

The Battle of Chino

by GEORGE WILLIAM BEATTIE

THE SO-CALLED Battle of Chino, fought on September 26 and 27, 1846, nearly a century ago, has been treated by nearly all California historians, and from a military standpoint has been given all the attention it merits. It was no sanguinary conflict between large forces. It was merely a skirmish about a ranch house between Spanish-Californians and Americans or American sympathizers, a skirmish in which a number of men were injured but only one was killed. It was important mainly in that Californians learned there that Americans were not invincible, and they doubtless bore this fact in mind when they went a few months later to meet General Kearny's forces that were advancing into Southern California. Indeed, had the Americans and not the Californians been victorious at Chino, the Flores-led revolt against "gringo" rule might have collapsed, and there would probably have been no clash at Dominguez Field in October, at San Pascual in December, or at the San Gabriel River the following January. Apart from these military results, however, the affair at Chino produced some of an entirely different character — minor ones, perhaps — but results that interest students of local Southern California history. They have not been written up to any extent, and they furnish the main reason for the following article:

It will be remembered that shortly after the declaration of war between the United States and Mexico, and the subsequent raising of the United States flag over Monterey, Pío Pico, the Mexican governor, and José Castro, the military chief, realizing that resistance would be futile, left for Mexico, just three days before Commodore Stockton and Fremont entered Los Angeles with their forces and, unopposed, completed the occupation of California. This did not mean that the Californians were a conquered people, by any means. They were merely acquiescing in the seizure of their territory, hoping and believing that the outcome of the war would bring it back to them.

It will also be remembered that Stockton feared that Castro's seeming departure was only a ruse, and asked Benjamin D. Wilson,⁽¹⁾ a well-known and respected American, to enlist a force of men he could trust and follow Castro far enough to make sure that he was really leaving California. Wilson did this, and reported that Castro had crossed the Colorado River at Yuma with a small force and had gone on into Sonora. This satisfied Stockton that Castro was not planning

to return with a rabble of Sonorians collected at the border to attempt to retake the country, and, anticipating no trouble in Los Angeles he left with his troops, leaving Captain Gillespie in charge with but a few men. Gillespie was tactless in dealing with the Californians, and soon had an active uprising on his hands. The instigator of the first overt act was the turbulent and irresponsible Serbulo Varela of whom we shall hear more, but men like José María Flores, José Antonio Carrillo, and Andrés Pico, men who had been officers of standing under Castro, soon assumed leadership and a general revolt against American rule was launched. Flores was made commander-in-chief.

There were in Southern California a number of men, mainly American-born, known commonly as *extranjeros*, or foreigners, men like John Rowland of the Puente Rancho, Isaac Williams of the Santa Ana del Chino, or Louis Robidoux, of Jurupa. Most of these had obtained Mexican citizenship and had been granted tracts of land by the Mexican government. As a rule they had married California women who brought rich dowries in property. Male Californians were perfectly aware of the prosperity that had come to these outsiders, and were more or less resentful of it. In return, the feeling of the *extranjeros* for Mexico could not be called strong. It was blended largely with self-interest, and loyalty could be shifted without undue heart pangs. Most of the foreigners were glad when the United States moved upon California, and were willing to aid the American cause.

Among them and yet not wholly of them was Benjamin Wilson. He had never renounced *his* American citizenship, although he had married a daughter of Bernardo Yorba, one of the great California land owners. In 1843 he had bought six thousand acres of the Jurupa Rancho from Juan Bandini and had established his home there. His land included what is now the business section of the city of Riverside and the adjacent lands along the Santa Ana River. On these latter lands his home was situated.

When Flores reasserted Mexican authority over California, foreigners who had favored the American cause found themselves in an embarrassing and even dangerous predicament. If Mexican citizens, they were liable to be charged with treason by Mexican army authorities and face a firing squad, and confiscation of their properties was almost certain. Such were many of the men who resisted the Californians at Isaac Williams' ranch house at Chino.

The main source materials relating to the Battle of Chino that are familiar to the writer are:

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1. Benjamin D. Wilson's *Observations on Early Days in California and New Mexico*.
2. José del Carmen Lugo's *Vida de un Ranchero*.
3. Michael White's *California All the Way Back to 1828*.
4. José Francisco Palomares' *Episodios de la Campaña Contra Los Americanos*.
5. Stephen C. Foster's *Angeles from '47 to '49*.

These men should be borne in mind by readers of this article for they appear frequently in the pages that follow. Wilson's *Observations* had been dictated to his niece, Mary Stone, and were copied by Thomas Savage in 1877 while in Los Angeles collecting historical material for Hubert H. Bancroft. The other accounts were all dictated directly to Savage. The first four of the men were in the Chino fight. Foster was not in it, but gathered his information, as he says, "from parties on both sides . . . within six months after it took place." ⁽²⁾

In addition to these manuscript accounts, there is a letter, written by Louis Robidoux to Manuel Alvarez, May 1, 1848, in which he describes the fight. ⁽³⁾ He was with the American party.

