

On Comic Opera Revolutions: *Maneuver Theory and the Art of War in Mexican California, 1821–45*

BY ROBERT PHELPS

“Like the tribes of the Stone Age ever preparing for war but rarely fighting, the Californios cultivated a state of perpetual excitement which culminated in anti-climactic decrees or minor skirmishes; three casualties in one of these fights would represent a major tragedy. Some of the rebels themselves complained of speeches that rang too gloriously, of politicians who were too soft-hearted, of ‘great struggles’ that were more like comic-opera episodes.”¹

So Leonard Pitt observed on the nature of military conflict in Mexican California, a style of war characterized, in the words of James J. Rawls and Walton Bean, by “bombastic ‘pronouncements,’ chesslike marches and counter-marches, and noisy but bloodless artillery duels, just out of range, in which both sides retrieved each other’s cannonballs and fired them back.”² Generally referred to as Alta California’s “comic operas” or “comic opera revolutions,” historians have viewed warfare by and among Californios as a less than serious affair. Never a topic of extensive study, explanations for the low casualties that typified these military maneuvers elicit only passing comment by scholars. Such observations tend to emphasize the notion that Californio society was in some way unique, ranging from comparisons to the nonlethal fighting cultures of California

Indians, to Bancroft’s reflection that mortal combat was somehow against the nature of specific Mexican communities, or even, as Rawls and Bean surmised, the result of intermarriage among Californio families and the fear among combatants that they might find themselves “killing a brother-in-law.”³

Yet when examined through the lens of military history, the art of war in Mexican California appears quite conventional. More than 2,500 years ago, Chinese general Sun Tzu argued that the highest form of generalship consisted of “breaking the enemy’s resistance without fighting . . . the next best is to prevent the junction of the enemy’s forces; the next in order is to attack the enemy’s army in the field; and the worst policy of all is to besiege walled cities. . . .” Translated into today’s military terminology, Sun Tzu was a proponent of “maneuver warfare,” the use of rapid movement to achieve the decisive defeat of military opponents. Throughout history, a number of the world’s “great captains,” from Genghis Kahn and Napoleon to such twentieth-century tank experts as B.J. Liddell Hart and Heinz Guderian, have emphasized maneuver over firepower to decide military encounters.⁴

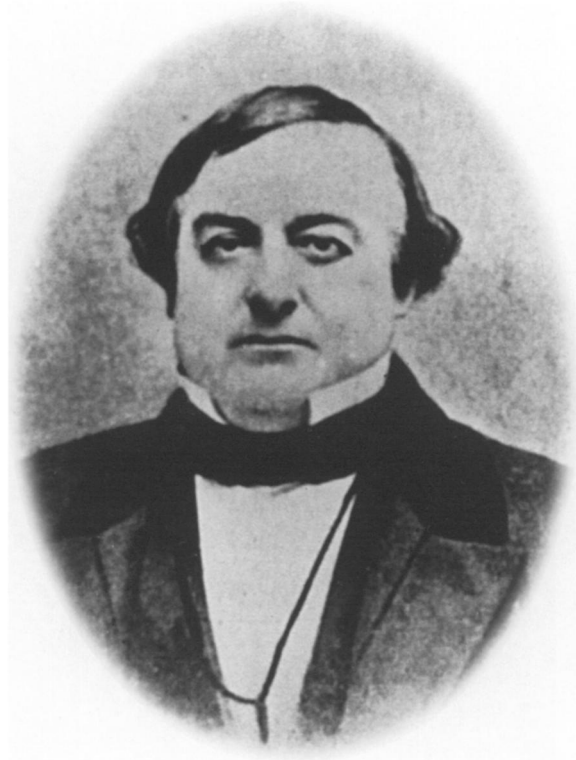
Maneuver warfare was the principle form of combat utilized by European-style military forces in Mexican California. The reliance on a high mobility-low lethality style of war in Alta California was not the result of military genius, the product of native precedents, or a cultural abhor-

rence for killing, but rather a practical solution to the geographic, logistical, and political realities of the region. The lack of manpower, the shortage of modern weapons, the wide availability of horses, and the personalized nature of military targets compelled the Californios to use rapid movement to defeat similarly equipped opponents, resulting in an extremely low level of lethality by contemporary standards. However, the failure to inflict casualties during white-on-white encounters does not mean that the Californios rejected lethal forms of warfare when such methods provided a clear advantage. Native Americans found that when confronting Californios, the latter followed the practice of their Spanish forebears, drawing on superior firepower to shatter opponents. And, as Stephen Kearny's Army of the West found at the Battle of San Pasqual in December 1846, when properly employed, Californio cavalry was deadly in the field.

In the pages that follow I will present an overview of military conflict in Alta California, from the region's incorporation as an often recalcitrant Mexican province in 1821 to the final rebellion against Mexican authority in 1845. I do not intend to provide an exhaustive study of Californio culture or the individuals involved in combat during the period. Rather, the following essay suggests an alternative framework through which we might interpret the nature of war in Mexican California and the character of the society that crafted it.

MANEUVER THEORY

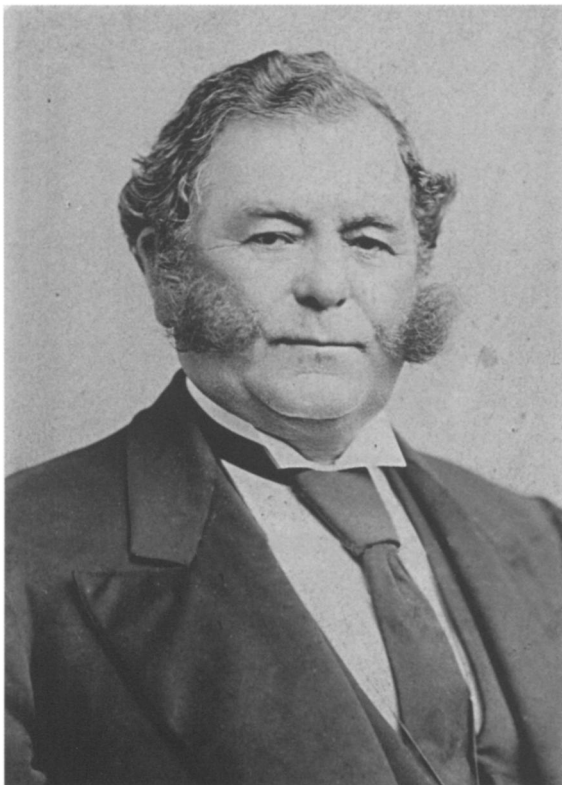
To comprehend military operations in California during the Mexican period, we must acquaint ourselves with the basic principles of maneuver theory.⁵ Maneuver deliberately rejects attrition warfare, a style of combat that emphasizes the destruction of an enemy's mass, the physical components of an army that includes troops, horses, guns, and so on. To achieve the destruction of the enemy's mass, attrition theorists emphasize the importance of the "decisive battle," where one of the combatants is annihilated in a single



The Californios' reliance on maneuver warfare—called “comic opera warfare” by some scholars for its small number of casualties and long-winded pronouncements by combatants—was a combination of tradition, adaptation to local conditions, and the geography of power in Mexican California.

Californio Juan Alvarado was the progeny of two military families, which inherited their low lethality fighting of wars from Spain. Alvarado's deft handling of his small forces ensured victories against Governor Nicolás Gutiérrez in 1836, residents of southern California resisting his own rule as governor in 1837 and 1838, and Governor Manuel Micheltorena's army in 1845.

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Not all conflicts fought in Mexican California resulted in few casualties. Californios subduing native populations resisting their rule killed many native fighters. For example, in 1834 Commander Mariano Vallejo led a campaign against the Satiyomi, resulting in the deaths of two hundred Indians and the capture of three hundred. Vallejo reported his own losses in a single three-hour battle as "six soldiers . . . killed and thirty-two of my veterans wounded, besides thirty Indian allies being taken prisoner and afterwards beheaded."

