

THE UNION RESPONSES TO THE INVASION

On September 9, 1861, New Mexico Territorial Governor Henry Connelly issued a call to arms saying "Citizens of New Mexico, your Territory has been invaded, the integrity of your soil has been attacked—and the enemy is already at your gates". In response to the invasion and Connelly's call to arms, 3500 New Mexicans were recruited as volunteers even though many had been U.S. citizens for less than 15 years. The majority were of Hispanic descent and came from the Northern New Mexican towns of Las Vegas, Mora, Santa Fe, Taos and other surrounding villages. At that time, the population of New Mexico was 80,000 excluding Indians. Their assistance became vital as all but a skeleton number of regular troops were being moved to the eastern theater.

Five regiments composed of five to ten companies (80-100 men per company) were raised and included both infantry and cavalry. The recruits were assembled and organized at Fort Union and Albuquerque under such prominent officers as Kit Carson, Ceran St. Vrain, Manuel Chavez, Miguel Pino, Raphael Chacon and Francisco Chavez.

Throughout the late summer and fall the New Mexico Volunteers were outfitted and received their initial training. In mid- August, those at Fort Union were assigned to construct star-shaped earthworks to defend against the invading Confederates. Three shifts worked 24 hours a day to complete the work before the Confederates arrived.

As soldiers, native New Mexicans experienced a multitude of frustrations in the service. First, English was the language of the military and confusion was inevitable. Second, ethnic jealousies surfaced, New Mexicans were labeled peons, greasers and called unprincipled, lazy, cowardly and ignorant. Additional frustrations resulted from poor training and obsolete equipment with the .69 caliber model 1842 musket being a standard issue to the volunteers.

Colonel Edward R. S. Canby (later commanding officer at the Battle of Mobile and the only general officer to die in the Indian Wars) commanding the Military Department of New Mexico, sought to stem the Confederate tide by protecting powerful Fort Craig (30 miles south of present day Socorro) and Fort Union so as to control the Rio Grande Valley. At Fort Craig, Canby called in garrisons from Arizona, activated the New Mexico Volunteers and militia, and drew ammunition and supplies from military depots at Albuquerque and Fort Union. In early February, Canby combined Col. Christopher (Kit) Carson's First Volunteer Regiment with regulars of the Fifth and Seventh Infantry (many refugees from the defeats at the forts to the south), detachments of the First, Second and Third Cavalry, and a company of Colorado Volunteers. By mid- February (just before the Confederates arrived on Feb. 16th) Canby had collected 3800 men at Fort Craig, but only 1200 were seasoned soldiers. The rest were of questionable value, hence the reason for combining the novices with the veterans. Canby reasoned that with untried troops, he could fight only under the most favorable conditions. Realizing that he would need reinforcements, Canby contacted the Department of Colorado for assistance.

Meanwhile, another potential source of assistance was the State of California and the following deals with that state's organization of troops and their eventual commitment against the Confederates in Arizona/ New Mexico. The following is from the "California Column" by Lieutenant George H. Pettis, commander, company K, 1st Regiment of Infantry, California Volunteers and describes events leading up to the counter- attack by the Californians." You will meet Lieutenant Pettis again after the counter- attack is launched in the final segment of this presentation." Immediately after the first battle of Bull Run on July 24, 1861, Governor John G. Downey received from the Secretary of War, Simon Cameron, a communication which said: "The War Department accepts, for three years, one regiment of infantry and five companies of cavalry to guard the Overland Mail Route from Carson Valley to Salt Lake City and Fort Laramie." This was the first official action towards organizing troops in California, and it required but a short time to raise the required number of men, and as fast as the companies were mustered in at the Presidio near San Francisco, they were transported across the bay to Camp Downey (in present day Oakland).

The First California Volunteer Infantry and five companies of the First Cavalry were being well drilled and disciplined at Camp Downey when news was received at Department Headquarters that Secessionists in the southern part of the state were becoming turbulent and more outspoken, and on September 17th General Sumner ordered Colonel Carleton's command to Southern California. (There they were to quell the uprising and thus end John R. Baylor's concept of an ocean to ocean Confederacy).

The First Infantry, under Colonel James H. Carleton since July 26, 1861, and the First Cavalry, under Lieutenant Colonel Benjamin F. Davis, arrived at San Pedro and marched some eighteen miles north to lay out a camp for fifteen companies near a small creek (Ballona Creek in present Culver City). They named it "Camp Latham" in honor of one of the California Senators. When the order came for regular Army troops to transfer to the East Coast, Major Edwin A. Riggs of the First California Infantry was sent with several companies to replace those leaving Fort Yuma. Other regulars from Los Angeles, San Bernadino and San Diego were soon assembled at San Pedro for shipment to New York.

On The 20th of October 1861, Colonel George Wright of the Twelfth U.S. Infantry replaced General Sumner as commander of the Department of California. General Sumner shortly thereafter, was drowned on his way to take command of the Department of Oregon when the steamer "Brother Jonathan" sunk off the mouth of the Columbia River. On November 20th, Colonel Carleton was called to San Francisco to take command of the California troops heading east by the overland route through Salt Lake City. But these orders were superseded when news was received of the successful invasion of New Mexico and Arizona by a force of Texans under Confederate General H. H. Sibley. Within a few days, Wright and Carleton developed a plan to proceed with a command through Arizona and attack Sibley on his flank and rear. General Wright submitted this plan to the War Department on December 9, 1861, and received immediate approval from General McClellan.

It was decided that Fort Yuma, on the California side of the Colorado River, should be the jumping off point for the expedition, and advance units were sent with all promptitude to prepare for the increased activity which would take place in a few months, and to strengthen its defenses in case Confederates arrived there before the

main force of California Volunteers. A small camp at Warner's Ranch (near present Warner's Springs), named Camp Wright was enlarged to serve as an intermediate supply and staging point halfway between Wilmington and Fort Yuma. Supplies started moving forward, both by Phineas Banning's teams across the desert and by steamship to the head of the Gulf of California and then up the Colorado by river steamboats of the Colorado River Navigation Company.

The "California Column" originally consisted of ten companies of the First California Infantry, five companies of the First California Cavalry, one company of the Second California Cavalry and Light Battery A of the Third U. S. Artillery. This command contained 1500 men, well drilled, well disciplined, and eager to show what stuff they were made of. Later on, Lieutenant Colonel George W. Bowie's Fifth California was added, bringing the total strength to 2350 rank and file. It should be pointed out here that never did the entire column move as one unit. Advance parties, some quite large, were sent ahead to scout, to strengthen fortifications at camping points, and to collect what food and forage was available for the large groups to follow. Another reason for breaking the column into smaller units was to conserve the water supply at springs and water holes, many of which only had enough water for a few hundred men with their mounts and mule teams at one time".

The Federal buildup of troops at Fort Yuma did not go unnoticed by the Confederates and was one of the major reasons for the campaign of Captain Sherod Hunter and his contingent of Arizona Rangers discussed following Sibley's Campaign.