It should be remembered that, excepting the Robidoux letter, all these accounts were given thirty-one years after the events had occurred, when impressions would naturally be less vivid than they were earlier. This tends to explain conflicting statements in them such as differences in compass directions, the arrangement of the Chino ranch house, and details of the fight itself. It is also entirely possible that in some instances personal opinions or prejudices colored them.

The *Observations* by Benjamin Wilson constitute by far the most important of these narratives. He was a man of superior intellect and character, the leader of the Americans in the fight, and he knew better than anyone else what occurred. Second in importance is the portion of José del Carmen Lugo's *Vida de un Ranchero* that has to do with the Chino affair. Lugo was then manager and part owner of the San Bernardino Rancho. He gives the steps leading up to the fight from the viewpoint of a Californian as probably only he could give them, for he was the organizer and leader of the men from San Bernardino and vicinity that followed Wilson's party from Jurupa to Chino. It was his men who engaged in the skirmish with the scouting party Wilson sent out from Chino, and it was they who began the siege of the Williams ranch house.

However, when Lugo gave his dictation to Thomas Savage he was weakened by age and misfortune, and his narrative shows an impair-

ment of mental faculties. Savage had great difficulty in getting the story from him. ⁽⁴⁾ Lugo had developed certain illusions, one to the effect that he had been commander of all the Californians at the Battle of Chino, whereas it is clear that he merely headed the group from San Bernardino the first day, and the main command next day was held by Serbulo Varela, leader of the force that came from Los Angeles that morning. Lugo also gave a fanciful reason for moving against Wilson in the first place, claiming that it was because Wilson had threatened to go to the Lugo home in San Bernardino and arrest him. This is most improbable, since Wilson and his small force were at the time endeavoring, at no slight personal risk, to get to Los Angeles to augment Gillespie's beleaguered command.

It is more reasonable to assume that on learning of the uprising in Los Angeles Lugo fell into a state of mind similar to that of José Palomares who says in his account of the Chino affair, "The object of their [the Americans'] gathering was to fight against Los Angeleños who had taken a stand against their country's invaders. . . . The pueblo became indignant on seeing that the men, most of whom had solicited and obtained Mexican citizenship, who had married the daughters of the country, and had made their fortunes under the Mexican banner, should show themselves such ingrates toward those who had loaded them with benefits." Lugo had doubtless observed the development of the part of Jurupa Rancho acquired by Wilson and Robidoux, and the Chino Rancho under Isaac Williams. He probably regarded all outsiders as a menace to the type of life his people were living. His *Vida* at various points displays a dislike for Wilson, Robidoux, and Williams, even though Williams was his brother-in-law.

The narrative of Michael White is of value in that it helps one to visualize the situation. White was an honest, practical, but uneducated man who came to California as a sailor on an English ship and married a California woman. He was in the Chino affair only through accident, but he was helpful to the Americans. The description of the battle by Señor Palomares and the letter by Louis Robidoux are both short, but they contain information that supplements the other accounts.

The narrative by Stephen C. Foster, although by the most highly educated man in Los Angeles at the time the fight occurred, does not rank so high as an account of the Battle of Chino as do those of Wilson and Lugo, since Foster was not in it and gained his information only through conversation with others. However, his wife

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was a sister of the wife of Williams, and his intimate acquaintance with the Chino Rancho, the ranch house, and its owner, enabled him to give clear descriptions. Also, from Antonio María Lugo, his father-in-law, he learned how that aged gentleman befriended the wounded American prisoners, a story of human interest which but for him would have been lost to us.

And now for the battle itself. We have seen that Benjamin Wilson went out with his party to make sure that José Castro, the Mexican military chief, had really left California for Mexico. He did not need to follow Castro clear to the Colorado River, for his acquaintance and friendship with Indians along the historic Colorado River Road which Castro's party would necessarily have taken enabled him to learn just who had passed that way, and where they had gone. After gaining the information he wished and instructing the tribesmen to watch for any troop movements or other unusual activity in their vicinity and report to him immediately, he turned his scouting force into a hunting party which enjoyed itself for a few days in the mountains between Warner's Ranch and Temécula, incidentally expending ammunition that was soon to be needed for another purpose.

