"Wherever we have been we have not been expected . . ."

The Pascagoula Expedition or "Davidson's Raid"

"Under information received from General [William Tecumseh] Sherman, and in anticipation of his coming out at some point on the Gulf," Major General E.R.S. Canby wrote Major General Henry Halleck on November 25th, 1864, "I have collected large supplies in the Gulf, and have transportation ready to move at any time to any point; rations for thirty days; clothing and ammunition for 60,000 men, and forage for the same period for 15,000 animals ... Cooperative movements for the cutting of the Mobile and Ohio Railroad will be made from Vicksburg and Baton Rouge, the former today, the latter day after to-morrow." Canby's plan for the Baton Rouge-based expedition called for a cavalry strike on the *Mobile and Ohio Railroad* at a point some 20 miles from Leakesville, Mississippi, 10 miles inside the Alabama border. A break in the railroad here, Canby hoped, would weaken the Confederate defenses at Mobile, Alabama, and divert Confederate reinforcements away from the gulf. ¹

Canby assigned command of the Baton Rouge-based movement to Fairfax County, Virginia, native and West Point graduate Brigadier General John W. Davidson. Davidson was an experienced warrior who had seen action in the Mexican War at the battle of San Pasqual and San Gabriel and been wounded fighting Jicarilla Apache Indians in New Mexico. Commensurate with the 40-year-old general's propensity for fighting was his almost ubiquitous use of profanity. Many years after the war the 11th New York Cavalry's Lieutenant Henry Calvert recalled the regiment's introduction to Davidson's Fescinine vocabulary. On one particular morning during the upcoming Pascagoula Raid, Davidson, with his staff in tow, rode up abreast of Calvert and asked, "What regiment is this?" When the lieutenant replied, "The 11th



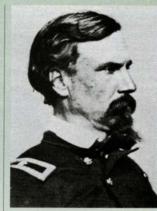
New York, sir," Davidson responded with a vigorous, "Damn me, but you look fine!" Turning to one of his staff," Calvert recollected, "he further complimented us by remarking, 'I'm damned if they don't look fine!' Thus his usual mode of expression was interlarded with expletives. It is not to be supposed that this detracted from his merits as a brave and useful defender of the Union it was only a way he had." 2

On Monday November 21st, elements of the Department of the Gulf's third cavalry brigade began leaving Morganza to join the main body of Davidson's force, the first and second brigades, at Baton Rouge. Those troopers already stationed in the capital city spent most of the week getting ready for the impending expedition. On Friday evening General Davidson ordered Baton Rouge to be encircled by a cordon of pickets in order to prevent anyone from leaving or entering the city. By noon the next day "nearly everything [was] packed and ready for a move." At 7 AM on Sunday, November 27th, nine regiments of cavalry, one regiment of mounted infantry, two batteries of artillery, a pioneer corps, and pontoon train moved out from Baton Rouge on the Clinton plank road.3

Davidson's force numbered close to 4,000 troopers and included "most of

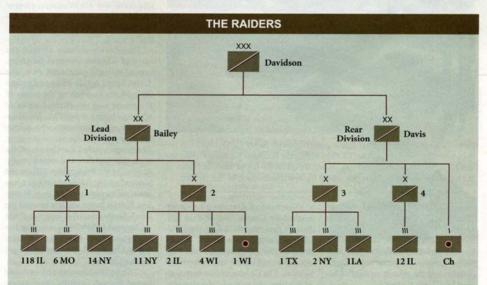
the available cavalry" in the Department of the Gulf. The Federal horse soldiers were divided into two divisions. The first or lead division included the first brigade's 118th Illinois Mounted Infantry, 6th Missouri Cavalry, and 14th New York Cavalry, the second brigade's, 11th New York Cavalry, 2nd Illinois Cavalry, and 4th Wisconsin Cavalry and the 1st Battery, Wisconsin Light Artillery all under the command of the 4th Wisconsin Cavalry's previous colonel, 39-yearold Brigadier General Joseph Bailey. An Ohio native who had studied civil engineering in Illinois prior to the war, Bailey had recently gained great notoriety during the Red River campaign when, as Banks' chief engineer, he saved Admiral David Porter's stranded fleet by raising the level of the Red River through a series of dams. 4

