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# THE ROLE AND INFLUENCE OF THE UNITED STATES MILITARY IN DISCOVERY AND DEVELOPMENT IN CONTINENTAL FULFILLMENT

*Bob Gose\**

Our symposium involves an important and rich area in the history of trans-Mississippi development for the United States. Many of us have personal impressions of this history as it unfolded, including impressions relative to the roles of the United States military. These impressions come from family stories, studies of history, and from many other sources. It is likely that some of these impressions are incomplete and unbalanced relative to the actual roles and influences of the military as an instrument of national will, policies, and initiatives.

Many of us have a stronger impression of the escort and fighting roles of the U.S. Army Cavalry than of other military activities and contributions on this frontier. I will spend more time here on the roles of the military in developing knowledge and infrastructure in the American West. I believe that law and order and justice in the frontier, then just as now, were served by effective knowledge and infrastructures, namely those such as communications, transportation, jurisdiction and boundaries, installations, private industry, education, and other civil institutions. As infrastructures were evolving for this early frontier, the military functioned somewhat as a forerunner in providing an umbrella and a safety net as other capabilities and processes were established to serve law and order and justice.

A great wealth of well-documented and detailed historical information exists about our subject in many excellent and accessible publications. The McCracken Library and other materials in the Buffalo Bill Historical Center in Cody, Wyoming, are awesome resources. Two of William H. Goetzmann's books, *Exploration and Empire—The Ex-*

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\* Bob Gose's industrial career included a position as director of Minute Man System development for TRW. He also provided support to the Apollo program and the petroleum and electric utility industries. He was a military combat pilot in WWII and the Korean War, and has a lifetime interest in the early development of our country and its leaders. He currently serves on the Board of Directors of the University of Wyoming Foundation and on the Engineering College's National Advisory Board.

*plorer and the Scientist in the Winning of the American West*<sup>1</sup> and *Army Exploration in The American West*,<sup>2</sup> have been special resources in my preparation for this symposium.

I believe that it is most appropriate in this symposium for me to present an overview of the subject, punctuated with some very important specifics in several key areas, and to not become bogged down by allowing too many details to obscure a coherent picture overall. I will address some specifics here more for prominence than for completeness and precision in order to identify and to characterize several underlying principles that have had direct influences on the course of history.

The statement of objectives for this conference includes a vision for the future, taking into account the rich culture and history of western America's past. In addressing our topic, "The Military in the West," with this objective in mind, it seems appropriate to address both the role and the overall influences of the military in the West, and to bridge from there to the present and on forward toward a vision for the future for America and the United States—utilizing all that we can learn from our past.

Throughout the *presence* and in the important influences of the military in development of the West, the military was and is and has been perceived as an instrument of the federal government. In all of its roles, the military is to serve important national initiatives in discovery, political, economic, social, as well as overall security and expansion objectives. It is therefore important, if this history is to serve us in projecting a vision for our ongoing future, that we have some understanding of the intended thrusts of our national leaders as they used the military as a national resource in pursuing objectives. It is also very important to me to have some sense of the temperament and commitment of United States citizens as initiatives have played out in the development of our western frontier. It is clear in reflecting on history that development of the West was actually carried out with significant regard for, and in many cases involvement of, considerations well beyond the geographic, political, social, and economic boundaries of what has become the continental United States. Our forefathers kept an eye on the global implications of their actions. In retrospect, it may be that treatment of some issues *within* the boundaries was somewhat flawed.

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1. WILLIAM H. GOETZMANN, *EXPLORATION & EMPIRE* (1966).

2. WILLIAM H. GOETZMANN, *ARMY EXPLORATION IN THE AMERICAN WEST, 1803-1863* (Texas State Historical Association 1991) (1959).

I have always had a great respect and appreciation for the profoundness and intellectual capacities, commitments to public service, statesmanship, and the will and wisdom of the founding fathers in our early United States history. Preparing for this symposium with a keen awareness of our country's current needs brings me to an even greater recognition of the unshakable foundations laid for us by individuals such as George Washington, John Quincy Adams, Thomas Jefferson, and others. Their drive and capacities for seeking out the understandings required to lead in establishing critical public policies for our country, and their unstoppable leadership in an unexplored and undefined new world, are truly remarkable. They had to take into account a great deal of history as they understood and experienced it leading to and through the Revolution. This required very special abilities for projecting a vision for the new country in the face of great uncertainty and hardship. There are great lessons unfolding in the following history for each of us as we reach for our own visions for our country.

