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# California Soldiers in the Civil War

By LEO P. KIBBY

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DURING THE CIVIL WAR the state of California, supporting the Union cause, "is credited with having furnished 15,725 volunteers."<sup>1</sup> This military organization represented a composition of two regiments of cavalry, a battalion of native cavalry, eight regiments of infantry, one battalion of veteran infantry, and the First Battalion of Mountaineers. In addition, California supplied five hundred men credited to the quota of the state of Massachusetts,<sup>2</sup> and a similar number, representing eight companies, for the territory of Washington. Authorization for recruiting in California for assignment to Washington had been given Colonel Justus Steinberger, in command of the Washington Territory volunteers, because he had found it impossible to raise the required number of troops in Washington to fill the territory's quota.<sup>3</sup>

California troops were responsible to the commander of the Department of the Pacific whose headquarters were in San Francisco. At the outbreak of the war the commander was Brigadier General Albert Sidney Johnston.<sup>4</sup> Others to serve in this capacity were Brigadier Generals Edwin V. Sumner and George Wright, and Major General Irwin McDowell.

The first call on California for troops was in July, 1861,<sup>5</sup> and thus the first five companies of the First Regiment of Cavalry were formed between August 15 and October 31, 1861. The first man to enlist was Charles S. Thompson who enlisted as a private in Company B at Folsom, on August 10, 1861.<sup>6</sup> Incidentally, Thompson remained in the service until mustered out at Fort Union, New Mexico, on September 30, 1864.<sup>7</sup>

Subsequent units completed and mustered into service for the remain-

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LEO P. KIBBY is both professor of history and chairman of the area of social science at San Jose State College. A graduate of both Stanford and the University of Southern California, Dr. Kibby is author of several articles dealing with California's military activities during the Civil War.

der of the war were as follows: during 1861 the Second Regiment of Cavalry, the First, Second, Third, and Fifth Infantries; in 1862 the Fourth Regiment of Infantry and the "California Hundred" (assigned to State of Massachusetts); in 1863 the First Battalion of Mountaineers and the "California Battalion" which went to Massachusetts; in 1864 the First Battalion of Veteran Infantry; in 1865 the Seventh and Eighth Regiments of Infantry.<sup>8</sup> By September 30, 1866, all California troops had been mustered out of the armed services.<sup>9</sup>

The First Regiment of Cavalry, composed of twelve companies, became a part of the famous California Column which advanced into New Mexico and Texas.<sup>10</sup> When Confederate troops appeared in New Mexico, it was feared they would secure a foothold there for use as a base to invade California. To prevent this, General Wright sought approval from the War Department to send troops into New Mexico.<sup>11</sup> General George B. McClellan authorized the request on December 18, 1861.<sup>12</sup> Thus the California Column was formed under the command of Colonel, later Brigadier General, James Henry Carleton, who was already the commanding officer of the First Regiment of California Volunteer Infantry. Making up the Column were ten companies from the First Regiment of Volunteer Infantry,<sup>13</sup> the First Voluntary Cavalry, plus an additional force which General Wright planned to send, and which was taken eventually from the First Regiment of Infantry under Colonel George W. Bowie.<sup>14</sup> Of significance was the fact that the First Regiment of Infantry had been originally organized in order to protect the overland mail route in Nevada, Utah, and Wyoming.<sup>15</sup>

In 1862 General Wright requested permission to raise four companies of native cavalry, to be known as the First Battalion of Native Cavalry, in the Los Angeles District. He also asked that the unit be commanded by Don Andrés Pico, then brigadier general of the First Brigade of California Militia.<sup>16</sup> The request for the cavalry companies had been based on the "extraordinary horsemanship" native Californians had displayed, and because it was believed such a battalion would "render excellent service in Arizona."<sup>17</sup> Authorization was given to the request by the Secretary of War, and recruiting began. Though offered a commission as major of the battalion, General Pico declined because of "sickness and his inability to ride on horseback."<sup>18</sup>

The battalion of native cavalry was stationed in various parts of California. Though its records are not very complete, one characteristic does stand out—it had an unusually large number of desertions. Over four hundred and fifty men composed the battalion, and approximately thirty-seven per cent of this number deserted. In San Jose alone, where fifty-one men had enrolled, thirty-one eventually deserted.<sup>19</sup>