The second or rear division was under the leadership of the 1st Texas Cavalry's "tall, gaunt, cold-eyed and rather commanding" 37-year-old Brigadier General Edmund J. Davis. A Floridian by birth, Davis had moved with his widowed mother to Galveston, Texas in January 1848. Davis studied law and in 1856 was named a judge in the Twelfth Judicial District at Brownsville by Texas Governor Elisha Pease. When he refused to take the oath of loyalty to the Confederacy in 1861, the state vacated



Brigadier Genral (later brevet major general) John Wynn Davidson (1824-1881) was a Virginian who remained loyal to the United States. He is said to have refused a commission in the Confederate army at the start of the war. He was injured when his horse fell on him in Montana in 1879 and died two years later while on sick leave.

his judgeship. Davis fled Texas in May 1862 and crossed into Mexico where he recruited the 1st Texas Cavalry from "large numbers of disaffected Texas Unionists." Davis' command consisted





Brigadier General (later brevet major general) Joseph Bailey (1825-1867) was the man whose ingenuity saved the U.S. fleet during the Red River Campaign. After the war he settled in Missouri and was elected sheriff in the fall of 1866. In March of the following year he was shot by a pair of bushwhackers whom he had arrested.

of his own third brigade (minus the 87th Illinois Mounted Infantry), which included the 1st Texas Cavalry, 2nd New York Veteran Cavalry, 1st Louisiana Cavalry, and the fourth brigade's 12th Illinois Cavalry. Also attached to Davis' division was the reserve artillery's Chicago Mercantile Battery. 5

The head of Davidson's column reached the Comite River at 10:15 AM. Bailey's first brigade, led by the 118th Illinois' Colonel John Fonda, crossed the river first, then halted a half-mile out and waited for the rest of the troops to cross. The Comite was running high at the time and many of the troopers' smaller horses were "obliged to swim the river." Davidson kept his horsemen moving up the Clinton road until a suitable campground was reached at 2 PM. The soldiers bivouacked here by brigades. Colonel Fonda assigned his troopers' security to the 4th Wisconsin Cavalry's Company M. A weary Sergeant John Bacon moved out to his post and watched the troops "coming in all the time." Bacon was relieved a few hours later after which he, Company M's Captain Michael Misner, and Sergeant Ozro Fobes erected a tent of ponchos and made a bed of cornhusks. The weather was very moderate and the three slept "comfortably," though not for very long. "Reveille," Bacon wrote, "sounded long before daylight and we ate our breakfast by starlight." 6

Fonda's troopers were drawn up in line just before midnight on the 27th. General Bailey and his staff rode by and were greeted with "tremendous cheering" from the Badgers. Davidson's column moved out "long before daylight" on the 28th. After halting for a rest at 2 PM, the men rode on another three and a half hours before finally going into camp near the forks of the Clinton and Jackson roads, 8 miles from Clinton. The men found what shelter they could then turned their attention to their horses. "We had some trouble getting corn," one 4th Wisconsin trooper recalled, "but after going all over the country we found enough for morning."7

Davidson's column skirted the town of Clinton the next morning, turned east and continued on to the Amite River. A ride of some 12 miles brought the Federals to the banks of the Amite and the charred ruins of William's bridge at 5:30PM. Davidson summoned his pontoniers who quickly began laying a bridge across the river. The troopers pulled their horses off the main thoroughfare and rested briefly. At 9:30PM the buglers blew "Boots and Saddles" and by 10PM the column was again on its way toward Camp Moore. The Federal horse soldiers reached the Confederate conscript camp at 2 AM on November 30th "but [were] too late to capture many Rebels as they were warned by signal guns before we got half-way [there]." 8

The column continued east and passed through Greensburg on its way

to the railway station at Tangipahoa. Bailey's advance arrived at Tangipahoa near 9 AM and captured the town after "slight resistance." The main body of Davidson's horse soldiers soon came up and rapidly went about the business of destruction. Almost all of the public and government buildings were burned. Five miles of track of the New Orleans, Jackson and Great Northern Railroad and the railroad bridge over the Tangipahoa River were also destroyed. As the 2nd Illinois Cavalry's band stood in the public square playing "Yankee Doodle" and "Dixie", "pillaging commenced in good earnest," recalled one 4th Wisconsin trooper, "[with] large quantities of tobacco and sugar &c [being] taken or distroyed (sic),"9

