



From the Collection of J. Gregg Layne
COLONEL JOHN CHARLES FRÉMONT
(FROM A VERY EARLY PHOTOGRAPH)

Tracing Frémont's Route with the California Battalion

from San Juan Bautista to Los Angeles,
November, 1846 to January, 1847



by GUY J. AND HELEN S. GIFFEN

THE series of events leading to the conquest of California by the United States from the raising of the flag at Monterey, July 7, 1846, to the signing of the Capitulation of Cahuenga, January 13, 1847, are well known. However, the march of the California Battalion, under the leadership of Lieutenant Colonel John Charles Frémont, from San Juan Bautista to Los Angeles is one phase of the conquest which has been little dealt with. Frémont in his *Memoirs* passes over this march with scant comment, and a complete lack of detail; and the only diary kept on this expedition which is available or known is that of Edwin Bryant, incorporated in his "What I Saw In California." Other Battalion members have commented on various events occurring on the march, but these are in manuscript form preserved in the Bancroft Library of the University of California.

In retracing the route followed by the battalion, ninety-three years after its memorable march, Bryant's diary has been used as the chief guide, his daily mileage figures being of particular value

Historical Society of Southern California

in definitely establishing camp sites; and in checking and rechecking the line of march his estimates of distance are found to be most accurate. Fourteen manuscripts in the Bancroft Library were read to obtain what additional information was available from the reminiscences of men who marched with Frémont along the often difficult and always strenuous trails over which he led them. Where Bryant has been vague in the description of the terrain over which they traveled a common-sense view of the country in question has been taken, with due regard for what a company of nearly five hundred men with horses and mules far exceeding that number would have done under the circumstances to which they were subjected at that particular time.

There has been no desire to engage in any controversy over Frémont's choice of routes. The excerpts from the various manuscripts, whether complimentary or otherwise, have been injected merely to further clarify the course of the march, with no emphasis upon their particular viewpoint, the sole desire of this article being to trace, in the interest of history, the route of a group of men whose leader succeeded in drawing up the Capitulation of Cahuenga which ended the period of hostilities in the south and made for a peaceful, and united, California.

As a preliminary to the final conquest of California Commodore Sloat, on the *Savannah*, arrived in the harbor of Monterey and ran up the Stars and Stripes on the pole adjoining the old custom house, July 7, 1846. Captain Montgomery of the *Portsmouth* which was anchored in San Francisco Bay, performed the same duty two days later at that northern port. John Charles Frémont having left Sonoma, scene of the Bear Flag Revolt, was encamped in the Sacramento Valley on his way to Monterey where he hoped to meet Sloat and persuade him to muster the Bear Flag Company into the military forces of the United States. Frémont arrived in Monterey July 10th, and a few days later Commodore Robert F. Stockton received his appointment as chief of all the land forces in California, this appointment leading to the forming of the California Battalion of Volunteers largely made up of the one hundred and sixty men of the Bear Flag group with Frémont as Major. The report of

Tracing Frémont's Route

Commodore Stockton, dealing with his operations on the Pacific Coast refers to this organization as follows:

"The California Battalion (Frémont's) was organized under my personal direction and authority under a special condition that it should act under my orders as long as I might remain in California, and require its services . . . The officers derived their appointments exclusively from me. It was never in any form or manner mustered into service of the United States as a part of the army or connected with it. It was exclusively and essentially a navy organization. The Battalion was composed of volunteers organized under my authority, but with their full consent . . . These men were not of that kind of personnel which sometimes composes regular armies. They were principally free American citizens who had settled in California."*

It is quite likely that Stockton was encouraged in the forming of this organization by Thomas Oliver Larkin, who suggested to him that, considering the circumstances of warfare in California, a company of men who were both saddle worthy and gun conscious might not be out of place among his sailors and marines.

Immediately following its formation the battalion proceeded to San Diego aboard the *Cyane* where they assisted in raising the flag over the plaza in Old Town. Los Angeles was occupied August 13th, 1846 as quietly as had been San Diego, and by early September Stockton had sailed for the north, while Frémont, with a detachment of his battalion, left for the Sacramento valley. To all outward appearances the conquest of California was now completed.

However, all was not yet won, as was soon evidenced by the revolt against the military rule of Captain Gillespie in Los Angeles—the news of these disturbing incidents winging their way to Monterey via the swift riding Juan Flaco.

To aid in reestablishing the American order in the south "it is recorded" says Bancroft, "that Frémont, with about 160 men of the battalion sailed for the south on the *Sterling* . . . but having met the *Vandalian* and learned . . . that horses could not be obtained at Santa Barbara or San Pedro, Frémont resolved to return for re-

*Executive Documents No. 1, 2nd Session 30th Congress, Dec. 1848.

Historical Society of Southern California

inforcements and animals, and to advance on Los Angeles from the north, by land.”* According to this plan Frémont landed in Monterey on October 28th, 1846, where he was met by the welcome news of his appointment as a Lieutenant Colonel of a rifle regiment in the regular army. Draped in the cloak of this authority he immediately sent his lieutenants to scour the country-side for horses and recruits. The former were obtained by the simple expedient of issuing receipts against the government, or if the owners of the *caballados* proved unwilling, force was used. Man power was offered \$25.00 a month, and within thirty days two hundred men had been added to the battalion's ranks, among them immigrants from Sutter's Fort, a company of fifty Walla Walla Indians and a goodly portion of the Sonoma garrison.

“I pause to say,” remarks Frémont in his *Memoirs* “that only in the emergencies which call out the best men could any four hundred be collected together among whom would be found an equal number of good, self-respecting men as were in the ranks and among the officers of the companies and of the staff of this corps.” He continues to add that his men were not only splendid fighters, but that he knew how to handle them; “giving them the advantage of the ground as I had learned how to do it, the reader can judge how much reason there was in Kearney's fear that I, too, would be defeated,” and he adds with a touch of the lands-man's contempt for the judgment of his sea-going brothers, “how much I needed a sailor's advice how to manage my woodsmen.”

