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# **A Leap in the Dark: The Campaign to Conquer New Mexico and California, 1846–1847**

by Cory S. Hollon

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**ABOUT  
THE  
AUTHOR**

**Lt. Col.**

**Cory S. Hollon**

is the director of operations for the 336th Fighter Squadron at Seymour Johnson Air Force Base, North Carolina. He is a senior weapon systems officer in the F-15E Strike Eagle, a 2004 graduate of the U.S. Air Force Weapons School, and a 2013 graduate of the School of Advanced Military Studies. He has master's degrees in history, military operational arts and sciences, and operational arts and science.



*The American Soldier, 1847, by Hugh Charles McBarron Jr.*



# "A LEAP IN THE DARK"



## The Campaign to Conquer New Mexico and California, 1846–1847

By CORY S. HOLLON

### INTRODUCTION

On 7 December 1846, the “day dawned on the most tattered and ill-fed detachment of men that ever the United States mustered under her colors.” The day prior, Brig. Gen. Stephen Watts Kearny’s Army of the West had engaged in its first battle against Mexican forces at San Pasqual, California, near present-day San Diego. While Kearny claimed a victory because the enemy left the field, the engagement had cost him 18 killed and 13 wounded from a force of fewer than 160. Kearny himself was wounded so severely that he temporarily transferred command to a captain of dragoons. The Army of the West, which had marched in June 1846 from Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, in pursuit of the strategic objective of annexing New Mexico and California to the United States, was now encircled on a small hill just west of San Pasqual. New Mexico had capitulated to Kearny

without a shot fired, but initial reports claiming the absence of any resistance to American rule in distant California proved highly inaccurate. It appeared that, despite having completed the longest march in United States military history, Kearny’s force would fall short of its ultimate goal. Kearny noted, “Our provisions were exhausted, our horses dead, our mules on their last legs, and our men, now reduced to one third of their number, were worn down by fatigue and emaciated.”<sup>1</sup>

These setbacks notwithstanding, the campaign to secure New Mexico and California was ultimately successful. On 8 December 1846, Commodore Robert F. Stockton sent 180 sailors and marines from San Diego to reinforce Kearny’s beleaguered force and escort it back to San Diego. From there, after replenishment and refit, Kearny led his force north and won a series of engagements in which the Army of

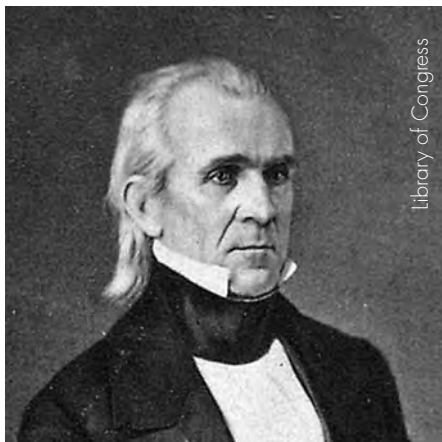
the West defeated the armed forces of California and in January 1847 established an American civil government in the province. General Kearny had achieved the stated political objectives of the United States nearly two months before Maj. Gen. Winfield Scott landed at Vera Cruz, Mexico.

### STRATEGIC SETTING

On 24 April 1846, Mexican and United States forces clashed near the Rio Bravo del Norte resulting in the death of sixteen U.S. soldiers. Word reached President James K. Polk on 11 May. Two days later, while Secretary of War William L. Marcy was drafting orders for Kearny, a colonel at the time, to take command of volunteers and secure New Mexico and California, President Polk signed the declaration of war against Mexico.

Secretary Marcy outlined four broad objectives and a timeline in the orders



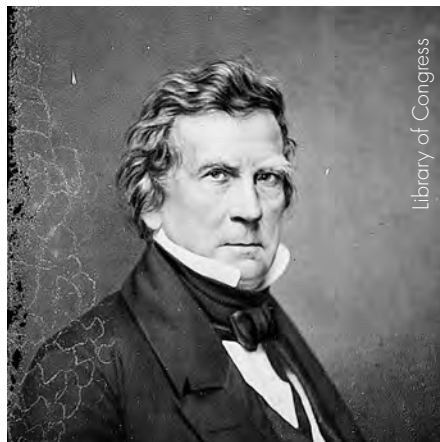


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President Polk, c. 1849

he sent Kearny. The initial order of business was to seize control of Santa Fe, New Mexico.<sup>2</sup> Mexico had all but abandoned New Mexico because of the prevalence of raiding Native American tribes that had mostly isolated the province, its proximity to the rebellious Texas, and its distance from the Mexican capital city.<sup>3</sup> However, the first real purpose of the expedition was the capture of California, preferably by the autumn of 1846. Marcy refrained from making the timeline explicit but mentioned the president's "cherished hope" that Kearny "should take military possession of that country as soon as it can be safely done." Further, Kearny was to travel to California without the 1,000 Missouri volunteers that Marcy had authorized. Second, after gaining military possession of the territories, Marcy directed Kearny to "establish temporary civil governments therein; abolishing all arbitrary restrictions that may exist, so far as it may be done with safety." Kearny was not only to occupy the land, but he was also to provide the framework for governments that would bring these conquered provinces into the Union. Third, while he was accomplishing these two positive aims, Marcy specifically directed Kearny not to disrupt trade between U.S. citizens and the Mexican provinces. Finally, while fulfilling the positive and negative objectives of the government, Kearny was to "act in such a manner as best to conciliate the inhabitants, and render them friendly to the United States."<sup>4</sup>

It would take substantial effort to accomplish these missions, but fortu-



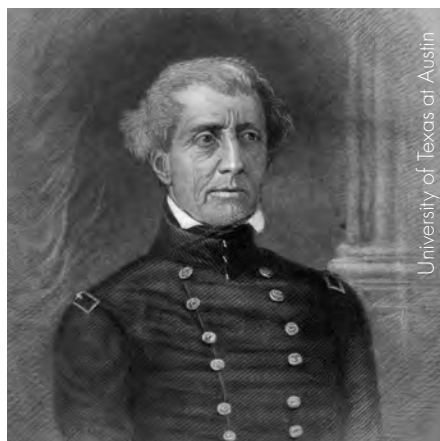
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Secretary Marcy, c. 1855

nately Kearny understood the overall environment in which he was working. In addition to expeditions to Colorado and Wyoming as a young officer, Kearny traveled the Oregon Trail in 1845 and returned to Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, via Bent's Fort, in present-day Colorado, and the Santa Fe Trail. Additionally, Fort Leavenworth's position just north of the Santa Fe Trail allowed Kearny to gain reports of the trail conditions from travelers. Kearny knew the terrain, habits of the indigenous populations, and available resources in the region, and this "amply qualified him to act the pioneer and commanding officer of the expedition which he so successfully conducted to Santa Fe."<sup>5</sup>

Perhaps the most daunting element for Kearny's force to overcome was the distance between its base and the objective. The straight-line distance from Fort Leavenworth to Bent's Fort to Santa Fe to San Diego, California, is

A drawing of General Kearny, c. 1847



University of Texas at Austin



National Archives

William H. Emory, shown here as a major general, c. 1865

just over 1,350 miles. However, Kearny had to utilize what trails existed, so his task would be to move an army capable of imposing U.S. sovereignty a distance of approximately 1,910 miles. Further, the topography of the land would make the journey extraordinarily difficult. Lt. William H. Emory, a topographical engineer and later adjutant to General Kearny, described the country as rolling prairie, giving way to high desert with limited vegetation as it approached Santa Fe. Santa Fe had so little in the way of vegetation or arable land that General Kearny remarked most of his mounted cavalry would become foot soldiers because of their inability to feed their horses.<sup>6</sup> Between Santa Fe and San Diego, there were at least two routes from which Kearny could choose. The northern route would not be available if his forces started later than early October because of the danger from winter weather. The southern route was extremely rugged, but it was passable throughout the year and offered more forage for the horses.

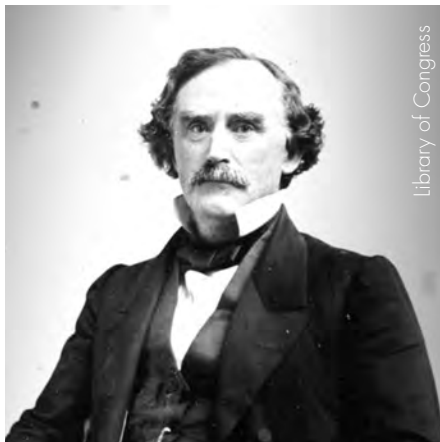
At the beginning of the march, Kearny drew troops from three different sources. First, he had the Regular Army forces made up primarily of the First Regiment of Dragoons (hereafter referred to as the 1st Dragoons). The forerunners of the cavalry, dragoons were highly mobile, horse-mounted troops whose decisive action was a charge against the enemy, followed by the pursuit of a retreating force. Each man carried a rifled Hall carbine, a brace of pistols, a cavalry saber, a bedroll with eating utensils, a blouse,

There were 800 mounted soldiers organized into a regiment with eight companies under the leadership of Col. Alexander William Doniphan. Kearny ordered muskets for the 800 men, but only enough carbines and sabers for one-fourth of them. In addition to the varying experience levels between the volunteers and the regulars, there was also a difference in fighting styles. Dragoons, despite their designation, expected to fight mounted, but the mounted Missouri riflemen expected to fight