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engagement. Military historians often focus on such decisive combats, from Waterloo to Desert Storm, seeming to view military operations that do not result in huge numbers of killed and wounded as unworthy of serious consideration. Moreover, emphasis on the decisive battle often leads historians to overlook the study of the campaign, actions over extended periods that regularly decide the final outcome of a conflict.⁶

Maneuver warfare rejects the quest for the decisive battle and instead focuses on the psychological dimension of war, seeking to create "the defeat phenomenon" in the minds of opponents. There are few examples in military history where victory was achieved by the complete destruction of an adversary. Rather, defeat is achieved when an enemy *believes* it is defeated, when it loses the will to go on fighting. To achieve this psychological result, maneuver theorists emphasize the concepts of *deception*, *preemption*, *dislocation*, and *disruption*.⁷

Sun Tsu argued that "all warfare is based upon deception," and practitioners of maneuver seek to use deception to hide the position of a friendly force, compel a commander to over- or underestimate the capabilities of an opponent, force an army to attack under disadvantageous conditions, or even surrender before an attack is attempted.⁸ *Preemption* is defined as attacking prior to the official outbreak of hostilities, before an opponent is militarily ready. Viewed by many as an "unfair" method of combat, for maneuver theorists, if preemption yields victory without extended fighting, so much the better.⁹

Dislocation is the next concept of maneuver warfare. Instead of fighting an opponent on its terms, the friendly force avoids any combat in which the enemy can bring their might to bear. Positional dislocation involves moving an enemy from the decisive point of conflict, or removing the decisive point away from an enemy. Functional dislocation, on the other hand, neutralizes an enemy's strength by technology or tactics. Spanish field

fortifications and battlefield armor, for example, functionally dislocated the muscle-powered weapons of California Indians.

Disruption, on the other hand, involves the destruction of the enemy's *center of gravity*, defined as the enemy's critical weakness. Cities are such *critical weaknesses*, because they function as seats of government and centers of population and production, as well as communication hubs. A center of gravity can also be an enemy headquarters, whose loss interrupts the effective coordination of combat units, or the blocking of supply lines and geographic positions, which erodes the fighting capability of an opposing army. In this regard, movement is the linchpin of maneuver warfare, because its adherents attempt to vector their forces toward the enemy center of gravity. Cutting a supply line might not result in the destruction of an army, but the presence of the enemy in the rear, the idea that escape is increasingly unlikely, might produce panic and rout an opponent.¹⁰

THE MILITARY CULTURE OF MEXICAN CALIFORNIA

The Californios' partial reliance on maneuver warfare was a combination of tradition, adaptation to local conditions, and the peculiar nature of their centers of gravity. The small armies in Mexican California were largely composite units, a complex blend of the self-appointed *gente de razón* (wealthier Californios who considered themselves to be "pure-blooded" Spaniards), Mexican troops on deployment in California, Native American auxiliaries, and foreign mercenaries. Some units were official organizations, while others were ad hoc groups. Yet in spite of the eclectic composition of military forces in California, we can draw a number of conclusions about their nature and capabilities.

First, war is in large measure a cultural product, and the Californios inherited their war-fighting culture from Spain. Pitt's comparisons with primitive war suggest that the comic operas were akin to the highly ritualistic, low lethality style of com-

bat practiced by native Californians prior to the Spanish conquest. Such characterizations ignore the violent nature of the Californios' wars against Indians, their relatively successful skirmishes with the Americans in 1846–47, as well as the fact that not all combatants were Californios. Certainly Micheltorena's "*cholo*" army, made up of convicts from Mexico, was not restrained by any prohibitions on killing. Moreover, in spite of such practices as the *pronunciamento* that preceded military conflicts in Alta California, these campaigns were not the scheduled confrontations of primitive warfare, where armies met on commonly chosen ground and elders stood by ready to mediate if casualties outweighed the benefits of battle. Rather, maneuvers involved concealed movement, spontaneous contact, and calculated risk taking. That two such battles took place at Cahuenga Pass was not indicative of any ritualistic penchant on the part of the Californios, but rather their recognition that the pass controlled the northern approaches to the pueblo of Los Angeles.¹¹

Suggestions that the *gente de razón* were inclined to mimic primitive styles of war also minimize the European ancestry of combatants. Juan Alvarado, who led a number of campaigns, was the progeny of two military families. His paternal grandfather was a member of the Catalanian Volunteers, the military component of the Sacred Expedition of 1769, while his father served with the cavalry company of Monterey.¹² Pío and Andrés Pico, prominent southern dons who played important roles in the political disputes of the 1830s and 1840s as well as resistance to the American invasion, were the sons of the company corporal of the San Diego garrison. A number of Mexican governors, particularly Nicolás Gutiérrez, Manuel Micheltorena, and Manuel Victoria, were army officers.¹³

Consistent with their Spanish lineage, the organization and equipment of military units in California followed the European model. Troops were uniformed and organized into companies identi-

fied by presidio, resembling a miniature version of the regimental systems of European states. Units were, in theory at least, well armed with muskets and sidearms. Artillery could be found at the presidios, and occasionally mounted on limbers. Regular troops were drilled in the tactics used by post-Napoleonic armies, which sought to destroy an enemy through the coordinated use of firepower.¹⁴

With professional or ancestral links to the Spanish and Mexican militaries and equipped with gunpowder weapons, the Californios, in principle at least, accepted lethal forms of combat. The Spanish invasion and subjugation of much of the Americas and their brutalizing of native peoples reinforced the absence of cultural restraints on battlefield killing. The French Revolution's linkage of war with mass politics further legitimized high levels of lethality on the battlefield, an association that found expression in subsequent rebellions throughout Latin America in the post-Napoleonic period. The long-winded pronouncements that often preceded the comic operas revealed not a cultural aversion to killing, but more the Californios' conventional Western appreciation that violence among whites could only be legitimized by its relation to a higher political goal.¹⁵

WHITE-NATIVE WARFARE IN MEXICAN CALIFORNIA

The Californios' cultural acceptance of lethality on the battlefield was exemplified by their military operations against California Indians, extremely violent campaigns that stood in stark contrast to the relatively bloodless comic operas. The gente de razón's small numbers and sense of vulnerability made them more than willing to kill unconverted Indians as well as rebellious neophytes. Mass insurrection and even limited defiance threatened to unhinge Californio hegemony, and captured Indian rebels were sometimes executed. Although racial attitudes certainly played a part in the larger casualties embodied within white-native conflicts, such prejudices were not the sole reason for the large number of dead and

wounded in such encounters. Another explanation is that, when confronting natives, Californios shunned maneuver tactics in favor of attrition.

The gente de razón's emphasis on attrition against Indian adversaries drew from the fact that, in contrast to the relatively nonlethal maneuvers, white versus native warfare pitted unlike forces against each other. During the initial stages of the conquest, the Spaniards possessed a decisive advantage in the novel quality of their horses and guns. Although natives resisted European incursion, their rebellions at San Diego in 1775, San Gabriel in 1785, and the Chumash Rebellion of 1821 targeted the missions where garrisons were small, while the fact that the four presidios were never an object of assault suggests that Indians deliberately avoided the superior firepower of their conquerors.¹⁶

Prior to Mexican independence, native deaths due to white violence were relatively small, probably owing to clerical restraint of the military. After 1830, casualties increased as ranch expansion and Indian stock raids led to retaliatory incursions and slave raiding in the Central Valley. Although much of the conflict consisted of forays by private individuals, when Mexican forces launched punitive expeditions, casualties were extremely heavy. S. F. Cook calculates that in the Central Valley alone, there were approximately eighty military encounters between whites and Indians, resulting in roughly eight hundred Indian deaths. North of San Francisco Bay, where the northern fringe of white settlement interacted with large numbers of unconverted natives, casualties were even heavier. For example, in 1834 Mariano Vallejo led a campaign against the Satiyomi, resulting in the deaths of two hundred Indians and the capture of three hundred. Although Mexican casualties could be heavy, Vallejo reporting his own losses in a single three-hour battle as "six soldiers...killed and thirty-two of my veterans wounded, besides thirty Indian allies being taken prisoner and afterwards beheaded,"

the superiority of gunpowder weapons ensured that native casualties were far greater. As Cook concludes, “Among the wild tribes those which resisted (Mexican) incursion most stubbornly. . . suffered really appalling losses.”¹⁷

The Californio campaign against Estanislao’s Rebellion of 1828–29 demonstrates the gente de razón’s reliance on attrition when engaging Indians. Estanislao, an alcalde from Mission San José, organized an Indian uprising after acquiring a pass to visit relatives in the interior. Fugitives from a number of missions joined him, and the territorial government ordered the army to crush the rebels. When the first expedition under Alférez José Sánchez arrived in May 1829, they found the Indians fortified in a thick wood, “very rough and more than a league in extent,” on the Stanislaus River. Confident of their superior firepower, the Californios dismounted and entered the wood, only to have two direct assaults repulsed with the loss of three killed and seventeen wounded. The battle continued without result until the Mexicans withdrew, their troops low on powder and their only artillery piece disabled in an accident.

