

FEDERAL RETAKING OF THE ARIZONA TERRITORY

You met Lieutenant Pettis previously in Part 3 of this presentation. Pettis was a member of the California Column and wrote a history of same in 1907 at age 73. Much of the following is from his history.

The California Column consisted of 10 companies of the 1st California Infantry, 5 companies of the 1st California Cavalry, the Fifth California and Light Battery A of the 3rd U.S. artillery, with a total strength of 2350 rank and file. Their campaign started from Fort Yuma on the California- Arizona border.

Never did the column move as one unit. Advance parties were sent ahead to scout, strengthen fortifications at camping points, and to collect what food and forage was available for the larger groups to follow. As we saw in the previous part, Confederate Sherrod Hunter and his Arizona Rangers did much to delay the column by destroying these accumulations of supplies whenever found. Another reason for breaking up the column as previously mentioned was the limited water supplies at springs and waterholes.

Following the Battle of Picacho Pass, Union Captain Calloway returned to the Pima Villages and started work on a permanent camp, the earthworks of which were named Fort Barrett. It took several weeks for the main elements of the column to reach the Pima Villages.

On May 15th, an advanced detachment under Colonel West left the villages for Tucson, going through "Casa Grande" and Rattlesnake Springs for old Fort Breckenridge (later named Fort Grant), where the American flag was run up on the flagpole of the abandoned fort amid the cheers of the men and the field music playing "The Star Spangled Banner".

On May 19th, the detachment marched 15 miles and encamped within 10 miles of Tucson. The grand entrance to Tucson was made from 3 different roads on the 20th. There they found that the Confederates had publicly announced that the "Abs" (abolitionists) would soon take control of the town which would be given over to a brutal soldiery. The alarmed population, mostly Mexican, had evacuated starting southward for Sonora.

The troops would stay in Tucson for two months, until July 20th, while the column was being assembled and accumulating enough food and forage to start the final leg to the Rio Grande, still almost 200 miles away. Almost all supplies were being brought by wagon train from Southern California. It was during this period that Carleton and Canby were promoted to Generals.

Repeated efforts were made to open communications with Federal troops in New Mexico and to alert them that the California Column was on it's way. None of the express parties ever returned. The following expedition though successful explains why. On June 15, 1862, Sergeant William Wheeling, expressman John Jones and a Mexican guide named Chaves left Tucson with dispatches for General Canby at Fort Craig. This party was attacked by Apaches at Apache Pass, about 75 miles East of Tucson, on June 18th. Chaves was killed by the first exchange of shots and Wheeling so seriously wounded that he fell off his horse and was dispatched. Both bodies were later found badly mutilated. Jones escaped and after a ride of 200 miles reached

the Rio Grande near Mesilla, where he was captured by the Rebels who relieved him of his dispatches and threw him in jail. He still somehow got word through to Canby, probably via a Union sympathizer.

On June 21st, a strong party of cavalry left Tucson, arriving at Fort Thorn on the Rio Grande (between Mesilla and Fort Craig) on July 4th. Thorn had been abandoned by the rebels. Lieutenant Commander Eyre was reinforced by a squadron of the 3rd U.S. Cavalry and proposed attacking Mesilla, but received peremptory orders from the "Fighting Parson" now Colonel Chivington of the 1st Colorado Volunteers at Fort Craig, who under General Canby's orders was in command of the Southern Military District of New Mexico.

The largest battle of the California Column took place in early July when Captain Roberts, Company E, 1st Infantry, Captain Cremony's Company B, 2nd Cavalry and with two mountain howitzers under the command of Lieutenant Thompson left Tucson for the San Simeon River to establish a camp for the relief Eyre's command should they be forced back by the Texans. This relief command was attacked by a large force of Apache warriors under Cochise. The howitzers turned the tide and the Apaches were forced with a loss of nine killed, while the troops suffered 2 killed and 2 wounded.

The California Column commenced advancing from Tucson on July 20th with five companies of infantry under the command of Colonel West departing. They were followed the next day by Captain Willis with two companies of infantry and Battery A, 3rd U.S. Artillery. On July 23, Lieutenant Colonel Rigg with five companies of infantry followed. Each detachment had subsistence for 30 days, with a full supply of entrenching tools. Upon their arrival in Tucson, the infantry had carried full fifty pound packs, a notable achievement considering the nature of the country through which they marched in woolen uniforms and the heat and thirst they encountered. Much to their relief, General Carleton issued General Order #10 on July 17th stating "that every soldier may move forward with a light, free step, now that we approach the enemy; he will no longer be required to carry his knapsack".

Carleton arrived at Fort Thorn on August 7, 1862 and immediately communicated with Canby. The balance of the column arrived on the Rio Grande in detachments as they left Tucson, one day apart. By August 15th with the retreat of the Confederates to San Antonio, Mesilla was made headquarters of the Federal District of Arizona. The Southern Overland Mail Route was opened and troops of the California Column reoccupied U.S. military posts in Arizona, New Mexico and Northern Texas.

On September 18th, 1862, General Carleton assumed command of the Department of New Mexico (General Canby had been ordered East) and active operations commenced against the hostile Apaches and Navajos. To congratulate the troops on the end of the Confederate threat, Carleton issued the following:

Headquarters of the Department of New Mexico, Santa Fe, N.M.,
Sept 21st, 1862

Gen. Orders No 85

In entering upon the duties that remove him from immediate association with the troops constituting the "Column from California", the Commanding General desires to express his grateful acknowledgement of the conduct and services of the officers and men of that command. Traversing a desert country that had heretofore been regarded as impracticable for the operations of large bodies of troops, they have reached their destination and accomplished the object assigned them, not only without loss of any kind, but improved in discipline, in morale, and in every other element of efficiency. That patient and cheerful endurance of hardships, the zeal and alacrity which they have grappled with, and overcome obstacles that would have been insurmountable to any but troops of the highest physical and moral energy, the complete abrogation of self and subordination of every personal consideration to the great object of our hopes and efforts give the most absolute assurance of success in any field or against any enemy.

California has reason to be proud of the sons she has sent across the continent to assist in the great struggle in which our country is now engaged. The Commanding General is requested by the officer who preceded him (Canby) in the command of this department, to express for him the gratification felt by every officer and soldier of his command at the fact that troops from the Atlantic and Pacific slope, from the mountains of California and Colorado, acting in the same cause, inspired by the same duties, and animated by the same hopes, have met and shaken hands in the center of this great continent.

The California Column would spend the remainder of the war in campaigns against the Indians. In 1863 they captured Apache chief Mangas Coloradas who was subsequently killed trying to escape. California troops were to escort immigrant and government wagon trains as far as Fort Dodge, Kansas until discharged in 1865.