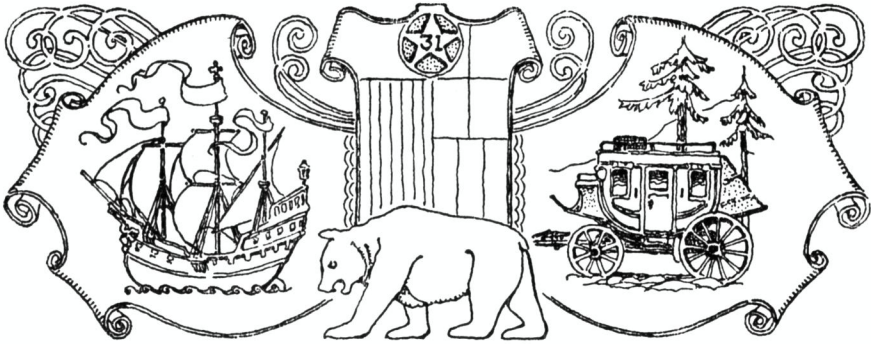


From Oil Painting in Bohemian Club, San Francisco.

Major John C. Cremony, 1865
Second Cavalry, California Volunteers.



J. GREGG LAYNE, *Editor*

HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA QUARTERLY DECEMBER, 1948

California Volunteers on Border Patrol Texas and Mexico, 1862-1866

By AURORA HUNT

CALIFORNIA VOLUNTEERS by the thousands were enrolled during the years 1861-5 to substitute for the Regulars who were withdrawn from the western states for duty on the eastern battlefields.¹ During the intervening years the details of their many and arduous services appear to have been obliterated as completely as their life blood on the desert sand of the Southwest.

Wyoming, Utah, New Mexico and Arizona have honored these boys by erecting monuments to commemorate their sacrifices. From California they have received scant recognition yet they helped make the settlement of California and the rest of the West possible. There were no pennants with gold stars hung for them. Their names are listed on the *Roll of Honor*—that is all.² These volumes are to be found in but a few of the libraries of the state and are not available to the general reading public.

California was the first western state called upon when the Volunteer Employment Act was passed by the Thirty-seventh Congress and signed by Abraham Lincoln, July 22, 1861. Two days later a telegram from the War Department was on its way to California. The telegraph line from the East had been completed only to Fort Kearney

so there it was handed to the Pony Express whose riders relayed it across the gap in the wires to Fort Churchill, Nevada, where it was telegraphed to Governor John G. Downey.³

The speed of the enlistments of the California Volunteers seems incredible when the only mail delivery then was by the old river boats, the stage coach and the pony. At that time no western state could boast of a single mile of railroad except California with her seventy miles and Oregon with only three and eight-tenths miles.⁴

But the news of the call spread and the quota for California was filled so rapidly that when the second call from the War Department reached Sacramento three weeks later, no difficulty was encountered in filling the required regiments.

California was then a young man's State as almost forty-five per cent of the population was of military age. At the beginning of the War, the U. S. Census credits California with a population that exceeded that of Washington, Oregon, Arizona, Utah and Colorado combined. In fact, their total was about 25,000 less than the military age group of California.

The frontier soldier is usually pictured as a cavalryman yet the California Volunteer Infantry far outnumbered the Cavalry. Eight regiments of Infantry were enrolled but these did not include the eight companies of the Washington First Infantry who were Californians recruited in San Francisco. There were only two full regiments of cavalry but in addition five companies of Californians formed an integral part of the Second Massachusetts Cavalry. Six companies made up the Mountain Battalion and four constituted the First Battalion Native California Cavalry. The total number of California Volunteers exceeded 17,000.

Authority to raise four companies of Native California Cavalry was granted by the Secretary of War on January 20, 1863. Don Andres Pico of Los Angeles, then Brigadier General of the First Brigade of California Militia, was commissioned Major but declined the honor on account of sickness. Salvador Vallejo was appointed to take his place. He resigned in February 1865 and was succeeded by Major John C. Cremony, Second Cavalry, California Volunteers.

Company D, commanded by Captain Edward Bale, was recruited in Los Angeles and trained at Drum Barracks along with Company C which enlisted at Santa Barbara under Captain Antonio Maria de la Guerra. These companies were greatly admired as they paraded before the other cavalymen who agreed that "it was really a gratifying sight to see these adopted citizens in Federal Blue, with their lances, sabres and pistols, ready to risk their lives in defense of their country."