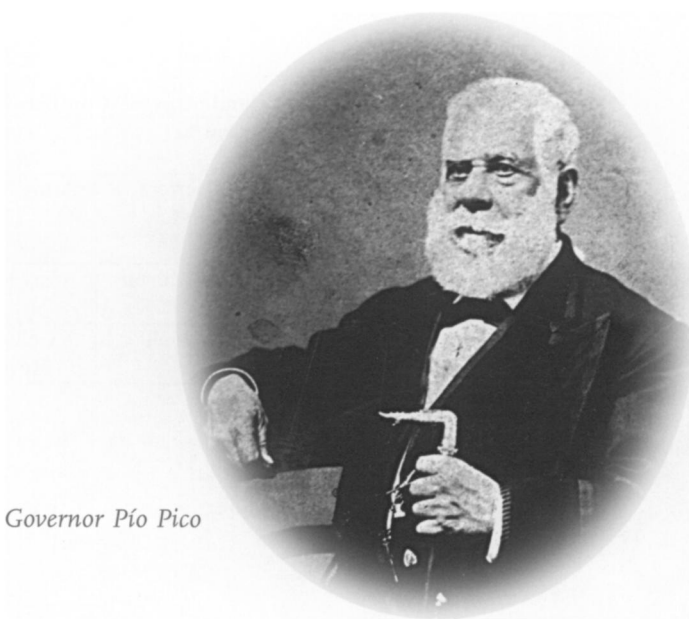
The territorial government dispatched a second expedition of more than one hundred men under the command of Lt. Mariano Vallejo a few weeks later. The unit was equipped with a new cannon and well provided with ammunition. Vallejo ordered the woods set on fire, an example of positional dislocation, and commenced a cavalry charge after seeing a number of rebels flee the burning grove. The insurgents escaped to another thicket near the village of Taguadames, where they threw up a stockade. The Californios deployed their cannon and fired into the fortification. Confident of the effectiveness of the artillery, they once more dismounted and advanced into the grove, only to become engaged in an hour of heavy fighting. Pressured by the soldiers, the cannon, and another fire, the Indians fled. A number of rebels were caught and some executed. The Californios, once again low on ammunition and with thirteen wounded, disengaged.¹⁸



General Andrés Pico

Andrés and Pío Pico, prominent southern dons who played important roles in the political disputes of the 1830s and 1840s as well as resistance to the American invasion, were the sons of the company corporal of the San Diego garrison. Andrés Pico’s defeat of Stephen Watts Kearny’s Army of the West at the Battle of San Pasqual in 1846 preserved the Mexicans’ honor, but the geographic isolation of Alta California ensured that the Californios, much like the natives they oppressed, lacked the means to prevent defeat and eventual subjugation.

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Governor Pío Pico

Mexican officials counted Vallejo's expedition a success, although a number of rebels, including Estanislao, escaped. Yet the two actions on the Stanislaus River demonstrate that when confronting California natives, the gente de razón used their advantage in military mass, mercilessly assaulting native forces with musket and cannon fire until the ammunition ran out. Native-white warfare in California, even during the Mexican period, was anything but comic.¹⁹

COMIC OPERAS AND THE MORTALITY OF WAR

The Californios' campaigns against natives not only show the gente de razón's willingness to engage in lethal combat, but also their ability to exact losses when possessing an advantage in firepower. Yet, this same warfighting culture exhibited an almost laughable failure to inflict casualties when combat pitted gente de razón against gente de razón. What then, are we to make of the comic opera revolutions?

There were nine major campaigns in Alta California between 1829 and 1845. Three of the episodes, listed in Table 1, can be excluded because Californios were uninvolved or only minor participants.

Two engagements were army disputes and the third a mutiny by recently arrived colonists. Joaquín Solís and José María Herrera, who used the failure to pay the San Francisco and Monterey garrison as the catalyst for a revolt against Governor Echeandía in 1829. Echeandía found himself the target of a similar revolt three years later when Captain Agustín Zamórano led a small force of convicts against army units loyal to the central government. In 1835, the short-lived Híjar Rebellion occurred when the governor failed to distribute mission lands to colonists recently arrived from Sonora. Abandoned by Mexico City, the settlers seized Los Angeles. When the pueblo's inhabitants showed no interest in the Sonorans' demands, the rebellion disintegrated.²⁰

More significantly, the six campaigns presented in Table 2 were the result of Californio disputes with governors dispatched from Mexico City. Five of these conflicts took place between 1831 and 1838, when Alta California was in the throes of the political turmoil that culminated in Juan Alvarado's rebellion against centrist Governor Nicolás Gutiérrez in 1836. Of all the confrontations presented in Tables 1 and 2, only two episodes, Alvarado's 1837 operation to assert

Table 1
"Comic Opera" Conflicts Involving Army Garrisons or Colonists, 1829–45

Year	Conflict	Type	Combat	Approx. # of Combatants	Casualties
1827	Solís-Herrera Revolt	Army Revolt	Battle of Santa Ynez	100	0
1832	Zamerano Revolt	Army Revolt	None	125	0
1835	Híjar Revolt	Colonist Revolt	None	50	0

Tables 1 and 2 show nine major campaigns in Alta California between 1829 and 1845. Conflicts in Table 1 were uprisings in Mexican military garrisons or revolts by recently arrived colonists. Table 2 shows conflicts against military governors imposed by Spain. Only two—Alvarado's campaigns—pit Californio against Californio. While the casualties of the Californios were at face value negligible, the mortality rates of the most famous comic opera campaigns were comparable to those suffered by European armies throughout the Napoleonic Wars

his authority in southern California and the 1838 campaign to consolidate his position against a rival governor, primarily set Californio against Californio.

True to the traditional portrayal of military engagements in Mexican California, the casualties reflected in the above tables do appear extremely low, and in the estimation of some, even comical. Yet in spite of the rather unusual appearance of the small number of fatalities, high lethality battles such as Waterloo or Borodino, engagements made famous by the enormous number of participants killed, were actually rare occurrences in the history of warfare. More typical was Austerlitz, a battle in which the victorious French Army lost 1,305 men killed, or 2 percent of the total of 65,000 men engaged; or Salamanca, where the Duke of Wellington lost 388 men killed out of a total of 30,562 men engaged, or 1.3 percent. Even when adding the huge casualties suffered at such battles as Waterloo and Albuera, the average mortality rate for the British Army throughout the Napoleonic Wars was 3.3 percent.²¹

While the casualties of the Californios were at face value negligible, the mortality rates of the most famous comic opera campaigns were com-

parable to those suffered by European armies throughout the Napoleonic Wars. For example, although only one man was killed in Governor Victoria's tiny "army" at the First Battle of Cahuenga Pass, that single casualty represented 2 percent of the fifty loyalist soldiers present. Even at Second Cahuenga Pass, the 1845 battle that supposedly resulted in the deaths of one horse and one mule, the number of fatalities may have been consistent with Napoleonic norms. Mariano Vallejo contended that a Californio artillery round killed four of Governor Micheltorena's "cholos," while additional sources report that Alvarado's rebels killed one to "several" loyalist soldiers in Los Angeles prior to the governor's arrival in southern California. Therefore, if we make the conservative estimate that six members of Micheltorena's command of approximately four men were killed in the Second Cahuenga Campaign, that number represents a mortality rate of 1.5 percent, a figure comparable to the typical Napoleonic engagement.²²

Although the two battles at Cahuenga may have been more lethal than traditionally held, the *average* number of casualties suffered by participants in California's comic opera battles were