Alexander William Doniphan, c. 1850

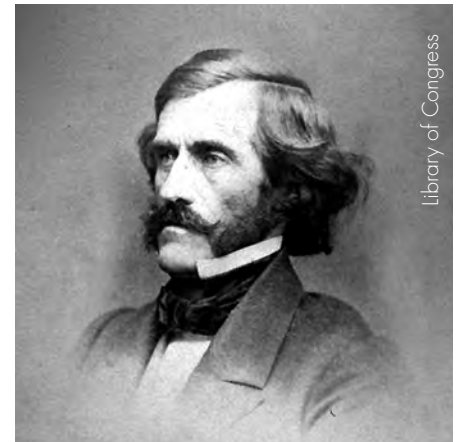




Meriwether Lewis Clark Sr., c. 1850



A postwar photo of James M. Allen



A postwar photo of Robert F. Stockton

dismounted. The Army of the West also mustered two companies of light artillery from the Missouri volunteers with twelve 6-pound cannons and four 12-pound mountain howitzers, forming the Missouri Artillery Battalion under Maj. Meriwether Lewis Clark Sr. Missouri volunteers also constituted the only infantry, in the form of two companies, to march with Kearny to Santa Fe.<sup>8</sup>

The final source of troops for the Army of the West was the Mormon Battalion. Pursued and persecuted because of their religious beliefs, the Mormons found themselves in western Iowa at the outbreak of war with Mexico. An emissary to President Polk convinced him to allow some of the Mormons to enlist in the Army as an expedient to move them out of the country and gain an occupation force in the process. Capt. James M. Allen of the 1st Dragoons was responsible for mustering them into service and capitalized on the Mormons' desire to relocate to the West to persuade men to volunteer. Secretary Marcy authorized Kearny to "muster into service such as can be induced to volunteer; not, however, to a number exceeding one-third of your entire force."<sup>9</sup> Ultimately, 400 Mormons formed the Mormon Battalion and marched from Fort Leavenworth to San Diego.

Upon arrival in California, Kearny expected to work closely with the Navy and take charge of the U.S. Army personnel who were there. Commodore John D. Sloat was in

command of naval and marine forces initially, but Commodore Stockton relieved him in July 1846. Together with Capt. John C. Frémont, a brevet captain of topographical engineers in the U.S. Army, Stockton would head the troops that Kearny anticipated to direct upon his arrival in California. Marcy's instructions to Kearny drove this expectation by stating that "the naval forces of the United States . . . will be in possession of all the towns on the sea coast, and *will co-operate with you* in the conquest of California."<sup>10</sup> However, because of the sometimes difficult and often personality-driven nature of what today is called a joint operation, Kearny had to cooperate with and influence the naval forces rather than assume command and control. While the size of these units was unknown at the start of the march, Kearny expected additional men being present upon his arrival in the terri-

tory, sufficient at least to secure the ports in California.

Kearny could only speculate as to the character of the enemy force while he was planning his campaign. He had information from sources in and around Santa Fe that Mexican Governor Manuel Armijo could field approximately 5,000 men for the defense of New Mexico. The composition and experience of that force was unknown, but there was a rumor that General Jose de Urrea was coming from Mexico with even more troops. Contrary to these rumors were indications that "a year before, the Mexican government had virtually abandoned northern New Mexico."<sup>11</sup> In either case, Kearny understood that he would be facing primarily volunteer infantry

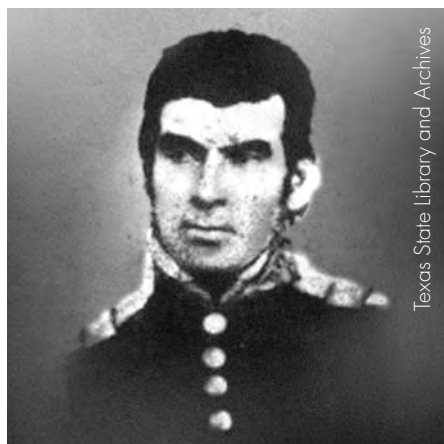
Portrait of Commodore Sloat



An undated portrait of Governor Armijo







General Urrea, c. 1845

with minimal combat training or experience. In California, because of the assurances of Secretary Marcy, Kearny anticipated minimal resistance, but there was no evidence to support this presumption.

Kearny faced a monumental problem. He needed to plan a way to conquer and subdue the vast expanses of New Mexico and Alta California while maintaining trade and peaceful relations with the population in order to fulfill the strategic objectives of the war and minimize the potential for future conflict. He had the Army of the West, which included five companies of the 1st Dragoons and the 1st Missouri Mounted Rifles, with the 2d Missouri Mounted Rifles and the Mormon Battalion as follow-on forces. However, he would confront an unknown number of enemy troops with assumed limited skill and a potentially hostile native populace. The strategic leaders, while not making it an order, strongly desired the acquisition of the territories to be completed before the end of the year, which gave Kearny only six months with which to march over 1,910 miles. Through all of this, Kearny had to pay careful attention to the terrain and distances in front of him, the impact his decisions would have on his mostly unseasoned troops, and the relationships he would have to create and maintain with the local population.

### FROM FORT LEAVENWORTH TO SANTA FE

When Kearny received orders from Secretary Marcy, he was the commander of the 1st Dragoons at Fort Leavenworth. His immediate concern



A sketch titled "The Volunteer" that appeared in *Doniphan's Expedition* (Cincinnati, Ohio, 1847) by John Taylor Hughes

was twofold: consolidate his Regular Army troops at Fort Leavenworth and train the new volunteers for service in the Army of the West. Kearny had begun the merger several days before the explicit instructions from the War Department arrived. In addition to the three companies of dragoons stationed at Fort Leavenworth, Kearny recalled his dragoons from Forts Atkinson and Crawford in what are now Iowa and Wisconsin, respectively. The Mexican War, while not popular in some parts of the country, caused mass volunteerism in Missouri. Kearny knew that he needed his regulars present at Fort Leavenworth as soon as possible

to help organize, train, and equip the new soldiers. The volunteers who reported first became the 1st Regiment of Missouri Volunteer Cavalry and elected Alexander Doniphan as their colonel.<sup>12</sup> The initial accumulation of combat forces went well; however, unfortunately for Kearny, events would not allow the continued buildup to proceed smoothly.

Kearny faced several problems while mobilizing at Fort Leavenworth and



mustering the volunteers. He received orders to intercept a shipment of arms and ammunition that was on the Santa Fe Trail bound for Governor Armijo. On 5 June 1846, Kearny dispatched Captain Moore with Companies C and G of the 1st Dragoons to overtake the caravan and detain all people and supplies traveling with it until he arrived.<sup>13</sup> He sent follow-on instructions demanding speed from Moore because an informant, a long-time resident of Santa Fe, “is further of the Opinion, from his knowledge of the Governor’s character, that if we can secure that property, we hold the governor as our friend and ally.” While not explicit in the directive to Moore, it is reasonable to assume that Kearny considered the possibility of turning the entire Mexican provincial government of New Mexico, as it currently stood, to the side of the United States through means other than overt military force.



An etching of Philip St. George Cooke, shown here as a lieutenant colonel, that appeared in *Harper's* magazine in 1858

This would have more than fulfilled Secretary Marcy’s order to secure the territory without disrupting trade or inciting popular revolt.<sup>14</sup>

In case the advanced party could not intercept the caravan, or the loss of the arms and ammunition did not bring Armijo to the United States’ side, Kearny would need to have an armed force ready to face the New Mexico governor. Therefore, Kearny arranged for the armament and provisions for the army he was training. As noted before, Kearny also ordered arms and ammunition for the volunteer forces, but he was also concerned about feeding and clothing them. He drafted supply wagons and teamsters to aid in driving the 1,556 wagons, 459 horses, 3,658 draft mules, and 516 pack mules used to transport the Army of the West to Santa Fe.<sup>15</sup> The journey to Santa Fe would be difficult, but Kearny made sure that his logistics would not unduly limit his operational reach.

In addition to the logistical arrangements for the march, Kearny made two decisions at Fort Leavenworth re-



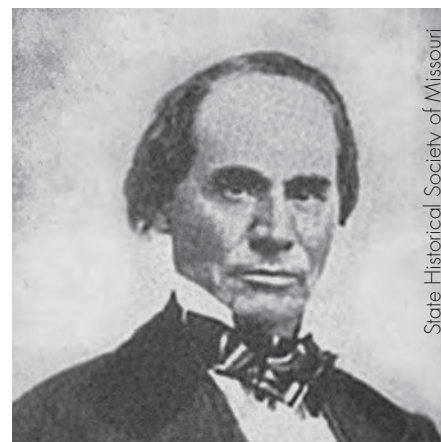


garding the composition of his forces that had far-reaching effects. First, he secured the services of an interpreter.<sup>16</sup> Even though the orders from Marcy indicated that he would supply Kearny with a proclamation in Spanish for the people of New Mexico, no such document ever reached him. Instead, Kearny had to carefully construct the proclamation himself and then rely on his interpreter to translate it for him. The document served as the opening gambit in the peaceful occupation and acquisition of the territory. Second, Kearny understood that the infantry needed to conduct the majority of the work involved in establishing a civil government in New Mexico. Kearny viewed “infantry, with their bayonets, as the main pillar and strength of an Army.” On two different occasions, he solicited more infantry for the Army of the West.<sup>17</sup> In the second request, he lamented the number of mounted riflemen he was taking with him because the scarcity of forage for the animals around Santa Fe would likely result in most of these troops becoming infantry as their mounts died.

