Captain Gustavus C. Doane (center), wife Mary and an unidentified officer relax at a temporary camp on the San Carlos Indian Reservation circa 1889. The new revelation regarding Doane’s encounter with Warren Earp has never been published.

— Courtesy Museum of the Rockies at Montana State University —
During the summer of 1886 in the midst of the Geronimo campaign in southern Arizona, Capt. Gustavus Cheyney Doane wrote dozens of letters to his wife, Mary, attempting to soothe her concerns about his safety. Doane commanded Company A, 2nd U.S. Cavalry, which, in August, had been posted at a sleepy heliograph station near Cochise Stronghold at the foot of the Dragoon Mountains. Of the more than 4,000 troops mobilized in Arizona, only a handful were actually needed to track Geronimo's band south of the Mexican border, while the majority of troops, like Company A, wiled away their time occupying strategic points and providing a reassuring presence for area civilians. As Doane came to realize, the greatest danger faced by his own command that summer came not from hostile Indians, but rather from the visits of mobile whiskey and flesh peddlers who promptly arrived every payday, setting up open air brothels just beyond his camp's perimeter.

"This country is full of tramps, thieves, and ten cent gamblers," he complained to Mary. "Both whiskey and water are sold per drink at about the same price at roadside doggeries."

In spite of his continuing reassurances, Doane never seemed to be able to convince his wife to stop worrying that summer. The more the captain wrote, the more things Mary found to fret about, ranging from her fears of his possible dalliance with prostitutes to rumors of a new war with Mexico. On August 18, Doane impatiently addressed both concerns in a remarkable letter that may not have comforted his wife, but certainly

Character I Ever Saw

New evidence places Warren Earp in Cochise County during the height of the 1886 Geronimo Campaign.
left a tantalizing clue for Earp family researchers. Doane's message suggests the presence in southern Arizona of Wyatt Earp's younger brother Warren at a time when his trail has largely been obscured to historians. Before we take a closer look at Doane's cryptic reference to Warren, however, we need to review the circumstances surrounding its composition.

Tracking the Earps

While Doane and his men fought their campaigns against boredom, the bottle and the bordello that August, most of the surviving members of the Earp brothers had scattered far from the scene of their famous 1881 gun battle in Tombstone. Confirmed evidence of their precise whereabouts and activities is hardly complete.

Jim, the eldest, had accompanied the body of his murdered younger brother Morgan back to Colton, California, in March 1882. Although he and his wife, Bessie, wandered as far as Montana Territory during the intervening years, Jim likely returned to his parent's hometown of Colton or nearby San Bernardino sometime prior to his listing in the 1885 city directory as the proprietor of the Club Exchange Saloon.

Virgil, grievously wounded by a shotgun blast in December 1881, also eventually returned to Colton. In February 1886, he, along with his father Nicholas, gave testimony in a Los Angeles breach of promise lawsuit and, in July, Virgil won election as the Colton village constable.

Wyatt had likely set up his residence in San Diego by the summer of 1886, although indirect evidence suggests he may have been in Trinidad, Colorado, as late as early January.

What has eluded historians is the 1886 location of the youngest Earp brother, Warren. We know he accompanied Wyatt on the Vendetta Ride in 1882, which led to a murder indictment against both men, and historians have placed Warren in Eagle City, Idaho, in 1884 when Wyatt and Jim were operating a saloon at that gold camp. In between times, Warren supposedly lived in Colton at the family home; in the summer of 1886, he presumably worked there as a "swamper" in his brother Jim's saloon. However, according to Capt. Doane's mention, Warren returned to the Tombstone area that summer, when he became involved with a Mexican controversy that had nothing to do with the chase after Geronimo.

The Mexican Trouble

Across the Rio Grande from El Paso in 1886, an American newspaper editor named Augustus K. Cutting managed to get himself into a load of trouble that resulted in escalating dangerous international tensions. Cutting published a newspaper on the Mexican side of the border that, in late June, attacked a rival editor in language guaranteed to bring a libel suit. When a Mexican judge ordered that Cutting publicly retract his comments, he did so, but he then walked across the bridge to the United States where he published the same slurs in the El Paso Herald.

