



Win the Battle, Lose the War

Readers of my BACKTALK columns will already know that I am a Civil War buff, and my recent move to New Mexico brought new sites to explore. I did not realize that the West was the site of many important Civil War battles. In fact, within 60 miles of Albuquerque, the Battle of Glorieta Pass was fought. This little-known battle has been called the *Gettysburg of the West*. It was such an important Northern victory that it effectively signaled the end of Confederate influence in the Southwest.

The Confederates were interested in the West. They wanted recognition by Mexico, and they also wanted the gold and silver that was in Colorado, Nevada, and California. Unfortunately for the Confederates, New Mexico (which fought on the Union side) stood in the way. Texas, a Confederate state, sent forces up the Rio Grande. The Confederates captured Fort Fillmore (near Las Cruces, N.M.), proceeded to win the Battle of Valverde, and advanced north up the Rio Grande. The Confederates eventually occupied Albuquerque and Santa Fe. Their primary objective was to take Fort Union, N.M. – an important Union federal supply center. Fort Union sat directly on the Santa Fe Trail, and is about 25 miles from present-day Las Vegas, N.M. It is about 50 miles northeast of Santa Fe as the crow flies (assuming the crow can fly over pretty rough mountain passes), but 100 miles away via the Santa Fe Trail. To combat the Confederate advance, Union forces from Fort Union, augmented by a regiment of First Colorado Volunteers, advanced south on the Santa Fe Trail towards Glorieta Pass.

The Battle of Glorieta Pass itself was fought from March 26-28, 1862 (the Battle of Gettysburg also took three days). For the first two days of the battle, there was mixed fighting at several locations near Santa Fe with inconclusive results. On March 28, the Confederates advanced toward Fort Union, initially heading southeast towards Glorieta Pass. In what proved to be a very unfortunate decision, the Confederates left all their supplies in a wagon train at Cañoncito, about halfway between Santa Fe and Glorieta Pass. This wagon train was guarded by a single cannon and a handful of noncombatants. This poorly defended supply train (about eighty wagons) contained the entire Confederate reserves of ammunition, baggage, food, forage, horses, mules, and medicines.

The Confederate forces proceeded toward Fort Union and met the advancing Union forces at Pigeon's Rest, slightly east of Glorieta Pass. The Confederates thought their supplies were safe – after all, for Union forces to reach the Confederate supplies, the Union forces would have to go through the Confederates. However, as the battle raged around Pigeon's Ranch, a small group of Union forces were dispatched to find and destroy the Confederate supply train. Since the Union forces consisted of frontiersmen from mining districts near Denver, mountainous terrain did not deter them. The Union dispatchment avoided the Santa Fe Trail, bypassed the Confederate forces, and crossed over 16 miles of mountainous terrain. They then located, attacked, and destroyed the entire Confederate supply wagon train at Cañoncito. The Union troops retraced their route and rejoined the main Union forces after dark (as the battle was ending).

The Confederates went to sleep that night thinking they had won this battle, just as they had won all their previous battles in New Mexico. The Union forces also thought they had won.

Casualties on each side were about the same – about 50 killed and 60 wounded. But it wasn't this relatively indecisive battle that was important. Unbeknownst to the Confederates, the destruc-

tion of their supply train checked the advance of the Confederate forces in New Mexico. Just as the Battle of Gettysburg was the *high-water mark of the Confederacy*, the Battle of Glorieta Pass was definitely the *high-water mark of the Confederacy in the Southwest*.

The Confederates' lack of supplies eventually forced them to retreat, backtrack down the Rio Grande, and return to San Antonio. It is now recognized that the Battle of Glorieta Pass effectively stopped a Confederate invasion in the Southwest. The battle signaled the end of a valorous Confederate presence along the Rio Grande in the War of Northern Aggression (I AM a Southerner and a Texas A&M grad – it was either put this in or get tarred and feathered at my next family or class reunion).

What does all this possibly have to do with maturity models? Because simply developing code is like fighting a battle. Winning one battle is not enough. To win the war, you need to be able to fully support all your assets. In the battle for the Southwest along the Rio Grande, the Confederates won most, if not all, of the battles. However, it was the lack of support and assets that cost them the war.

It doesn't really do you any good to deliver code to your users if you cannot provide support for maintenance and updates. You need a process (or maturity model) in place to ensure that you can provide long-time support. Just as losing the supply train spelled the end of the Confederacy along the Rio Grande, problems with life-cycle support can easily spell the end of your development effort.

Maturity models have to support everything you are going to need to eventually win the war, not just the upcoming battle. If it doesn't, then you need to implement whatever process it takes. If you are only worried about the current skirmish, ask yourself this: "Is my lack of configuration management, risk management, or requirements management going to eventually cost me the victory?" Short-term thinking wins battles. Long-term thinking wins wars.

Do you have a maturity model in place? Does it work? If not, then why aren't you fixing it?

Do you want to win a battle, or win the war?

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Additional Reading

1. See <www.santafetrailnm.org>, <<http://web.archive.org/web/20001002020035/>>, <www.nmhu.edu/research/sftrail/mapsft1.gif>, <<http://web.archive.org/web/20001002020035/>>, and <www.nmhu.edu/research/sftrail/mapsft1.gif> for maps and more information on Glorieta Pass.
2. Information in the preceding paragraphs has been taken from an article by Don E. Alberts at <www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/GG/qfg2.html>, <<http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/GG/qfg2.html>>, and also from <<http://history.sandiego.edu/gen/civilwar/14/glorieta.html>> and <<http://history.sandiego.edu/gen/civilwar/14/glorieta.html>>. Additional information has been taken from personal trips to New Mexico's Las Cruces, Glorieta Pass, Pecos National Historical Park, and Ft Union National Monument. And no, I am not in the employ of the New Mexico Department of Tourism.