Kearny’s final important decision at Fort Leavenworth concerned the path that his forces would take to California. Three different routes composed the Santa Fe Trail: the lower, middle, and upper crossings. Where they intersected the Arkansas River distinguished each from the others, but all the avenues eventually came together on the Cimarron River near Lower Cimarron Spring.<sup>18</sup> Kearny chose to follow the upper crossing, also known

as the Mountain Pass, because of the scarcity of resources on the other routes. As Capt. Philip St. George Cooke noted, “There is a shorter route to Santa Fe which passes no mountain, or very bad road; but this one by Bent’s Fort was selected as better meeting the needs of the expedition. The other, the ‘Cimarrone Route,’ is much more deficient in fuel and has a dreaded *jornada*; while that by Bent’s Fort has in the fort on the frontier a *quasi* base.”<sup>19</sup> The upper crossing route had the advantage of Bent’s Fort, which could serve as a forward base and an intermediate staging base for the troops. Additionally, because Kearny’s forces needed to march at intervals that precluded mutual support, the upper crossing route offered added distance from hostile forces.<sup>20</sup> Even though the crowding of the upper crossing strained the available fodder along the way, this route provided distinct advantages in logistics, protection, and potential basing locations.

By 30 June 1846, the Army of the West had assembled most of its forces, so Kearny, now a brigadier general, began the march toward Santa Fe and California. The journey from Fort Leavenworth to Santa Fe allowed Kearny to pursue the training and discipline of the volunteers while safe from enemy attacks. The march was difficult on the volunteers, who learned how hard they could push themselves and their mounts after extended periods of deprivation. Lieutenant Emory took time “to speak of the excellent understanding which prevailed throughout between regulars



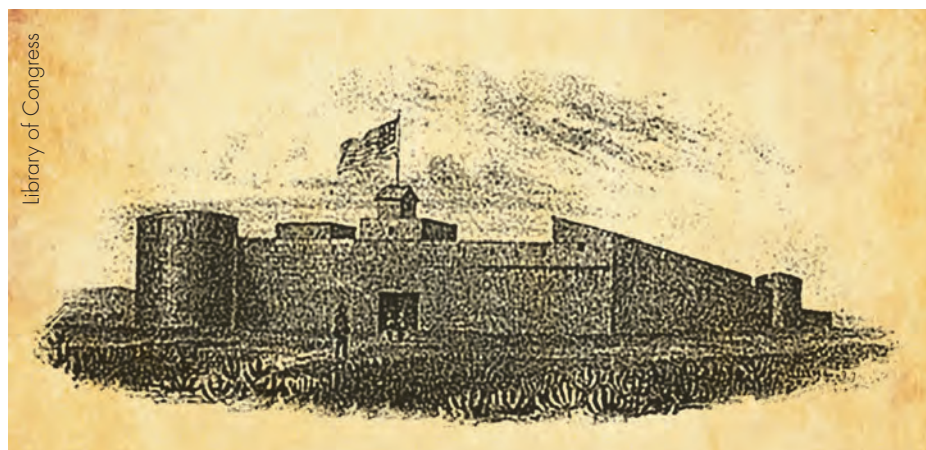
State Historical Society of Missouri

William Bent, c. 1850

and volunteers, and the cheerfulness with which they came to each others assistance whenever the privations and hardships of the march called for the interchange of kindly offices among them.”<sup>21</sup> Kearny’s force completed the 529-mile march to Bent’s Fort in twenty-nine days and suffered two dead. As Kearny’s biographer Dwight L. Clarke noted, “Grueling lessons were being learned daily that would make soldiers out of these recruits.”<sup>22</sup> In the end, Kearny built a cohesive and disciplined team out of a hodgepodge of men.

At Bent’s Fort, Kearny consolidated his army, secured the forward base of operations, and took a significant risk. Because the line of operations extended along the upper crossing, Bent’s Fort became a decisive point in the campaign for Santa Fe. Even though it was outside of New Mexico, control of Bent’s Fort gave the Army of the West a place to regroup, reorganize, and recuperate from the long march. The two companies under the command of Captain Moore that had failed to intercept the enemy ammunition wagons bound for Santa Fe rejoined the Army, and the men repaired equipment and wagons, consolidated food stores, and allowed the horses and mules to graze. Additionally, Kearny sent some wagons back to Fort Leavenworth in order to begin resupply efforts for follow-on operations.<sup>23</sup> He gave every indication that Bent’s Fort was to become an intermediate base to facilitate the continued march toward Santa Fe.

An undated sketch of Bent’s Fort



Library of Congress



During the three days the army spent at Bent's Fort, Captain Moore's men brought three captured Mexicans to meet with Kearny. Two of the men were spies, and the third, while probably also a spy, claimed to be looking for his wife who had been taken by Comanches and sold to a William Bent. Kearny could have ordered the execution of the spies and kept the size and composition of his force secret; however, he chose an alternate, and more dangerous, course of action. Capt. Henry Smith Turner, Kearny's adjutant, related that, "after holding conversation with the Colonel and being permitted to walk through the whole camp, that our strength might be made known to them, they are liberated with permission to return to New Mexico, where doubtless they will make a full report of our strength and operations."<sup>24</sup> The spies lamented the fate of their republic upon their departure from Bent's Fort and filled Santa Fe with exaggerated stories about the number and might of the U.S. forces. To help capitalize on the appearance of overwhelming strength, Kearny wrote a letter to Governor Armijo, stating, "I come to this part of the United States with a strong military force and a yet stronger one is now following as a reinforcement to us. We have many more troops than sufficient to put down any opposition that you can possibly bring against us, and I therefore for the sake of humanity call upon you to submit to fate."<sup>25</sup> Kearny weighed and accepted the risk of the enemy learning the size and composition of his forces in order to capitalize on the opportunity that the Mexican government and population, realizing the futility of resistance in the face of such massed combat power, would peacefully submit.

After the beneficial and productive time spent at Bent's Fort, Kearny's Army of the West began its march toward Santa Fe on 2 August 1846. The route took the force through a series of small towns and villages that, according to the instructions from Secretary Marcy, were to be subdued and "conciliate[d] . . . and render them friendly to the United States." Each town, therefore, became a decisive

point in the operation. Kearny could not leave a potential enemy in his rear; however, he did not have sufficient forces to occupy every village along the way without risking being in a diminished state when meeting Governor Armijo's reported forces. Kearny's solution was ingenious. He marched into villages at the front of his army and asked for a meeting with the *alcalde* or mayor. While giving a strong show of force, Kearny would explain the benefits of annexation and his intention to leave the *alcalde* in power provided he swore an oath to the United States. After the *alcalde* took the oath, Kearny installed him in his office and pronounced all the people citizens of the United States.<sup>26</sup> The solution demonstrated significant flexibility and adaptability in meeting the objective of pacifying the population while annexing the territory. Additionally, he understood the utility of violence and, more importantly, the threat of violence. There was no need to do more than show sufficient force in order to coerce the villagers into allegiance to the United States. Further, this took advantage of the limited allegiance the people had to Mexico because of their distance from

the capital and the lack of support from that government. However, the oaths taken were of questionable legitimacy as nothing had really changed in the day-to-day lives of the villagers. Nevertheless, Kearny was able to seize Tecelote, San Miguel, and Las Vegas on the way to Santa Fe without expending valuable combat power in either their acquisition or retention.

By 15 August, Kearny's force had arrived at Las Vegas, New Mexico, and received an intelligence report that Armijo had assembled a force of 2,000 men in a canyon on the approach to Santa Fe. Armijo had placed an army in a nearly impregnable defensive position approximately six miles south of Las Vegas. However, the Mexicans' resolve quickly faded. By the time Kearny formed his men into a line of battle and advanced toward the canyon, the entire Mexican force had dispersed. Armijo and the other leaders were quarreling over command of the army, and "since the common people were peaceably disposed toward the invaders, they had used this squabble as a pretext for deserting, and Armijo was thus left without soldiers."<sup>27</sup> Armijo fled south toward El Paso, Texas, and was no longer a factor in New Mexico's defense. Captain Cooke hinted at the prevalent strain of racism, which may have played a role in the later stages of the campaign, by noting that the New Mexicans "became panic-stricken at once on the approach of such an imposing array of horsemen of a superior race, and, it appeared, over-estimated our numbers, which the reports of ignorance and fear had vastly magnified." Regardless, there were no enemy forces between Kearny and Santa Fe. He seized the city without firing a shot and proclaimed all of New Mexico annexed to the United States on 22 August 1846.<sup>28</sup> The first phase of the campaign was over.

The seizure of Santa Fe only completed half of Kearny's objectives for the area; he still needed to establish a civil government. In order to transition to the next phase of his operation, Kearny had to provide for the sustenance and protection of the force he would leave behind and set up a legal system for civilian governance. He

A late nineteenth-century etching titled *The Capture of Santa Fe, 1846*





accomplished all of this in a period of six weeks.<sup>29</sup>

Kearny's first order of business was to consolidate the recent gains and ensure the army's ability to hold the territory by establishing a fort. Kearny's engineers selected a low hilltop northeast of Santa Fe on which to build. The hill commanded the city but was beyond the range of small arms from the hills surrounding the town. Within a week more than a hundred people were working on what Kearny christened as Fort Marcy. On 19 September, Kearny reported Fort Marcy completed and capable of accommodating a garrison of 1,000 soldiers. In addition, Kearny also visited several towns to the south of Santa Fe in order to secure the peaceful transition of sovereignty from Mexico to the United States. Kearny took the same approach with the towns north of Santa Fe. While there were some issues with the volunteers, Kearny's trip during 2–11 September demonstrated his skillful use of diplomacy and the efficacy of not using lethal force in subduing a population.<sup>30</sup>

Kearny established a civil-military government by drawing on the talents of Colonel Doniphan to draft a code of laws and by installing government



Governor Bent House and Museum

An undated portrait of Governor Bent

officials to carry on the work once Kearny and his men had left. Kearny charged Doniphan, an attorney from Missouri in civilian life, with studying the current laws of New Mexico and making suggestions on how they could be modified to conform to the American system and the U.S. Constitution. Doniphan and another lawyer, Pvt. Willard P. Hall, worked together and submitted their suggestions. Kearny proclaimed the laws to be in effect on 22 September 1846.<sup>31</sup> Also on that day, Kearny appointed Charles Bent as the territorial governor as well as installed a secretary, a U.S. marshal, a district

attorney, a treasurer, an auditor, and three superior court justices.<sup>32</sup> With these positions filled, Kearny reported "everything is peaceful and the future commander of U.S. troops here should only concern himself with protection of the people from Indians."