#### I. THE GEOGRAPHIC SETTING—TRANS-MISSISSIPPI REGION

Map 1 shows the geographic configuration of the initial thirteen states in 1800, immediately after the American Revolution.

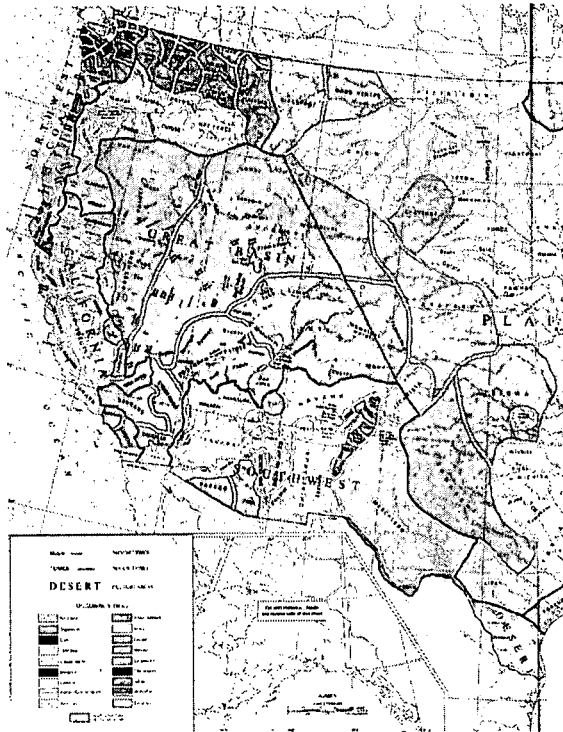


District of Columbia established  
as Federal territory

1800

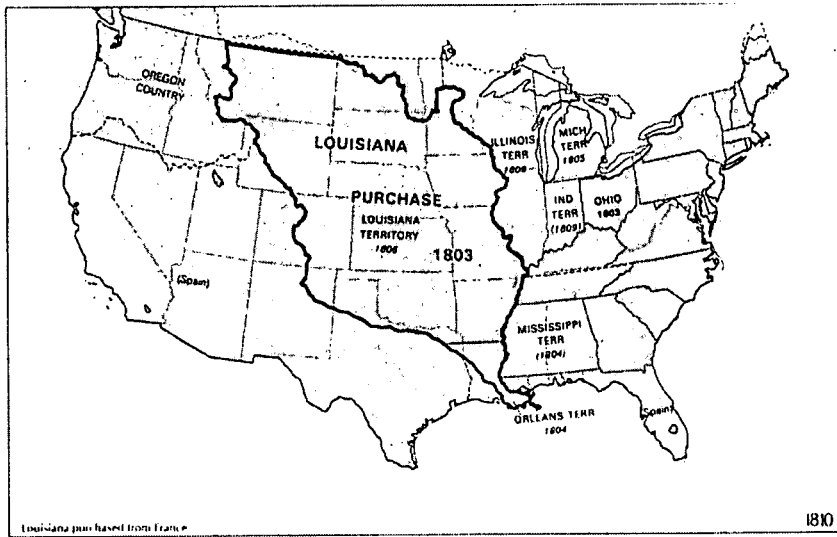
Map 1. Courtesy of The General Libraries, The University of Texas at Austin.

The trans-Mississippi region of the North American continent at that time was understood to be about as shown by Map 2. Although explorers, trappers, and missionaries had been into this region, and some penetrations had taken place from the east, from the southwest, from the west, and from the northwest, little knowledge was shared or recorded. This was the “frontier” to be addressed. It contained many Indian tribes, each with characteristic values, living patterns, ambitions, and attitudes relative to their neighbors and intruders.



Map. 2. Courtesy of The General Libraries, The University of Texas at Austin.

In 1803 the United States completed the fifteen million dollar Louisiana Purchase from France. Map 3 presents the geography of this purchase and the political configuration of continental North America at that date. At the time of the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, and later, the British were in the northwest, and Spain and then Mexico were in the southwest in what has become California, our southwestern states, and Texas.



Map 3. Courtesy of The General Libraries, The University of Texas at Austin.