By the middle of November Lieutenant Colonel Frémont left Monterey, proceeding to San Juan Bautista where he completed the organization of the battalion, save for the contingent from the Sacramento Valley which did not arrive in San Juan until Frémont had already begun his march, making his first camp ten miles south of the Mission in the arroyo of the San Benito River, where Edwin Bryant and the company from the vicinity of Sutter's Fort joined him on November 29, 1846.

Instead of choosing the level stretches of the Salinas plain for his route, Frémont, influenced perhaps by the recent clashes around

**History of California*—H. H. Bancroft, Vol. V.

Tracing Frémont's Route

Natividad, decided to follow the course of the San Benito River, giving as his reason, "There was no point on the line which I chose for my march from San Juan to San Fernando . . . no camp by night . . . where I could have been taken at a disadvantage." Whether this was poor generalship on the part of a man who was familiar with the California landscape is a question that invariably makes for controversy. However, in retracing the route followed by the California Battalion one cannot but admit that "the advantage of the ground" was undoubtedly upon his side.

The battalion of 428 men, including mounted riflemen, Indians and servants, left San Juan Bautista on November 28th, at their first camp they were joined by Bryant, the company continuing down the "valley of the arroyo" on the 30th, for ten miles making camp in "a circular bottom, near a deserted adobe house" where they remained until the morning of December 3rd. The Battalion kept to the west bank of the San Benito River, following its course all through the day of December 3rd, encamping that evening on an oak timbered bluff near the river, having covered only eight miles, due to the difficulty in pulling the field pieces through the mud.

December 4th found the company cutting westward from the San Benito, ascending "steep hills sparsely covered with oak" and descending into another and smaller valley (Cienega Valley) which was followed to its termination. In exploring the gullies and gulches in their immediate vicinity members of the battalion discovered an abandoned horse and other evidences of the trail of the party of Californians who had headed south immediately following the disturbances in the vicinity of Natividad at which time Thomas Oliver Larkin had been taken prisoner by the Californians. Larkin, himself, in the *Californian* of February 27, 1847, relates his capture at the home of Joaquin Gomez on the Rancho Los Vergeles, about ten miles south of San Juan Bautista, and how, after the encounter between the Americans and the Californians on November 17th, "we travelled south . . . and encamped after midnight far in the mountains off the main road to Santa Barbara."

The battalion made camp at 3 o'clock in the afternoon ten miles from their former stopping place, and the following morning

Historical Society of Southern California

started "through a deep, brushy mountain gorge," where the cannon had to be lowered by ropes down several steep declivities. This section is now known as Thompson's Creek, and affords the only logical pass toward the coast in the entire range of the Gabilan mountains for many miles. Following the creek they made camp in a small valley, now known as Thompson's Valley, which is surrounded by elevated and broken country sparsely covered with timber and grass. The distance covered that day was twelve miles, many of the men having been forced to continue their way on foot, the horses having given out on the march.

The following morning the terrain afforded easier going, and fifteen miles were put behind them before the battalion prepared to stop on "a small tributary of the Salinas (Chualar Canyon)." The Gabilan range had now been crossed, and on December 7th, the Valley of the Salinas was reached by noon without incident. Owing to the exhausted condition of men and beasts a halt was called after a short march of eight miles and Winston Bennett and an advance guard were detailed by Frémont, to pick a suitable crossing of the Salinas River. Keeping up the river two days, the men forded it on the third above the forks "at a point distant about six miles north of Mission San Miguel."*

Meanwhile the rest of the company continued down the valley covering fifteen miles on the 8th and ten on the 9th. On the latter date the battalion experienced difficult going and it was necessary to negotiate deep ravines filled with undergrowth and steep brush-covered hills. Again many horses gave out and were left behind and Bryant remarked that "our *caballado* is diminishing rapidly." On leaving San Juan Bautista the battalion had almost 600 horses in reserve not counting pack mules. This number had been reduced at an alarming rate, and the need for fresh animals was becoming acute. More than once Frémont has been accused of poor judgment in the selection of his route, and Bennett makes the assertion that "he avoided roads and took the most difficult trails, wearing out men and horses alike."†

*Winston Bennett in *San Jose Pioneer*, May 26, 1877.

†*San Jose Pioneer*, May 26, 1877.

Tracing Frémont's Route

On December 10th, the battalion camped below Mission San Miguel, in a grove of oaks, after a march of twenty miles. In spite of the bronze marker which has been erected a few hundred feet north of the Mission designating Frémont's supposed campsite in the vicinity of San Miguel, both Bryant and Bennett agree in their statements that the camp was four miles south of the Mission "in a grove of large oak timber." During the day's march a scouting party had branched off to the west, arriving at the Rancho Los Ojitos of Mariano Soberanes, where the buildings were burned and Don Mariano and his sons taken prisoner. It was afterward claimed by Frémont that the depredations indulged in by members of the California Battalion were committed by detached parties over whom he had no control, although in his *Memoirs* he makes the statement that he knew how to handle his men. William A. Streeter, who rode out to meet Frémont before he entered Santa Barbara quotes the Lieutenant Colonel as saying to him: "All along the route I have pursued the same course, destroying all the property I could find of them who were out in arms against me, and I have sent word to all of them that such will continue to be my course."*

On December 11th the battalion rested in their camp, feasting on mutton and visiting Mission San Miguel which was then occupied by the Englishman William Reed and his family.

December 12th the march was resumed and twelve miles were covered that day. It was a foot march, the first to which the battalion had been subjected, but the horses were badly in need of rest and the men plodded along, on blistered feet, through a soaking drizzle. The events of the day were enlivened by the capture of an Indian named Santa Maria, who had been dispatched by José de Jesus Pico of San Luis Obispo to spy upon the Americans. Upon his person an incriminating document was found, according to Bryant's diary, while Bancroft states that the evidence which led to his execution was probably a communication to the enemy, but that it was the general sentiment of the undisciplined men comprising the battalion that made it necessary to kill him. However,

*A recollection of Historical Events in California—Wm. A. Streeter Mss. Bancroft Library.

