

# 1000 Dead Indian Ponies: Soldiering in a Complex Environment

Duke University Sanford School of Public Policy,  
Counterterrorism and Public Policy Program Fellowship  
Fellows Research Paper Discussion, 7 April 2020

# Discussion Outline

- Reflection/Topic Selection/Topic Refinement
- Research Question
- Project Methodology – an Historical Approach
- Research Findings
- Contemporary Application / Target Audience
- Questions

NATIONAL SECURITY  
STRATEGY  
*of the United States of America*

DECEMBER 2017



Description of the  
National  
Military

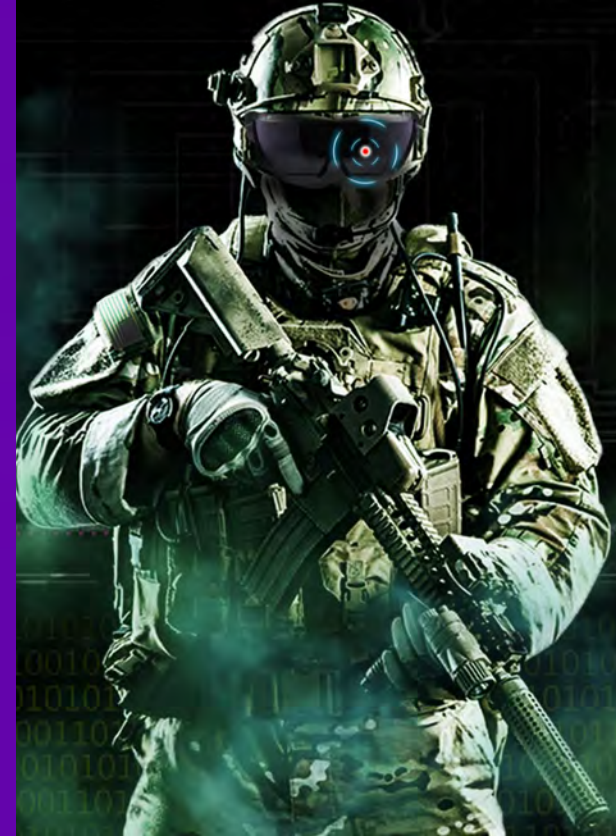


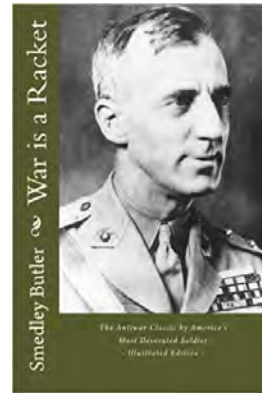
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**MODERNIZATION STRATEGY:**  
Investing in the Future