Companies A and B were made up of Californians from San Jose and San Francisco. Porfirio Jimenez was commissioned Captain of

Company B and José Ramon Pico of Company A. At the recruiting Headquarters on the Plaza at San Jose, Pico made a stirring appeal to his countrymen.

“We convene here this evening on an important matter. The Captain’s commission, which I here display before you, authorizes me to form a Company of California Cavalry to be composed of a hundred able bodied men to serve the Government of the United States of America. Those among you, who are willing to enlist under my command, shall not regret their choice, I have sworn to defend this beautiful Flag, the Star Spangled Banner, the emblem of Truth, Liberty and Justice, and I would also take another oath, to guard the personal rights of each and every volunteer under my command.

“Sons of California! Our country calls, and we must obey. This rebellion of the southern states must be crushed. They must come back into the Union, and pay obedience to the Stars and Stripes. United, we will become the freest and mightiest republic on earth. Crowned monarchs must be driven away from the sacred continent of free America.

“Strike for your altars and your fires!
Strike for the green graves of your sires!
Strike for our Union’s emblem grand,
Star Spangled Banner, God, and your native land!”⁵

Los Angeles County supplied 163 volunteers in addition to those enrolled in Company D, Native California Cavalry. The Los Angeles men wished to be enrolled in one of the regiments of Cavalry but both the First and Second were filled so the disappointed Volunteers were mustered into the companies of infantry whose ranks had not been filled.⁶

As early as September 9, 1861, about six weeks after the first call for volunteers, the Federal troops were ordered to leave at once for the East. By Christmas, all but a skeleton force had sailed leaving the responsibility of protecting this frontier of a million square miles to young volunteers.⁷

Theirs was the job of keeping watch over a 1500-mile seaboard and protecting it from foreign intervention and internal disturbances. From the Pacific to the Rocky Mountains and from the Canadian border to Mexico, this small volunteer army garrisoned the old forts and blockhouses.

To them was assigned the duty of shielding from Indian attacks, the freight and emigrant trains; the mail routes and telegraph lines; the miners, farmers, the sheep and the cattlemen. They were everybody’s escort — the surveyor, clergy, journalist, artist and layman.

In addition to their western services, some of them guarded the

Capitol at Washington and fought with the Army of the Potomac. Their complete story would cover more than a thousand pages. If their footsteps could be traced, a veritable spider web would be designed.

One of their most important duties was the patrol of the borders of Texas and Mexico. By the time the Californians, under the command of Brigadier General James H. Carleton, had reached the Rio Grande, the Confederate troops had recrossed the Texas border en route for San Antonio. Nevertheless, they were followed by the California Volunteers and the United States Flag was raised over Forts Bliss, Quitman, Stockton and Davis across the Texan border.⁸

In their hurry to reach San Antonio, the Confederate troops were unable to move their sick and wounded and were obliged to leave them in improvised shelters and hospitals where they were under the care of Surgeon Edward N. Covey, formerly of the United States Army, then serving with the Confederate States Army. The civilians and even the Union Officers' families cared for these unfortunate soldiers until arrangements could be made for their return to Texas.

It was September 1862 before General Carleton made provision for the transfer of the last of the prisoners of war and the sick and wounded. His letter, written at Franklin (El Paso, Texas) to the Confederate Officer in command at San Antonio, provides a striking example of the compassion and consideration of the early frontier soldier as well as the exigencies of the situation.

"Sir: I found upon my arrival here, twenty or more sick and wounded soldiers of the Confederate States Army whom I was ordered by General Canby, commanding the Department of New Mexico, to make prisoners of war.

"These men, at their earnest solicitations, I sent to San Antonio on their parole. They have been furnished with rations for forty days and medicine and hospital stores necessary on the road. I have also furnished two wagons for those who cannot walk, and have sent an escort of one Lieutenant, Albert H. French, and twenty-five rank and file of the First Cavalry to guard against attack by Mexicans or Indians until a sufficient force of your army is met to whom they can be transferred; or until they reach some point near San Antonio from which they can travel with safety. From that point the Lieutenant is ordered to return with his party and all the means of transportation belonging to the United States with which he was intrusted for the use of his escort and for the benefit of the prisoners."