Wilson's account of what followed is of such importance that we give it verbatim. He says, "We went upon our hunt in the mountains, and after a few days hunting and shooting, a messenger arrived with a letter from Mr. David W. Alexander and John Rowland advising me that they were on my ranch, having fled from the Pueblo and from their homes with others, and there was a general revolt of the Californians and Mexicans against Gillespie and all Americans, and that there was the devil to pay generally and to hasten down. Received the information in the evening and started at once. We marched all night and arrived at the Jurupa by daylight. Found there Alexander, Rowland, Robidoux, and others. . . . I mentioned the fact that in the mountains we had wasted most of our ammunition. That reminded them that they had a letter from Colonel Williams of the Chino Ranch. On opening this letter I saw that Williams had invited me to come to his place with my men, assuring me that he had plenty of ammunition.

"We at once saddled up and in great haste repaired to the Chino. On our arrival Williams advised me that an officer and some soldiers of the "California Brigade" had just been there and taken all the ammunition he had. I then called all my men to hold counsel and told them that we had little ammunition to fight or stand a siege, and that in my judgment it was best that we should go to the

mountains and make our way to Los Angeles by following the edge of the mountains, when we found ourselves threatened by a superior force. But the majority of them, being very new in the country, had a very contemptible opinion of the Californian's courage and fighting qualities and seemed to be of the unanimous opinion that a few shots would suffice to scare away any number of them that should come to attack us, and they seemed to hint that any attempt on my part to avoid meeting the Californians face to face would be deemed by them as an evidence of lack of courage in me.

"I remarked that I hoped they had not underrated the natives, but in obedience to their opinion I would remain with them, and as we were all volunteers, would not attempt to exercise any authority over them, and that we would see where the real courage was. I then called Colonel Williams to one side and asked him if he had any trusty men in whose charge I might send a letter to Captain Gillespie. He answered in the affirmative, one Feliz Gallardo, whom he would have there in a few minutes. I wrote a short note to Gillespie, informing him of all that had happened, the conversation I had with my men, the scarcity of ammunition, and the almost certainty that I could not come to his assistance. I told Williams to give the Mexican a pair of new shoes, I had the outer sole ripped, put my letter inside, and the sole resewed, then directed the man to go as fast as he could to Los Angeles, and not to take off his shoes till he got to Gillespie's quarters; all of which he promised to do faithfully.

"After he had ridden off some hundred of yards, Williams called loudly to him and made him stop and walked towards him. Gallardo always affirmed afterwards to me that Williams in that conversation used threats to him to report him if he did not deliver my letter to Captain Flores, the Commander of the Mexican forces, with his, Williams' compliments, as an evidence of his loyalty to the Mexican Government. Gallardo obeyed Williams and not me, and carried my letter to Flores. This was on the 26th day of September, 1846, in the evening.

"Very soon there appeared from eighty to one hundred men on horseback. Some of my men, among them Isaac Callaghan, volunteered to go and ascertain who these men were, and their number. Callaghan soon returned with a broken arm, stating that as soon as he approached the Californians, several shots had been fired at him, one of which struck him on the arm. He added that among the Californians he had seen one of the Lugo brothers, who was ap-

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parently commanding, and I believe it was José del Carmen Lugo, one of the owners of San Bernardino.”

Lugo's account in his *Vida* of proceedings up to this point varies but slightly from Wilson's, with the exception of his claim that Wilson had been threatening him personally. He tells how some young men had arrived at the San Bernardino Rancho from Los Angeles with the news that an uprising against the Americans was being planned there, and that “Benito” Wilson, who Lugo knew had been “engaged in patrolling the mountains with a detachment of foreigners and some of this country”, had been summoned to Los Angeles.

Lugo knew that Wilson had just returned to Jurupa, and prepared to go there and face him. He enlisted some men from his own rancho, busied himself that night in assembling such men as he could at Agua Mansa, and went on to meet Wilson. He says he had then about twenty-two men. He found no one at Wilson's home excepting his family and one or two employees. He induced one of these latter to accompany him, and from him learned that Wilson had left for the Rancho Chino.

En route to Chino he met some Indians returning to their own lands and took from them some crude spears or pikes they were carrying, giving them to some of the men in his party who were unarmed. On nearing Chino he sent five men ahead under Diego Sepúlveda to spy out the land, and these encountered an American (doubtless Callaghan) and two Californians. In the melee that resulted the American escaped, but the two Californians were captured and taken back to Lugo.

Foster says in his account that Callaghan and his opponent came to such close quarters that the powder from his pistol set fire to the seat of the Californian's trousers as he lay along the side of his horse away from his assailant, in Indian fashion, and the bullet plowed a furrow across his buttocks.

Lugo represents his party as doing no firing during this encounter, while Callaghan behaved in a menacing manner with his gun. The gun, by the way, was a peculiar sort of weapon, a revolving eighteen-shot rifle. It was put out of commission rather quickly, but Callaghan still had a pistol. Lugo also explains that thus far his moves had been made solely in response to Wilson's threat to arrest him. But when he reached the vicinity of Chino word came from Flores summoning him to Los Angeles with as many men as he could muster, and from then on he was acting under a recognized military authority and his men were soldiers. He

sent a request back by the messenger for reinforcements, saying that Wilson was fortified in William's home with about fifty men.