From the moment that Kearny arrived in Santa Fe, he began preparing for his follow-on march to California. He first assigned the route selection to his aide, Capt. Abraham Robinson Johnston. The northern route, also known as the Spanish Route, and the one recommended by Secretary Marcy, presented problems in terms of force sustainability and weather. Johnston knew that the route was subject to harsh snows and, although it was easily traversed by wagons, offered little for the mounts or pack animals to eat. The southern route, which went along the Gila River, was too rocky for wagons, but contained better vegetation.<sup>33</sup> Therefore, the selection of the route depended heavily on logistics and the date of departure from Santa Fe.

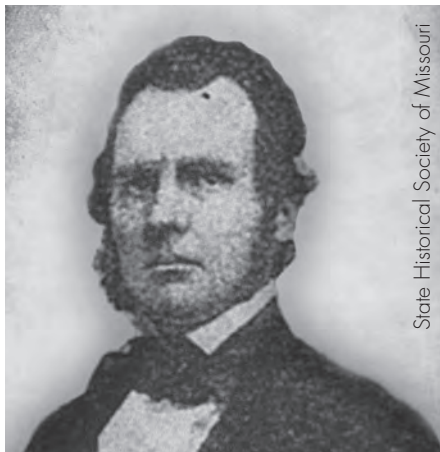
Sustainment quickly became the primary concern. On the march to Santa Fe, a lack of food for the horses forced the men to help pull many of the supply wagons up the mountain

A drawing by John Mix Stanley showing Kearny's column passing through San Felipe, New Mexico

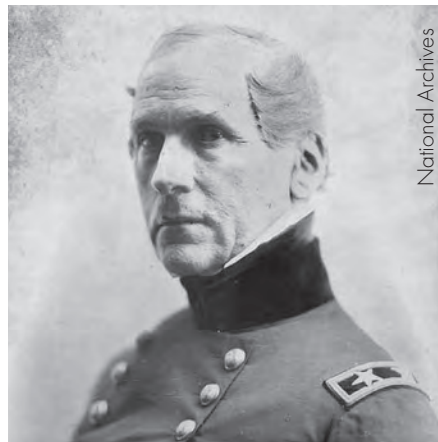


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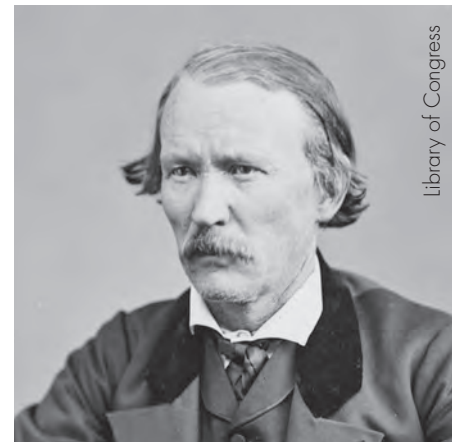




**Sterling Price, c. 1847**



**John E. Wool, shown here as a major general, c. 1862**



**Christopher H. "Kit" Carson, c. 1860**

trails; moreover, the logistical difficulties often forced the men to live on half rations. Kearny had begun sending supplies from Fort Leavenworth to Santa Fe before the main body had departed, but the supply train was not always reliable, which led to much grumbling from the volunteers.<sup>34</sup> In Santa Fe, conditions did not improve much because the quartermaster could not secure fresh mounts and the commissary was limited to Taos flour and salt pork, which "required a good appetite to relish." Not only were the men in poor shape, but also most of the 1st Dragoons now rode mules or recently acquired horses. If not as

highly regarded as horses for proper cavalry mounts, at least mules ate less than horses, were more sure-footed, and were more aware of events around them, which would be beneficial on the rocky trail west.<sup>35</sup> Kearny favored the southern route because his mounts could eat even though the trail was inaccessible to wagons.

Nevertheless, the final determining factor for selecting the route was the timing of the march. As late as 16 September, Kearny reported that he did not know when the Mormon Battalion would arrive in Santa Fe. His orders were to proceed, if at all possible, and take California in the fall. The northern

route presented an additional danger of inclement weather, which could delay Kearny from reaching California until the spring.<sup>36</sup> Ultimately, Kearny was willing to accept the risk of exposing the troops and their mounts to the environment as well as the uncertainty of the terrain on the southern route in order to complete the mission by the fall.

With the route chosen, Kearny now needed to decide which elements of his forces would accompany him to California. He assumed that California would be mostly subdued and in the hands of the Navy, in accordance with the instructions he had received in May from Secretary Marcy.<sup>37</sup> There-

**A drawing of Kearny's column by John Mix Stanley titled *The Last Day with the Wagons***





Kearny's eagerness to get to California may explain why he sent Colonel Doniphan's regiment to Mexico to join with Brig. Gen. John E. Wool, although other reasons could have influenced his decision. First, New Mexico appeared to be pacified, so Colonel Price's troops, only a few weeks away from Santa Fe, would be sufficient to maintain the peace. Second, Kearny knew that the trail to California was difficult and lacked good forage for the horses, but spacing out the column as he did on the way to Bent's Fort was not possible because of the threat from hostile Native Americans. Furthermore, a large body of troops would be inherently slower and entail more risk. Third, Kearny assumed that the operation in California would be similar to that in New Mexico since the Navy would be in control of the ports and seaside cities. Even if that assumption proved false, the Mormon Battalion would arrive shortly after Kearny, and there were other forces scheduled to be in California to support Kearny early in the next year.<sup>39</sup> Fourth, there was some friction between Kearny and the volunteers. Although the new recruits held up well under the strains of the march to Santa Fe, this portion of the campaign would be much longer, with more difficult terrain, and a scarcity of food and water. In addition, some of the volunteers were rankled by Kearny's discipline, and he may not have wanted to place them in a position to grow more resentful of their service. Finally, Kearny's sense of American racial superiority might have led him to dismiss the ability of the enemy to put up a strong resistance in the face of American military might. Regardless of the reasoning, Kearny left Santa Fe on the morning of the twenty-fifth with 300 dragoons, 2 mountain howitzers, and a handful of officers. Captain Cooke noted that "tomorrow

## THE CONQUEST OF CALIFORNIA

Grande) and began the third phase of his operation. The first part of the route was familiar to the troops as they had traveled south to Tomé less than a month earlier. Their trek paralleled the river for approximately 225 miles and then deviated from the river heading west. Their route crossed the Continental Divide and joined the





Gila River after about 150 miles. After a 500-mile trek along the Gila, the dragoons stayed near the waters of the Colorado River for another 40 miles before facing a 60-mile trip across the desert of California. San Diego, which Kearny assumed the U.S. naval forces controlled, was only another 90 miles from there. He was close to completing the journey some viewed as “the leap in the dark of a thousand miles of wild plains and mountains, only known in vague reports as unwatered [*sic*], and with several deserts of two and three marches where a camel might starve if not perish of thirst.”<sup>41</sup>

The trip itself would be rigorous as well as monotonous. As author Dwight L. Clarke points out, “Only the details differed from mile to mile: rough, rocky trail, scant grass of poor quality, frequent dusty stretches in the powdery soil resembling cold ashes rather than earth.”<sup>42</sup> During the trek the column would be forced to transition from wagons to pack mules due to the terrain.

On 6 October 1846, Kearny met Christopher Houston “Kit” Carson near Socorro, New Mexico, on the Rio del Norte. Carson was returning from California with correspondence from Commodore Stockton that reported the conquest of California after a ten-day fight with Mexican forces.<sup>43</sup> Because of this new intelligence, Kearny had to decide whether to continue with his original plan or alter it. A problem with the Navajo tribe appeared to be escalating in New Mexico, and he was taking his best cavalry toward what was now a conquered territory. Further-



National Archives

An undated photo of Archibald Gillespie

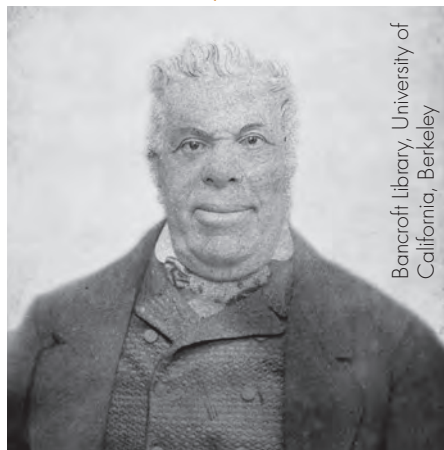
more, a smaller party could move faster and required less sustenance. Kearny decided he should change the plan, so he sent 200 of the 1st Dragoons back to Santa Fe. Carson had garnered a commission as a lieutenant of U.S. Mounted Volunteers, so he had no recourse when Kearny ordered him, despite his objection, to join Kearny’s troops and serve as a guide on the trail. The remaining troops were to be no more than an escort for General Kearny to get to California and fulfill his orders.<sup>44</sup>

Four days after Carson joined the dragoons heading west, Kearny decided to abandon the wagons and switch to pack mules. Carson had been complaining about the slow pace caused by the wagons. The route had been extraordinarily difficult on the men and equipment, and reports were that conditions worsened farther on the trail. Kearny ordered the march to halt and wait for pack animals. The

only wheeled vehicles that Kearny kept were the gun carriages mounting two mountain howitzers.<sup>45</sup> Interestingly, Kearny’s aide, Captain Turner, assumed that the howitzers were going back with the rest of the wagons. At some point, though, the decision was made to bring the howitzers along despite the difficulties the wagons had already faced. Author William Perkins argued that “the backbreaking toil and the expenditure of mules involved in getting these guns down the Gila River sealed the fate of the 1st Dragoons and contributed heavily to their losses at San Pasqual.”<sup>46</sup> While it is impossible to judge how much transporting the mountain howitzers contributed to the forthcoming casualties at San Pasqual, it can be concluded that the extra effort expended to get them there took a toll on an already exhausted unit.