Other prisoners of war, almost a hundred, were supplied with arms belonging to the United States Army with which to defend themselves while en route to San Antonio. They were permitted to travel without escort as they were then able to take care of themselves.

The only requirement was that they must deliver their arms to Lieutenant French who was instructed to return them to the Headquarters of the California Volunteers.

General Carleton's orders were repeated to other California Officers. When Captain Edmond D. Shirland, Company C, First Cavalry, was detailed to raise the United States Flag over Fort Davis, he was reminded that if he found any sick or wounded Confederate soldiers there, he should put them on parole and report to Headquarters if they needed food, transportation, medical or surgical attention, as it was Carleton's wish that they be properly cared for.⁹

Although the Confederates had been frustrated in their first attempt to obtain possession of Arizona and New Mexico, rumors persisted that a second invasion was imminent. Letters flaunting, "Department Headquarters of Texas, New Mexico and Arizona," were intercepted on the border and revealed the determination of the Texans to make another effort to conquer the Southwest.

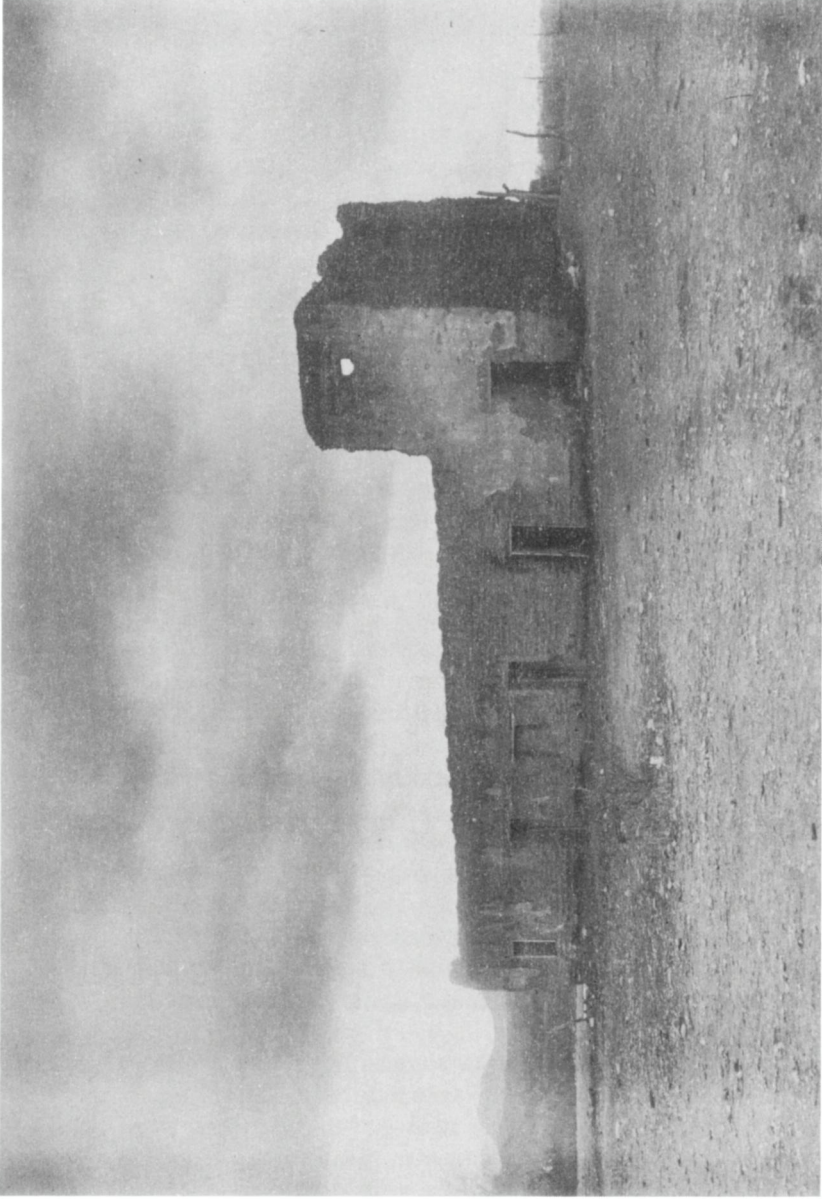
To prevent a surprise attack, General Carleton concentrated a number of the California Volunteers at Las Cruces and Mesilla, New Mexico, Fort Bliss and at Hart's Mill, Texas. A California Volunteer from Company A, First Cavalry, contributes a detailed account of Hart's Mill, near El Paso, Texas, where he was stationed October 4, 1862.