It will be noted that both Wilson and Lugo augment generously the forces of the opposition, while holding their own well within bounds. Indeed, this is the case in all the accounts.

In further effort to show that he was not the aggressor, Lugo proceeds to tell how a very strong north wind set in while he and his men were passing around the Williams home, at a distance of more than three hundred yards. The wind blew the hat from the head of one of his young men, and as the boy ran to recover it a shot rang out from the house. Lugo's men responded with three or four shots, but he says he ordered them not to waste the little ammunition they had.

He does not say what time of day it was when they reached Chino, but says they waited all afternoon for the men in the house to come out and fight. None came. The firing from the house continued, however, while the Lugo party rode around it, answering only occasionally. Lugo says that if the men had come out they could have finished his force, since he had only five muskets and a few pistols and lances, plus the spears he had taken from the Indians. As darkness came on, he posted guards on horseback about the house.

Michael White says that on this day that the trouble began, he was on his way from San Gabriel to San Gorgonio [Pass] to inspect some lumber that was being cut there by Pablo [Pauline] Weaver, and at Williams' invitation had stopped at the Chino Ranch for the night. While there Wilson's party, numbering "not more than eighteen" arrived. Five other men joined him later, and that evening the siege began. ⁽⁵⁾

White stood guard with one of Wilson's men, and during the night he heard the Californians outside telling each other how they would burn the Americans out next morning. He had suggested to Wilson and Williams that they have some crude wooden projections built at opposite corners of the house, so that each would command two sides of it. There were joists lying about which could have been used for such a purpose. His advice was not taken, as the Americans believed that the Californians would not venture near enough to the house to do any harm to it. Had his suggestion been acted upon, it might have saved the day for the Americans by preventing the firing of the roof. As it was, the walls of the house protected the besiegers, after the first dash, fully as well as they protected the besieged.

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White supports Wilson's statement concerning Williams' treachery in ordering his man, Gallardo, to deliver the letter entrusted to him to Flores instead of to Gillespie as Wilson had directed. He says, "Williams was a traitor to us", adding, however, that Williams and not Wilson wrote the letter. In this he is mistaken. We shall hear of Williams in this connection again.

José Palomares, in his account, describes the mustering of the Californians under "Don José Antonio Carrillo, military chief of the national guards, or volunteer soldiers, who had gathered to the number of four hundred to defend their homes from the rapacity of the foreigners." This is doubtless the organization which Williams designated as the "California Brigade" in the conversation with Wilson in which he told of his ammunition being taken from him. Palomares says that on learning of the gathering at Chino, Carrillo ordered thirty of these men, under the command of Serbulo Varela, to go and attack the "conspirators".

All this was on the first day, the 26th. The next day brought more action. The part of the ranch where the struggle occurred is now part of the grounds of the California Junior Republic, and the knoll on which stands the well-known Casa Colina was a central point. To the south of it, near the site of the Republic dairy buildings, was the Williams house. Around it at greater or lesser distances were structures used in the slaughtering of cattle, the rendering of tallow, and soap-making, for workshops, storerooms, and so on, along with corrals, and the rancherías where lived the Indian laborers.

Between the knoll and the Republic administration building stood a large adobe that had been the home of Antonio María Lugo, ⁽⁶⁾ and had been occupied by him until a short time before the fight. Not far from it, to the east, were the willows along Chino Creek among which Lugo's men encamped. The reinforcements from Los Angeles that came in response to his request would naturally have joined him there, since at this point they would have been out of sight of the men in Williams' home. Wilson says the Californians arranged their plan of attack on the knoll.

As to the Williams house, Wilson says it was "an old adobe built in the usual Mexican style, with a patio inside entirely enclosed by rooms. . . . "Stephen Foster describes it more fully than does Wilson, speaking of it as "perhaps the largest and best arranged private one in California." He says it formed a quadrangle of about two hundred and fifty feet with an open courtyard within, the walls built of adobe but the roof was covered with asphaltum. On

the north and south sides two large folding doors opened into the courtyard." The Wilson and Foster descriptions are at variance regarding certain compass points, especially the location of the house with reference to the knoll near it, and in this respect both seem to be wrong. The exact location of the house with reference to natural objects would probably be given accurately in the two surveys of the Chino Rancho made by the United States Government in 1858 and 1862, when the house was still standing, and it is this location that the writer accepts as correct.⁽⁷⁾

Wilson says, "At daybreak on the morning of the 27th, we found ourselves almost surrounded by California cavalymen", and goes on to tell how before his men could fire more than two or three shots apiece—they had no breechloaders or repeaters—the larger part of the attackers gained the protection of the house walls. He says they immediately set fire to the roof, and it burned rapidly with much smoke and vile odor. Neither party could see the other.