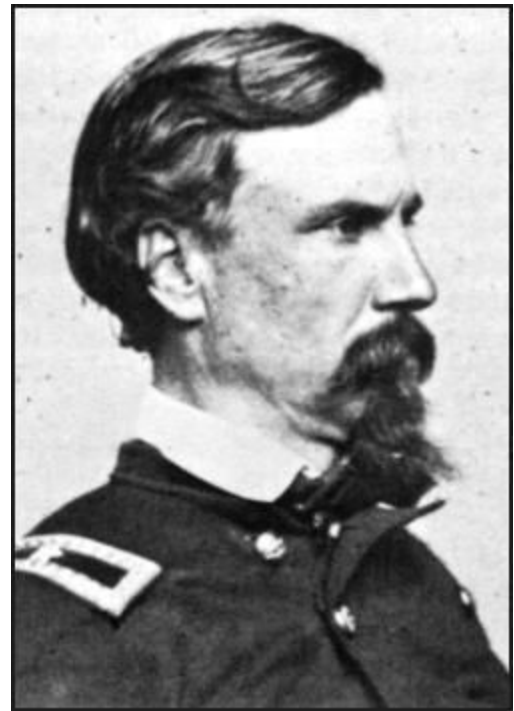


# Research Questions

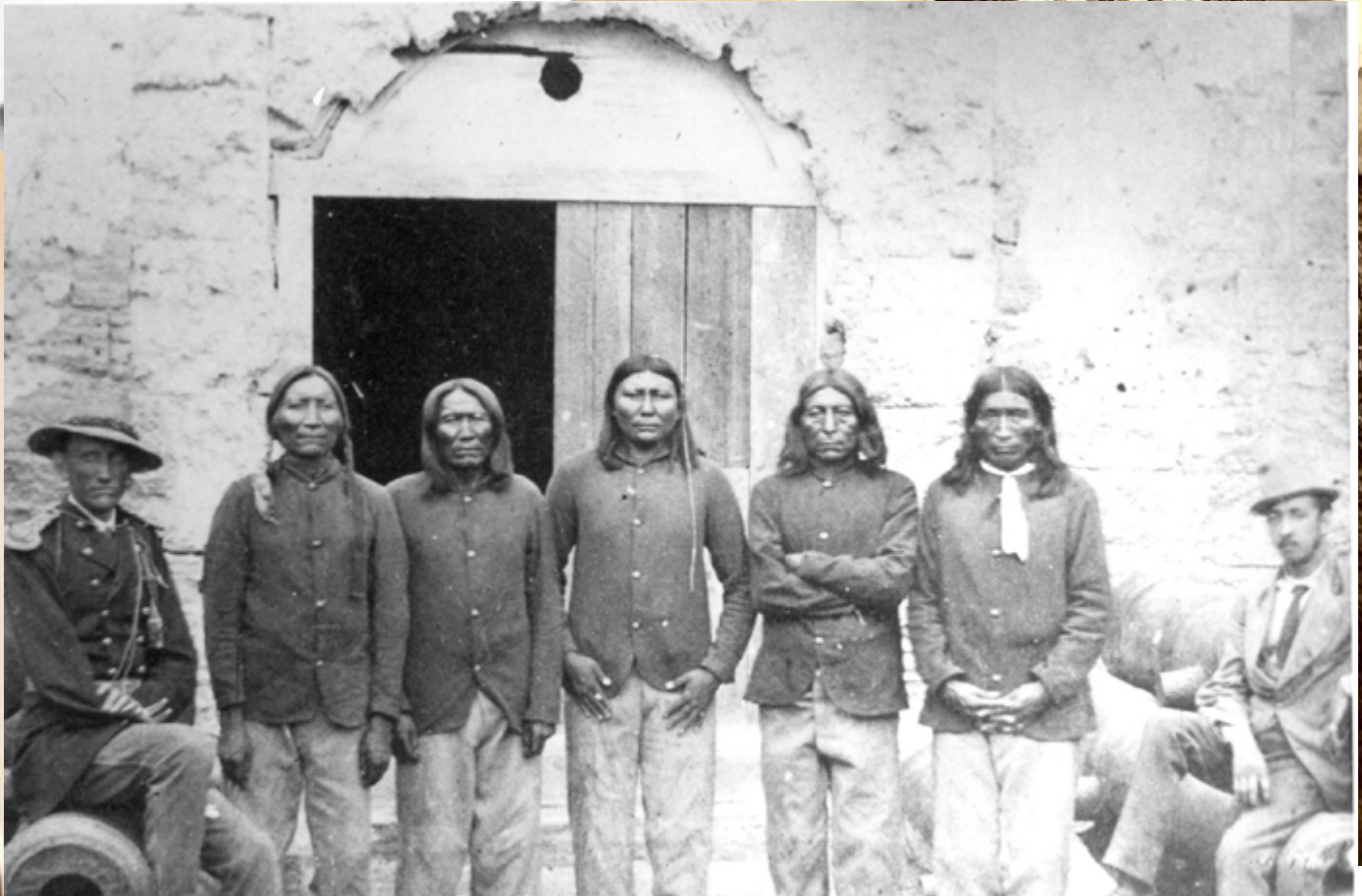
- How has America's small, professional army confronted an extremely capable irregular foe in a harsh and complex environment?
- Why did Mackenzie order the slaughter of over 1000 capture native American ponies?
- What attributes of his unit allowed him to make this decision?
- What does this event leave for the contemporary warfighter or policymaker?