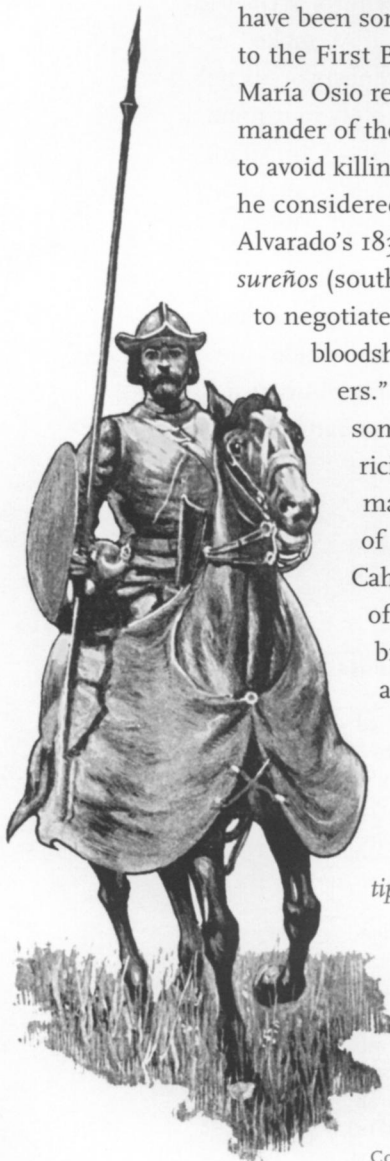
Table 2
"Comic Opera" Campaigns With Californios as Primary Participants, 1829–45

Year	Conflict	Type	Combat	Approx. # of Combatants	Causalities
1831	Southerners and Military Garrison vs. Gov. Victoria	Political Rebellion	First Battle of Cahuenga Pass	250	2 Killed Several Wounded
1835	Revolt Against Gov. Chico	Political Rebellion	None	100	0
1836	Alvarado's Revolt	Political Rebellion	None	150	0
1837	Alvarado's First Southern Campaign	Political Consolidation	First Battle of San Buenaventura	400	1 Killed, Several Wounded
1838	Alvarado's Second Southern Campaign	Political Consolidation	Second Battle of San Buenaventura	400	1 Killed, Several Wounded
1845	Revolt Against Micheltorena	Political Rebellion	Second Battle of Cahuenga Pass	800	"Several" Killed or Wounded

still significantly lower than that experienced by Napoleonic armies. Even when discounting the revolts against Chico and Gutiérrez, disputes in which the governors surrendered before battle was joined, probably no more than ten participants were killed in four such campaigns involving roughly 1,850 men, for a combined mortality rate of .54 percent.

A traditional explanation for the low casualties of the comic operas was the fear among Californios that inter-white combat might result in the death of family members. Mariano Vallejo complained that his command consisted of "an army of unpaid relatives and friends" and there may have been some truth to such grievances. Prior to the First Battle of Cahuenga Pass, Antonio María Osio recalled that Captain Portilla, commander of the Los Angeles rebels, was anxious to avoid killing loyalist soldiers, many of whom he considered his "adopted sons," and during Alvarado's 1837 campaign against the south, the *sureños* (southerners) dispatched a commission to negotiate with Alvarado in order to "avoid

bloodshed among fathers, sons, and brothers." Yet despite the personal ties of some of the combatants, fear of fratricide appears to have played a minimal role in the nonlethal character of the comic operas. The meeting at Cahuenga Pass ended with the killing of two participants and the stabbing of Governor Victoria himself, and even Osio admits that during



Soldado de Cuera. Armed with spear-tipped lances and protected by cowhide armor, "leather jacket soldiers" were Spanish frontier adaptations carried into the Mexican period. From a description by Zoeth Eldredge in *The Beginnings of San Francisco* (San Francisco: Z.S. Eldredge, 1912).

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the 1837 conflict, "no one withdrew his voluntary enlistment, not even out of respect for paternal, filial, or fraternal ties, because he did not want to provide the slightest grounds for reproach due to cowardice or not keeping his word."²³ More important, the employment of foreign mercenaries by both southerners and northerners in 1837 and 1838 belies the notion that the *gente de razón* would shrink from killing its own if necessary.²⁴

If familial ties did not play a significant role in the comic operas' low casualties, what did? Like all martial cultures, the Californios confronted "permanently operating" and "contingent" factors that influenced their military operations. Permanently operating factors include such things as terrain, distance, and climate. These timeless challenges effect the contingent considerations of troop numbers, training, quality of equipment, and supply. For the *gente de razón*, Alta California's geographic isolation from other settled areas of North America was the crucial permanently operating factor limiting the size and capabilities of their military forces. It was this logistical reality, and not any cultural qualms about killing, that primarily explains the small number of casualties in white-on-white conflicts.

In specific terms, when confronting non-Indian enemies, Californio armies lacked *mass*, and for aspiring revolutionaries, the recruitment of local militias, mercenaries, and civilians was an incessant challenge. There were never more than one thousand non-Indian males of military age in the territory throughout the period, while the Mexican Army deployed just four hundred men and twenty officers in the entire territory in 1830.²⁵ Spanish, and later, Mexican authorities attempted to compensate for their small numbers by the employment of Indian auxiliaries. Natives were generally used as scouts, but Mariano Vallejo employed Suisun warriors as combatants in a number of punitive campaigns against tribes on the northern frontier. Typically armed with bow and arrow, natives did not see widespread use in Californio disputes because of their limited value against

gunpowder adversaries, but also because public concern prevented the outfitting of Indians with European weapons. The territorial deputation's protest of Governor Echeandía's arming of natives with lances and horses while instructing them in rudimentary cavalry tactics to crush the Zamorano Revolt, as well as the defection of a number of Micheltorena's supporters because of John Sutter's arming of Indians in support of the governor, reveals the *gente de razón's* determination to maintain natives as an inferior military adversary.²⁶

Unwilling to arm the largest segment of Alta California's population, Californio armies only ranged from fifty to four hundred men, and the small number of combatants on one side or the other meant that in some cases, combat was never joined. The 1835 revolt against Governor Chico succeeded because the governor had at his disposal a total of eight infantrymen of dubious loyalty to support him against an armed mob, a rebellious deputation, and a lack of support from his subordinate officers. With no help coming from units commanded by Mariano Vallejo and Nicolás Gutiérrez, either because they were unwilling or occupied with Indian uprisings, the dejected governor fled to Mexico.²⁷

Alta California's geographic isolation not only resulted in armies of diminutive size, it also led to major supply problems. Units were plagued by chronic shortages of equipment and ammunition, and numerous military actions, from expeditions against Indians to the U.S.-Mexican War, were broken off because of a lack of gunpowder. It was in part this logistic reality that led Spanish and, later, Mexican officers to enhance or even replace the equipment of their frontier troops with local materials. The moniker "Leather Jacket Soldiers" originated from the use of the *cuera*, a vest inspired by native armor and made of cowhide. The *cuera* was complemented by the *adarga*, a shield woven from three layers of cowhide and fabricated by artisans at the missions. Locally made lances, up to ten feet in length and topped with metal blades, drew their origin from

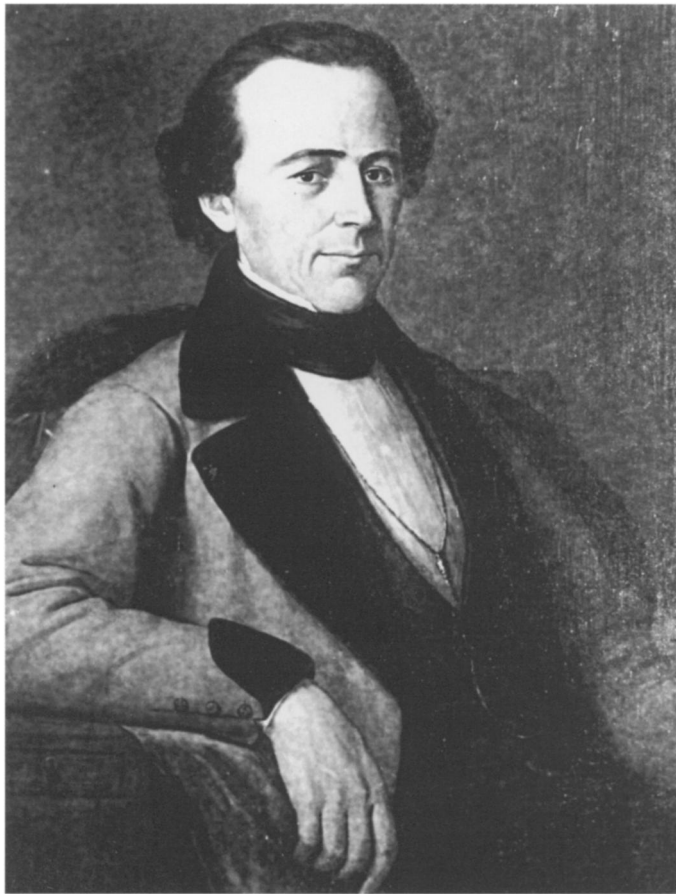
medieval Spain and were ubiquitous weapons on the California frontier. Easier to maintain than Europe's heavy cavalry and reasonably effective against natives, hide-armored lancers were vulnerable when engaging an infantry line armed with gunpowder weapons.²⁸

Such adaptations could at least partially offset the tenuous logistical situation of cavalry on the northern frontier, but artillery units operating in Alta California were in an almost hopeless situation, in spite of the fact that the remnants of the



Standard Mexican Cavalry and Infantry Uniforms. In practice members of the eclectic comic opera armies wore a hodgepodge of official uniforms and civilian clothing and carried a mixture of operable and inoperable equipment. From an illustration in Thomas Farnham, The Early Days of California (Philadelphia: J. E. Potter, 1862).