Serbulo Varela, as soon as he was satisfied that the fire would force the inmates from the building, went to the main door and called upon Wilson and his companions to surrender, assuring them that he was friendly toward them, that as an old soldier he knew the laws of war respecting the treatment of prisoners, and they would not be harmed. Wilson conferred with the men in the house, and they, realizing that they could easily be roasted alive, agreed to give themselves up with their arms if Varela would send his men away. Varela immediately ordered his men to the rear of the house to put out the fire, and Wilson's men filed out and stacked their arms against the walls as directed. They were then marched to the *casa de matanza*, or slaughter house, about four hundred yards south, where horses were waiting to convey them to Los Angeles as prisoners. Williams and his children were allowed to remain in the house.

On reaching the *casa de matanza* Varela ordered all to mount, Wilson being permitted to retain his own horse and saddle and ride beside Varela. The others were sent ahead in charge of one of the Californians, with orders to be in Los Angeles that evening. Varela delayed his start for a few minutes in order to speak with some one, after which he and Wilson followed slowly after the main party. When about half a mile from the house, he put spurs to his horse exclaiming that some devilry was afoot and calling to Wilson to follow him. When near enough to be heard, he called sharply to the leader to stop.

The prisoners had been stood in a line along the side of the road, and were apparently about to be shot. Wilson says Varela dashed

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forward and placed himself between the Americans and their captors, shouting that he would run his sword through the first man that touched a hair of their heads, that he had given his word as a gentleman and a commander to save the prisoners, and if they wished to kill anyone they could shoot him. This ended that matter. All arrived that evening at the California encampment on the mesa south of Los Angeles known later as Boyle Heights, with nothing more of a distressful nature beyond the suffering and groans of the wounded men.

The Californians had not been of one mind concerning their prisoners. Native-born Californians were bound to each other by intermarriage, and were responsive to blood relationships; and the fact that Williams' late wife was a daughter of Antonio María Lugo and hence a sister of José del Carmen, brought greater consideration for Williams and his children—two little girls and a boy—and possibly for the men under his roof, than more recent arrivals from Mexico were disposed to grant. Furthermore, the fear of reprisals in case the United States should be successful in the war with Mexico must have had its effect on the cooler headed among them, leading them to give up any idea of killing the Americans after they had surrendered. These cooler heads also doubtless foiled the scheme Flores had of transporting the prisoners to Mexico.

Now to go back to the Lugo account. The reinforcements he had sent for arrived from Los Angeles about daybreak, thirty men under Varela and Ramón Carrillo, and Lugo says he hid them to keep the foreigners from knowing that they had come. But suddenly a youth rushed out from the house, mounted a horse, and started on the run southward. Lugo ordered two of his men to follow and capture him, and the others, hearing the outcry, dashed forward. Lugo says they misunderstood a signal he gave them to stop, and charged at the house, upon which the men inside fired at them from all four sides. A short distance from one wall was a picket fence which some of the attackers tried to leap. The onrush of the horses broke it down. Nearer the house was another fence, and beyond it a ditch. As they tried to clear this fence Carlos Ballesteros' horse fell, and while recovering his mount he received a ball in the temple which killed him instantly.

Ten men behind had abandoned their horses before reaching the ditch, and they gained the house walls. Lugo says he ordered those who had no fire arms to collect dry grass, and those who were armed to station themselves at the doors and windows of the house. The grass was thrown onto the roof but no one had anything with which

to ignite it. Lugo set out through the bullets that were flying in all directions, lying alongside his horse, and from an Indian ranchería near by snatched a firebrand. Dashing back he threw it onto a corner of the house, and ordered the men to do the same with the other corners.

He says he then went to the main door and hammered on it calling for the men inside to surrender, but they were not willing to open to him. Sepùveda, meanwhile, had managed in some way to enter by the other door, and making his way through the establishment opened the main one. All the foreigners were there, and surrendered their guns and became prisoners. Lugo detailed a guard to watch them while he and his men busied themselves putting out the fire and carrying the furniture and other belongings out of the house. He set a guard to watch these also, and then searched the house thoroughly. He says that, apart from the roof, the house was not badly damaged, and it cooled off quickly. He reports finding some men hidden, and he took them prisoners also. This seems odd when we remember his previous statement that all the foreigners were at the front door when it was opened. He proceeds to tell how, about an hour after the fire was extinguished, his men replaced the furniture and other properties, and then set out for Los Angeles with the prisoners, arms, ammunition, horses, saddles, and so on.