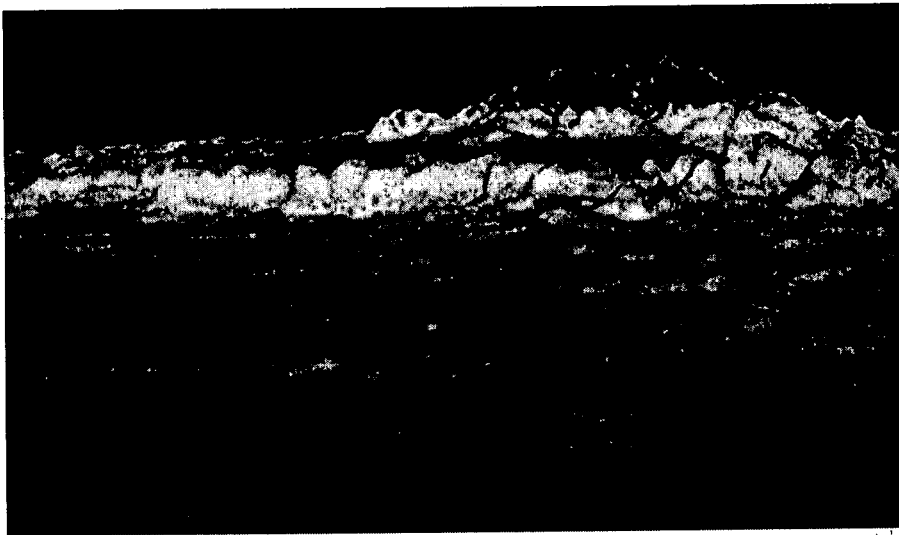
Map 4 is an overlay of this picture as a backdrop with current states and dates of statehood. In this time frame the Spanish holdings of what is now California, our southwestern states, and Texas became Mexican holdings.



Map 4. Courtesy of The General Libraries, The University of Texas at Austin.

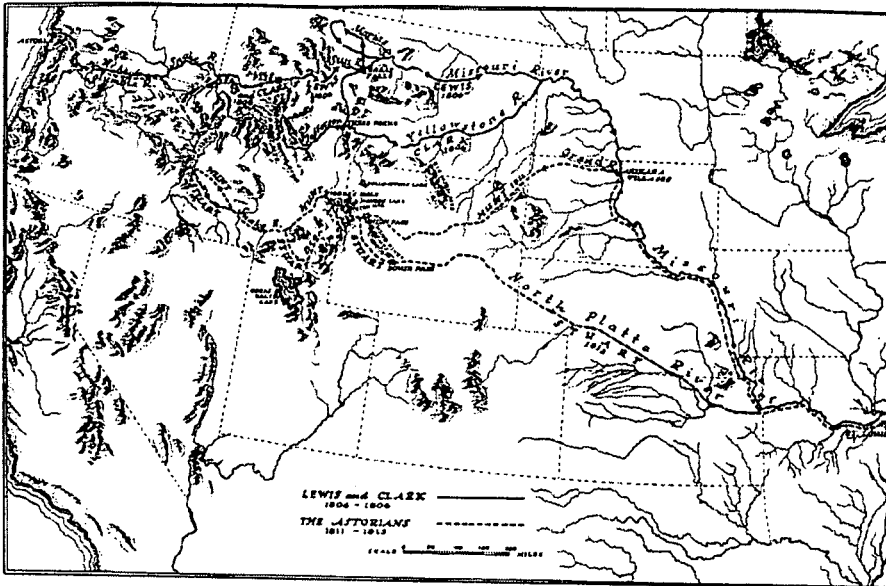
On July 15, 1803, President Jefferson articulated seventeen questions regarding the Louisiana Purchase territory. These questions were forwarded to government agencies requiring actions to develop the information and knowledge necessary for characterizing this new U.S. Territory and to serve in its exploration and development. The military expedition of 1804-06 led by Army Captains Lewis and Clark was mounted to survey and to secure boundaries, as well as to gain information answering President Jefferson's questions. The expedition was also required to support development of this territory and ongoing United States objectives related to this frontier.

Map 5 projects something of what the country ahead looked like to someone on the ground and moving west. We can appreciate the characteristics of the people daring to address this frontier.