". . . El Molino del Norte, or Hart's Mill, as it is more frequently called, is situated on the eastern bank of the Rio Grande, about a mile above and opposite the Mexican town of El Paso del Norte. I shall not attempt a description of this latter place as it would be superfluous.

"The mill is in sight of the Monument No. 2, erected by Major Emory's Boundary Commission. The country in the immediate vicinity of the mill is desolate in the extreme with the exception of a few cottonwoods in the enclosures. When one stands near the buildings his eye meets nothing but sand, gravel, the eternal mesquite, and various kinds of cacti. If we except the river, the mill, and away off in the distance the *bosques* which surround the town of El Paso, and the little village of Franklin, a more desolate picture cannot well be imagined.

"But let us turn from this to something a little more agreeable. The mill and adjoining houses were built by Simeon Hart of New York in the year 1852 . . . The mill is run by water power and is complete in all of its appointments. It runs four French stones and the largest one is three and a half feet in diameter.

"Attached to the mill are four large storehouses which were, in prosperous times, filled with wheat, corn, flour, etc. These storehouses are now occupied by the men composing Company A, First Infantry;



From Author's Collection

Fort Tubac, Arizona

contents not quite so bulky perhaps as the former, but far more valuable, for a finer set of men never marched 'to battle for their country's rights.' But I will not praise them. What they have endured is written in letters of gold on the tablets of fame; what they are yet to do remains to be seen . . . Judging by the past, none of its members will ever have cause to blush that they once belonged to the First Infantry, California Volunteers.

"The mill on one side, a storehouse on another, the private residence of Hart on the other, and a wall connecting the house and mill, form the sides of a spacious courtyard, in the center of which is a sun dial. The house is very large, and previous to Hart's leaving, was elegantly furnished with all that the most fastidious taste could suggest and the most ample purse procure. His storerooms were well filled with all that an epicure could desire. Costly wines and liquors he had in abundance and the dinners which he gave were of the most princely character . . .

"When the Texans left, Hart went with them but he left his furniture and valuable library in El Paso del Norte, Mexico. That he did not destroy the mill is a matter of some surprise, but he fully believed that another Secesh force would arrive in a few months to retake the country. He left the mill in charge of his miller, Mr. H. H. Cooper, of Rome, New York. This gentleman is a strong Union man and upon hearing of the arrival of our Column immediately sent for a force to take possession in the name of the United States. The course which he pursued has met with the hearty approbation of General Carleton as well as every one in the Column. By his uniform kindness to both the officers and men of Company A, First Infantry, and to every one with whom he comes in contact, he has won for himself the highest encomiums. It is to his instrumentality that we are indebted for many comforts which we now possess. In after years when we think of our stay at Hart's Mill, his memory will be sure to have a bright place in our hearts . . ."¹⁰

The Volunteers probably did remember their stay at Hart's Mill, and without doubt their commanding officer, Colonel Edwin A. Rigg, never forgot as he married the daughter of H. H. Cooper, the mill superintendent. She was described as a "beautiful black-eyed bride of seventeen summers."

About the middle of October 1862, a notorious Confederate spy known as Captain Skillman arrived in El Paso, Mexico, and reported that a large force of Texans was within ten days march of the town. His propaganda was so effective that many of the residents of Isleta, Socorro and San Elizario hurriedly crossed the Rio Grande to Mexico to escape the Invaders.