It will be noted that Lugo's account disagrees with Wilson's statement that Varela received the surrender and directed the departure for Los Angeles. And regarding the furniture and other things in the house, Foster says that, far from replacing them, the Californians looted the place thoroughly, loading their plunder on Williams' ox-carts and hauling it away with Williams' oxen. He says they drove off all Williams' saddle animals, two hundred and fifty in number, and then, with their prisoners set out leaving Williams, his three children, and some Indian servants behind. He says further that Williams told him that when the Californians departed they did not leave a change of clothing for him or his children, not a bed or blanket, or a mouthful of food. Nevertheless, he felt richer than he had ever felt in his life before, for he and his children had been spared when he had been sure that they would all be slain. Oddly enough, Wilson says nothing of the looting.

Palomares says that when Varela demanded the surrender of the Americans, they replied that they would die first, and he clearly believed that it was the firing of the house that brought about the change in their attitude. He says the men issued from the house and gave up their arms about four o'clock in the afternoon.

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Lugo says that when he reached the main door of the house he heard Williams' children—his own nephew and nieces—crying for him, and saw them on the coping above the wall of one of the corals. He called to them to reassure them, and had one of his men climb up and lower them to him. He placed them and two Indian women that were with them in charge of two of his men until he could take charge of them himself. When the house cooled off and the fumes had escaped, he returned them to their father. Their mother had died about four years before. He says that Williams expressed deep gratitude to him at the time for saving their lives, but that none of them ever showed any sign of gratitude afterwards. The little boy, then about eight years old, died shortly after. The girls grew to be women and were living when he dictated his story to Savage. He complained then that they had no recollection of their uncle.

Wilson says that during the fighting Williams sent his three children up a ladder to a part of the roof that was not afire, following them with a white flag and proclaiming his loyalty to the Mexican government, crying between times, "Don't shoot me! Don't shoot me." One of the Californians shouted back, "Carajo, porque no hablas in lengua que se entiende, porque no dices 'No me maten?'" [Fool! Why don't you speak in a language that is understood? Why don't you say. 'Don't kill me?'] Some of them also shouted "co-barde" [coward] at him, about the worst insult that a Spaniard can hurl at another person. All this the men in the house heard plainly.

Foster says that when it became known among the Californians that Carlos Ballesteros had been killed, the cry arose from many of them, "Mueran los Americanos! No hay cuartel!" [Death to the Americans! No quarter!] Ballesteros, by the way, was a very good man, and had been among Wilson's best friends. When the cry arose, one of the men inside the house exclaimed, "For God's sake, let's save the children!" A ladder was procured and Williams mounted to the roof and the children were passed up to him. He had taken no part in the fight. With a little girl in each arm and the frightened boy clinging to his knees, he approached the edge of the roof, crying, "Quarter for my motherless children!" Foster says he was an illiterate man, speaking very bad Spanish and not much better English. This may account for the jeering remarks of the Californians that Wilson reported. The sight of the children seemed to mollify them, and they shouted in reply that if the Americans laid down their arms they would be shown mercy.

Michael White says that on the second morning ". . . we got

up and one fellow went on top of the house. . . . He sang out to me and said, 'Good God, what a lot of horses there are!' I told him to look sharp and he would see men on top of them. . . . I had hardly got the words out of my mouth when I saw the whole force of California cavalrymen rush to the house, and it was very soon on fire."

He continues, "Williams begged me to go out on the roof and ask the Californians to let us off, but I was angry with him for not heeding my advice of the night before and charging me with cowardice. I refused and told him to go himself. Williams was frightened out of his wits. . . . He took a very long reed and hung on it something that looked like a piece of shirt, and exhibited it in the enclosed plaza so that the Californians could see it above the roof."

Continuing still further, he says, "We accepted the terms offered and surrendered. The Californians took us over to the soap works.⁽⁸⁾ On going over I noticed one of the Mexican officers brandishing his sword and heard him say that they must look upon us with mercy. Loring asked me what the Californians were talking about, and what they were going to do to us. I answered that they were going to make soap of us. Loring did not like this joke, for he had seen the brandishing of the sword and had not understood the words. Indeed, I believed that they were going to kill us all. . . . I had been requested by Wilson to say that we had taken the Chino by force, so as to save Williams from being carried off as a prisoner, and I complied."

This was only fair. Feeling the prevailing unrest, Williams' sending to Jurupa for the Americans had very probably been with the idea that their presence at Chino would be a sort of protection for him and his children. Instead, the Americans and their allies came to him for refuge, and the Californians proceeded to besiege them there. Williams had not counted on such an eventuality. His weakness and indecision in this crisis brought him much unhappiness in later years.