The remaining units of California volunteers, as can be seen from the Data Sheet, were given assignments covering an extremely wide geographical area: The First Battalion of Veteran Infantry, formed in 1864 from new enlistees and veterans from the First and Fifth Infantries, served principally in New Mexico and Texas. The Second Regiment of Cavalry was active in the Utah Territory. The Second Regiment of Infantry served in Oregon and Washington; the Third in Humboldt County and Utah; the Fourth in Oregon and Vancouver; the Fifth in New Mexico and Texas with the California Column; the Sixth in California only; the Seventh in Arizona and California; the Eighth in California and Washington; and the First Battalion of Mountaineers, requiring from May 30, 1863, to March 16, 1864, for all companies to be mustered in, served a specific assignment in the Humboldt District.

Many young men in California wished to go East and join the Army.<sup>20</sup> Though the War Department would not accept volunteers from the Pacific Coast for fighting in the East,<sup>21</sup> it did not oppose the authorized arrangement by which the state of Massachusetts was able to raise troops in California, take them East, and have them credited to the state's quota.<sup>22</sup> These California troops were the only soldiers from California to engage in major battles of the Civil War.<sup>23</sup> D. W. C. Thompson, who had been major of the California Cavalry Battalion, gave to the California Adjutant General on November 15, 1867, a full account of the battalion's operations. Among the battalion's achievements, he stated that in two and one-half years of hard service in the field it had participated in over fifty engagements. Moreover, of the four hundred officers and enlisted men mustered into the battalion at San Francisco, only one hundred forty-eight remained to be mustered out on July 20, 1865. Many had been killed in battle, or died in the service; some were missing and unaccounted for; others had been discharged because of wounds or disability.<sup>24</sup>

Records relating to the total number of California troops serving under the Massachusetts quota show that eighty-six died in the service of their country, thirty-four deserted, and seventeen were missing.<sup>25</sup>

California troops, except for those assigned to Massachusetts, remained on the western frontiers. They fought in no major battles of the war. Rather, their military engagements were with small forces of Confederate troops in New Mexico and with Indians throughout the West. Among their many functions, three stand out as being extremely significant: first, to prevent the Confederacy from gaining a foothold in the West; second, to relieve United States regular soldiers stationed in outlying posts on the western frontiers and thus enable them to be returned to the East for military duty; third, to prevent the Indians from their depredations, consisting of such things as destroying government property, stealing, raiding, plundering, etc. The records of the regiments of California troops serving outside of California show frequent encounters with Indians in the areas of assignment. Moreover, one battalion, the Mountaineers, was raised in 1863-1864 exclusively for service against the Indians in Humboldt County and in the northwestern portions of California.<sup>26</sup> As one authority has said, the California volunteers in doing their duty "preserved peace in these western States and Territories, and the flag of rebellion was soon driven beyond the Rio Grande."<sup>27</sup>

A recent writer has stated that the California volunteers served without appropriate recognition from their contemporaries and "without fan-fare then or since."<sup>28</sup> Moreover, the campaigning in the West was just as hazardous as it was in the East. To describe the situation more completely, the same writer continued:

... Poorly shod and foot-sore, these soldiers marched hundreds of miles over the desert without enough water. They plowed their way through snowdrifts until their feet were frozen. They swam the rivers, dodging the broken ice that cut the flesh. Many were drowned in the rivers from the Columbia on the north to the Rio Grande on the southwest; and on the coast, from Humboldt bay to San Diego. The fatalities from arrow wounds were far greater than from bullets—fully sixty per cent of the arrow wounds proved fatal.<sup>29</sup>

Fatalities for California troops were not high in comparison with the total Union casualties. George W. Adams stated that 300,000 Union soldiers lost their lives from 1861-1865.<sup>30</sup> This would approximate a

twenty per cent loss. Of the total number of troops assigned to duty during the war, from California, seven officers and four hundred ninety-four enlisted men, exclusive of the casualties of those in the Massachusetts quota, died in the service of the United States. This is a fatality figure of less than three and one-half per cent.<sup>81</sup>

That high respect for the California volunteer was voiced may be determined from the view expressed by a correspondent for *Harper's Magazine* and special agent for the Department of Interior. He spoke as follows concerning an escort of thirty soldiers assigned to him in southern Arizona:

... a better set of men I have never traveled with. They are good humored, obliging and sober and not one of them stole a pig or a chicken on the entire trip.<sup>82</sup>

#### NOTES

1. Richard H. Orton, comp., *Records of California Men in the War of the Rebellion, 1861 to 1867* (Sacramento, 1890), p. 11, under "Note."

