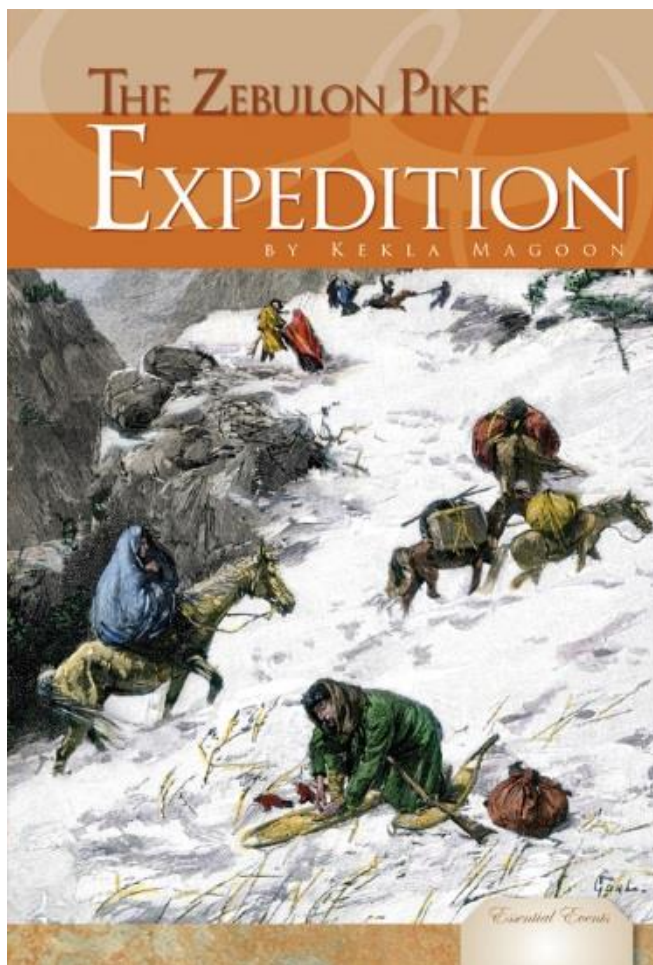




LOST ON PURPOSE?

The men's frustrations and concerns did not subside. Had they come the wrong way? Why had Pike led them through such bad weather? Why had they waited so long to stop and build a fort? Part of their mission was to explore the Red River, but the mission did not have to be completed during the winter months. There did not seem to be any good explanations.

Pike was also concerned, and he was baffled by the western terrain. He carried a compass and other instruments to help him with navigation and mapping. He also had two maps with him that were drawn by other travelers. However, these maps were not very detailed in their descriptions of the landscape over which Pike and his men were traveling. Pike very well could have gotten lost due to the inaccuracies of the maps. But perhaps he went out of his way on purpose and intentionally led his team into Spanish territory. This might have been his plan all along—to get close enough to spy on the Spanish settlers.

If Pike had a reason for leading his men into Spanish territory, he was taking a very big risk. The governments of Spain and the United States had a

fragile relationship. A band of U.S. explorers discovered wandering in Spanish territory could meet disastrous consequences.

FINALLY FOUND

Indeed, the Spanish suspected that something was not right. While Pike and his men were busy building their fort and warming their frozen limbs, a force of more than 100 Spanish dragoons rode through the countryside, searching for the lost explorers. The Spanish government had learned of Pike's journey, and it feared that his team would enter their land. The Spanish planned to stop him.

The Spanish riders reached Rio Conejos on February 26, 1807, and surrounded Pike's tiny fort. There was no way the frostbitten, sickly team of less than a dozen men could battle such an impressive force. Pike's only hope was to negotiate an agreement

Dragoons

Dragoons are specially trained soldiers who ride into battle on horseback. This type of military unit was used widely throughout Europe for centuries. British, French, Spanish, German, Danish, Russian, and other armies all used dragoons.

Dragoons were used by the United States as well. During the Revolutionary War, General George Washington organized several dragoon regiments within the colonies. The new United States formed its first dragoon unit in 1792 and established more in the following years. By the time the Civil War began in 1861, the dragoon units had been reorganized under the U.S. Army and officially renamed the First Regiment of Cavalry. In today's U.S. Army, a few units still bear the name cavalry, including several tank-driving squadrons.