

Road Trip for Book Sales—a Pilgrimage

Part One

By Doug Boren

About a month after *Beyond the Horizons* was released, I decided to make an extensive road trip to the locales where the story took place. I thought that my chances of getting it into some of the tourist shops and bookstores in the area were good because of the “local” significance. But more than that, it was a pilgrimage of sorts for me. I had lived in years past at or near many of the locations, and the story came to mean so much to me, that I felt I owed it to my characters to walk the same ground they had. To live vicariously a small part of their lives, even if for a short time.

Day One

I left El Paso at dawn, wanting to beat the morning traffic, as well as make some time for the long trip ahead. Today would be one of the longest of the trip. The sky was a pale orange-pink as the sun made its tentative peek above the mountains.

Just over the New Mexico line, there was a tourist rest stop with “historic interest” promised on the sign. I pulled in and sure enough, there was a large stone monument detailing General Sibley’s campaign into New Mexico during 1862, when the Confederacy planned to extend its empire to the Pacific.

As I walked over toward the gift shop, I saw another sign... a small placard that warned “beware of scorpions and rattlesnakes! Stay on the path!” I looked around nervously, and decided that was probably good advice. Unfortunately, because it was still so early in the day, the gift shop was closed. No chance to pitch my book here. What a shame, because it would have been a good place.

Back on the Interstate, I drove north, generally following the Rio Grande. Goosebumps came over me as I realized I was driving the same route that the Confederate Army had marched so many years ago. My eyes darted about constantly, trying to soak in everything I could. The desert was expansive, made up of numerous sand hills and mountains, punctuated with cactus and arroyos everywhere.

It was already getting hot. I could imagine the poor soldiers as they marched in the heat in their woolen uniforms. There were hardly any trees in sight, and I wondered how they ever managed to tolerate what must have been a grueling march.

Looking over to the west, I remembered that was the very desert that Sibley’s army had retreated through on foot, without supplies, water, or discipline. The failed New Mexico Campaign dashed forever the South’s hope for a western empire. My stomach clenched in knots, and my eyes grew a little misty when I thought how just a few miles to my left, their unburied bones lie in the desert that I was so easily speeding past.

At about 9:00, I took the exit that I thought was to take me to my first historic site-- Fort Craig. Leaving the smooth interstate behind, I now traveled a gravel road meandering around washes and hills, still keenly aware that the footsteps of the soldiers haunted these grounds. There was a pickup truck about four car lengths ahead of me, and after about 20 miles, it suddenly stopped in the middle of the road for no apparent reason. I also stopped waiting to see what it would do. Without warning it

suddenly started back towards me, quite fast. I honked my horn to no avail. It still came barreling towards me with increasing speed. I jammed my car in reverse, and started backing up as quickly as I could to avoid getting hit.

I wasn't fast enough. There was a sickening thud as the tail end of the truck hit my front, jolting me roughly. Well, *that* made him stop! I was *pissed!* What the hell was he doing? Ready to do some serious complaining, I got out of the car.

The kid who drove the pickup couldn't be more than 18 or 19 years old. He was dirty, with long greasy blonde hair straggling past his shoulders. There was a glazed look in his eyes, and I could tell immediately he was stoned.

"*What the hell were you doing?*" I shouted. "Didn't you see me? Didn't you hear me honk?"

"Jeeze, man, I'm sorry. I thought I saw a snake in the road."

"So what if you did? That doesn't mean you gotta plow into me!"

He stared blankly at me for a few seconds, as if trying to figure out what was reality. With slurred speech, he continued. "I'm sorry, man. Hey, dude, is yer car hurt bad?"

My heart sank and my gut turned over. If my car was incapacitated, I'd be stuck out in the middle of nowhere, in a desert far from any water, or help. Visions of Confederate soldiers traipsing across the desert on their death march flashed through my mind.

There was a half inch hole in the plastic bumper. I raised the hood, hoping with all my might that the radiator was intact. It looked ok. I leaned down to the road, and saw no water leaking. I started the engine, and mercifully, it hummed along like it was supposed to. Thank God I had been moving backwards just enough when I had been hit to prevent any major damage. If not, it would have been a lot worse.

The kid was still mumbling something unintelligible, and I knew it was useless to get anything out of him as far as insurance was concerned. He was out of it... totally spaced out.

Cursing, I told him to forget about it, and turned around back towards the interstate. I wanted to be near some form of civilization if the car fritzed out on me. My enthusiasm for re-living the events of my book, much less trying to sell it, was diminishing rapidly.

To be continued...

For information about *Beyond the Horizons*, go to: www.dougboren.homestead.com/Beyond.html