## II. EXPEDITIONS

Map 6 shows the routes taken by Lewis and Clark in their 1804-06 expedition. As you can see from this map, the Lewis and Clark routes went well beyond the Louisiana Purchase boundaries. They went all the way to Astoria in the northwest before returning. You can also see from this same map that the 1811 through 1813 expedition of the Astorians, leaving from the mouth of the Columbia river at the Pacific Ocean and looping to St. Louis and returning to Astoria, took in a lot of this same frontier region.



MAP 1

Map 6. Reprinted from William H. Goetzmann, *Army Exploration in the American West, 1803-1863* (Texas State Historical Society 1991). Copyright Texas State Historical Association.

The Lewis and Clark military expedition included surveys of the trans-Mississippi frontier. These military contingents were made up so as to be self sufficient for their missions. They included combat military elements as well as military scientific personnel and other resources. They could protect themselves and those they were responsible for and maintain security in skirmishes with the Indians and others as the expedition and surveys were carried out. Thus began serious authoritative contributions to the country's knowledge and technology for the frontier West. It is clear that national leaders had at that time an agenda well beyond the boundaries of the United States—even the boundaries of the new Louisiana Purchase.

To reset time-wise for the genesis of the Army's multiple capabilities and particularly its roles in surveying, geography, geology, and in scientific discovery, we can go back to July 25, 1777, when General George Washington appointed Robert Erskin as the first Geographer and Surveyor for the Continental Army. Erskin soon died and was succeeded by Simeon DeWitt. Thomas Hutchins was then appointed as Geographer of the United States in the American Army. From that point in time until the Lewis and Clark expedition into the trans-Mississippi frontier, capabilities in this field were directed primarily to needs in the thirteen states. Primary missions in the thirteen states were survey and infrastructure definition and construction. These engineering capabili-



ties were made a part of the Lewis and Clark expedition. Introduction of these capabilities and their objectives through the Lewis and Clark expedition and the results of these expeditions moved toward a focus of national enthusiasm related to expansive development of the western frontier—an urge to “continental fulfillment.” President Jefferson is given credit for moving expression of the national spirit toward an open statement of the “manifest destiny” of the United States.

It is recorded that on Christmas day 1824 President Jefferson sat for several hours at Monticello with a gentle Virginia mountain snow storm outside and compared political views, plans, and strategies for the west with frontier U.S. Senator Thomas Hart Benton of Missouri. Senator Benton later described this meeting with President Jefferson as a “laying on of hands, a mission and a commission.”

The current *Webster's Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language* defines manifest destiny as: “The belief or doctrine, held chiefly in the middle and latter Part of the 18th century, that it is the destiny of the U.S. to expand its territory over the whole of North America and to extend and enhance its political, social, and economic Influences.”

### III. THE U.S. ARMY TOPOGRAPHICAL CORPS AND EXPEDITIONS OF LT. JOHN C. FREMONT

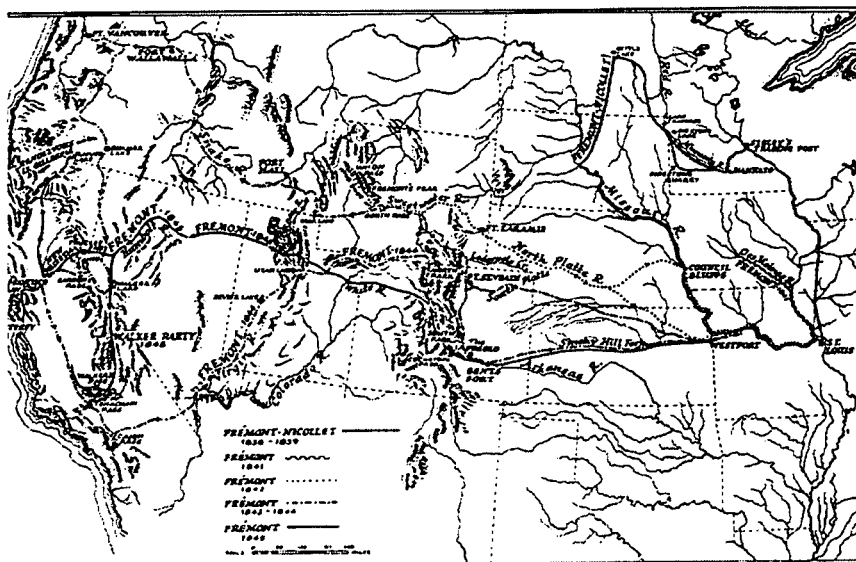
John Quincy Adams is given credit as the outstanding advocate in this early time frame for explicit initiatives for acquiring knowledge in all aspects and dimensions of our country and for this frontier as an overriding requirement for effective development.