Davidson and his men rode east out of Tangipahoa at 11 AM. They reached Oak Grove post office late in the afternoon and went into camp 13 miles north of their next stop, Franklinton. The first division's troopers were in the saddle and on the road by 6 AM the next morning, Thursday, December 1st. The advance galloped into Franklinton at sunset and captured 25 prisoners. Bailey's troopers also interrupted a wedding ceremony, thoroughly surprising the bride and bridegroom who "took to horseback and fled." Davis' division arrived in town "just at dusk" and went into camp at 8 PM. One 4th Wisconsin trooper complained that the camp was "not in a very convenient place as we had to go about a mile for water to cook with." A tired John Bacon recorded in his diary, "We only made 13 miles to day on account of having to build a bridge across a bayou & repairing an old bridge across the river [probably the Bogue Chitto River] so that the artillery could cross. There has been 5 wagons burnt today so as to enable us to move faster. We have had splended (sic) weather so far on our raid." 10

Though Davidson had his column in motion by 7:30 AM the next morning, the march was painfully slow. The Federals were now deep in the swamps of north-central Louisiana and the roads had begun to suffer as a result. Most of the partly submerged thoroughfares had to be painstakingly corduroyed in order to get the wagons and artillery through. Even so, the horses became mired in many places and

"some could not be got out." By 2 PM the column had progressed only two and a half miles in spite of the fact that the troopers, when possible, had "troted and loped" their horses. Davidson's men struggled northeast through the swamps another four miles before halting to feed their mounts at 6 PM. Jaded troopers and mounts wended their way through bayous and swamps another six and a half toilsome miles before camping in a pine wood between 2 and 3 AM on December 3rd. ¹¹

Davidson was now 18 miles from the Louisiana-Mississippi border. The General let his men rest until 4:30 Art then continued north toward the Parl River. A 4th Wisconsin soldier wrote,

We marched 16 miles over roads that were hardly passable. 75 men of the Mississippi State Malitia (sic) were captured today while they were drilling. Wherever we have been we have not been expected. We camped about 8 o'clock P.M. For the last 4 or 5 miles every little way the roads were flooded with water. ¹²

Davidson's weary Federals slept until late in the morning on Sunday the 4th. The troopers finally broke camp at 10 AM and reached the Mississippi border and Pearl River around noon. The pontoniers services were again requested and in a short while the bridge was "laid and ready for crossing." Davidson's horse soldiers continued north through Fordsville, Mississippi, and bivouacked in a pine wood just above town at 8 PM. That evening Company M's Sergeant Bacon pulled his diary from his saddlebags and summed up his thoughts on the expedition to date:

One week ago from this morning we left our camp at Baton Rouge. We are now about 140 miles from Baton Rouge in the state of Mississippi... We find the roads much better on this side of the [Peatl] river. We were supporting the wagon train on todays march. They are burning wagons as fast as they become empty. ¹³

The mud-spattered horsemen were in the saddle and moving north by 6:30 AM on Monday, the 5th. The Federal column reached Columbia at 1 PM and captured several Confederate soldiers. In order to reduce his wagon train, Davidson now paroled all prisoners that had been captured in Louisiana. A portion of the 11th New York Cav-

alry was also detached and sent north to Monticello to "ascertain what rebel force was there." A squadron of New Yorkers comprised of Companies C and F was left behind in Columbia to hold the city until the main body of troopers returned. Lieutenant Calvert and his comrades in Company F were "heartily glad of the rest this arrangement gave us; but we had some lively skirmishing with the enemy, who peppered us from across the river ... this completely frustrated [our] intention of taking a bath in the clear, refreshing water, cool and crisp as air." 14

The remainder of Davidson's horse soldiers turned east at Columbia and rode on all night without stopping. At 8 AM the next morning, December 6th, the 4th Wisconsin Cavalry was pulled out of the advance and sent to the rear to guard against an expected attack. After marching through "the largest swamp" one soldier had ever seen, the Badgers were again ordered to the front. "Through some misunderstanding of the order," a Wisconsin trooper penciled in his diary, "we galloped about 5 miles through mires and over fallen trees. It was hard on our horses and will be the cause of many giving out sooner than if it had been otherwise." Davidson's men finally went into camp at 8 PM after a taxing march of 25 miles. Most of the fatigued troopers immediately untacked their horses and dropped to the ground. Troopers in the 4th Wisconsin Cavalry's



Brigadier General Edmund Jackson Davis (1827-1883) was a Texas loyalist who became governor of the state in 1869.