It took nearly two months for Kearny and his escort to get to California; he encountered a significantly different environment than he expected once he arrived. During the march, there were various encounters with Indians, traders, and Mexicans. The recurrent theme of these events was Kearny’s attempt to get fresh mounts for his troops. On 22 November, Lieutenant Emory reported that most of the men in the column were on foot, and even General Kearny resorted to use of his mule because his horse could no longer stand. Additionally, news was reaching Kearny from California that the declaration of a peaceful annexation might have been premature.<sup>47</sup>

Governor Pio Pico, c. 1858



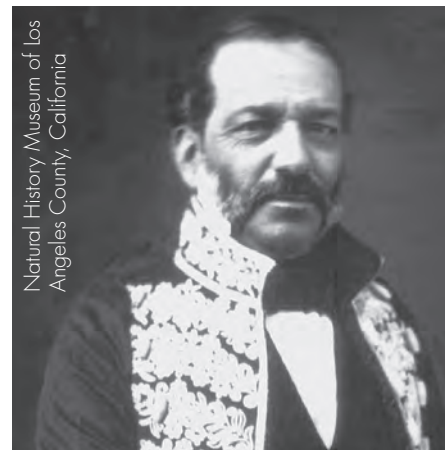
Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley

An undated portrait of General Castro, c. 1840



Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley

General Andrés Pico, c. 1850



Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County, California





*The Battle of San Pasqual* by Col. Charles H. Waterhouse

Commodore Stockton had accomplished the initial conquest of California easily because the governor of *Alta California* (Upper California), Pío Pico, and the military commander of Mexican forces, General José Castro, decided they could not mount a successful defense. However, Stockton's brief administration of the territory was inept and cruel, and the people rose in revolt against the American occupation within a few weeks. Ironically, the *Californios* (native Californians of Mexican descent) forced the Americans out of Los Angeles the same week that Kearny left Santa Fe. When Kearny reached Warner's Ranch, northeast of San Diego, on 2 December and requested that Stockton send a party to open up communication with him, he learned that the American forces only held the ports of San Diego, Monterey, and San Francisco. Kearny remained at Warner's Ranch for a day to rest his forces then resumed the march to San Diego on 4 December.<sup>48</sup>

On 5 December, in the midst of a driving rain, Kearny's men made contact with Capt. Archibald Gillespie of the United States Marine Corps.

Gillespie was still a lieutenant in the Marine Corps, but Stockton had commissioned him a captain in the California Battalion. On that day, he was commanding a party of thirty-five men and one 4-pound artillery piece. While the additional men were a welcome sight, Gillespie brought much-needed intelligence about the operating environment into which Kearny now entered. The *Californios* had a force of approximately 150 troops about nine miles from Kearny's present location. In a letter, Stockton urged Kearny, "If you see fit, endeavor to surprise them." Subsequently, Kearny sent out a scouting party that found the enemy; however, the enemy also discovered Kearny's forces and went on the alert.<sup>49</sup> Upon the scouts return around 0200 on 6 December, Kearny decided to attack.

After saddling up at 0200, the 1st Dragoons traveled the nine miles toward the enemy camp.<sup>50</sup> Kearny stopped at the top of San Pasqual Hill, which was about a mile and a half south of the *Californios*' camp. It had been raining for several days, and a fog covered the valley in the predawn

hours. Captain Johnston was in the lead with twelve dragoons on the best horses available. Kearny followed in the second line with about fifty dragoons under the command of Captain Moore. These men were on the mules that had survived the journey from Santa Fe. Behind that second line of dragoons, Captain Gillespie led his troops. Kearny placed the two mountain howitzers and the gun crews next, deploying his entire command in depth. The remainder of the men and the baggage stayed in the rear. Kearny and his men could see the *Californios*, commanded by General Andrés Pico, mounted and prepared to receive a charge.<sup>51</sup> Nevertheless, Kearny ordered an advance.

After descending the hill, the riders deployed into combat formation and began their approach. When the dragoons reached about a mile away from the camp, they encountered two forward guards of *Californios*. Here, the historical record becomes less clear. Some reports claim that Kearny ordered a trot, but Captain Johnston misunderstood and directed a charge. The *Cavalry Tactics* manual of 1841



cites very specific instructions on how to execute a charge. About 180 paces from the enemy, the commander gives the order to trot, followed 60 paces later by the direction to gallop, and the command to charge is given after another 80 paces. In the end, the commander's instructions to charge occurred after two previous, incremental increases in the rate of advance and then only 40 paces from the enemy. The manual clearly states that "the charge in line . . . should be as short as possible, so as to arrive in good order, and without fatiguing the horses."<sup>52</sup>

Others argue that Johnston initiated the charge in response to the enemy's advance guard retreating to alert its commander. This seems nonsensical because tactics at the time directed "as soon as any confusion is observed, it is necessary to have and recommence the movement."<sup>53</sup> Johnston's decision violated tactical practice without sufficient justification to do so. Regardless of motivation, the first line of the U.S. force began a charge approximately one mile from the enemy.

The advance line of dragoons arrived well ahead of its support and on tired horses. Further, the *Californios* carried lances, which had a significant reach advantage over the cavalry saber carried by the dragoons. The U.S. forces suffered heavy casualties but were able to drive the enemy fighters from the field after the 4-pound artillery piece fired canister into them. After collecting the U.S. dead and wounded, which numbered nearly a third of the total force and included a severely wounded General Kearny, the rem-

nants of the Army of the West camped near the battlefield. On 7 December, the dragoons fought in a minor skirmish against the *Californios* with no American casualties. After taking a hill south of San Pasqual, Kearny had to transition to the defense because of the state of his weakened force and the wounded, who were in no condition to travel. On the night of 10 December, after three days deployed in the defense of Mule Hill, 200 troops from San Diego relieved Kearny. The Battle of San Pasqual ended early the next day when the *Californios*, realizing the Americans had received reinforcements, withdrew, and Kearny led his forces into San Diego.

While the issue about the tactics used in the battle continues to inspire debate among historians, the decision to engage the enemy in the first place raises interesting questions. Kearny's determination to attack makes sense in light of his original orders. Secretary Marcy had directed Kearny "to conquer and take possession of . . . Upper California."<sup>54</sup> The defeat of General Andrés Pico and his men would aid substantially in achieving that objective. Moreover, Stockton's letter advising assault also encouraged him to make quick work of the *Californios*. Additionally, the defeat of the enemy formation would prove to be a decisive point in the campaign. The force of *Californios* represented a major source of strength for the enemy both materially and psychologically. If Kearny could beat them at the end of a rigorous march from Santa Fe, he would have gained a significant advantage in

reducing the size of his opposition and bolstering his reputation. By choosing to face the enemy at San Pasqual, Kearny could dictate the tempo of the campaign, rather than waiting for the enemy to move forward and set the pace of battle. For some time he had been in search of better mounts for his troops. With the possibility in front of him that he could obtain the enemy's horses, Kearny reasoned that attacking presented the best opportunity.<sup>55</sup> Finally, Kearny may have believed that seizing the initiative would allow him to disguise how weak his forces really were. A successful fight could decrease the risk of having to face larger forces in the coming days. Given the aforementioned reasons Kearny had for engaging the *Californios*, it may appear that bad luck, or a misinterpretation of battlefield orders, caused the 1st Dragoons' misfortune; however, a further examination of the situation reveals that Kearny could have anticipated, with greater accuracy, the outcome and consequences of the battle.

Some of the reasoning Kearny presented in his report operates from the assumption that the battle was unavoidable. A map of the area drawn by Lieutenant Emory showed only one road between the American forces and San Diego. However, Emory also noted that "we were now on the main road to San Diego, all the 'by-ways' being in our rear."<sup>56</sup> Kearny might have retraced his steps and sought a detour around Pico's force, but that would have risked leaving the enemy behind him. Moreover, now that Kearny was in hostile territory, obtaining fresh and able mounts

A sketch by John Mix Stanley of San Diego as it looked upon Kearny's arrival



became a key objective for his force. Although Dwight Clarke dismisses the possibility, it may have been that Kearny was also eager to engage in a battle after a long march, and both Kit Carson's and his own experience in New Mexico reinforced his low estimation of the enemy.<sup>57</sup> Ultimately, Kearny may have been able to avoid the fight, but given his tendencies, training, and interpretation of his orders, his pursuance of combat was the obvious course.

