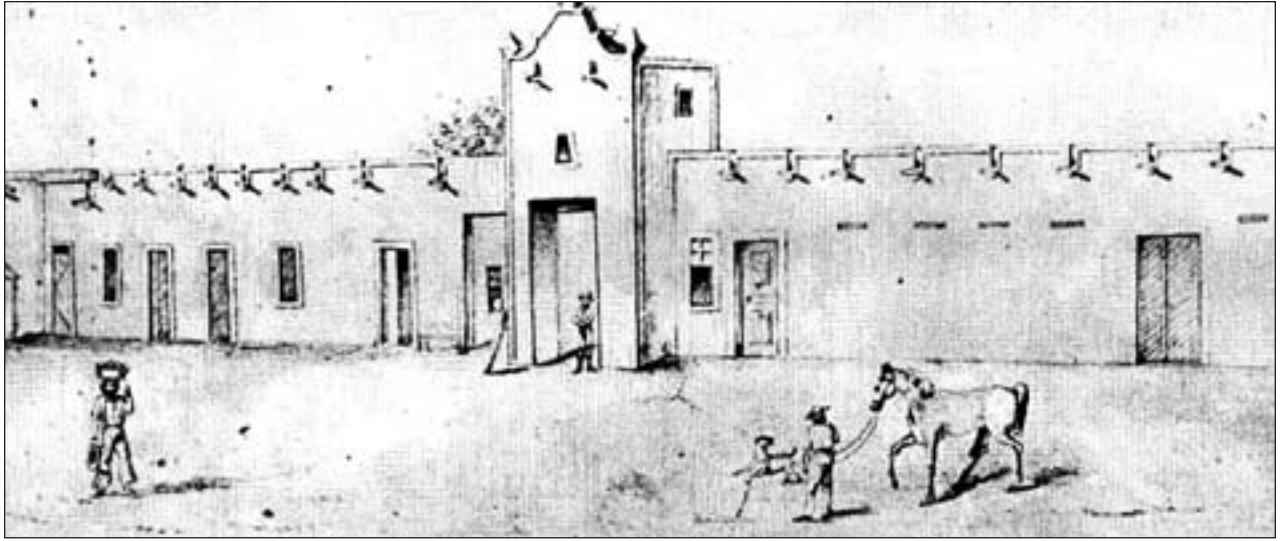
COMPILED BY RETIRED MAJ. KEVIN HARRIS

### Chapter 2 - The First Post

At the conclusion of the Mexican American War with the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo the United States assumed responsibility for the security of its newest possession - the American Southwest; comprising the present states of Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and California. To this end, General Order No. 58 was issued by the War Department Nov. 7, 1848, declaring "...the six companies of the [3rd] Regiment now in Texas, will, as soon as the necessary reconnaissance can be made in the direction of El Paso, be put enroute for that post."

Successful reconnaissance efforts encouraged by Gen. William J. Worth, commander of the Eighth Military District in San Antonio, and led by Texas Ranger veterans Robert S. Neighbors and John S. "Rip" Ford in the north and by Lts. W.F. Smith and W.H.C. Whiting of the Corps of Topographical Engineers in the south, opened the Upper and Lower Roads, respectively, across West Texas. The Lower Road ran along a trail previously marked by John Coffee Hays through the Big Bend country to Presidio, then followed the Rio Grande to the Pass of the North. It was along this route the Regimental Headquarters and six companies traveled, pursuant to Orders No. 8, issued by the Headquarters of the 8th and 9th Departments in San Antonio Feb. 3, 1849, to establish an outpost in the vicinity of El Paso del Norte.

June 1, 1849, saw Maj. Jefferson Van Horne marching Companies A, B, C, E, I, and K, the Regimental Staff, a howitzer battery, a party of surveyors and road builders, a mixed herd of 2500 head



**Fort Bliss at Magoffinsville. 1853-1868. The first post in El Paso to be named Fort Bliss. The land and buildings were leased from Kentuckian James Magoffin, early Santa Fe trader, diplomat and businessman.**

of livestock, and an undetermined number of emigrants, across 673 miles of dry and rugged terrain before reaching the Rio Grande five miles below El Paso del Norte Sept. 8, after one hundred days of travel. Scouting the area for a week, Van Horne selected a site and marched into what is now downtown El Paso Sept. 14, 1849, establishing the first United States Army garrison at the Pass on land and buildings rented from Benjamin Franklin Coons. It became known as the Post Opposite El Paso, referring to El Paso del Norte across the river in Mexico. Brevet Maj. William S. Henry and Companies I and K and the howitzer battery occupied the presidio at San Elizario, twenty miles to the southeast, the next day.

The first post returns indicate the area was considered part of the Department of New Mexico and it was not until the next year that Congress established the 32nd Parallel of Latitude as the boundary between Texas and New Mexico, thereby placing the Post Opposite El Paso in Texas. The garrison consisted of the Regimental Staff (1 officer and 13 troops), Company A (1 officer and 42 troops commanded by Brevet Lt. Col. Louis S. Craig), Company B (3 officers and 34 troops commanded by Brevet Maj. Oliver L. Sheperd), Company C (2 officers and 43 troops commanded by Capt. William E. Johns), and Company E (2 officers and 39 sol-

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