Historical Society of Southern California

according to James Gregson, who was a member of the battalion, the general sentiment, after Pico was pardoned at San Luis Obispo, was that "the boys thought it a shame to kill the Indian, and not Pico."*

According to Bryant, Santa Maria was arrested near the camp site of December 12th, and Bancroft makes the assertion that it was in the vicinity of Paso Robles, probably referring to the Rancho Paso de Robles of Petronile Rios, who was friendly toward the Americans. The camp on the evening of December 12th was made on the lands of Rancho Ascension which belonged to Joaquin and Pedro Estrada, the twelve miles covered that day bringing them to within a mile or two of the old adobe of the rancho, which is still standing on the banks of the Salinas River, a short distance from the town of Atascadero.

During the night of December 12th, a Mr. Stanly died of typhoid fever, a malady from which he had been suffering for some days. Stanly had first become known to Edwin Bryant at the Humboldt Sink, then known as Mary's River. He was buried on the morning of the 13th, "in a small circular opening in the timber and the cold earth heaped upon his mortal remains in silent solemnity, and the ashes of a braver or a better man will never repose in the lonely hills of California."

Soon after this duty had been performed the Indian, Santa Maria, was executed in full view of his fellows of a neighboring rancheria, and even the hardened men who watched the brutal act were affected by it. "It was," says Bryant, "a scene such as I desire never to witness again."

The march was now resumed in a cold, dreary rain. The route following along the Salinas River for some miles, then branching off toward the *Cuesta* which lead to San Luis Obispo. Camp was made about four o'clock in the vicinity of the old asistencia of Santa Margarita, and the main body of the troops, coming upon the advance guard, were startled by the sounds of sharp firing. Anticipating an ambush they rushed forward only to find their companions shooting bears which they had disturbed in the act of hunting

*Statement of James Gregson—Mss. Bancroft Library.

Tracing Frémont's Route

acorns, the old bears pushing the cubs up the trees to shake down the sweet nuts. Twenty-six bears were killed that evening, according to William Swasey.

Owing to the rain it was impossible to kindle fires, and the men huddled about in extreme discomfort endeavoring to coax some heat from the smouldering logs that were constantly being moistened by fresh downpours of rain. During the evening the scouting party which had plundered the Los Ojitos Rancho on the San Antonio River rejoined their comrades.

Having spent a night of intense physical discomfort the battalion broke camp early on the morning of December 14th and proceeded up the narrow valley toward the *Cuesta*, fording the usually dry stream beds which had been turned into small torrents by the downpour and finding the terrain treacherous in the extreme. A halt was made at noon to slaughter and cook a beef after which refreshment the journey was continued toward the summit of the pass. This objective was reached at a point some distance from the present highway No. 101, and the descent toward San Luis Obispo was made without untoward incident.

Upon reaching the vicinity of the Mission at about 9 o'clock at night, great preparations were made by Frémont to frustrate any surprise attack which might be made upon the battalion. He divided the men into three companies, according to Swasey, each division approaching the Mission by different routes, Frémont was to come in by the main trail, Captain Sears and his men from the southeast and a third unit from the southwest. However, all these elaborate preparations were uncalled for, for no one disputed the battalion's arrival. It was pitch dark and raining, and the Church served to house a portion of the soldiers, while others sought shelter in the "miserable mud houses" within the Mission gardens. A placque placed at the corner of Oso and Mill Streets in San Luis Obispo marks the site of the general encampment.

José de Jesus Pico who had broken his parole by taking up arms against the Americans, was thought to be residing at his house in the town. When a detachment was sent to bring him in it was found that he had fled to the Rancho Los Osos of Captain John

Historical Society of Southern California

Wilson in the Osos Valley a few miles west of the Mission. Thomas Martin was a member of the party detailed to search the Rancho and apprehend the culprit and he recounts in his recollections* how, when Pico saw that he was about to be made a prisoner, he tried to jump out of the window, an act which was frustrated by Martin. Pico was brought into the presence of Frémont and made a prisoner with the prospect of the death penalty.

Edwin Bryant makes the statement that no acts of violence or outrage were indulged in by members of the battalion while in San Luis, "The men composing the battalion . . . have been drawn from many sources, and are roughly clad and weather-beaten in their appearance; but I feel it is but justice here to state my belief that no military party ever passed through an enemy's country and observed the same strict regard for the rights of its population."† Other chroniclers do not share Bryant's opinion, Florencio Serrano, for example, recounts how the bell-ringer of the Mission was threatened with death by members of the battalion, and died of fright soon afterward.**

The battalion remained in San Luis Obispo until December 17th, Frémont being occupied with the court-martial of Pico who was condemned to death for his part in the encounters near Natividad and the forcing of Californians to join the ranks of the insurgents. Pico's wife, Javala Villavicencio, his numerous children and a company of Californian women waited upon Frémont in the *corredor* of the Mission and pled for the release of the erring husband and father. For once the Lieutenant Colonel relaxed his strict military discipline and for some unknown reason graciously allowed Don José to go free, the offender then joining the ranks of the battalion where he remained as a loyal servant until the end of the march.

Having settled Pico's fate on the morning of the 17th of December, and having appointed Mariano Bonilla as *alcalde* to keep the peace, Frémont and his battalion were ready to continue the march

*Narrative of John C. Frémont's Expedition to California in 1845-6, Thomas S. Martin, Mss. Bancroft Library.

†*What I Saw in California*—Edwin Bryant.