Kearny's decisions, and subsequent events, demonstrated some errors of judgment in his tactical arrangements and their place in his pursuit of strategic objectives. His poor situational awareness regarding events in California compounded Kearny's erroneous estimation of the fluid strategic context during his campaign. His misjudgments resulted in nearly disastrous consequences for the Army of the West and put the United States' plans for conquest and empire in peril. First, as seen above, the battle was arguably unnecessary. Second, the operating environment disadvantaged Kearny. The wet weather of the past several days rendered the army's carbines nearly useless because water had fouled the cartridges. The carbine was not the primary weapon during a horse charge, but Kearny was also attacking before the sun had come up over unfamiliar terrain without any prior reconnaissance, which gave the advantage to the enemy. Third, he was unaware, or possibly misinformed, about the character of the threat. The *Californios* were on fine horses and were skilled riders.<sup>58</sup> Further, they carried lances that had significantly greater reach than his cavalry sabers. Also, the element of surprise was lost because Pico's men were already mounted and prepared. Fourth, Kearny overestimated or misused his friendly forces. Unfamiliar with Captain Gillespie and his men, Kearny chose to employ them as flank protection in the fourth line of his attacking force. In addition, he did not utilize his artillery to prepare the battlefield and attempt to scatter the enemy before his charge. Moreover, the march had exhausted Kearny's men and their mounts. Finally, Kearny culminated at San Pasqual because he



Portrait of John C. Frémont, as a major,  
by George Peter Alexander Healy

had overextended his supply chain. Two weeks after he left Santa Fe, supply wagons crowded the streets of the city. Had Kearny waited to start the journey, he might have been in better shape when he transitioned from wagons to pack animals. His prioritization of speed resulted in a poorly prepared force facing an underestimated enemy in a disadvantageous operational environment.

General Kearny arrived in San Diego on 12 December 1846, but fulfilling his orders would not be a simple task. The first problem Kearny encountered was a question of command authority. Stockton was the commander of the naval and Marine forces in California. There were no provisions for what today would be considered a joint operation as the Navy and Army recognized different chains of command. Collaboration and

cooperation between Navy and Army forces tended to depend greatly on the personalities of the commanders, and Stockton was flamboyant, cavalier, and self-serving. Kearny refused the command Stockton offered him upon his arrival but soon afterward would regret that judgment as Stockton made some questionable planning decisions for the reconquest of California. Correspondence between the two became heated, with Kearny sending Stockton copies of his orders that showed his authority to assume military command and governorship of the territory.<sup>59</sup> Stockton argued that, because Kearny's orders read "should you conquer" California, his authority to become military commander and governor was nullified when Stockton conquered it. The subsequent loss of all of California except three cities was merely a minor setback that had no bearing on the matter.<sup>60</sup> The conflict between the two carried on for over a month. In the end, Kearny wrote to Stockton that to prevent trouble he would "remain silent for the present, leaving with you the great responsibility of doing that for which you have no authority and preventing me from complying with the President's order." Fortunately, the march to Los Angeles went extremely well, although it suffered from a confusing command structure with Kearny as leader of the expedition and Stockton as the commander in chief.<sup>61</sup>

Los Angeles, as the capital of California, was the objective of the campaign

A colored sketch of a mounted *Californio* with lance





for two reasons. First, it was a decisive point in the conquest of the territory because it served as the base for the enemy forces under General José María Flores. Second, Capt. John C. Frémont was in command of a force of Californian volunteers somewhere to the north of Los Angeles, and they were making their way southward toward the city. Neither Kearny nor Stockton knew the size or location of Frémont's forces; therefore, Flores in Los Angeles represented a threat to Frémont unless Kearny could rendezvous with him.<sup>62</sup> To effect this concentration of forces, Kearny would have to move against Los Angeles.

On 28 December 1846, Kearny assembled his troops to begin the march to Los Angeles. Kearny reported that he "left San Diego with about five hundred men, consisting of sixty dismounted Dragoons under Captain Turner, fifty California Volunteers and the remainder of Marines and Sailors, with a Battery of Artillery." The trek was about 135 miles and would cross several rivers on the way. General Flores calculated that his best chance to stop the Americans would be during one of the river crossings.<sup>63</sup> The first opportunity for an engagement came eleven days after Kearny left San Diego on 8 January 1847.

Kearny faced a portion of the San Gabriel River that ran roughly north to south. The *Californios* organized their forces on the west side of the river with "a bank fifty feet high, ranged parallel with the river, at point blank cannon distance, upon which he posted his artillery."<sup>64</sup> Kearny formed his men into a line of battle and, despite artillery fire, crossed the river. The American artillery battery traversed the river and silenced the *Californios'* artillery rather quickly.<sup>65</sup> While the artillery dueled, the infantry crossed the river and then charged the enemy's position. Almost simultaneously, the *Californios* struck the American left flank, but the sailors and marines repelled them easily. As the enemy retreated, Kearny was unable to pursue because he lacked cavalry. The two forces then camped within sight of each other, but Flores eventually withdrew under the cover of darkness.



General Kearny's dragoon officer's dress coat

The next morning, Kearny resumed his advance. Because the *Californios* had the advantage of mobility with their cavalry, Kearny arranged his forces essentially in a square, which the sailors and marines called a "Yankee corral," with the front and rear ranks in line of battle, the two wings in column, and the baggage and wagons in the middle. Leaving the San Gabriel River, the troops pushed across a wide mesa toward the Los Angeles River. After five to six miles, Flores' troops, which were on a hill to the north and west of the direction of march, opened artillery fire on the Americans. Kearny directed his forces to "incline a little to the left to avoid giving Flores the advantage of the ground to post his artillery."<sup>66</sup> The fire had little effect on Kearny's men. The *Californios* mounted an attack on the American left flank, but several shots from American artillery dispersed the charge. Lieutenant Emory noted that the enemy made an orderly retreat, which gave the indication that the resistance would continue. However, the next morning, representatives of the city came forth with an offer of surrender. General Flores fled to the north but turned his command over to General Andrés Pico, who negotiated a peace on

13 January 1847 with Captain Frémont in the Treaty of Campo de Cahuenga.

The Mexican defeats at the Battles of Rio San Gabriel and La Mesa signaled the conclusion of organized resistance to the American occupation of California. Kearny's march ended in victory with the annexation of California and the achievement of his objectives. With the exception of San Pasqual, Kearny had arranged his tactical actions in pursuit of the strategic directives articulated by Secretary of War Marcy. Kearny would have a much publicized feud with Frémont and Stockton, but this was a minor distraction from his governing of the new territory. Less than five months later, Kearny began the long trip back to Fort Leavenworth with a small party, which included Captain Frémont, who was on the way to his court-martial trial for mutiny against Kearny.

## CONCLUSION

Kearny had led the Army of the West from Fort Leavenworth to Santa Fe and finally to San Diego, annexed New Mexico without firing a shot, and gained the territory of California for the United States. During the seven months of the campaign, Kearny commanded formations ranging in size from several thousand to only a hundred. The first battle of the war for Kearny was a Pyrrhic victory at San Pasqual, but Kearny recovered and led a large force in a successful operation against a prepared enemy force.

Kearny's expedition acted directly against the enemy strongpoints, or centers of gravity, while shaping the operational environment through non-combat actions and providing for the sustainment of his troops. He arranged tactical actions on the approach to Santa Fe and California while integrating with the other U.S. armed service forces in order to apply the correct level of lethality for the annexation and pacification of the territories. His army advanced on a single line of operation and managed not to deplete or overstretch the logistical capabilities of the Santa Fe Trail between Leavenworth and Bent's Fort. After concentrating there, Kearny pacified the towns on the way to Santa Fe with minimal force while leaving the administrators in office. Governor Armijo

and his men chose to flee rather than fight, and Kearny was able to complete the annexation of New Mexico without confrontation. After establishing a friendly civil government in the territory, Kearny split his force. He sent 1,000 volunteers under Colonel Doniphan south to Chihuahua to support General Wool, ordered another 1,000 volunteers under Colonel Price to remain in New Mexico as an occupation force, and led 300 regulars toward California. As he gained intelligence about the situation in California and in New Mexico, Kearny sent two-thirds of his regular force back to Santa Fe and proceeded to California with only a hundred men. On arriving in California, Kearny fought an extremely costly battle at San Pasqual and required troops from the Navy to supplement his force. He then reconstituted, integrated his troops with the naval land forces, led a joint force in two more battles, and defeated the enemy in California. Kearny understood the end state and conditions required by his directives and visualized the decisive points of local governments along his approach route. Additionally, his actions demonstrated a consideration of his problem of operational reach and acceptance of certain risks. The combat losses at the Battle of San Pasqual often overshadow the success of the overall campaign. While Kearny made a poor decision to engage the *Californios* at San Pasqual, the operations on either side of the battle revealed a brilliant military mind coordinating complex actions across the expanse of a continent.



## EDITOR'S NOTE

The managing editor would like to thank the staff of the Command Museum, Marine Corps Recruit Depot, San Diego, for providing the image of the painting *The Battle of San Pasqual* by Col. Charles H. Waterhouse.

## NOTES

1. Quotes from William H. Emory, *Lieutenant Emory Reports: A Reprint of Lieutenant W. H. Emory's Notes of a Military Reconnaissance* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1951), pp. 171 and 170, respectively, and see also p. 169.

2. Marcy sent the original orders to Kearny on 13 May, but the operational focus of the campaign was stated in the orders dated 3 June 1846. Instructions from the War Department to Colonel S. W. Kearny (hereafter cited as Marcy to Kearny), 3 Jun 1846, in Dwight L. Clarke, *Stephen Watts Kearny: Soldier of the West* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1961), pp. 394–95. Marcy assumed that control of Santa Fe meant control of all of New Mexico.

3. Clarke, *Stephen Watts Kearny*, p. 105.

4. Quotes from Marcy to Kearny, 3 Jun 1846, in Clarke, *Stephen Watts Kearny*, pp. 394–98. Additionally, Kearny was advised that he could leave some of his regulars in Santa Fe if he thought it necessary.

5. William H. Wroth, *Stephen Watts Kearny*, accessed 12 February 2013, <http://www.newmexicohistory.org/filedetails.php?fileID=550>; Clarke, *Stephen Watts Kearny*, p. 105; Hans Von Sachsen-Altenburg and Laura Gabiger, *Winning the West: General Stephen Watts Kearny's Letter Book, 1846–1847* (Boonville, Mich.: Pekitancui Publications, 1998), p. 85. Quote from James Madison Cutts, *The Conquest of California and New Mexico, by the Forces of the United States, in the Years 1846 & 1847* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Carey & Hart, 1847), p. 35.