Captain Skillman usually arrived at night and would deliver the

mail, secure all possible information, and be away by morning. At one time, he barely escaped capture when he and ten of his men held the Plaza at El Paso for two hours before they were able to shoot their way out.¹¹

American and Mexican outlaws were then operating on both sides of the border. A gang at Fort Leaton, on the Texas side, crossed to Del Norte and took a peaceful American citizen named Wolfe from his bed one night, and hung him until he was almost dead before they released him. He was subjected to this gruesome experience because he had vowed his loyalty to the Union. The chief instigator of this near-hanging was the American desperado, Edward Hall, who lived at Fort Leaton. He claimed to be an agent of the Confederacy and showed papers signed by a notary empowering him to dispose of the United States Government property at Fort Davis.¹²

When President Lincoln appointed Reuben Creel as United States Consul to Chihuahua, more reliable information was obtainable and before long the activities of the outlaws and the spies on the border were curbed. Creel had lived in Chihuahua for sixteen years and offered his services to the Government gratis.

Major David Fergusson, First California Cavalry, was ordered to confer with the new Consul and devise plans whereby the movement of the Texas troops could be watched and an invasion of the Southwest averted. Fergusson also called on Don Luis Terrazas, Governor of Chihuahua, in order to adopt some plan to rid the border of desperadoes and the abuses of some of the Southern sympathizers who had taken refuge in Mexico. Terrazas agreed to grant passports to American officers and their armed escorts when necessary for their protection. Lack of extradition laws proved harmful to both the United States and Mexico as the outlaws habitually crossed the border after raiding one side or the other.¹³

Creel was able to obtain considerable information from M. M. Kinney, Vice Consul at Monterrey and from citizens of San Antonio, but because mail service was so slow and uncertain, the California troops on the border would receive the information before Creel's letter arrived, or Skillman would have come and gone again.

Orders were issued for increased vigilance and unceasing patrol of all border trails. As a further precaution, all supplies were to be moved north of the border if the Texan force proved too large to be held back. Furthermore, buildings that might be of service to the Texans, were ordered burned. Hart's Mill was especially marked for destruction and also all ferry boats on the Rio Grande. Colonel Joseph R. West, First Infantry, was cautioned to retreat rather than to permit the enemy to advance to a position where they could shut off the Californians' source of supply at Fort Craig, New Mexico.¹⁴

Letters and newspapers from Texas exaggerated the threat of invasion, and Reuben Creel concluded that the army reported moving north was a humbug. However, he did give credence to a rumor that the Jews were fleeing from Texas and pouring into Mexico for safety as they were being violently persecuted.¹⁶

For almost three years, Captain Skillman, the Confederate spy, rode the border trails, eluding the troops on each trip; but he was destined to take his last ride. It was April 1864, when he reached the Spencer Ranch near Presidio del Norte to rest his horse in the hospitable shade. Company A, First Infantry, was then stationed at Hart's Mill and Captain Albert H. French had ordered his men to keep a sharp lookout for Skillman. Did the daring spy and pony express rider decide to fight his way out, and did he die fighting? Was he surprised and shot when he refused to surrender? The records do not say. Shorn of all details, the official report reads, "One of my scouts killed the notorious spy, Skillman, and confiscated the mail he carried . . ."¹⁶

The California Volunteers on the Arizona-Mexico border were alerted for any trouble that might arise from the French occupation of Mexico. Five companies of the Seventh Infantry and four of the Native California Cavalry were stationed at Fort Mason near Calabasas, Arizona, to preserve the neutrality of the United States. Fort Mason was formerly named Buchanan and was the first United States Fort built after the Gadsden Purchase. Other companies were assigned to duty at Tubac to control the Indians.

General Carleton found himself in an embarrassing position when the War Department warned the California troops against any military action that would jeopardize the friendly relations with France or complicate the United States in the war between Mexico and Maximilian's French troops.¹⁷

On the other hand, William H. Seward, Secretary of State, adhered to the good neighbor policy and maintained that the United States recognize only the Republic of Mexico and its President, Benito Pablo Juarez, and not the government of Prince Maximilian.¹⁸

When the French troops landed at Guaymas and began their conquest of Sonora, Governor Don Ignacio Pesqueira succeeded in eluding them and crossed the international border near Fort Mason, Arizona. The Governor sent a message to ask Colonel Lewis's permission to camp near the Fort. A soldier correspondent from Company C, Native California Cavalry, furnished an account of this incident: "Colonel Lewis replied that he and his officers would do themselves the honor to wait on the Governor of Sonora. This they did and offered him the hospitality and protection of the Post.