The following three definitions, also from *Webster's Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language*, serve us at this point:

- *Knowledge*: “1. Acquaintance with facts, truths, or principles, as from study or investigation; general erudition: 2. Acquaintance or familiarity gained by sight, experience, or report.”
- *Technology*: “4. The sum of the ways in which a social group provide themselves with the material objects of their civilization.”
- *Infrastructure*: “1. The basic or underlying framework or features of a system, as the military installations, communication and transport facilities of a country.”

The U.S. Army Corps of Topographical Engineers was established on July 5, 1828. Although working integrally with other Army elements in the explorations and surveys to follow, its missions and reporting responsibilities set it apart as a national institution. A major responsibility was scientific discovery and understanding of the nature and resources of the frontier country. It was set up as a separate office of the U.S. War Department in 1831. Throughout its separate life span, 1838 to 1868, the Corps was staffed by seventy-two officers. Sixty-four of those officers were trained at West Point in engineering. West Point, until Rensselaer was established, was the only United States source of formal civil engineering training up until about the Civil War.

With U.S. government support from Senator Benton and higher, Lt. John C. Fremont led the 1842 expedition and subsequent expeditions along the routes shown in Map 7, utilizing the Army Topographical Engineering Corps resources. These expeditions have been characterized as outstanding examples of using exploratory expeditions by the military as diplomatic weapons. Clearly, the country's top national leaders were fully behind these expeditions, although details of some of these activities were kept close for political reasons.

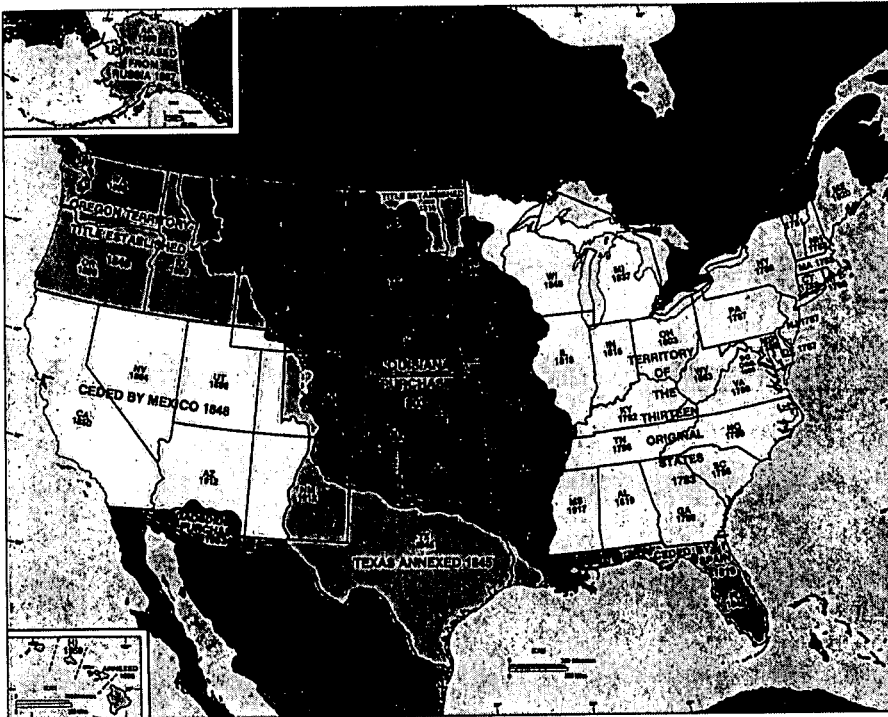


MAP 4

Map 7. Reprinted from WILLIAM H. GOETZMANN, *ARMY EXPLORATION IN THE AMERICAN WEST, 1803-1863* (Texas State Historical Society 1991). Copyright Texas State Historical Association.