2. Orton, *Records of California Men*, p. 848.

3. George Wright to Lorenzo Thomas, February 8, 1862, *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington, 1897), Ser. I, Vol. 50, Pt. 1, pp. 849-50. Hereinafter cited as *O. R.*

4. General Johnston later joined the Confederate Army and was killed early in the war while in command at the Battle of Shiloh, fought in western Tennessee on April 6 and 7, 1862.

5. Simon Cameron to the Governor of California, July 24, 1861, *O. R.*, Ser. I, Vol. 50, Pt. 1, p. 543. Orton, *Records of California Men*, p. 12.

6. Orton, *Records of California Men*, p. 68.

7. Orton, *Records of California Men*, p. 107. See roll of Battalion members.

8. See accompanying Data Sheet which summarizes the following information on California volunteers: name of unit, period of muster in, number of companies in each unit, period of muster out, commanding officer or officers who served each unit, and the principal geographical areas of activity to which each unit was assigned. Hereinafter cited as *Data Sheet*.

9. See First Regiment of Cavalry in *Data Sheet*.

10. Orton, *Records of California Men*, p. 68.

11. George Wright to Lorenzo Thomas, December 9, 1861, *O. R.*, Ser. I, Vol. 50, Pt. 1, pp. 752-753; Orton, *Records of California Men*, p. 46.

12. Authorization of General McClellan, December 18, 1861, *O. R.*, Ser. I, Vol. 50, Pt. 1, p. 753.

13. In April, 1862, Colonel Joseph R. West became colonel of the First Infantry, succeeding Carleton who had been promoted to brigadier general. See Orton, *Records of California Men*, p. 47.

14. Orton, *Records of California Men*, p. 47.

15. Simon Cameron to the Governor of California, July 24, 1861, *O. R.*, Ser. I, Vol. 50, Pt. 1, p. 543.

16. George Wright to Lorenzo Thomas, December 19, 1862, Orton, *Records of California Men*, p. 304.

17. Orton, *Records of California Men*, p. 304.

18. Orton, *Records of California Men*, p. 304.

19. Orton, *Records of California Men*, pp. 307-320. See roll of battalion.

20. Orton, *Records of California Men*, p. 5.

21. Aurora Hunt, *The Army of the Pacific* (Glendale, 1951), p. 354.

22. Orton, *Records of California Men*, p. 848.

23. Orton, *Records of California Men*, p. 5.

24. D. W. C. Thompson to George S. Evans, November 15, 1867. Orton, *Records of California Men*, pp. 849-853.

25. D. W. C. Thompson to George S. Evans, November 15, 1867, Orton, *Records of California Men*, pp. 854-870. See "Roll of the California Hundred and Battalion."

26. George Wright to Leland Stanford, January 21, 1863, Orton, *Records of California Men*, p. 826.

27. Orton, *Records of California Men*, p. 5.

28. Hunt, *The Army of the Pacific*, p. 362.

29. Hunt, *The Army of the Pacific*, pp. 362-363.

30. *Doctors in Blue* (New York, 1952), p. 3.