White supports Wilson's assertion that while on the march to Los Angeles the Americans were in imminent danger of being shot, and offers as a reason the fact that the Californians and Mexicans were enraged over the death of Carlos Ballesteros. He declares, however, that it was Carrillo and not Varela who saved their lives. He says, "Mr. Wilson has always said that we owed our lives to Servulo Varela, but I know that he and another Californian were in cahoots and would have sent us to the other world if it had not been for Ramón Carillo. I saw with my own eyes when Carillo on the road

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went and struck several whacks on Varela's back with the flat of his sword, saying at the same time, 'I'll let you know that they are prisoners of mine, and you can do nothing with them. They say that I am an assassin. I will prove to the world that I am not one.' If this statement by White is true, Carillo was referring to charges of having murdered some Americans in the vicinity of Sonoma during the Bear Flag Incident. Whether it was Carillo or Varela who saved the men from death may never be determined conclusively.

White tells how William Skene, one of the American party, was struck by a bullet which exploded a box of caps in his breeches pocket, the caps burning into the fleshy part of both thighs and inflicting serious injuries in that part of his body. In addition to Skene, at least four others of the American party were wounded—Isaac Callaghan, who had his arm broken the first day, Joseph Perdue, and Mat Harbin. Perdue was injured severely.

Foster's account of the elder Lugo's attitude toward the prisoners is one that we are exceedingly glad to have. He says that when they reached Los Angeles, Lugo offered bail for all of them if they could be released on parole. General Flores refused this, claiming that they knew too much of the country, and it was necessary to hold them as hostages for California's safety. Don Antonio María then said, "You have some sick and wounded prisoners. Let me have them and I will take care of and be responsible for them." Flores consented, and sent an officer with Lugo to pick out those whose health would be endangered by confinement. Skene was in agony, and lay groaning on the ground. Lugo exclaimed, "Pobre muchacho—ya me pertenece—El picaro de mi hijo le ha echado a Ud. me fierro." [Poor fellow! Now you belong to me. My rascal of a son has made you my responsibility.] He claimed Skene first of all.

He took the unfortunate men to his own home and cared for them until they were recovered sufficiently to return to the jail. Foster says that both Lugo and Skene told him that they had no surgeon. Lugo treated Skene's injuries himself, and Skene reported that each time he bent to this task he cursed his son roundly for causing an old father such trouble. He told Foster that he was three weeks getting those cap fragments from Skene's flesh, and it was the hardest work he ever did. He was seventy-three years old, and although his eyesight was dim he had never used glasses. Wilson speaks of a Dr. Richard Den, an Irish physician, who visited the men in the prison, and of a Spaniard, Don Eulogio de Celis, who carried blankets, clothes, and other comforts to them.

The Robidoux description of the fight is similiar to those of

Wilson and Lugo. Like them he has the actual struggle short and sharp, whereas Palomares has firing going on from two in the morning till four in the afternoon. Robidoux says, "The enemy numbered two hundred men, we with little ammunition and victuals, our opponents with plenty of war materials, and the camp was theirs." His estimate of the number of Californians is, of course, entirely too large. All agree that the house was set afire early in the morning, and that the Americans realized quickly that they were trapped and would have to surrender. Palomares' statement, therefore, that shots were exchanged until well into the afternoon seems inconsistent. The party may have started for Los Angeles at about four o'clock, as he says, and the interim between the surrender and the departure could have been utilized in putting out the fire and loading the booty that was taken away. ⁽⁹⁾

We have seen that Williams' attitude undoubtedly saved him and possibly his children from serious trouble—imprisonment or even death for himself. Benjamin Wilson, and many other persons also, held ever afterwards that Williams behaved treacherously toward the Americans then, and the resentment they felt and expressed could easily have influenced the California Legislature when, in January, 1850, a joint resolution tendering thanks of the State to Captain John A. Sutter and Colonel Isaac Williams for their benevolence and humanity in giving assistance to immigrants to California during the days of '49 was submitted by a senator from the San Joaquin district. When the resolution finally passed, only Sutter's name appeared in it, and it must have been Southern California influences that brought about the omission of Williams' name. ⁽¹⁰⁾

Williams heard of this slight and sent a vigorous letter of protest to the President of the Senate, but apparently it was never brought to the attention of that body, since there seems to be no record of it in any of the Senate Journals. Ninety-two years later the son of a San Bernardino County pioneer read before the State Senate a communication which was probably a draft or copy of this letter made when the original was written, and led the senators to recognize the document intended for it nearly a century earlier, and to express its appreciation of the kindness shown by Williams to pioneers arriving in California. ⁽¹¹⁾

There is no doubt that the Williams home in Chino was more or less of an open house for Americans during the days of the Gold Rush, and that he extended helpfulness of a high order to them. This is indicated in the informal register he kept during these years, a register that is now one of the treasures of the Huntington

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Library.⁽¹²⁾ Incidentally, the letter which the Senator read before his colleagues was found in this register. There is no doubt that when the Mexican War was in progress and the fate of the region hung in the balance, Williams was in a critical position. His possessions were vast and he could easily have lost everything. When the war ended he was as many men were who had avoided taking an open and definite stand on either side. Both Californians and Americans distrusted and even disliked him. He had other troubles also, and it may have been unhappiness over the general situation that led him to offer his ranch, with all the stock on it, to the Mormons for so low a figure as he did on at least three occasions. But as more and more Americans entered the country and his efforts to win public regard were having an effect, he must have felt more cheerful, for when Mormon agents finally came to California to avail themselves of the offers, all negotiations broke down.⁽¹³⁾ Rancho Santa Ana del Chino was no longer for sale.