Company M, however, had "no sooner unsaddled than we had orders to saddle up for picket [duty]." As the Badgers rode out on picket, the 11th New York Cavalry finally rejoined Davidson's command sometime after 9 PM. 15

The exhausted New Yorkers had also experienced an odyssey following their return to Columbia at 10 PM on the 5th of December. After feeding their horses and "taking a short rest," the troopers had started out at 2 AM on Tuesday to overtake the main column "now twelve hours' march ahead." Though the regiment had become lost in the woods, the New Yorkers managed to capture a number of mounted rebels who had been following them and annoying their rear guard.

It was not until 9 o'clock at night after a very hard and long day's ride, recalled the 11th New York Cavalry's Henry Calvert, that we came up to the main column as it was going into camp. We turned into a clearing in a the forest and, having rubbed down our jaded horses and fed them ourselves, we made a couch on the wet but hospitable ground, and the sighing of the wind in the pines lulled us to sleep. 16

The Federal column continued east towards Augusta with the 4th Wisconsin Cavalry again riding in advance of the second division. After a march of 15 miles the horse soldiers went into camp at 8 PM. Davidson dispatched the 4th Wisconsin to reconnoiter and secure the ford on the Leaf River. At 9 PM, the regiment, under the command of Major Nelson Craigue, started on its mission. The Badgers rode 16 miles and bivouacked within two miles of the ford near the city of Augusta. "It is very cold," a thoroughly chilled Sergeant Bacon struggled to write in his diary. "This is the hardest night's march we have had yet. We crossed ravines on horseback which was hardly passable for a man. The roads most of the way were flooded with water up to our horses' knees." 17

The 4th Wisconsin Cavalry's William Weed never forgot the privations he and Davidson's horse soldiers encountered during the raid. In a deposition for a pension increase written for fellow trooper Jason Root 18 years after the war's end, Weed recalled, "... we were ordered on another [raid] from Baton



Colonel (later brevet brigadier general) John Giles Fonda (1822-1910) had previously served as a first lieutenant in the 2nd Illinois cavalry and major in the 12th Illinois Cavalry.

Rouge La to cut telegraph and Railroad lines north of Mobile AL... We marched through the swamps of southern Mississippi for days and weeks and a good share of the time were wading through mud and mire up to our hips it being so deep that we could not ride our horses and during this march experienced some of the worst sleet storms that Lever saw..."¹⁸

The Badgers spent most of Thursday the 8th watching the ford and waiting in camp for the main body of Davidson's army to come up. Several troopers went out foraging and found a surprising preponderance of livestock and crops in the immediate area. A satiated 4th Wisconsin soldier's diary entry read, "We have lived in gay style. We have had chickens, turkeys, Geese, hogs, sweet potatoes & honey to eat." The remainder of Davidson's force arrived at about 6 PM. Scouts sent across the river detected a heavy force of rebels and the planned crossing of the Pascagoula at this point was postponed. 19

Shortly after his arrival, Davidson came into possession of a Mobile newspaper that contained "full accounts of [our] strength and designs . . . [Our] daily marches and progress [were] also telegraphed to Meridian [Mississippi] . . . and to Mobile." Davidson now

believed that Confederate troops were on their way south from Meridian, and perhaps north from Mobile, to defend the Mobile and Ohio Railroad. In order to confirm his suspicions and delay, if possible, any enemy force coming from Meridian, Davidson sent the 2nd New York Veteran Cavalry, 1st Louisiana Cavalry, and part of the 11th New York Cavalry, all under the command of the 2nd New York's Lieutenant Colonel Asa Gurney, over the Leaf and Chickasawha Rivers "with orders, via Leakesville, to cut the telegraph and destroy what of the road [they] could, while my main column crossed below on the Pascagoula and struck for a lower point of the [Mobile and Ohio] railroad." If met by a superior force, Gurney was to fall back along the east bank of the Chickasawha and Pascagoula Rivers and join the main column at Fairley's Ferry on the Pascagoula. 20