6. Henry Smith Turner, *The Original Journals of Henry Smith Turner with Stephen Watts Kearny to New Mexico and California, 1846–1847*, ed. Dwight L. Clarke (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1966), pp. 76, 124. By way of comparison, this is roughly the same distance one covers on today's interstates going from New York City to St. Louis and back again. Emory, *Lieutenant Emory Reports*, pp. 26–29; Altenburg and Gabiger, *Winning the West*, p. 156.

7. War Dept, *Cavalry Tactics*, 3 vols. (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1862), 3:121; Interv, author with George R. Moore, Curator, Frontier Army History Museum, 7 Oct 2012, Fort Leavenworth, Kans., in author's files; Clarke, *Stephen Watts Kearny*, p. 115.

8. Altenburg and Gabiger, *Winning the West*, pp. 151–53; Moore interview; William Elsey Connelley, *Doniphan's Expedition and the Conquest of New Mexico and California* (Topeka, Kans.: William Elsey Connelley, 1907), p. 134. See also California Pioneer Heritage Foundation, A Unit of Kearny's Army of the West, accessed 8 November 2012, <http://californiapioneer.org/for-history-buffs/mormon-battalion/15-a-unit-of-kearny%E2%80%99s-army-of-the-west>.

9. Philip St. George Cooke, *The Conquest of New Mexico and California in 1846–1848*

(Chicago: Rio Grande Press, 1878), p. vi. Quote from Marcy to Kearny, 3 Jun 1846, in Clarke, *Stephen Watts Kearny*, p. 395. Kearny appointed Allen to be the commander and, after Allen died en route to Santa Fe, gave command to Capt. Philip St. George Cooke.

10. Marcy to Kearny, 3 Jun 1846, in Clarke, *Stephen Watts Kearny*, p. 396. Italics added.

11. Quote from Clarke, *Stephen Watts Kearny*, p. 105, and see also pp. 111–12. Kearny's sources were primarily the travelers along the Santa Fe trail who passed near Fort Leavenworth, so their veracity may have been in doubt. The truth of the situation was that Armijo and Mexico City were late to recognize the possibility of invasion and did not start discussing methods of defense until after Kearny had left Fort Leavenworth.

12. Ibid., p. 106; Ltr, Kearny to Brig Gen G. M. Brooke, 31 May 1846, in Altenburg and Gabiger, *Winning the West*, p. 134. For a complete history of Doniphan and the 1st Missouri Volunteers, see Joseph G. Dawson III, *Doniphan's Epic March: The 1st Missouri Volunteers in the Mexican War* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1999).

13. Ltr, Kearny to Moore, 5 Jun 1846, in Altenburg and Gabiger, *Winning the West*, p. 139.

14. Quote from Ltr, Kearny to Moore, 6 Jun 1846, in Altenburg and Gabiger, *Winning the West*, p. 140. Marcy to Kearny, 3 Jun 1846, in Clarke, *Stephen Watts Kearny*, pp. 395–97.

15. Clarke, *Stephen Watts Kearny*, p. 108.

16. Ltr, Kearny to Robidoux, 4 Jun 1846, in Altenburg and Gabiger, *Winning the West*, pp. 136–37.

17. Quote from Ltr, Kearny to Edwards, 16 Jun 1846, p. 145. Ltr, Kearny to Edwards, 2 Jul 1846, p. 156. Both in Altenburg and Gabiger, *Winning the West*.

18. Altenburg and Gabiger, *Winning the West*, p. 83; Robert Duffus, *The Santa Fe Trail* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1972), p. 93.

19. Cooke, *The Conquest of New Mexico and California*, p. 13. The “Cimarrone” route was the middle route. *Jornada de trabajo* means “working day” in Spanish, whereas *jornada* translates into “a full day's travel across a desert without a stop for taking on water.”

20. Ltr, Kearny to Brig Gen R. Jones, 17 Jul 1846, in Altenburg and Gabiger, *Winning the West*, p. 157. This letter indicates that there were three main concentrations of forces, each separated by thirty miles. The distance between these groups would prohibit any kind of rapid support because the mounted forces could go no more than thirty miles in a day; fighting at



the end of such a ride would result in severely limited performance.

21. Altenburg and Gabinger, *Winning the West*, p. 120. Emory also noted that “horses occasionally fed on grain become very weak feeding on grass alone, and should never in that condition be subjected to quick work. A violation of this precept has cost my volunteers their horses, and entailed trouble without end on many inexperienced travellers ‘westward bound.’” Emory, *Lieutenant Emory Reports*, p. 27, and quote from p. 31.

22. Turner, *Original Journals*, pp. 61, 67. Quote from Clarke, *Stephen Watts Kearny*, p. 117.

23. Glenn D. Bradley, *Winning the Southwest: A Story of Conquest* (Chicago: A. C. McClurg, 1912), p. 150; Turner, *Original Journals*, pp. 65–66; Clarke, *Stephen Watts Kearny*, p. 123. Clarke relates a story of the horses being turned out to graze on Colonel Doniphan’s orders and then stampeding. This event was costly in time and manpower required to deal with it; however, it is not mentioned in any other account of the Army’s time at Bent’s Fort, which makes the account suspect as to veracity or significance.

24. Turner, *Original Journals*, p. 66.

25. Clarke, *Stephen Watts Kearny*, p. 124. Quote from Ltr, Kearny to Armijo, 1 Aug 1846, in Altenburg and Gabiger, *Winning the West*, p. 158.

26. The terrain continued to be difficult throughout this portion of the march; however, for the purposes of the present inquiry, the engineering and technical skill demonstrated in overcoming these obstacles is secondary to the seizure of the villages and defeat of the enemy armed forces. Quote from Marcy to Kearny, 3 Jun 1846, in Clarke, *Stephen Watts Kearny*, p. 397. Cooke, *The Conquest of New Mexico and California*, p. 34. The mayor of San Miguel flatly refused to take an oath even after the local priest urged him to do so. Kearny decided to make the *alcalde* go through “the form and semblance of swearing allegiance,” and then he proceeded as he had in previous towns.

27. Quote from Bradley, *Winning the Southwest*, p. 152 and see also p. 153.

28. Quote from Cooke, *The Conquest of New Mexico and California*, pp. 37–38. Proclamation, Kearny to Citizens of New Mexico, in Altenburg and Gabiger, *Winning the West*, p. 159.

29. In a strictly legal sense, Kearny did not have the authority to annex New Mexico (only the U.S. Congress could approve annexation), nor the right to declare its inhabitants U.S. citizens. By doing so, Kearny created logistical problems

for his army. It could no longer seize personal property for military use with the simple issuance of a writ for government repayment because the people it would be taking property from were now American citizens. Had Kearny waited, his men might have fared better in regards to provisions.

30. The trouble with the volunteers is recounted in Clarke, *Stephen Watts Kearny*, pp. 154–55, and see also pp. 146–47, 156–57. Bradley, *Winning the Southwest*, pp. 164–65. For the timing of the excursion, see Turner, *Original Journals*, pp. 75–76; Emory, *Lieutenant Emory Reports*, p. 74, and see also pp. 57, 63–73, 75.

31. Clarke, *Stephen Watts Kearny*, pp. 148–49. The Kearny code is still in effect as the basis of the New Mexico Bill of Rights.

32. Cooke, *The Conquest of New Mexico and California*, p. 66.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 45.

34. Bradley, *Winning the Southwest*, p. 158; George Rutledge Gibson, *Journal of Soldier Under Kearny and Doniphan: 1846–1847* (Glendale, Calif.: Arthur H. Clark, 1935), pp. 40–41.

35. Quote from Clarke, *Stephen Watts Kearny*, p. 157. There were fine mules in Santa Fe, but they were too expensive for the quartermaster to purchase and, because Kearny had proclaimed all the population to be U.S. citizens, the army could not seize them. Homer D. Wilkes, *Kearny on the Gila* (Scottsdale, Ariz.: Homer D. Wilkes, 1990), p. 19.

36. Ltr, Kearny to Brig Gen R. Jones, 16 Sep 1846, in Altenburg and Gabiger, *Winning the West*, p. 165; Cooke, *The Conquest of New Mexico and California*, p. 62. Cooke actually claims that the northern route was not an option because of the late arrival of the Mormons.

37. Marcy to Kearny, 3 Jun 1846, in Clarke, *Stephen Watts Kearny*, p. 396.

38. Colonel Doniphan’s regiment, stationed south of Albuquerque, would march south to join Brig. Gen. John E. Wool in Chihuahua after Colonel Price’s regiment of Missourians relieved it. The battalion of artillery would remain in Santa Fe and, along with Colonel Price, would provide protection for the new government from the threat of Navajo violence and serve as an occupation force until the resumption of peace. The Mormon Battalion, which had been under its own leadership since Captain Allen died from illness in the first days of the expedition, would have the new leadership of Captain Cooke and follow Kearny on the southern route. Ltr, Kearny to Brig Gen R. Jones, 16 Sep 1846, in Altenburg and Gabiger, *Winning the West*, p. 165; Cutts, *The Conquest of California and New Mexico*, p.

66; Emory, *Lieutenant Emory Reports*, p. 77; Clarke, *Stephen Watts Kearny*, p. 165.

39. Kearny was not satisfied with Price as the latter had not kept him informed of his progress from Fort Leavenworth other than to plead for supplies once. The march and subsequent occupation of New Mexico had trained and disciplined Doniphan’s troops. Clarke, *Stephen Watts Kearny*, p. 161. A regiment of New York volunteers and a company of regular artillery were en route to California already. Valentine Mott Porter, *General Stephen W. Kearny and the Conquest of California (1846–7)* (Los Angeles, Calif.: Historical Society of Southern California, 1911), p. 11.