31. Orton, *Records of California Men*, pp. 871-883. See "Deceased Officers and Enlisted Men."

32. Quoted in Hunt, *The Army of the Pacific*, p. 133.

## DATA SHEET FOR CALIFORNIA VOLUNTEERS

| NAME OF UNIT                         | NO. OF<br>COS. | PERIOD OF<br>MUSTER IN     | PERIOD OF<br>MUSTER OUT   | COMMANDING OFFICER(S)                           | PRINCIPAL<br>GEOGRAPHICAL AREAS<br>OF ACTIVITY                           |
|--------------------------------------|----------------|----------------------------|---------------------------|---|--|
| First Regiment<br>of Cavalry         | 12             | First five companies:      |                           | Lt. Col. Benjamin F. Davis                      | California Column;<br>Arizona, New<br>Mexico, and Texas                  |
|                                      |                | 8/15/1861 to<br>10/31/1861 | 10/?/1864 to<br>9/30/1866 | Lt. Col. Edward E. Eyre                         |  |
|                                      |                | Last seven companies:      |                           | Col. David Ferguson                             |  |
|                                      |                | 5/16/1863 to<br>12/31/1863 |                           | Col. Oscar M. Brown<br>Col. Clarence E. Bennett |  |
| Second Regiment<br>of Cavalry        | 12             | 10/2/1861 to               | 2/1/1866 to               | Col. Andrew J. Smith                            | Sacramento, Utah<br>Territory, Nevada,<br>Humboldt;<br>California Column |
|                                      |                | 10/30/1861                 | 7/31/1866                 | Col. Columbus Sims                              |  |
|                                      |                |                            |                           | Col. George S. Evans<br>Col. Edward McGarry     |  |
| First Battalion of<br>Native Cavalry | 4              | 9/7/1863 to                | 3/15/1866 to              | Major Salvador Vallejo                          | California and<br>Arizona  |
|                                      |                | 8/25/1864                  | 7/20/1866                 | Major John C. Cremony                           |  |
| First Regiment<br>of Infantry        | 10             | 8/17/1861 to               | 8/31/1864 to              | Col. James H. Carleton                          | California Column;<br>Arizona, New<br>Mexico, and Texas                  |
|                                      |                | 1/10/1862                  | 9/17/1866                 | Lt. Col. Joseph R. West                         |  |
|                                      |                |                            |                           | Col. Edwin A. Rigg                              |  |
| Second Regiment<br>of Infantry       | 10             | 10/2/1861 to               | 4/16/1866 to              | Col. Francis J. Lippitt                         | Oregon, Washington,<br>and California                                    |
|                                      |                | 12/31/1861                 | 7/2/1866                  | Col. Thomas F. Wright                           |  |
| Third Regiment<br>of Infantry        | 10             | 10/31/1861 to              | On 7/27/1866              | Col. Patrick E. Connor                          | Humboldt; Utah   |
|                                      |                | 12/31/1861                 | all companies             | Col. Robert Pollock                             |  |
| Fourth Regiment<br>of Infantry       | 10             | 9/21/1861 to               | 9/23/1865 to              | Col. Henry M. Judah                             | Oregon, Washington,<br>and southern<br>California                        |
|                                      |                | 2/1/1862                   | 4/18/1866                 | Col. Ferris Forman<br>Col. James F. Curtis      |  |

|                                     |    |  |                             |  |   |
|-------------------------------------|----|--|-----------------------------|--|---|
| Fifth Regiment of Infantry          | 10 | No muster roll available, but companies were enrolled between 9/12/1861 and 10/21/1861 | 11/27/1864 to 12/14/1864    | Col. John Kellogg<br>Col. George W. Bowie                              | California Column; Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas |
| Sixth Regiment of Infantry          | 10 | 10/21/1862 to 9/12/1864  | 10/25/1865 to 12/20/1865    | Col. Henry M. Black  | Humboldt District                                 |
| Seventh Regiment of Infantry        | 10 | 11/22/1864 to 1/28/1865  | 3/1/1866 to 6/28/1866       | Col. Charles W. Lewis  | San Francisco; Arizona                            |
| Eighth Regiment of Infantry         | 10 | 11/29/1864 to 3/31/1865  | On 10/24/1865 all companies | Col. Allen L. Anderson   | Alcatraz; Fort Point                              |
| First Battalion of Veteran Infantry | 7  | 11/?/1864 to 12/?/1864   | 9/9/1866 to 9/20/1866       | Col. Edwin A. Rigg   | New Mexico; Arizona                               |
| First Battalion of Mountaineers     | 6  | 5/30/1863 to 3/16/1864   | 4/25/1865 to 6/15/1865      | Lt. Col. Stephen G. Whipple  | Camp Baker, California; Humboldt County           |
| The California Hundred (Mass.)      | 1  | 12/10/1862   | 7/20/1865                   | Major DeWitt C. Thompson<br>(Became Company A of Second Mass. Cavalry) | East  |
| The California Battalion (Mass.)    | 4  | 3/20/1863 to 5/10/1863   | 7/20/1865 all companies     | (Became Companies E, F, L, and M of Second Mass. Cavalry)              | East  |

Based on Richard H. Orton, *Records of California Men in the War of the Rebellion, 1861 to 1867* (Sacramento: State Office, 1890), 887 pp.