On the morning of the 9th, Gurney led his troopers east across the Leaf River, while Davidson's column continued south to Fairley's Ferry. "The rain," Davidson would later report, "fell in such torrents as to render the roads almost impassable. Davis' division was "unable to make any progress, and the streams rose so between the head and rear of his column as to sweep out an ammunition wagon, which could not be saved." After a miserable march of 16 miles, Davidson's thoroughly sodden horse soldiers reached Fairley's Ferry and went into camp. ²¹

Gurney left the 1st Louisiana Cavalry at the Leaf River ford to "cover the retreat, should one be necessary," and continued on in pursuit of the expedition's objective which was the destruction of a bridge on the Mobile and Ohio Railroad at a village called "State Line" near the Alabama border. Gurney, his 2nd New York Veterans, two companies of which were "supplied with canteens of turpentine to help in the work of destruction," and Lieutenant Richard Littlewort's squadron from the 11th New York Cavalry, reached the Chickasawha River sometime after nightfall on the 9th. 22

The Federals crossed the river the next morning, turned north and commenced their march toward State Line. The Empire Staters had been on the road only a few hours when they were met "in force" by Colonel Robert Mc-

Culloch's 2nd Missouri Cavalry and Leonidas Willis' Texas Battalion of Cavalry. Following a "severe fight" in which three 2nd New York cavalrymen, Company A's Sergeant Theodore Moss and James Wood and Company B's 1st Lieutenant Albert Westinghouse, were killed, Gurney abandoned his objective and fell back. After "much hardship and severe fighting," the lieutenant colonel and his New Yorkers rejoined Davidson's main column two daws' later. ²³

Using information gleaned from local inhabitants and reports sent back from Lieutenant Colonel Gurney following his skirmish, Davidson learned that the enemy had amassed a "force of 2,500 cavalry and artillery, consisting of McCulloch's brigade of Forrest's command, and the Fifteenth Confederate and Eighth Mississippi, to watch and impede our progress to the road at different crossings." With the Federals still almost 50 miles west of the railroad, Davidson realized that if the enemy could slow his column's advance, "they would have time to concentrate at our designed point of attack several thousand infantry from Meridian and Mobile." The vituperative Mexican War veteran considered his options and prudently chose not to cross the Pascagoula River. Davidson submitted his decision to his division commanders both of whom "entirely concurred." The commanding general later justified his course of action:

On account of the state of the roads and swollen condition of the streams, and their [the enemy's] perfect knowledge of our movements, celerity and surprise were impossibilities. To have crossed a wheel over the Pascagoula would not only, in my opinion, have involved the loss of our artillery and pontoons, but most probably that of the whole command, without the power of inflicting compensating damage upon the enemy. Weighing well all the facts and chances, I decided to move my command to this point [West Pascagoula], to be transferred to East Pascagoula, from whence a constant series of threats and attacks may be made upon the railroad, 24

Davidson turned his column south and crossed Black Creek on the now indispensable pontoon bridge at 8 PM. The horse soldiers rode on another



A postwar photograph of Sergeant John Bacon of the 4th Illinois Cavalry.

two-and-a-half hours before camping in the "tall pines." Sunday's march commenced at 9:30 AM on a "very cold but pleasant day." A seven-mile trek brought the column to the banks of Red Creek at noon where the pontoniers were again called upon to bridge the stream. The men passed through "turpentine country" in the afternoon, an image that one impressionable Badger thought was "worth seeing." ²⁵

Davidson's blue coats went into camp at dusk. "Fodder is getting scarce," a 4th Wisconsin soldier observed, "cannot find sufficient to half feed our horses." The men also suffered from a shortage of food during the column's bleak 4-day march down the west bank of the Pascagoula River. "Provisions were gone, habitations were few, and men and horses suffered for want of food, and from the hardships of the march in the long cold rain," remembered one 11th New York Cavalry officer. Some lucky soldiers, however, managed to eat well. 4th Wisconsin Cavalry Sergeant John Bacon's Sunday supper was "tip-top" and included "fresh pork, roasted potatoes, coffee & honey." "We have got the same for breakfast," he further crowed. 26

"Boots and saddles" roused the troopers at 8 AM on Monday the 12th. An hour later the men were in the saddle heading south. After marching five miles, it was found that the column had taken the wrong road. A livid General Davidson made the air blue with expletives then ordered the whole army to countermarch. The horse soldiers proceeded another 4 or 5 miles when a baggage wagon broke through a bridge killing one man and a mule. With the span disabled, the remaining soldiers were forced to ford the "very deep" bayou. Some of the horses lost their footing during the crossing "and while floundering to gain it, threw their riders off, thus giving them a rather unwelcome bath." 27