**Apuntes-Florencio Serrano, Mss. Bancroft Library.

Tracing Frémont's Route

south. They proceeded down the fertile valley which is watered by the San Luis Creek, and camped that afternoon seven miles from the Mission at a point near the present bridge, not far from Ontario Springs. The weather was clear and cold, and frost whitened the ground as the company prepared to continue their way on the morning of December 18th. Following the creek they cut across to the sea in the vicinity of the present town of Ávila, and proceeded along the cliffs, with the surf breaking against the rocky coastline to their right, and the steeply rising hills to their left. From what is now Pismo Beach they swung away from the water, "the low hills rising in conical forms" beyond which could be seen the higher peaks, covered with snow. At three o'clock camp was made at a point fifteen miles from their morning's start "near the ranch of Captain Dana, in a large and handsome valley well watered by an arroyo."*

In retracing the route taken by the battalion, from the vicinity of Ontario Springs to the "large and handsome valley," the fifteen miles recorded as the day's march brings one to the Los Berros Creek and the wide, valley-like arroyo through which it runs. It is only reasonable to suppose that a company of more than four hundred men with a *caballado* of several hundred head of horses would choose this well watered spot, rather than the dry mesa where the present marker is placed on Highway No. 101. Undoubtedly the camp was placed out of the danger of high water, in case of rain, and in an advantageous position in case of attack, although the country through which they were passing was not known to contain any Californian party.

The Nipomo Rancho of William Goodwin Dana, upon which the battalion camped, comprised 38,000 acres and included within its boundaries the smaller grants of the Oso Flaco and the Los Berros. Dana, who was an adopted Californian, had married Josefa Carrillo, and received the grant to his lands in 1835. In 1839 he erected a house on the rancho, whose four rooms were to serve as the nucleus for the spacious adobe *casa* of thirteen rooms which kept pace with the demands of his ever increasing family. For years this

**What I Saw in California*—Edwin Bryant.

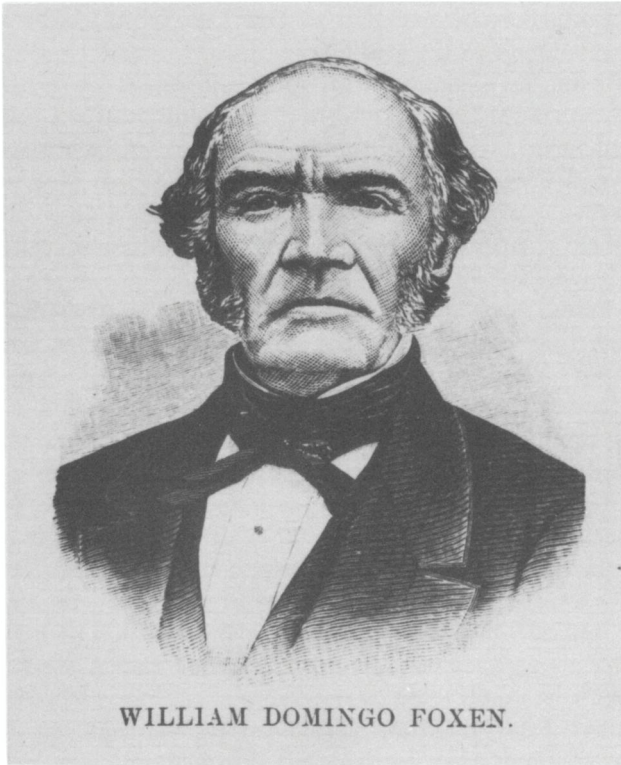
Historical Society of Southern California

dwelling was one of the few places of habitation between the Mission of Santa Barbara and that of San Luis Obispo, and its doors were always open to the wayfarer.

In spite of his affiliation with the Californians by virtue of his Mexican citizenship, Dana was not unfriendly toward the Americans and he rode out to Frémont's camp to pay his respects and to extend an invitation to the Lieutenant Colonel to dine with him. He generously ordered enough beef to feed the hungry battalion. He also sold them some bread, which was the first they had tasted in some time.

Juan Francisco Dana, son of William Dana, who died at the age of 98, frequently recounted, in his later years, his impressions of Frémont's visit to the Nipomo. He made the statement that his father scorned to accept the warrants offered by Frémont in payment for supplies; and that after the battalion left the rancho it was discovered that several of the family's riding horses were missing. The appropriation of these few mounts probably giving rise to the story that Frémont obtained a number of fresh horses from Dana. Thomas Martin in his narrative, relates that while they were camped on the Nipomo Lieutenant Finley and fifteen men were detailed to look for horses. They went to the Guadalupe Ranch of Ben Lippincott—here they captured two horses, and an Indian who led them to the Casmalia ranch where sixty-five picked horses were just being driven into the corral. These were taken. Remaining over-night they rejoined Frémont after he had left Foxen's and was proceeding through the Zaca Rancho. This too, would indicate that no great number of animals had been procured from Dana.

According to Bryant's diary, the battalion broke camp the morning of the 19th. The night had been unpleasantly cold and windy, but the sun rose in a clear sky, promising a warm day. The company after leaving the Nipomo proceeded up the valley, taking a route half-way between the foothills and the present highway, for it is to be remembered that Frémont was taking advantage of the ground as he found it. They crossed the Santa Maria river at a point near the present Suez crossing, some distance from the bridge on the highway; and continued along the south bank of the Santa Maria



*From Thompson & West, History of Santa Barbara
and San Buena Ventura Counties*

BENJAMIN FOXEN, (FRÉMONT'S GUIDE)

GRANTEE OF TINAQUAIC RANCHO IN FOXEN CANON.
FOXEN WAS BAPTISED WILLIAM DOMINGO WHEN HE
BECAME A CATHOLIC AT THE TIME OF HIS MARRIAGE.

Tracing Frémont's Route

toward Sisquoc. In the distance were the snow-topped peaks of the Sierra Madre mountains, while on the plain could be seen large herds of cattle. Horses to the number of one hundred gave out on the day's march, although the way was not as treacherous as the terrain they had already traveled. It is evident that the horses which Frémont had secured at San Juan and along the way were of the poorest sort and with insufficient food to keep up their strength. Camp was made eighteen miles from Dana's, near the head of the valley.

