

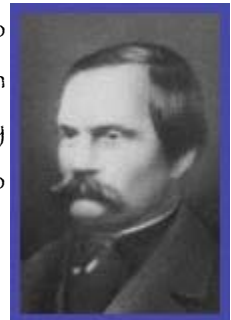
Major General James Henry Carleton

Biography

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A veteran dragoon who rose to command the Department of New Mexico during the Civil War. It was the approach of Carleton's California Column in September 1862 that finally caused Confederate General H.H. Sibley to abandon all thoughts of taking New Mexico and, in turn, to quit El Paso and march his brigade eastward.



After serving as a volunteer in the Aroostook War in his native Maine, Carleton received a commission in the Regular Army in 1839. He served under Brigadier General Stephen W. Kearney on the Rocky Mountain Expedition of 1846, then joined the staff of General John Wool on the latter's march into Mexico. He was brevetted for gallantry in the Mexican War and thereafter served on surveying, exploring and Indian fighting expeditions. From 1851 to 1856 he served in New Mexico with the First Dragoons. After duty in the East he was back in 1859 at Fort Tejon, California, with the 1st Dragoons.

The outbreak of the Civil War found him a major in the newly formed 6th U.S. Cavalry. General George Wright, responding to a plea from Canby in New Mexico, ordered Carleton to raise a relief force. The latter raised the 1st California Infantry and the 1st California Cavalry as the nucleus of the relief force and was appointed Colonel, 1st California Volunteer Infantry. He moved his force eastward almost at once.

'A remarkable march through the hostile Indian country of Arizona to join Canby made by eleven companies of infantry, two of cavalry, and two batteries under Colonel J. H. Carleton...overland from Southern California,' we are informed by the editors of *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War* (Vol. II, p. 698).

The Confederate threat was ended, but the concentration of the troops along the Rio Grande had given the Indians an opportunity to raid and pillage. Apaches, Kiowas, Navajos and Comanches were striking throughout the territory. Shortly Carleton was promoted Brigadier General (US Volunteers) succeeding Canby in command of the Department of New Mexico. He moved immediately against the hostiles, combining his California Volunteers with those from New Mexico and Colorado, together with a handful of Regulars, "Carleton's principal field commander was himself no novice at Indian fighting," writes Utley "Kit Carson, now Colonel of the 1st New Mexico Cavalry, was the mailed fist with which the general struck at the hostiles."

For the rest of the war the troops campaigned without let-up. Carleton was relentless, harsh, hardbitten. "All men... are to be killed whenever and wherever you find them," he ordered a subordinate. "The women and children will not be harmed, but you will take them prisoners ." The Mescaleros were suppressed and moved east to the Pecos. Then Carleton crushed the Navajos and brought their 250-year reign of terror to an end with a scorched-earth policy which ruined their crops, captured their stock and wrought devastation in their homeland. The shattered Navajo bands drifted in to surrender. Kit Carson was next sent into the Panhandle to war upon the Kiowa and the Comanche, while escorts were provided for the vulnerable wagon trains

At the Battle of Adobe Wells, Carson found himself besieged by a large party of Kiowas and Comanches. The outnumbered Carson kept the Indians at bay with his howitzers and successfully withdrew that night after first burning the Kiowa village.

As the Civil War ended in the East, the volunteer regiments continued in action until relieved by the Regulars in late 1866.

Carleton was promoted to Major General, USV, and brevetted Major General, U.S. Army. With the postwar reduction of the Army, Carleton was appointed Lieutenant Colonel of the 4th U.S. Cavalry. He wrote numerous articles for military publications and published a book on the Battle of Buena Vista. He died in uniform at age 59 in 1873.

It should be noted that although he was strong on discipline, General Carleton was popular with his men, a careful writer and tactician who impressed both Jefferson Davis and George McClellan, and a faithful and beloved husband and father.

Sources

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