NOTES

1. At this time Wilson was *alcalde*, or justice of the peace, in his own community at Jurupa and a firm friend to his neighbors, the New Mexicans at Agua Mansa. After California became a state, he was the first elected county clerk in Los Angeles County, and the first mayor in Los Angeles City. He represented his district in the State Senate during three different terms. He also served, under appointment by President Fillmore, as United States Indian Agent for the Southern District in California, and was a staunch friend to them. The report he made while in this position is still an outstanding source of information concerning Indian tribes of Southern California in the early days of American occupation. He became a wealthy property owner in Los Angeles County, Huntington Library stands on land that was his, and Mount Wilson is named in his honor. His "Observations" were dictated only a short time before his death, but they show no indication of failing mentality.
2. Savage's signed copy of Wilson's "Observations" and the original dictations to Savage by Lugo, White, Palomares, and Foster are among Bancroft Library manuscripts.
3. Printed in Oral Messmore Robidoux, *Memorial to the Robidoux Brothers*.
4. Note by Savage attached to "Vida".
5. The Robidoux letter supports White's statement as to the number besieged.
6. G. W. Beattie, "Where Was the Battle of Chino Fought?", *The Quarterly*, Hist. Soc. Sou. Calif., June, 1940.
7. *Ibid.*
8. Soap-making as an important industry on the Chino Rancho is described by Daniel Tyler in *A Concise History of the Mormon Battalion*, 292. The building called the soap works by White was the *Casa de Matanza* of the Wilson narrative.
9. The following list of men in the Battle of Chino is, with the exception of two names, taken from the narratives just quoted. The names of James S. Barton and John Reed were found in a paragraph referring to the battle in one of the writings of Judge Benjamin Hayes, of Los Angeles. His authority for naming them is not known. There is some doubt concerning the name of Alex. Godey, mentioned in the narrative of Michael White. Godey was not in prison at the time of the Battle of San Pascual and, according to Stephen Foster, was put with the Chino prisoners after that affair. He may have been one of the Chino prisoners that White says were exchanged for men held by Gillespie.

HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

Alexander, David W.
 Anton, the Cook
 Barton, James S.
 Batchelder, Isaac
 Callaghan, Even
 Callaghan, Isaac
 Callaghan, Edward
 Cherokee, half-breed
 Cottrell, Edward
 Cottrell, William
 Dotson, _____
 Godey, Alex (?)

Harbin, Mat
 Loring, Thomas
 Marshall, William
 Perdew, Joseph
 Reed, John
 Rowland, John
 Robidoux, Louis
 Skene, William
 Walters, George
 White, Michael
 Williams, Isaac
 Wilson, Benjamin D.

From the narratives we also gain the following partial list of men on the Californian side:

Ávila, José María
 Ballesteros, Carlos (Killed)
 Bermudes, José María
 Carrillo, Ramón
 Lugo, José del Carmen
 Lugo, Vicente
 Morales, _____
 Palomares, José Francisco
 Sepúlveda, Diego
 Varela, Cerbulo
 Varela, Hilario
 Véjar, Ricardo

Stephen Foster says that five sons of Antonio María Lugo were in the battle.

10. *Journal of the Senate . . . California . . . First Session . . . 1850*, 76, 79, 82, 84; *Statutes of California*, 1850, "Joint Resolution of Thanks to Captain John A. Sutter", Approved January 24, 1850.
11. *Senate Daily Journal, California Legislature Fifty-Fourth (First Extraordinary) Session, 1942*, 92, 117.
12. "The Record Book of the Rancho Santa Ana del Chino", transcribed and edited by Lindley Bynum. *Annual Publication*, Hist. Soc. of Sou. Calif., 1934.
13. Jefferson Hunt *et al* to Brigham Young, May 14, 1847, in F. A. Golder, *March of the Mormon Battalion*, 252; Bigler's Journal in '49," *Overland Monthly*, Oct. 1888; Isaac Williams to C. C. Rich, letter supplied by Dr. Ezra C. Rich, Ogden, Utah; J. H. Evans, *Charles Coulson Rich, Pioneer Builder of the West*, 206.