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Manuel Micheltorena. Poor artillery, undisciplined soldiers, and the unreliable New Helvetia Army led by John Sutter cost Manuel Micheltorena the governorship in 1845. All three factors were typical of comic opera conflicts: armies lacked gunpowder and ammunition, militias were untrained, and engagements were sometimes fought in part by mercenaries.

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Spanish coastal defenses provided the gente de razón's tiny armies with artillery at a very high density. For example, the ratio of cannons to troops in Napoleon's Army du Nord during the Waterloo campaign was 3.3 guns per 1,000 men, while comic opera units possessed a similar or even higher ratio, with groups of 200 to 400 men armed with 1 to 3 guns.²⁹ In a meeting of such seemingly well-armed antagonists, the natural inclination of both sides was to increase the distance between the opposing lines, avoiding friendly losses while relying on the skills of artillery gunners to inflict enemy casualties. Such was not the case during the 1831 revolt that ended in the deaths of Romualdo Pacheco and José Avila, and the serious wounding of Governor Victoria. Neither loyalist nor rebel forces possessed cannons, both groups feeling free to close within small arms range.³⁰ Yet in most comic opera conflicts, one side or the other possessed artillery, and in opening the range to avoid enemy fire, the difficulty of gunnery also increased. However, artillery crews either lacked the quality ammunition or skills necessary to hit their targets.

Cannon balls were always a scarce commodity. Juan Alvarado's artillerymen began the 1836 revolt without a single artillery round while rebel gunners at the Second Battle of Cahuenga Pass compensated for their lack of solid shot with cobblestones found on the bed of the Los Angeles River. The famous retrieval of expended cannon balls in artillery duels was therefore not some lighthearted ritual, but simply a practical fix to a lack of ordnance.³¹ Yet even when artillery crews found shot to load into their pieces, they were confronted by the same shortage of powder that plagued infantry. But more serious for the long-range fire capabilities of the cannon, gunners often substituted high-quality powder with an unpredictable propellant manufactured at the missions and hence, Californio artillery rounds followed depressingly erratic trajectories. In September 1846 José Carrillo's artillerymen broke off from the retreating Americans at the Battle of San Pedro after a round from their single can-

non fell far short of the enemy column. The report of the gun was weak, and the powder was manufactured at Mission San Gabriel. When Stockton and Kearny's forces launched their campaign to recapture Los Angeles in January 1847, Americans at the Battle of San Gabriel reported that shots from the Californio gun line again fell short, the powder of such poor quality and the resulting fire so inaccurate that Mexican forces failed to prevent the American crossing of the San Gabriel River.³²

While the quality of ammunition may alone account for the "bloodless artillery duels," the lack of powder meant that few troops in California had proper training in handling cannon. The 1836 campaign against Governor Gutiérrez was only successful because Juan Alvarado relied on an "old veteran," identified by Mariano Vallejo as Artilleryman Balbino Romero, who was competent enough to land his single round near the governor's house at close range.³³ The bulk of Californio combatants lacked such talent, or even luck, and without live fire practice, the accuracy of artillery suffered. At the Second Battle of Cahuenga Pass, the three artillery pieces of Manuel Micheltorena's "cholo" army were supplied with shot and grape, the latter requiring expert handling of the fuses to ensure that the shells exploded directly over their targets. Yet in spite of the fact that the artillery caissons were for once well-stocked, loyalist gunners fired a total of 124 rounds without killing a single Californio. When Micheltorena's gun crews opened fire again the next morning, this time apparently with solid shot, the governor continued to be beset by the ineffectiveness of his artillerymen, who throughout a two-hour bombardment "could not aim straight and fired in such a way that the cannon balls rolled harmlessly away after landing far from where were located the three (rebel) cannon."³⁴ The importance of gunnery training and high-quality powder can be seen at the Battle of San Gabriel, when Robert Stockton, a trained naval gunner, took personal command of one of

the fieldpieces and destroyed a Californio cannon with a single shot.³⁵

The problem of effective gunnery was further aggravated by the fact that when taking artillery fire, Californios followed their instincts, dispersed, and took cover. This was the case at Second Cahuenga Pass, where the insurgents sheltered themselves from Micheltorena's cannonade in a ravine, as well as the sureño-norteño conflicts of 1837–38, where combatants turned structures into small forts. Indians took cover as well, and at battles such as Stanislaus River, natives attempted to nullify the effect of artillery by building stockades or occupying buildings. However, the Indian tactic was counter-productive because, unlike the Californios, bow and arrow armed natives took artillery fire at close range. Gunnery problems were minimized and the kinetic energy discharged by the impacting round shattered walls into lethal splinters. And unlike Indians, most Californio soldiers were mounted, and with their ability to disperse rapidly, cavalry was the most troublesome of artillery targets.³⁶

While the shortage of high-quality ammunition, deficiencies in gunnery training, and the mobile nature of Californio targets were important determinants in habitually poor artillery performance, the California coastal climate may have played a factor as well. The most effective Californio cannonade, the bombardment of American sailors and marines at the Battle of San Pedro, took place in September. By sheer coincidence, the conflicts that included artillery fire occurred during Alta California's rainy season, between the months of November and March, with the most serious cannonade, that of Second Cahuenga Pass, taking place in January. Although accurate weather reports are unavailable for the period, it is likely that the ground was moist during most if not all of these engagements, a condition that would seriously erode the "ricochet effect" that solid shot depended on for inflicting casualties.³⁷

Another reason for the low level of lethality in comic opera revolutions had much to do with the nature of centers of gravity during the politi-

cal disputes that raged in Alta California during the Mexican period. The small white population and the undeveloped state of the territory's infrastructure meant that geographic centers of gravity played a secondary role. Although the possession of Monterey or Los Angeles was of some value in determining the outcome of a campaign, particularly when they served as the capital and ensured control of customs revenue, in most of the comic opera revolutions, Alta California's centers of gravity were typically composed of persons: that of the Mexican governor on one side and a few rebel leaders on the other. When these centers of gravity were captured, wounded, or lost heart, the rationale for the conflict evaporated.

The identification of persons as centers of gravity was intensified by early nineteenth-century styles of command and the emergence of the Californios as a regional identity after 1821. Until the advent of such impersonal communications systems as the telegraph, military commanders placed themselves close to the action to follow the course of the battle and ensure that orders were carried out. Officers sometimes commanded in a heroic style, entering the fray with sword and pistol in hand, as was the case with Governor Victoria, who was seriously wounded at the First Battle of Cahuenga Pass.³⁸ Similar risk-taking helped legitimate authority in Mexican culture, but it was indispensable in Alta California where, as Lisbeth Haas stresses, "a pretense to aristocracy was not uncommon for the Spanish/mestizo population that came to identify themselves as Californios and Spanish Californians." Affectations toward the blue blood of Spain and the traditions set by the Franciscan Fathers justified domination of the territory's Indian population and political defiance toward Mexico City. The resultant political culture demanded that leaders be present for battle and make themselves visible to the enemy.³⁹ The linkage of social status with behavior on the battlefield is best illustrated by Pío Pico, no soldier by his own admittance, who berated José Castro as a simple "*vaquero*" for shedding his uniform during the artillery exchange at Second Cahuenga Pass.⁴⁰

The permanently operating factors of Alta California then ensured that European-style armies operating in the territory were crippled by a small number of combatants, persistent supply problems, and chronically ineffective artillery. Because the Californios' military shortcomings made attrition warfare against non-Indian adversaries highly problematic, and because widespread destruction was made unnecessary by the personalized nature of the region's centers of gravity, conflicts were characterized by a lower mortality rate than those experienced by other European style armies during the period. However, the Californios proved themselves highly adaptable. Lacking the resources necessary to wage effective attrition warfare against non-Indian opponents, the Californios compensated for their deficiencies by the ubiquitous use of cavalry in wide-ranging campaigns of maneuver, a style of war that was the final factor in the low casualties of the comic operas.