# Research Methodology

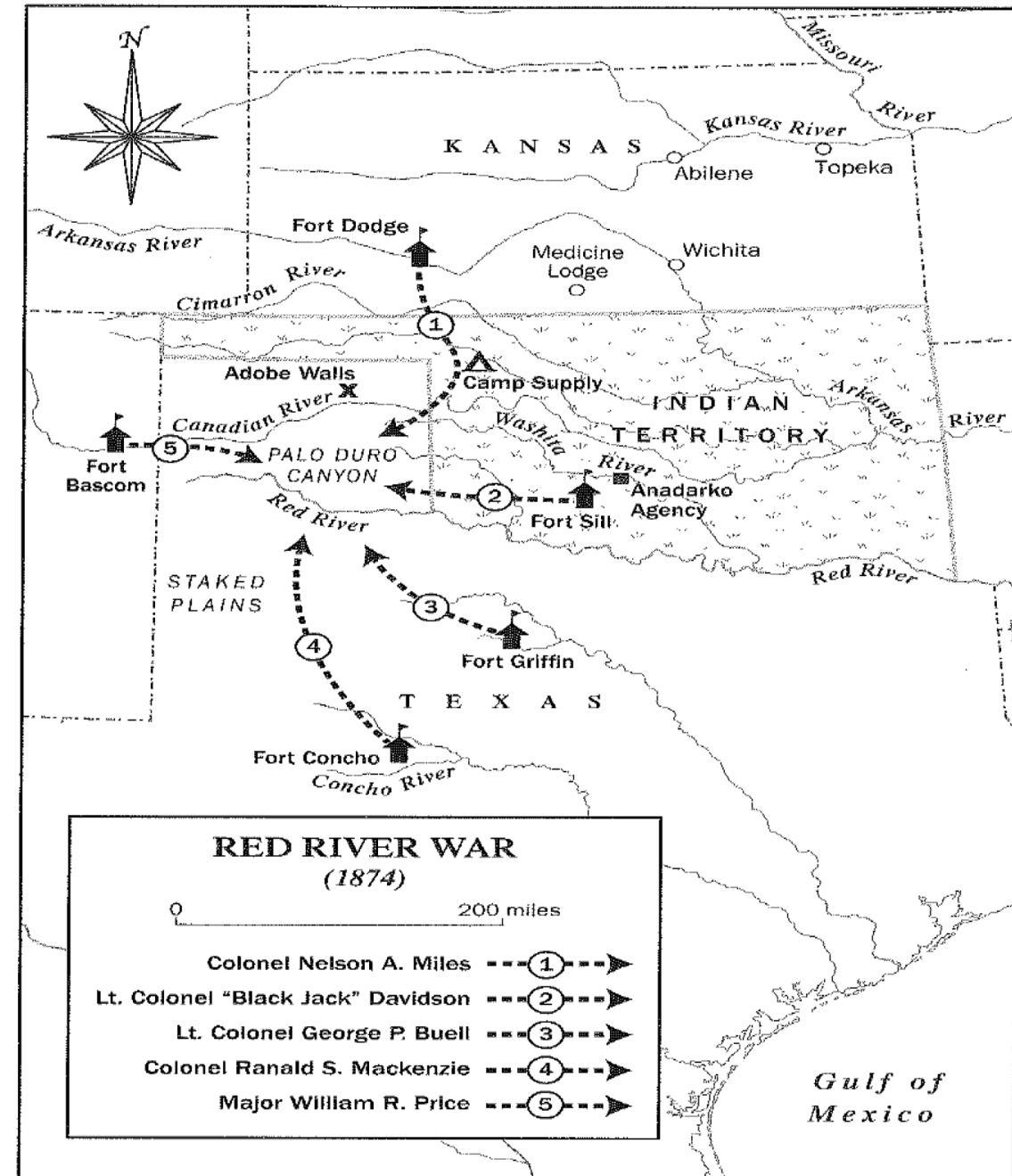
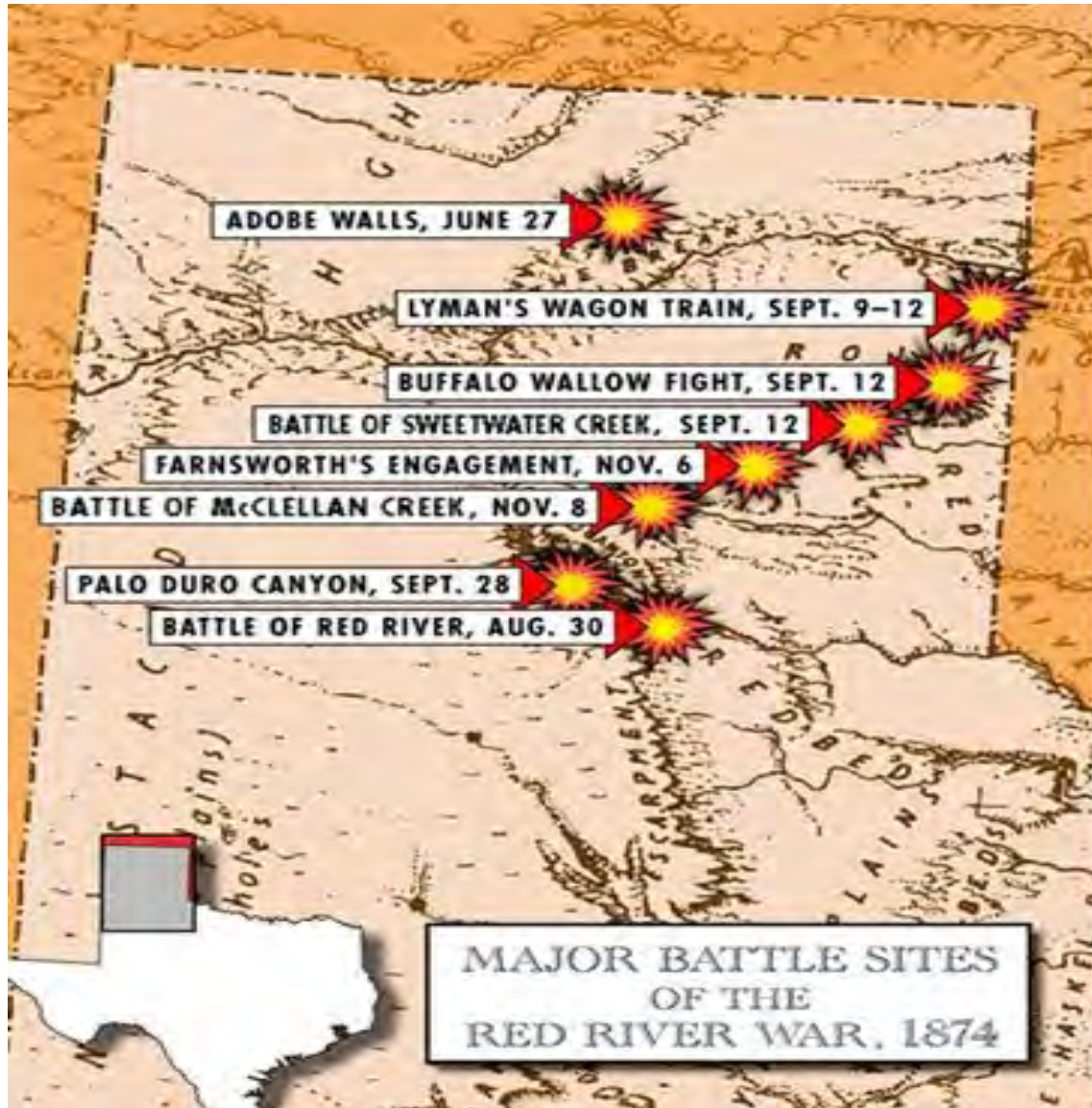
- Narrow focus on a specific, significant tactical decision
- Avoid focus on the individual leader (Ranald Mackenzie)
- Analyze the organizational determining factors that led to this decision
- Examine characteristics of the army formation