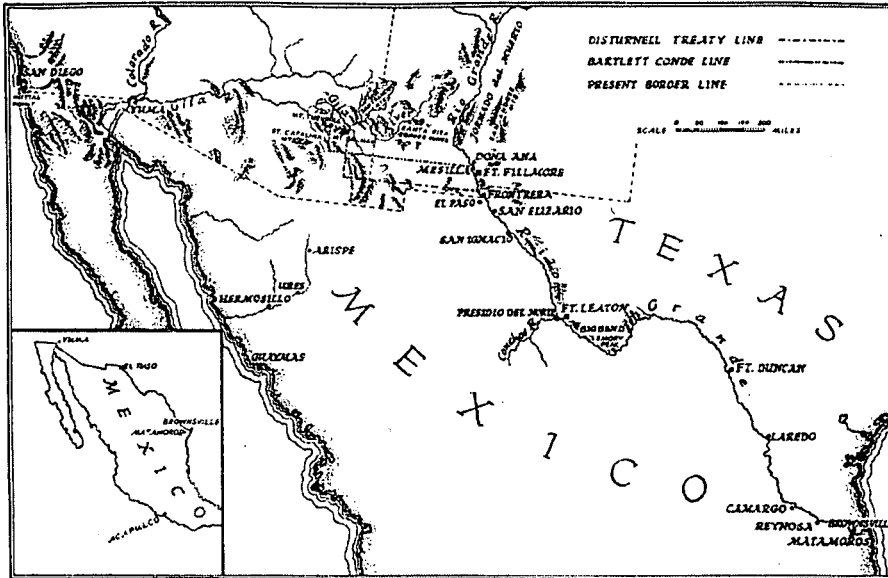
The Army Topographical Engineering Corps under the leadership of Fremont, and supported by his political mentor and father-in-law, frontier U.S. Senator Thomas Hart Benton of Missouri, became a focus of national enthusiasm for “manifest destiny” initiatives. Fremont’s vice presidential running mate as he later ran for President of the United States was Abraham Lincoln. Their campaign was unsuccessful.

Map 8 is the same as the fourth map shown previously. I am using it here to point out the addition of Texas to the United States by annexation in 1845 and the addition of California and what has become our southwestern states as ceded by Mexico in 1848. These additions were the result of military actions against Mexico. Title to the Oregon Territory was established in 1846 through diplomatic efforts with the British.



Map 8. Courtesy of The General Libraries, The University of Texas at Austin.

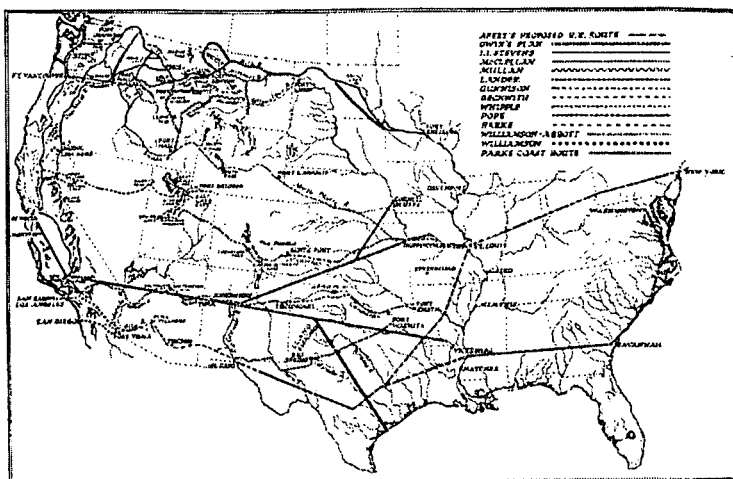
Map 9 relates to complex efforts involving the military in surveying for final settlement of the boundary between Texas and Mexico.



MAP 6

Map 9. Reprinted from WILLIAM H. GOETZMANN, *ARMY EXPLORATION IN THE AMERICAN WEST, 1803-1863* (Texas State Historical Society 1991). Copyright Texas State Historical Association.

Map 10 shows some of the important expeditions and surveys seeking to find appropriate routes for railroads and for trans-continental U.S. railroads. Some of these were conducted by the military. The military then provided security for the detailed design, surveys, and construction of railroads by private enterprise.



MAP 10

MAP 10. Reprinted from WILLIAM H. GOETZMANN, *ARMY EXPLORATION IN THE AMERICAN WEST, 1803-1863* (Texas State Historical Society 1991). Copyright Texas State Historical Association.