CALIFORNIOS AND MANEUVER

The Californios' selective shift from attrition to maneuver tactics when facing non-Indian opponents appears to have originated from a practical comprehension of what is known in military physics as the *momentum equation*.⁴¹ Because the gente de razón's tiny armies were pitifully lacking in mass when engaging other Western style forces, they were inferior in regards to their potential *momentum*, or the military effectiveness of their units. But momentum is the product of mass and velocity:

$$M = mv$$

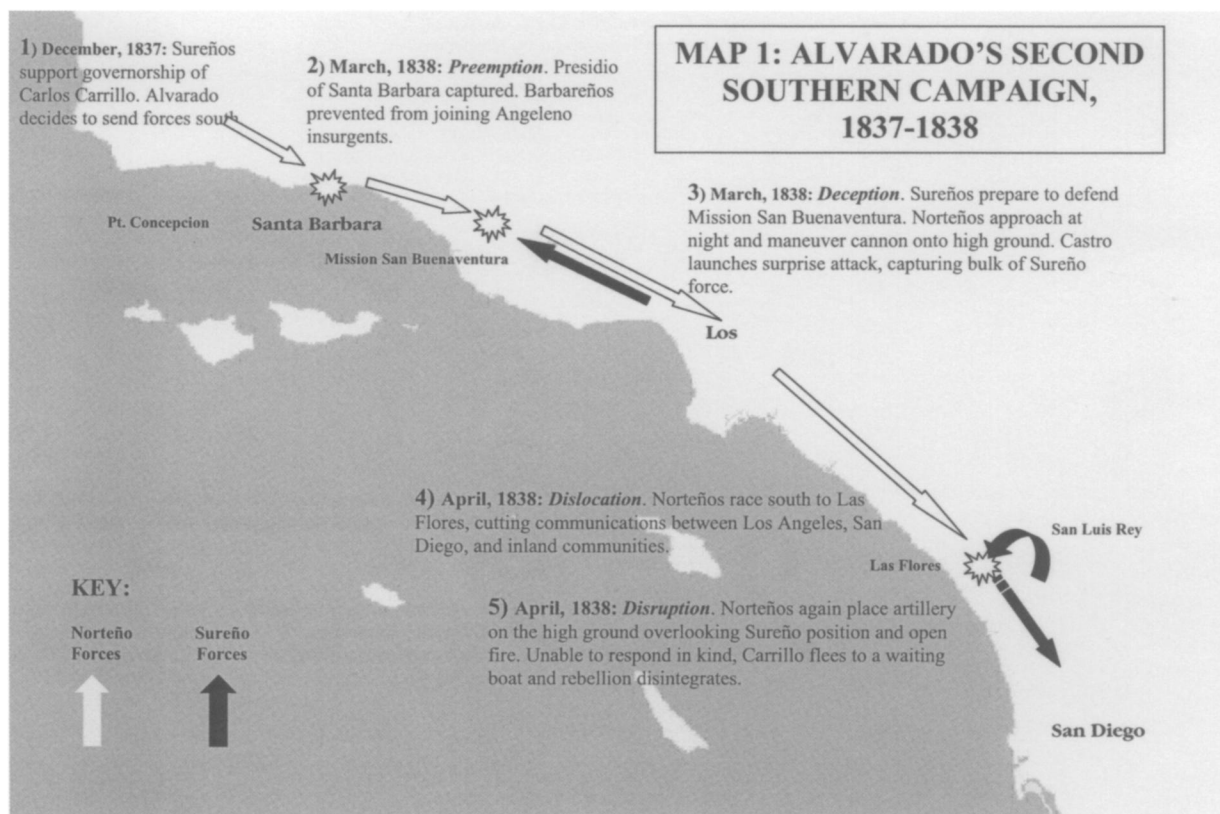
As a practical matter then, if the gente de razón could not achieve momentum through the mass of their military forces, they could make up for it by increasing their velocity in combat. Indeed, the Californios' primary compensation for their lack of military mass was the horse. The use of cavalry had a long tradition on the Spanish frontier, where mounted units served as the shock troops of the conquistadors. The great horse

herds that appeared in Alta California after 1769, the subsequent development of a ranch economy capable of supplying a wealth of experienced riders and superb mounts for military operations, and the vast distances between population centers made the widespread use of cavalry in the territory a foregone conclusion.⁴² A solution to the challenges of geography and their relative lack of firepower, the potential of Californio mounted units were not just apparent during the U.S.-Mexican War, at such victories as San Pasqual and San Pedro, but also during the political-military disputes of the Mexican Era.

THE NORTH-SOUTH CONFLICT: 1836–38

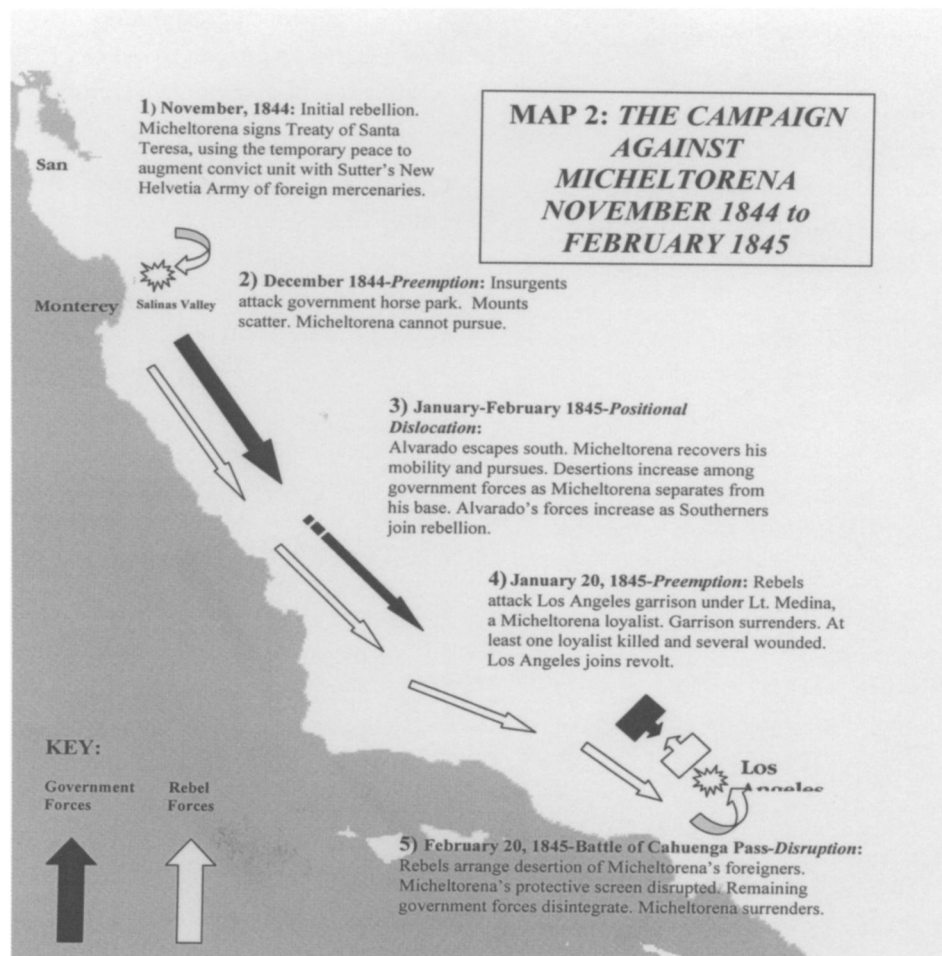
The wounding of Manuel Victoria in 1831 and the surrender of Governor Chico in 1835 preclude any in-depth analysis of these early comic operas, but Juan Alvarado's 1836 rebellion and his subsequent victories in southern California were the result of a consistent use of maneuver to bring about the defeat of opponents with a minimum of bloodshed.