On the 20th the rear guard of the battalion did not break camp until afternoon, and then only covered three miles to the Rancho Tinaquic of Don Domingo Foxen, where they halted in a small hollow which was well watered by a stream. "The camp spread over an undulating surface of half a mile in diameter, and at night, when the fires were lighted, illuminating the grove with its drapery of Spanish moss, it presented a most picturesque appearance."*

It is easy to identify this small amphitheater, for its moss draped trees appear much as they did on that December day almost a century ago. The stream still ripples along between its steep, shrub covered banks, and save for the absence of the Foxen adobe all is as it was a hundred years past. The glade in which the battalion camped has the excellent advantage of a steep hill to the west, upon whose crest rises a cairn of stones resembling the ruins of some ancient castle. This was an excellent vantage point from which the look-outs could survey the surrounding country and give ample warning of the approach of the enemy, for it is to be recalled that in spite of Frémont's so far undisputed passage toward the south the Californians were out in arms, and there was constant danger of a surprise attack. A granite shaft in which is embedded a bronze plaque rises near the present bridge across the creek, and marks the approximate camp site of the California Battalion.

It is at this point that we begin to run across the various stories relating to the supposed ambush in the Gaviota Pass which Frémont was seeking to avoid. It has been stated that Frémont had no definite knowledge of the numbers and armed strength of the Californians, and that when he visited Dana, the owner of the Nipomo sug-

**What I Saw in California*—Edwin Bryant.

Historical Society of Southern California

gested to him that it might be wise for him to go by way of Foxen's ranch in order to find out if the rumor concerning the Gaviota was true. This story, which has been passed down the years by word of mouth seems to be ignored by historians who evidently found no foundation in fact. Bancroft states that Frémont has been accused of bad judgment for his choice of the route over the San Marcos Pass, instead of the Gaviota but gives no indication that this was due to any sudden change of plan in the line of march mapped out for the battalion, adding that if it had not been for the violent storm which overtook them in the pass the crossing would have entailed neither needless risk or hardship. Bryant mentions no apparent change in plans, indicating that it was intended to go by way of San Marcos from the beginning. It is reasonable to suppose that as there were no friendly stopping places between the Nipomo and Santa Barbara along the coast where Frémont might obtain supplies, it was but natural for him to go via Foxen's where he might hope to obtain sufficient food to last him until Santa Barbara was reached.

However, one cannot entirely ignore the tales which have been told and retold by Dana and Foxen descendants for more than half a century. If reiteration establishes the fact, then surely the following story comes under that heading. It is told that Frémont camped on the Rancho Tinaquic for three weeks, and that while there Eduarda Osuna de Foxen, wife of Don Domingo, who was a Mexican citizen, received word through an Indian servant that the Californians planned to ambush the battalion in the narrow defile of the Gaviota Pass. According to this more than "twice told tale" Foxen, whose loyalties were torn between his English heritage and his adopted citizenship, was trying to bring himself to warn Frémont of the danger lurking in the Pass where Agustin Janssens, *alcalde* of Santa Ynez in 1846, and the owner of the Rancho Lomas de Purificacion, was lying in wait at a point where the rocky cliffs barely allowed the passage of a single vehicle.

In the end Foxen's English sentiments won out and he told Frémont of the impending danger, offering to guide him over the narrow trail of the San Marcos. Here we come to the point where

Tracing Frémont's Route

it is necessary to refer once more to the written records of the period, in order to pick the flaws in the foregoing tale. In the first place it must be remembered that Frémont was hurrying with all the speed possible to the aid of the beleaguered southland, and that under these circumstances it is not likely that he would spend three precious weeks in one spot no matter how sorely his horses needed rest. Also, Bryant in his diary, which was kept on the march, states positively that the camp at Foxen's was broken on the morning of December 21st, not twenty-four hours after the battalion's arrival. As a three week's stay on the Tinaquaic would have brought Frémont into San Fernando many days after the 13th of January, the date of the Capitulation of Cahuenga which is established by indisputable documentary evidence, it is seen again that the story as related above is hardly creditable.

After leaving Foxen's the battalion, according to Bryant, followed down the canyon, passing a deserted rancho and ascending a steep ridge of hills, descending into the next valley (that of the Santa Ynez), and encamping on the Alamo-Pintado Creek, not far from the present town of Los Olivos. The highway which runs through the Foxen canyon connecting with the San Marcos Pass road follows closely the route taken by the California Battalion.

Pat McChristian, a member of Fremont's company, in a statement given to Robert A. Thompson of the Sonoma *Democrat* has this to say: "From San Luis Obispo we directed our steps toward Santa Barbara; and at the foot of the Santa Ynez mountains Captain Frémont, much against the wishes of the greater part of his followers, resolved to cross the mountain by an unfrequented route. He said that this step was necessary for the purpose of insuring the safety of the expedition, he having heard that near Gaviota Pass . . . was stationed a force of Californians who were prepared to resist his progress. This story did not take with us, for we were well aware of the fact that in point of numbers and equipment we were strong enough to resist and overcome any force the Californians might be able to concentrate at any given point laid out on our route; and so confident were we of our superiority that many among us broke forth in terms far from complimentary to Captain Frémont to whom

Historical Society of Southern California

we freely applied the terms of 'coward' and 'old woman.' Having at last been prevailed upon to follow our captain we, in the midst of a fearful storm, crossed the Santa Ynez mountains."*

John Bidwell, while not a member of the battalion, says: "It is difficult to conceive why that route should have been selected. The great natural break in the chain known as the Gaviota opened through it a door to the sea coast. This was the nearest and best way, yet Frémont chose to scale the high mountains in a dark night, following a trail, for there was no wagon road, and conveying his cannon and baggage under difficulties almost impossible and unparallelled.