#### IV. THE ARMY AND YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK—STEWARDSHIP

The military role in Yellowstone National Park deserves special commentary here. The initiatives for creating Yellowstone as the first national park go back to John Colter's time in this area around 1807, and subsequent military and U.S. Geological Survey expeditions up to 1871 to locate and understand the natural wonders existing in what has become Yellowstone National Park. Yellowstone was designated the first national park in 1872. The Army Corps of Engineers did some roadwork in the Park in the 1880s. However, it was not until August 1886 that the U.S. Army assumed responsibility for operation of Yellowstone Park. Very significant mistreatment and damage had taken place in the essentially uncontrolled Park before the Army took over. The Army built and operated the Park from Fort Yellowstone at Mammoth Falls until a U.S. Park Service was created to assume responsibility for the Park in 1916. This represents a very significant stewardship performance by the U.S. Army. There are many other military stewardship roles. Some of these have evolved to the U.S. Army Engineers and the Bureau of Reclamation.

If you allow me, I will project on through the Civil War, the Indian Wars, World War I, and World War II because I believe that you are more familiar with the combat and fighting roles of the U.S. military and with the specific impacts of those great disruptions on our country and the roles of the military. Each represented serious disruptions; however, they did not deflect eventual fulfillment of the intended destiny for the American West. The groundwork and foundations put in place in the frontier period have prevailed. They do leave us with some issues yet to be reconciled.

#### V. SUMMARY OF U.S. MILITARY ROLES AND INFLUENCES

The major roles and influences of the military in development of the west may be categorized, albeit somewhat oversimplified, as follows:

1. Conducting expeditions and surveys.
2. Providing security through military presence and actions for:
  - Military expeditions and surveys
  - U.S. citizens moving in the regions
  - U.S. established boundaries
  - Disturbances and disasters

- Conduct of private and civil activities—including law and order.
3. Supporting U.S. ambitions for expanding territorial claims and defining new boundaries
  4. Developing infrastructure for:
    - Routes, trails, and roads for travel and communications
    - Railroad routes and construction of railroads
    - Development of resources—including water ways and water resources as later by the Army Corps of Engineers
    - Stewardship of resources

A presence and stabilizing influence by the U.S. military has assured in many instances that law and order could be prosecuted and maintained by the appropriate civil institutions.

Somewhere in the above are the roots and the foundation for what has happened overall with the presence and involvement of the military in the development of our American West. Some important aspects can be characterized as:

1. United States leaders and citizens defining and buying into a “manifest destiny.”
2. Seeking and assimilating the knowledge and technology required to perform.
3. Laying the foundations and implementing critical elements of infrastructures.
4. Supporting citizenry development by assuring stable and secure environments.

The U.S. military has had a pervasive and relentless role throughout the development of the American West.

## VI. PROJECTING A VISION FOR THE FUTURE

An understanding of the fundamental dynamics and influences of top United States leadership throughout this history of our western frontier in “continental fulfillment” and pursuit of “manifest destiny,” with

the military functioning as an instrument of national policy, can certainly help each of us as we work to focus on a vision for the future of our country by taking our rich cultural and historical background into account. The following thoughts are on my mind:

1. The understandings and wisdom of our early leaders in developing national policies and in implementing major initiatives was profound. The results have stood the test of time and tribulations. They have served our country well in moving forward in remarkable ways.
2. Their approaches put a very high value on intellectual capabilities and upon gaining command of all possible relevant information for illuminating the issues involved, operating with outstanding leadership from authoritative platforms. This allowed those considerations leading to critical policies and actions to take the complete picture into account with better understanding of critical cause and effect relationships. This is a current shortfall in the processes currently used in deriving many of our national initiatives (or lack thereof) for education, energy, environment, taxation, transportation, and socio-economic considerations.
3. Our own first building block now for increased results begins with high quality education for all possible of our young people. Several characteristics of the education/capabilities of graduates are very important.
4. Our second building block relates to processes for developing and applying *more effective knowledge and technologies* in addressing our critical needs—in systematic and cross-disciplinary formats.
5. Encourage and support individuals with outstanding leadership, communication, technological, and resilient capabilities to participate in public service.
6. Develop and apply metrics to support accountability for successful initiatives.