Juan Bautista Alvarado began his revolt against Governor Nicolás Gutiérrez because of his distaste for centrist politics as well as a personal dispute regarding the misappropriation of customs house funds. Alvarado was joined by a num-



Alvarado's second summer campaign, 1837–38. Juan Alvarado's 1836 rebellion and his subsequent victories in southern California were the result of a consistent use of maneuver to bring about the defeat of opponents with a minimum of bloodshed.

MAP BY THE AUTHOR. CALIFORNIA COASTAL OUTLINE COPIED FROM RAND McNALLY'S *NEW MILLENNIUM WORLD ATLAS* (1999)



The campaign against Micheltorena, November 1844 to February 1845. The final chapter in the rebellion against Micheltorena was the Second Battle of Cahuenga Pass, two days of fighting that ended with the governor's surrender. The battle has long been considered the prototypical comic opera, for total casualties amounted to the deaths of one horse and one mule.

MAP BY THE AUTHOR. CALIFORNIA COASTAL OUTLINE COPIED FROM RAND McNALLY'S
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ber of Bay Area ranchers, the militia of Sonoma and San José, as well as Isaac Graham's well-armed American frontiersmen. Deception was the key to this eclectic army's first success. Although the Californio rebels were short of muskets, they had plenty of mounts and a large cache of old, unserviceable weapons. Provided they still had stock and barrel, the insurgents carried the otherwise worthless muskets to convince government troops that they opposed a well-armed force.

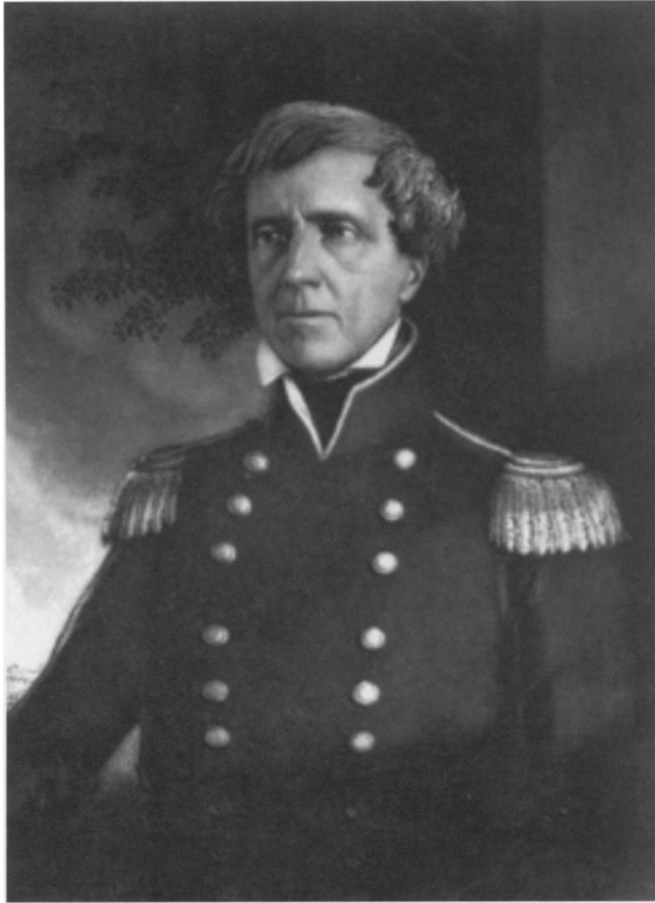
The ill-equipped rebels marched to Monterey, where Alvarado placed his men among pine groves at a considerable distance from the presidio, ordering the blowing of bugles and the lighting of numerous campfires so that Gutiérrez would overestimate his opponent's mass. The rebels deployed their lone artillery piece on high ground dominating the governor's house in the hopes of frightening, if not outright killing Gutiérrez, for the governor was the isolated agent of Mexican federal authority and hence the center of gravity for the centrist position in Alta California. The single, well-placed cannon shot at the square where Gutiérrez conferred with his officers convinced the governor that he faced an attack from a superior force if he did not surrender, although Alvarado's gunners had just expended their only round, a solid ball accidentally left behind by loyalist forces. The cannon had also been brought for appearances.⁴³

The most serious confrontation among the Californios themselves involved the southerners' refusal to recognize Alvarado's authority once the latter deported Gutiérrez and declared the territory's independence. In response, Alvarado gathered an army of roughly seventy Californios and Isaac Graham's American mercenaries, all under the command of José Castro. The sureños countered by forming their own force of about one hundred men. Determined to seize Los Angeles, the center of resistance and in this case a geographic center of gravity, Alvarado marched one force south while he sent another detach-



By the time of the U.S.-Mexican War, the comic opera revolutions had left the Californios highly adept at military operations requiring extensive movement. In 1846, at both the battles of San Pasqual and San Pedro, Californio cavalry soundly defeated similarly sized U.S. forces.

"THE CHARGE OF THE CABALLEROS," AN ILLUSTRATION OF THE BATTLE OF SAN PASQUAL BY W. FRANCIS, IN ZOETH SKINNER ELDREDGE, *THE BEGINNINGS OF SAN FRANCISCO* (SAN FRANCISCO: Z. S. ELDREDGE, 1912), TICOR/PIERCE COLLECTION, CALIFORNIA HISTORICAL SOCIETY, UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA LIBRARIES



Although Stephen Watts Kearny was known as the "Father of the U.S. Cavalry" in his lifetime, Andrés Pico shattered his forces at the Battle of San Pasqual in 1846. Kearny united the survivors with naval forces in San Diego and in 1847, took Los Angeles. He was briefly military governor of California and died in Veracruz, Mexico, in 1848.

COURTESY OF THE BANCROFT LIBRARY, UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY

ment to Point Concepción in a hired boat. Once his forces were united at La Purísima, Alvarado quickly took the presidio of Santa Bárbara and augmented his own force with two cannons found there, as well as a few local sympathizers.⁴⁴

Alvarado next sent a message to the ayuntamiento of Los Angeles proposing negotiations. The Angelenos dispatched a commission that included Antonio María Osio and José Sepúlveda. In the middle of the talks at San Buenaventura, Alvarado forced the commission to hand over their instructions, revealing the ayuntamiento's desire to avoid a military confrontation. Emboldened by the disclosure, Alvarado sent an emissary to inform the pueblo's inhabitants that his army "carried no commissary," and would not hesitate to lay the sureños' fields waste. The threat was effective. The sureños "had a wholesome dread of Graham's riflemen," and Osio later described Graham as someone who knew "how to use a rifle," and his compatriots as "wicked." With the previous seizure of the commission, the Angelenos required little convincing, although a final stand was made at Mission San Fernando, where the governor's cannon fired a shot at the church. Possessing no artillery of their own, the defending sureños fled. Alvarado's army entered the pueblo without resistance a few days later.⁴⁵

When the southerners renewed their defiance in 1837 and supported an attempt to install José Carrillo as governor, Alvarado repeated his earlier performance, sending a force of loyalists and mercenaries from Monterey, once more under José Castro, to end sureño resistance. Castro moved rapidly, sending messengers ahead with orders to prepare fresh horses to enable the rapid movement of his army down El Camino Real and prevent the juncture of Angeleno forces with their Barbareño allies.⁴⁶ Santa Bárbara was taken easily, and the Angelenos fell back to San Buenaventura. Castro appeared soon after, capturing the sureños' horses and using cover of night to maneuver an eight pounder over rocky terrain onto the high ground of El Rincón. At dawn the

norteños opened fire on the mission church, taking the seventy sureños sleeping inside by surprise. Although the attack failed to inflict a single casualty and a Texas mercenary shot down one of Castro's gunners, without artillery of their own and trapped inside the mission, the norteño assault on San Buenaventura, as Pío Pico lamented, "made prisoners, the major part of our force that had been stationed there."⁴⁷

After San Buenaventura, Alvarado arrived, and the governor and his general entered Los Angeles. Remnants of Carrillo's supporters reformed at Las Flores, an Indian village north of San Diego, where they barricaded themselves inside a number of homes and a large corral. Alvarado advanced toward the village, hoping to capture Carrillo himself, as well as to sever communications between Los Angeles, San Diego, and a few rebels to the east at San Luis Rey. The norteños seized the high ground once more, using movement to dominate the village and cut off the defenders from neighboring wells. Virtually surrounded and his army short of water, José Carrillo, the *raison d'être* for the campaign and the sureño center of gravity, fled to Baja California, and the remaining insurgents surrendered. Alvarado paroled them after they promised to refrain from additional mutiny, his victories of 1836–38 assured by swift movement, the preemption of unified resistance and the seizure of dominant ground, the continuous use of deception and the disruption of his enemy's centers of gravity.⁴⁸

THE CAMPAIGN AGAINST MICHELTORENA: 1844–45

Alvarado's campaigns of 1837 and 1838 illustrate the nonlethal but decisive character of white-on-white military encounters in Alta California, yet the rebellion against Mexican Governor Micheltorena is the best example of the Californios' grasp of the principal concepts of maneuver.