40. Clarke, *Stephen Watts Kearny*, p. 155. Clarke dismisses claims that Kearny was a disciplinarian and argues that the complaints written about Kearny were either normal soldierly gripes or an isolated incident not representative of the general mood of the volunteers. Quote from Cooke, *The Conquest of New Mexico and California*, p. 69.

41. The present-day Rio Grande was referred to in journals and letters as the Rio del Norte. Emory, *Lieutenant Emory Reports*, pp. 78, 86–102. Tomé is approximately twenty-five miles south of present-day Albuquerque. Turner, *Original Journals*, pp. 77–87; Clarke, *Stephen Watts Kearny*, pp. 180–84; Rpt, Kearny to War Dept (hereafter cited as Kearny Rpt), 12 Dec 1846, in Altenburg and Gabiger, *Winning the West*, p. 167. Quote from Cooke, *The Conquest of New Mexico and California*, p. 69.

42. Clarke, *Stephen Watts Kearny*, p. 184. Kit Carson had joined the expedition by this point and was the epitome of cheerfulness as he reminded these weary soldiers that the terrain ahead was worse and “every party which made the trip through the Gila’s canyons had emerged in a starving condition.”

43. Kearny Rpt, 12 Dec 1846, in Altenburg and Gabiger, *Winning the West*, p. 175; Wilkes, *Kearny on the Gila*, p. 3; Clarke, *Stephen Watts Kearny*, pp. 166–68. Clarke asserts that “few chance meetings in history have proved more fateful.” Wilkes contends that this was the “greatest surprise” in the lives of the men. While these claims may be exaggerations, there is little doubt that the meeting between Carson and Kearny had significant effects on the campaign, specifically the political wrangling that was to happen between Kearny, Stockton, and Frémont.

44. Turner, *Original Journals*, p. 80; Kearny Rpt, 12 Dec 1846, in Altenburg and Gabiger, *Winning the West*, p. 176; Clarke, *Stephen Watts Kearny*, pp. 167, 169. Clarke also recounts the later criticism of Kearny for reading the dispatches of

Carson and not turning back to Santa Fe once he had done so. The critique is that Stockton had accomplished Kearny's mission, so there was no reason for him to go there. This is nonsensical because Kearny's orders were to first go to California, then subdue it, and then establish a civil government. He could not disobey the first part of the order simply because the next step appeared to be *fiat accompli*. Clarke essentially makes the same argument.

45. Turner, *Original Journals*, pp. 80–81; Wilkes, *Kearny on the Gila*, pp. 1–4; Emory, *Lieutenant Emory Reports*, p. 90; Kearny Rpt, 12 Dec 1846, in Altenburg and Gabiger, *Winning the West*, p. 172; William L. Perkins, "Those Accursed Howitzers," *Journal of San Diego History* 10, no. 3 (July 1964), accessed 8 December 2012, <http://www.sandiegohistory.org/journal/64july/howitzers.htm>.

46. Ltr, Turner to Sumner, 9 Oct 1846, in Altenburg and Gabiger, *Winning the West*, p. 172. Quote from Perkins, "Those Accursed Howitzers."

47. Emory, *Lieutenant Emory Reports*, pp. 91–164; Turner, *Original Journals*, pp. 82–124. Both of these first-person accounts of the trip are interesting reads. Clarke, *Stephen Watts Kearny*, pp. 187–88.

48. Sally Cavell Johns, "¡Viva[n] Los Californios!: The Battle of San Pasqual," *Journal of San Diego History* 19, no. 4 (Fall 1973), accessed 14 December 2012, <http://www.sandiegohistory.org/journal/73fall/sanpasqual.htm>; Clarke, *Stephen Watts Kearny*, p. 190. Also Kearny heard a rumor that a band of Mexican horses and mules was nearby. He sent his weary dragoons to obtain them, but they were unsuccessful. Turner, *Original Journals*, p. 124. Turner reports Lieutenant Davidson had captured about seventy-five mules and mares, but only thirty were usable for the dragoons. This provides further evidence of Kearny's fixation on properly equipping his soldiers.

49. Emory, *Lieutenant Emory Reports*, p. 168; Clarke, *Stephen Watts Kearny*, p. 192. Turner's journals do not contain any entries between 4 December and the return trip in May 1847. Additionally, it is worth noting that Gillespie was the incompetent commander of the garrison force at Los Angeles, and his absurd and abusive policies were principally responsible for the revolt there. See Johns, "¡Viva[n] Los Californios!" Quote from Ltr, Stockton to Kearny, in Porter, *General Stephen W. Kearny and the Conquest of California*, pp. 12–13.

50. This account is a distillation of the following sources: Emory, *Lieutenant Emory Reports*, pp. 169–73; Clarke, *Stephen Watts*

*Kearny*, pp. 195–232; Rpt of General Kearny on Battle of San Pasqual, in Altenburg and Gabiger, *Winning the West*, pp. 177–79; Cutts, *The Conquest of California and New Mexico*, pp. 197–202; George Hruby, Account of the Battle of San Pasqual, accessed 16 December 2012, <http://www.sanpasqual.org/battleaccount.html>; Owen C. Coy, *The Battle of San Pasqual: A Report of the California Historical Survey Commission with Special Reference to Its Location* (Sacramento: California State Printing Office, 1921), pp. 7–12; George Walcott Ames Jr. and John S. Griffin, "A Doctor Comes to California: The Diary of John S. Griffin, Assistant Surgeon with Kearny's Dragoons, 1846–47 (Continued)," *California Historical Society Quarterly* 21, no. 4 (December 1942): 333–38.

51. Andrés was the brother of Governor Pío Pico.

52. Quote from *Cavalry Tactics*, 2:247, and see also 2:188–89.

53. *Ibid.*, p. 247.

54. Marcy to Kearny, 3 Jun 1846, in Clarke, *Stephen Watts Kearny*, p. 396.

55. Kearny Rpt, in Cutts, *The Conquest of California and New Mexico*, p. 199.

56. *Ibid.*; Cutts, *The Conquest of California and New Mexico*, p. 197. Quote from Emory, *Lieutenant Emory Reports*, p. 168, and see also p. 169.

57. Clarke makes the argument that Kearny intended to bypass the *Californios*, but Carson and Gillespie persuaded him to attack on the premises that the enemy could not withstand an attack, and fresh horses were available. The horses would give Kearny a decided advantage in the fight ahead. Clarke, *Stephen Watts Kearny*, pp. 204–06.

58. Kearny Rpt, in Cutts, *The Conquest of California and New Mexico*, p. 199. It is odd that Kearny included this in his report inasmuch as it seems he ignored it in formulating his battle plan.

59. Clarke, *Stephen Watts Kearny*, pp. 236–41, 262; Ltr, Kearny to Stockton, 16 Dec 1846, in Altenburg and Gabiger, *Winning the West*, pp. 181–82.

60. Clarke, *Stephen Watts Kearny*, pp. 259–61.

61. Quote from Ltr, Kearny to Stockton, 17 Jan 1847, in Altenburg and Gabiger, *Winning the West*, p. 182. Clarke, *Stephen Watts Kearny*, p. 240. The command chain was even more muddled because Kearny outranked Stockton, Stockton had transferred command of the marines and sailors in San Diego to Kearny, and both of them were present on the march. Little

is known about the confusion of couriers and others looking for the man in charge.

62. Ames and Griffin, "A Doctor Comes to California," p. 344; David S. Heidler and Jeanne T. Heidler, *The Mexican War*, Greenwood Guides to Historic Events, 1500–1900 (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2005), p. 102. In correspondence, the objective is alternately referred to as Los Angeles and the Pueblos. The full name of the settlement was *el Pueblo de Nuestra Señora la Reina de los Ángeles*, but it will be called Los Angeles for ease of identification in this article. Ltr, Kearny to Stockton, 22 Dec 1846, in Altenburg and Gabiger, *Winning the West*, p. 180; Clarke, *Stephen Watts Kearny*, p. 239.

63. Quote from Kearny Rpt, 12 Dec 1846, in Altenburg and Gabiger, *Winning the West*, p. 181. Heidler and Heidler, *The Mexican War*, p. 104.

64. The present-day Rio Hondo was called the Rio San Gabriel in 1847. Clarke notes "only one certain landmark remains: the steep bluffs along the westerly bank of the present Rio Hondo. Undoubtedly these are the heights up which the Americans charged at the Battle of the San Gabriel." Clarke, *Stephen Watts Kearny*, p. 245. Quote from Emory, *Lieutenant Emory Reports*, p. 185.

65. In addition to the sources for the Battle of San Pasqual, the following has been used to reconstruct the next engagements. Hubert Howe Bancroft, *History of California, Volume 5* (San Francisco, Calif.: History Publishers, 1886). The episode with the artillery battery is one instance where the confusing chain of command almost cost the American force dearly. Kearny ordered the guns unlimbered on the left bank, but Stockton countermanded this directive and told the artillery to cross. Halfway across the river, the guns began to sink into the quicksand. Kearny sent word to Stockton of this, and the latter came to the scene and personally led a team of artillerymen and mules in dragging the gun out of the river. All of this under fire from the enemy. The *Californios'* poor powder and shot prevented them from making the most of this opportunity, and Stockton was convinced he made the correct decision after the first shot blew apart the carriage of the enemy's largest gun. Kearny watched this wordlessly until the guns were in position. Clarke, *Stephen Watts Kearny*, p. 246.

66. Emory calls it the San Fernando River, but, on modern maps, it is the Los Angeles River. Emory, *Lieutenant Emory Reports*, pp. 186–87.





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