"If the reason for choosing this mountain route was because it was feared that the Californians might roll rocks down on the army passing through the Gaviota in the night, it would be as good as the other reason for taking a route of march toward Santa Barbara not near the coast . . . lest the enemy might drive the cattle away into the mountains; and so a route was selected away from the coast and in the mountains, where there were no cattle. I don't say these were the reasons, for I was not with Frémont on the march, but such reasons were current among men who were on that expedition."†

As Agustin Janssens' name was frequently linked with the supposed ambush in the Gaviota a glance at his recollections "Vida y Aventuras" in manuscript form in the Bancroft Library, reveals no mention of this much discussed subject. Janssens was at his Rancho Lomas de Purificacion in the vicinity of Santa Ynez Mission when Frémont was reported marching south from San Luis Obispo, and a look-out was kept for his approach, "the notice having arrived that the pardoned comandante of San Luis Obispo, José de Jesus Pico, was with the forces of Frémont . . . the order was given . . . to drive off all the tame horses (the colegio had about 100),** from the vicinity of the San Marcos, and hide them in the Canada de Quichums." Janssens also gave the order that no one was to leave

*Pat McChristian's Narrative—Mss. Bancroft Library

†Life in California—John Bidwell, Mss. Bancroft Library.

**The college near the Mission Santa Ynez.

Tracing Frémont's Route

his rancho without his permission. He also mentions the visit to Mission Santa Ynez made by Pico and other members of the battalion, but he ignores any reference to a contemplated ambush. Bryant also states that on making camp on the 21st, fifteen miles beyond Foxen's and about four miles from the Santa Ynez Mission, "a party was sent from the camp to inspect the mission, but returned without making any important discoveries."

On December 22nd an early start was made from the Alamo-Pintado camp, with a rear guard rounding up the straggling men and weary horses. It was a clear, pleasant day, but in spite of favorable weather "parties of men, exhausted, lay down on the ground, and it was, with much urging, and sometimes with peremptory commands only, that they could be prevailed upon to proceed."*

Camp was made that night between nine and ten o'clock, after traveling fifteen miles. It had clouded up and by morning it was raining and continued to do so all of the 23rd. The advance guard took two Indians prisoner and learned from them of the *caballado* of horses which had been secreted in one of the *cañadas*, very probably the horses which had been driven to cover by Agustin Janssens. Twenty-five animals were brought into the camp of the battalion which was situated near the base of the Santa Ynez mountains. According to Bryant they passed that morning "a rancho inhabited by a foreigner, an Englishman." The battalion was by this time on the lands of the Rancho San Marcos which belonged to Richard and Nicholas Den, well educated Irishmen of Santa Barbara, which education probably led Bryant to mistake them for Englishmen.

The day before Christmas was cloudy with now and then a hard shower. "Our route today," says Bryant, "lay directly over the St. Ynez mountains by an elevated and most difficult pass."

In retracing this portion of Frémont's route it becomes necessary to forget all present roads and vision the country as it must have appeared on that December 24, 1846. The trail followed by the battalion did not lead over the summit by the wide, sweeping curves and easy grades of the highway, but followed as nearly as practicable with existing weather conditions, the canyon leading to the summit.

**What I Saw in California*—Edwin Bryant.

Historical Society of Southern California

If one surveys the rocky terrain of the country surrounding San Marcos Pass it is easy to see how bitter was the struggle of the California Battalion to force horses, men and cannon to the crest of the pass. It was heart-breaking work, and the condition of the battalion was pitiful as the summit was reached—not at the present point, but at the lowest dip in the pass, which is one mile out on the Camino Cielo leading to the La Cumbre Look-out. The monument erected to the memory of Frémont, which is on the main highway, is about one hundred yards west of the branch road which leads to the east. From this point one may look down upon the Santa Barbara plain and the ocean beyond.

Standing where the weary men and exhausted horses finally struggled to the summit, one may look down the west side of the San Marcos at the masses of sandstone and conglomerate “immense masses of which, piled one upon the other, form a wall along the western brow of the mountain.” Only four miles were covered on the 24th, and the descent was not begun until Christmas Day, a day of violent storms, with a wind that swept the mountain with hurricane force. Under such inauspicious conditions the downward journey was begun.

It proved far worse than the wildest flights of imagination had pictured. Horses and baggage were left behind on the slippery slopes, many of the animals plunging into the ravines where they drowned in the muddy waters of the canyons. Men made their perilous way down the rocky defile tearing at the roots and branches endeavoring to gain a foothold in the soggy soil. “The advance party did not reach the foot of the mountain and find a place to camp until night,” and then on ground that was so saturated with water that although it sloped to the stream, men and horses sank knee-deep at every step. Those who were laboring to bring down the cannon finally gave up the task and struggled to camp to lie exhausted in water two or three inches deep. They propped their heads on logs and thus kept from sinking into the muck and mire.

The morning of the 26th found the men endeavoring to kindle fires and dry out their sodden gear. A party was detailed to go back and retrieve the field pieces and baggage. The destruction of horse

Tracing Frémont's Route

flesh on this short march was placed at between seventy-five and one hundred and fifty, their bodies lying heaped in the gullies and gulches where they had fallen. No attempt was made to enter Santa Barbara that day, the time being spent in recuperating man power and drying out the soaked fire arms and baggage.

On the morning of the 27th the camp was visited by Doctor Den, Isaac Sparks, Lewis T. Burton and William A. Streeter. The latter in his "Recollection of Historical Events in California 1843, 1878," recounts the high lights of this call: "Learning that Frémont was close at hand, I rode out and found him at the foot of the mountain on this side of the San Marcos Pass, filling up a gully in order to pass his cannon over. I at once rode up to the camp fire where he was standing. . . . He came forward and shook hands with me and we at once entered into conversation. Frémont told me that it was his intention to enter into Santa Barbara with fire and sword, that with the exception of two or three houses he did not propose to leave a single building in the town. I told him I thought that would be rather unjust. 'But,' he said, 'they are all out in arms against me and merit it. All along the route I have pursued the same course, destroying all the property I could find of them who were out in arms, and I have sent word to all of them that such will continue to be my course.'"