Personally liked by a number of dons and flowing with good intentions, Manuel Micheltorena's dispatch to California with a force of three hundred convict soldiers was the basis for the 1844–

45 rebellion. The upheavals of the 1830s taught the federal government that territorial governors required military support if they were to survive the Californios' constant political mischief, but with U.S.-Mexican tensions high, Mexico City needed its best troops on the Texas frontier. With no logistical support, Micheltorena's "cholo army" earned the disgust of Alta California's citizenry through their requisitioning, if not outright stealing, of food and supplies. That was enough for Californios used to opposing the "tyranny" of appointed governors.

On November 16, 1844, about one hundred men under Jesús Pico, Antonio Chávez, and Manuel Castro opened the rebellion by attacking Mission San Juan Bautista, where a large cache of government munitions were stored. Ensuring the adequate arming of their own force, they then raided the government horse park, driving the mounts to the Salinas Valley and detaching a small unit to ensure that the animals did not return. This opening move was a classic example of preemption, robbing Micheltorena's army of the mobility necessary for effective operations before the conflict began.⁴⁹

Faced with another challenge to federal rule, Micheltorena gathered supporters and new mounts to crush the opposition, now forming under Juan Alvarado and José Castro. In late November, government and rebel forces clashed just south of San José. Rebel horsemen rode around government troops in an attempt to frighten Micheltorena into capitulation. The strategy apparently worked, for in the resulting Treaty of Santa Teresa the governor promised to deport the hated convict soldiers. Micheltorena was, however, only buying time until he could rally additional reinforcements. The governor gave John Sutter the power to grant land to foreigners in an attempt to recruit American settlers to his cause. Micheltorena's composite force, made up of his own convicts and Sutter's largely American "New Helvetia Army" soon outnumbered Alvarado's insurgents by four to one.

Confronted with a superior force, Alvarado decided to move the base of his rebellion to Los Angeles. There he surprised the army garrison, and several loyalist soldiers were killed or wounded. Faced with the possibility of a full-scale rebellion, Micheltorena pursued. In a single stroke, the rebels moved Micheltorena and Sutter away from their base of operations and avoided fighting the government on its terms. Alvarado and Castro's dash to Los Angeles in January 1845 was thus a superb example of positional dislocation, the act of rendering an enemy's strength irrelevant by removing them from the decisive point of conflict. The preemptive horse raid ensured the completion of the movement, for Sutter's pursuit was held up by the shortage of mounts. Eventually, the New Helvetia Army procured an adequate number of horses, and a force of 150 men with Sutter in command, marched to Los Angeles with Micheltorena and a convict detachment, their combined strength numbering about 400 combatants.⁵⁰

The final chapter in the rebellion against Micheltorena was the Second Battle of Cahuenga Pass, two days of fighting that ended with the governor's surrender. The battle has long been considered the prototypical comic opera, for total casualties amounted to the deaths of one horse and one mule, although the traditional narrative ignores the unfortunate victims of Alvarado's prior attack on the Los Angeles garrison or Vallejo's assertion that a number of cholos were killed in the artillery duel.⁵¹

Arriving in Los Angeles, Alvarado and Castro evened the odds by joining their forces with sureños, who themselves possessed a hearty distaste for the cholos. Together, they prepared to resist an expected assault. With little following among the Californios themselves, Micheltorena, like his predecessors, was the loyalist center of gravity. However, unlike previous conflicts, a relatively large force protected the governor. As the most effective element of that screen was the New Helvetia Army, peeling away Sutter's mercenaries was the only way to disrupt the loyalist center of gravity.

First, the insurgents planted rumors among captured foreigners that Americans residing south of the Tehachapi mountains were joining the rebels massing in Los Angeles, counting on Micheltorena's defeat and the stripping of Sutter's power to grant land to his allies. Partially through the efforts of John Marsh, the deception found its way to the foreign contingent of Micheltorena's force, and roughly thirty-five Americans deserted. Such fabrications, as well as the long march south, depleted Sutter's New Helvetia Army. By the time government forces reached Cahuenga Pass in mid-February 1846, Sutter had only fifty of his original 150 riflemen left.⁵²

Fifty marksmen were still a dangerous force by the standards of war in Mexican California. The insurgents took up positions at the crest of Cahuenga Pass, protecting the path to Los Angeles. Micheltorena's army formed up at the base of the hill. On February 20, 1846, the governor's artillery began its pathetic performance. In the middle of the bombardment, Pío Pico, elected the new governor of California by the Los Angeles *diputación*, sent a message to the foreign mercenaries, decreeing that should they surrender, they would receive full pardons, be allowed to remain on land awarded them by Micheltorena, and be granted legal title should they adopt Mexican citizenship.⁵³

Sutter's probable irritation at the lackluster performance of government artillery was certainly dwarfed by the spectacle of his New Helvetia Army laying down their rifles to cast votes on the question of surrender. As the cannonade continued, most of the foreigners left the field, and Sutter himself was captured. With the disintegration of the New Helvetia Army, Micheltorena, the loyalist center of gravity, was left only with his cholos to defend him. The following day the governor attempted to maneuver the remnants of his army around the rebels in hopes of seizing Los Angeles and salvaging the battle. But the Californios detected the move, matched the governor's march, and blocked the path to the capital. With no hope of victory, Micheltorena surren-

dered. The preemption of an early government attack, the positional dislocation of the New Helvetia Army, the evaporation of the mercenary component of the loyalist army and the resulting capture of Micheltorena himself were the keys to the outcome of the campaign.⁵⁴

CONCLUSION

Rather than a cultural curiosity, the comic opera revolutions of Mexican California were classic applications of maneuver warfare. The handicaps placed on military units in the region, the widespread availability of horses, and the personalized nature of the combatants' centers of gravity resulted in low levels of lethality during white-on-white combat and forced the Californios to rely on maneuver as a principle means of war when engaging similarly armed opponents. It was only when fighting poorly armed natives that the gente de razón possessed such an advantage in the mass of their military units that they could inflict significant casualties on their enemies.

Viewed in such a way, the military campaigns of the comic opera revolutions bear a striking continuity with the Californios' performance during the U.S.-Mexican War. The nortehños' victory at the Battle of Natividad, the triumph of José María Flores's "Flying Artillery" at the Battle of San Pedro, and Andrés Pico's shattering of Stephen Watts Kearny's Army of the West at the Battle of San Pasqual should therefore not surprise us. The result of Natividad was owed to the exceptional horsemanship of the Californios, San Pedro to the lack of American mobility achieved by Carrillo's preemptive scattering of horses, and San Pasqual to the perfect timing of Pico's counter-charge.⁵⁵ The Californios, in their estimation at least, preserved much of their honor during the events of 1846 and 1847, but the geographic isolation of Alta California ensured that the gente de razón, much like the natives they oppressed, lacked the means to prevent defeat and eventual subjugation. Yet the fleeting victories of 1846, and the tactical experience needed to achieve them, did not arise in a vacuum. The political disputes that plagued the territory between 1821 and 1845, and

the "bloodless marches and countermarches" that were their mark, proved an exceptional training ground. Whether amusing or not, the "comic opera revolutions" prepared the Californios to meet the initial chapter of their own conquest story and deserves a re-evaluation of their place in California history.⁵⁶

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His writings have appeared in a number of books and historical journals, including *Rooted in Barbarous Soil*, part of the *California History Sesquicentennial Series*. He is a past recipient of the Doyce B. Nunis Award for the best article produced on the history of southern California. His most recent works include photographic histories of the city of Hayward and the community of Castro Valley, California.

Dr. Phelps is currently working on a book-length study of the early years of the model city of Torrance entitled: *Torrance: Corporate Efficiency and City Planning in Open Shop Los Angeles*.