Cutting found himself in jail after returning to Mexico, and his imprisonment for libel committed on American soil started a firestorm of protests across the United States. Hotheads from Pennsylvania to California called for a war against Mexico. While Mexican troops prepared entrenchments across the river from El Paso, volunteers offered their services for an invasion. One such group of would-be liberators gathered in the Tombstone area; Warren may have been among their number.

As Cutting cooled his heels in a Mexican jail and excitable Americans howled for the opportunity to help liberate the newspaperman, Capt. Doane continued to battle the whiskey peddlers and prostitutes who assaulted his Cochise Stronghold camp. His strain began to show as the summer dragged on. When Mary expressed her concerns that her husband might be tempted, Doane dismissed her distress with crude jocularity. "What do you suppose I would have to do with those hideous old sluts that are humping soldiers out in the brush in reliefs?" he asserted, "If you could see their performances by moonlight once or hear their howls and jokes with the men at a distance of a few hundred yards as I am compelled to night after night you would probably be at least as disgusted as I am."

If not placated by this blunt reassurance, Mary at least found something else to worry about—the rumors of a new war with Mexico over the Cutting affair. When Doane answered this concern, he left the clue regarding Warren that continues to puzzle Western historians nearly 130 years later.

"The Mexican trouble is all bosh. Cutting was properly imprisoned, at least so it begins to come out from the best sources. There is no movement [of troops] here in consequence of such reports and none expected," Doane wrote. "The men who are offering to raise troops
are mostly seedy scallywags of whom one
is the man who keeps the little doggy
in the bush in my camp, a man named
Broad from Tombstone and the most
contemptible character I ever saw, Earp
of Colton, a murderer who was driven
from Tombstone, is another."

Doane’s letter gives plenty of room
for interpretation and deserves a closer
look. “Broad” is no doubt Frank “Bloody
Frankie” Broad, a Tombstone saloon
owner, unofficial enforcer in the city’s red
light district and a successful candidate
for the area’s judicial district constable
that summer. Broad’s resume sounds
remarkably similar to the well-known
activities of all the Earp brothers during
their various careers throughout the West,
making Broad a logical companion for
someone like Warren.

That Warren is the particular brother
Doane referred to is also logically
established. Of all the surviving brothers,
Warren, Virgil and Jim were the most
widely associated with the village of
Colton, but only Warren was still under
indictment in 1886 for the murder of Frank
Stilwell in Tucson at the beginning of
the Vendetta Ride in March 1882. The
ambiguous wording of Doane’s sentence
could imply that Warren was Broad’s
partner in the doggy business, but it
could also suggest that Warren was simply
involved in organizing Cochise County
volunteers for the supposed invasion
of Mexico. Regardless, the sentence
establishes that Warren was in the area
because of Doane’s specific choice of
words, “the most contemptible character
I ever saw.”

“Earp of Colton”
The captain was never one to
use words carelessly. He held
a reputation as one of the best
report writers in the frontier
Army, and his published description
of the 1870 Yellowstone expedition played a
key role in the establishment of America’s
first national park. If Doane told his wife
he saw “Earp of Colton,” he meant exactly
that. Although the Tombstone newspapers
do not report on any Mexican invasion
volunteers organizing, a blurb in Prescott’s
Arizona Weekly Journal-Miner confirms
that 28 unidentified Tombstone men had
offered themselves for such a purpose on
August 18, the same date that Doane wrote
his letter.

Tombstone newspapers gave Broad
plenty of notice that summer for his
“supply” efforts directed at soldier
outposts, as well as his enthusiastic
activities in Tombstone’s anti-Chinese
league. Perhaps his role in calling for
volunteers was so well known, the paper
found it did not merit specific mention. Of
course Warren, if in the area, had his own
reasons for avoiding newspaper notice.

Was Warren involved in the purveying
of vice to soldiers in southern Arizona
during the Geronimo campaign, or was
he just an enthusiastic volunteer for an
imagined invasion of Mexico? From Capt.
Doane’s testimony, either conclusion
seems possible. Unless other evidence
regarding Warren’s whereabouts in the
summer of 1886 comes to light, this
statement by Doane supports the notion
that Warren returned to Arizona much
earlier than anyone has proven to date.

Professor Kim Allen Scott is the university archivist at
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depth biography of Capt. Doane, Helldorado Denied, was