"The next day the Governor and his officers paid a visit to Colonel

Lewis. The fugitive Governor decided to make his quarters on an old ranch nearby where he can pasture his cattle, mules, and donkeys and horses. He brought 1,000 head of cattle, 100 head of horses and mules, beside a large number of sheep and goats. They say that the last place he visited in Sonora was his mine. It is reasonable to suppose that he has money. All his family and servants are here with him . . ."¹⁹

At about this same time, some of the California troops were having troubles of their own on the Mexican side of the border where they had been intercepted by the French troops and obliged to explain their presence south of the border. When the Californians said they had deserted from the Native California Cavalry, they were held as prisoners and their horses, arms, and equipment confiscated.

Captain José Ramon Pico, Company A, and Captain Porfirio Jimenez, Company B, with thirty men, crossed the border to obtain the release of their men. They met the French troops in Magdalena and demanded the deserters. They were told that if they would acknowledge the Imperial Government in Mexico, the prisoners would be freed. Captain Pico swore that he would not recognize the Emperor or the Imperial Government; and that the Republic of Mexico under President Juarez was the only Government he would recognize.

The French officer then replied that he could not surrender the California Cavalrymen until he had notified and received permission from his superior officer at Hermosillo. So Captain Jimenez returned to Fort Mason to report to Colonel Lewis. A few days later, Captain Pico and his deserters returned to the Fort, as the French had agreed to release the Californians and given them eight hours to leave Magdalena and twenty-four to cross the border.

Colonel Lewis increased the guard on the border to be assured that the French troops would not cross and if they did, they would not be permitted to return.

Soon after this trouble, it was reported that President Juarez, his cabinet, three hundred soldiers and a dozen pieces of artillery were approaching El Paso. General Carleton requested instructions from the War Department regarding the admittance of the fugitive President and his protection by the California Volunteers.

Carleton said, "Does the Government desire that greater hospitality be shown the President of our sister Republic, who has been driven from his country by foreign bayonets and forced to seek an asylum on American soil, than to any other private gentleman?"

"It seems to me that if our own President (Lincoln) were compelled to leave his country under similar circumstances, we should

feel grateful to Mexico, if she in turn, held out a helping hand and had a cheering word for him. I have ventured to say this, presuming that we, as a nation, are able to do right without an eye to diplomacy and are able to let the consequences of right take care of themselves."—Just another incident in the world history of political refugees.²⁰

It must have mitigated the General's anxiety when he was informed that the United States then had no extradition treaty with Mexico that required the giving up of belligerents to their adversaries.

Then as now, the lure of lost gold mines impelled the Volunteers to search for these hidden treasures whenever they had the opportunity. Tales of riches circulated about the garrison. ". . . Eighteen miles to the northwest of Tubac there is said to be an immensely rich gold mine which supported the old Mission San Xavier. When the Apaches drove off the Jesuits a number of years ago, they covered up their mine and left no landmark. One hundred thousand dollars is offered for its discovery. One old Mexican thinks that he has found it but dares not to go to work there for fear of the Indians, as one Indian would be more than a match for a dozen Mexicans.

"In short, within 50 miles of Tubac may be found gold, silver, and copper mines of immense value, which will be worked as soon as they can have military protection. At the Sierra Colorado mine, three overseers have been killed by the Indians within a year, but it is still being worked."²¹

The Indians were an ever present danger to the citizens and to the soldiers. In their many encounters, only one out of four resulted in fatalities for either the Indians or the Californians as the race appeared to be to the swift and the Indians won.

A correspondent from Company E, Seventh Infantry, relates his experiences in a "chase." ". . . A camp of tame Apaches was attacked by a number of wild ones and one of them brought the news to town (Tubac). Colonel Lewis ordered out all the command except the sick and guard. Thereupon Companies E and D (Seventh Infantry) followed in the footsteps of Companies A and L, First Cavalry, who had 'mounted in hot haste' to pursue the untamed and fiery savage. Well, after a long afternoon's chase through mesquite brush, they returned to camp with two or three soldiers wounded — by mesquite thorns . . . Distance traveled, some 20 miles."²²

The California Volunteers continued their vigilance on the border for almost a year after the close of the war or until a sufficient number of the Regular Army arrived on the western frontier to relieve them. A considerable number served in this Volunteer Army for five years before they were mustered out.

HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

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