Streeter assured Frémont that not *all* Santa Barbara was out in arms against him, that, in fact, many of the citizens had fled the city locking their houses behind them, in anticipation of his arrival; and that if he, (Frémont) would agree to spare the town, Streeter would send word to the population to come in and sign the necessary paroles. Somewhat reluctantly Frémont acquiesced to this compromise, and he afterward accompanied Streeter into the town, the battalion, meanwhile, having advanced to a small grove of trees within a half-mile of Santa Barbara, where they had strict orders not to leave camp without permission that evening. The following day Frémont took up his headquarters in the St. Charles Hotel, the adobe built by Alpheus Thompson in 1835, and the American flag was raised in the public square.

George Nidever, a resident of Santa Barbara, was engaged by

Historical Society of Southern California

Frémont to search whatever houses he had reason to believe harbored arms. "I led them first to the de la Guerra house," he says in his *Life and Adventures*. "Here we found the Captain, his son, Antonio Maria, and Cesar Lataillade standing in the porch surrounded by several members and servants of the family."

Captain José de la Guerra y Noriega, Santa Barbara's wealthiest resident as well as her most prominent citizen, naturally resented the intrusion of Frémont's representative, especially since he came on so insulting a mission as the searching of his house. Standing in front of the fine old adobe which he had erected in 1818, Don José defied Nidever to carry out his purpose without first stepping over his dead body.

Nidever, who had suffered considerably at the hands of the Californians, did not hesitate in his reply, assuring de la Guerra that unless he gave way voluntarily every box, trunk and door would be opened without consideration.

Only then did Don José grudgingly stand aside, instructing his son, Antonio Maria, to lead the way into the house. Nidever and the soldiers who accompanied him, probably probed every nook and cranny without respect to privacy or personal rights, however, they found nothing for their trouble but a quantity of silver coins stored in old chests.

At the request of Frémont, Nidever also approached Isaac Sparks with the suggestion that he join the Battalion. Sparks, who had no particular liking for Frémont refused on the plea that he was a citizen of Mexico. This news, when conveyed to the Lieutenant Colonel, caused him some displeasure, and there was immediate talk of reprisals, such as burning Sparks' house and driving off his stock, among which was a fine race horse. Nidever had the grace to inform Sparks of this intended spoliation of his property, and the latter then bowed to the inevitable and joined up with the Battalion.

The Señora Bernarda Ruiz, appeared before Frémont and somewhat dramatically pleaded with him to put an end to the war "and to do so upon such just and friendly terms of compromise as would make the peace acceptable and enduring," according to Frémont's *Memoirs*.

Tracing Frémont's Route

From December 27th to January 3rd, of the new year, the battalion remained in Santa Barbara. From the Californians who had returned to their homes and signed the parole, it was learned that their forces in the south were weakening, which was welcome news to Frémont. One morning the *Julia* arrived in the roadstead, landing a cannon for the battalion's use. On the last day of 1846 it was rumored that the Californians were planning to attack the forces of the Battalion at San Buenaventura; and after the new-year's celebration of the Indians in Santa Barbara, at which time they diplomatically played "Yankee Doodle," preparations were completed for the battalion's continued march toward the south.

On January 3rd Bryant records: "A beautiful spring-like day. We resumed our march at eleven o'clock and encamped in a live-oak grove about ten miles south of Santa Barbara." A constant lookout had been kept for the enemy, especially at the "Rincon" where at high tide the surf reached to the steep cliffs that protruded almost into the sea. The way now followed the beach, where the water reached almost to the horses' bellies, and only six miles was covered on the day of the 4th, camp being made close to the sea.

March was resumed on the 5th, and the *Julia* lay off shore for the purpose of aiding Frémont in case of an attack. However, the vicinity of San Buenaventura Mission was reached without incident, the Ventura River was forded, and a camp was made on the west side of the Mission orchard somewhere between the present site of the Ventura Police Station and the bank of the Ventura River, which Bryant has confused with the Rio Santa Clara.

A party of Californians now appeared on the hill above the Mission. This was the first indication of the presence of the enemy since the march began at San Juan Bautista, and there was a considerable stir in the camp of the battalion as they were called to arms, the field pieces wheeled in position, and the cannon fired. As the noise of the firing echoed over the hill the Californians disappeared, and the preparations for battle subsided as suddenly as they had begun. As a precautionary measure, however, Frémont ordered the hill occupied against a surprise attack; but the only disturbance in the night was the high wind "which blew a blast so cold and piercing as almost to congeal the blood."

Historical Society of Southern California

Frémont had the Mission of San Buenaventura pretty well to himself save for a few Indians, as the greater number of the inhabitants had fled. Bryant records that one man, a Californian, "met us yesterday and surrendered himself a prisoner." This man was José Arnaz, native of Spain, who first arrived in California as representative of Enrique Virmond, merchant of Acapulco. Arnaz later engaged in business in Los Angeles and married Mercedes Ávila and after disposing of his interest in the southern pueblo he settled in Ventura where he became co-grantee with Narciso Botello of Ex-Mission San Buenaventura and also owner of the Rancho Santa Ana in partnership with Crisistomo Ayala.

In his *Recuerdos*, or Memoirs, Arnaz relates his version of the battalion's visit in San Buenaventura. He locates Frémont's camp as being "in the orchard of an Indian known as the *General*" and that at eight o'clock on the evening of January 5th, as he, Arnaz, sat in his home he was startled by the appearance of several armed men who informed him that he was now a prisoner. He was then escorted into the presence of Frémont who, with scant ceremony, informed him that he was about to be shot.

Upon inquiring the reason for this hostile demonstration against him, Anaz was informed that unless he delivered up the curate, Padre Rosales at once he would be executed.

Recovering from his first indignation Arnaz answered brusquely that he could not produce the Padre as he did not carry him around in his pocket, and that he had no idea where the man might be other than he had joined the Californians. Dismissing the subject as abruptly as he had introduced it, Frémont now began to question his prisoner about the Californians, their numbers, equipment and where they were stationed. Having answered to the best of his ability Arnaz was taken back to his house, nothing more being said about his execution. The following day he was requested to furnish the battalion with horses, beef, and some cattle to drive along with the company, all of which Don José did, watching Frémont and his men march away from San Buenaventura with a sigh of relief that he was still alive.