The head of Davidson's column finally reached the vicinity of West Pascagoula at noon. The jaded troopers went into camp on Pascagoula Bay within a mile and a half of town. The 11th New York Cavalry's Lieutenant Calvert viewed the future accommodations with disdain, "[We] camped in a marsh without shelter of any kind, [and] suffered intensely from the cold and raw sea air." At 10 o'clock that evening close to 4,000 fatigued but greatly relieved horse soldiers heard a passing steamboat out in the bay whistle three times. As the last whistle blast faded in the distance, "it seemed as if the whole army was filled with the same impulse for there went up (as if at once) a tremendious (sic) shout," a sergeant in the 4th Wisconsin Cavalry wrote. "Even the horses seemed to understand what was up." 28

Davidson's men had reason to be proud. They had ridden almost 300 miles in 15 days through "dismal" swamps, blackened bayous, tall Georgia pine forests and "a country so poor as to render the transportation of subsistence a matter of necessity." They had crossed four major rivers, "repaired and rebuilt upwards of 15 bridges, laid miles of cordurov over the swamps of Louisiana and Mississippi" and fended off nightly attacks by the enemy, all with the loss of only 3 men killed, 8 wounded and 13 missing. A few feats of engineering and the capture of 20 prisoners, however, could not offset the failure of Davidson and his men to achieve their



Lieutenant Colonel Asa Gurney.

primary objective, the destruction of the Mobile and Ohio Railroad. While the raid's threat to the major southern railroad did draw troops and potential reinforcements for Hood's army away from Major General Dabney Maury's District of the Gulf, the number of soldiers probably amounted to 3,000 or less. Their presence would have had little impact on the outcome of the upcoming battle at Nashville. ²⁹

The expedition to Pascagoula also brought out the worst in ungentlemanly behavior from some of the Federal horsemen. A veteran of fighting in both theaters of the Civil War, the 11th New York Cavalry's Lieutenant Henry Calvert concluded that there were unseemly men in every army "who exercised a mania for straggling." "Riding along in twos and threes," he later wrote, "they [would] visit houses that are off the road and, being armed, commit depredations unworthy of true soldiers." ³⁰

During the Pascagoula expedition Calvert noted, "there was a law-less streak in some of the troops and it showed itself in mean ways." On one occasion, the New York trooper recalled, General Davidson "accosted a soldier who was carrying a large swag on his saddle, and asked him what he had in there. "When the luckless trooper replied, "Some things I am going to take back," the general "in true Davidsonias tyle," fired back: "Who—told you that you were going back? Open that swag,

sir!" An irate Davidson peered into the satchel and observed several articles of women's clothing along with two pairs of little shoes and little socks. "The loss to the women and children who had owned these things was irreparable, [while] the gain [to the perpetrator] was nothing, for in all probability he would have to throw them away somewhere on the road, and there was no possibility of undoing the damage he had done," admitted the remorseful New York officer. 31

Though instances of wanton stealing "roused the righteous wrath" of General Davidson several times during the Pascagoula expedition, the consequence of such actions paled in comparison to rape, which was also rumored to have occurred. Long after the war's end a doleful Lieutenant Calvert recalled his unexpected meeting with the alleged victims:

Nothing, perhaps, that happened in that ride of several weeks' duration is so retained by my memory as the sight of two young ladies whom we met one bright beautiful morning, walking sorrowfully down the road. They were crying and one of them, who carried a sunbonnet in her hand, had a fresh wound on her cheek. I had viewed scenes that made me squirm as I beheld them, but that spot of blood on the girl's cheek told a tale of guilt terribly painful and terribly rasping.

Men said that some of the wild boys of the Texan regiment, composed mostly of Comanche Indians, had illused these young ladies. So great was General Davidson's wrath that he said he would like to have the offenders burned at the stake. This outrage was the only one of the kind which came under my notice during a service of thirty-nine months in three great armies; and I am glad to be able to say that our officers were habitually on the watch to prevent such offences. When, however, the dogs of war are let loose, unlawful things are possible, even in the best regulated army, 31

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