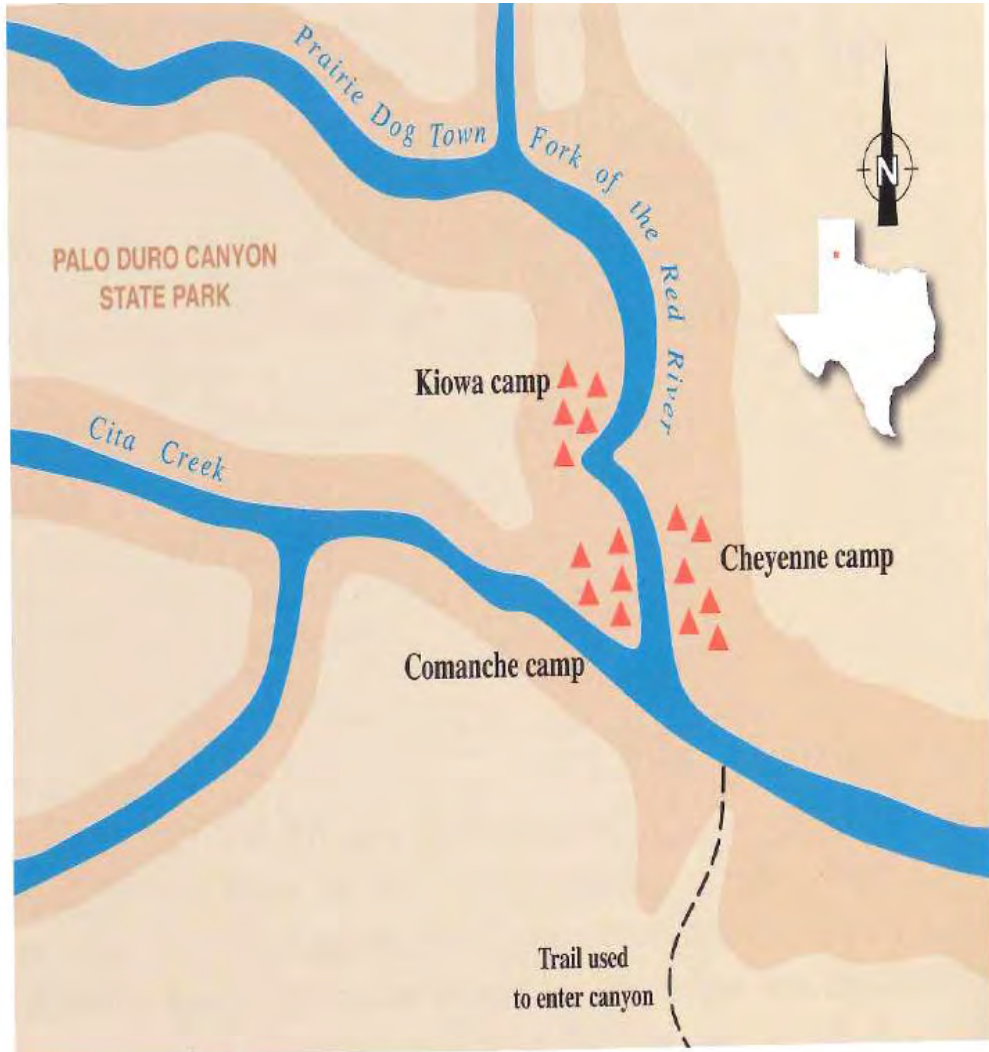




# The Red River War



# The Palo Duro Canyon, Maman-ti's Village



# Research Findings

- Mackenzie's personal experience influenced his decision to slaughter the ponies
  - Previous forays into the Staked Plains
  - Loss of captured horses to native raids while on campaign
- Specific attributes of Mackenzie's command were instrumental in putting him in the position to make the decision to slaughter the captured animals
  - Grit and Discipline
  - Empowerment of Trusted Leaders Up and Down the Chain of Command
  - Reliance on Indigenous Expertise

# Grit and Discipline



# Empowerment of Trusted Leaders



# Indigenous Expertise



*Young Tonkawa braves with soldiers from Fort Griffin, 1870*



*Red Bullhead Buffalo Bill Texas Jack*



# Conclusion

- Three important attributes reveal what made Ranald Mackenzie's column succeed in the field against a fierce and irregular foe.
- Two of those attributes are evident in the modern army, the third is less clear
- The historical record suggests that the small, professional U.S. Army will need an openness to rely upon experts (outside of the military) to help it adapt to a new or uncertain operational environment.