On January 6th, the company proceeded seven miles inland, fol-

Tracing Frémont's Route

lowing the base of the foothills toward the Santa Clara River, up which valley they intended to pursue their course. Enroute they discovered a party of Californians numbering about sixty or seventy, drawn up on a hill watching the movements of the battalion. Fearing that this was but the vanguard of a larger force Frémont ordered scouts to take to the hills. Meanwhile the enemy had descended to the plain and scattered, putting on an exhibition of horsemanship for the edification of their adversaries, careful, however, to keep out of gun range.

At this point, according to Bryant, "The battalion wheeled to the left for the purpose of crossing a point of hills jutting into the plain, and taking the supposedly concealed enemy on their flank."*

According to James Gregson, Frémont "got scared and ordered us up a hollow we could not get out of, and had to come back." After an exchange of harmless shots, the battalion went into camp on the Santa Clara River, having covered nine miles.

The route now lay along the Santa Clara River, an easy and uneventful march, in spite of the Californians who kept popping up now and then, always out of gun range. The wind blew a steady gale on the 7th and 8th, and camp on the night of the 7th was made on the Rancho Sespe, in the vicinity of present Santa Paula. This Rancho was the property of Carlos Carrillo, who was away with the insurgents, and the battalion feasted on his corn undisturbed. Camp on the 8th was in a willow grove not far from what is now Fillmore, and again a plentiful supply of food was found.

Before dawn on the morning of the 9th, Captain George Hamley (Frémont spells it Hamlyn) rode into camp. He had arrived in Ventura the day before and had been guided to Frémont by Pedro Carrillo† and an Indian. He bore dispatches from Stockton dated at San Luis Rey, Jan. 3rd, in which he advised Frémont that "If there is one single chance against you, you had better not fight the rebels until I get up to you, or you can join me on the road to the Pueblo,"** and continued that he and Kearny were then advancing upon Los Angeles.

*Statement—James Gregson, Mss. Bancroft Library.

†Son of Carlos Carrillo and grandfather of the actor Leo Carrillo.

**Frémont's Memoirs.

Historical Society of Southern California

The march of the 9th brought them into the Camulos Rancho of Lieutenant Antonio Del Valle who had come to California in 1819 and was grantee of the huge Rancho San Francisco. "I could not but feel compassion," says Bryant, "for the venerable old man, whose sons were now all absent and engaged in the war, while he, at home, and unsupported was suffering the unavoidable inconveniences and calamities resulting from an army being quartered upon him."

The San Fernando trail was now followed, and crossing the plain on January 10th, camp was made in the afternoon in the vicinity of what is now Castaic Junction. "Some forty or fifty mounted Californians exhibited themselves" to the battalion during the course of the afternoon; and as preparations were made to resume the journey on the morning of the 11th, Frémont ordered the battalion divided, two hundred men (dismounted) being detailed to advance up the ravines ahead of the main body. In this formation the final ascent of the *Cuesta* leading to the San Fernando Valley was reached. No enemy appeared during the course of the march, "a temporary excitement being caused by some Indian wood-choppers from the San Fernando Mission, but that was all."*

"We found" says Bryant, "the pass narrow and easily defended by brave and determined men." The present highway to the Mojave desert lies just west of the famous Beale Cut, which marks the pass (Frémont called it the San Bernardo) over which the battalion now labored. General Edward Fitzgerald Beale, surveyed this route in 1859 and cut the old road through the hills. It was an engineering feat which is still held to be remarkable.

Upon emerging from the hills the advance guard was met by two messengers riding from Mission San Fernando, who asked to be directed to Frémont. They were Californians, and brought the news that Kearny and Stockton had marched into Los Angeles, victorious after two days of fighting on the banks of the River.

Now that the battalion's march to Los Angeles was almost over, they were met by word of the victory in which they had hoped

*Life and Adventures—George Nidever, Mss. Bancroft Library.



From the Collection of J. Gregg Layne

GENERAL ANDRES PICO

**SON OF JOSE MARIA PICO, AND BROTHER OF GOVERNOR PIO PICO,
BORN 1810, DIED 1876**

Tracing Frémont's Route

to take a definite part. Behind them lay several hundred miles of heart-breaking effort, their route marked by the bleaching bones of the animals who had perished during the journey. Before them was the Mission of San Fernando, which they entered shortly after noon on the 11th of January. The Ex-Mission was now in possession of General Andrés Pico, comandante of the Californian forces, at present absent with his men who were encamped not many miles distant.

Little remained for Frémont to do but to conclude satisfactory arrangements for peace with General Pico. To this end he sent José de Jesus Pico to the Californian camp with a message for Don Andrés; and on the following day, according to Frémont's own *Memoirs*, he and José de Jesus who was a cousin of the General's, went alone to enter into conference with Pico to iron out the main points for a treaty of capitulation.

The actual signing of the Capitulation took place at the adobe house of Tomás Feliz, which he had built in 1845, at the north end of Cahuenga Pass, only a few feet from the banks of the Los Angeles River. On the morning of January 13th, the representatives of the Californians and the officers of the California Battalion, who had been appointed as commissioners by Frémont, met to affix their signatures to the treaty, while the rank and file of the Battalion remained encamped at some distance.

It now remained for Frémont to conduct his men into the Pueblo of Los Angeles and deliver his report to Commodore Robert F. Stockton under whose order the battalion had been originally organized. On January 14th, marching through a heavy rain over "the magnificent undulating plain surrounding the city of Los Angeles" and passing "several warm springs which throw up a large quantity of bitumen and mineral tar," (La Brea), the battalion followed the old road into the Plaza of the Pueblo, and laid down their arms in the plaza a stone's throw from the adobe of Señora Encarnacion Ávila which had been appropriated by Kearny and Stockton as headquarters. The war was over in California, and it only remained for the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo to put the final seal on an already accomplished fact.

