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Military Order



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United States



COMMANDERY OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA.



WAR PAPER 45.

New Mexico in the Civil War.





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WAR PAPERS.

45

New Episodes in the Civil War.

PREPARED BY COMPANION

Lieutenant-Colonel

STEVENS T. NORVELL,

U. S. Army,

AN

READ AT THE STATED MEETING OF JANUARY 7, 1913

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New Mexico in the Civil War.

The Utah expeditions of 1857-58, culminated in August of the latter year in the establishment of a military post in Cedar Valley, Utah, named Camp Floyd, in honor of the then Secretary of War. Here were concentrated between four and five thousand men of the regular Army, the post being under the command of Brevet Colonel Charles F. Smith, Lieutenant-Colonel of the Tenth Infantry.

The relations existing between the Army and the Mormon inhabitants of the Territory were somewhat strained, but as the former was subservient to the civil authorities, and as the latter never called upon it for assistance, the garrison had ample time to devote to military instruction.

It is quite probable that the United States Army never produced an officer better qualified for command and instructor than Colonel Smith, and under his instruction and supervision the command attained a perfection in everything pertaining to the military profession never excelled up to that time in the history of the Army. Colonel Smith left his mark upon every man who ever served under him.

In 1860 the garrison at Camp Floyd was scattered to the four winds, and this was due—so it was charged—to the secession element in the then existing administration, it being the policy of that element to so distribute the Army as to prevent its quick concentration. Under the order part of the Second Dragoons, the

Fifth, Seventh, and part of the Tenth Infantry, were sent to the Department of New Mexico, where already were stationed the Mounted Rifles and part of the First Dragoons.

The Department of New Mexico embraced that Territory, eastern Arizona, and southern Colorado. The Rio Grande flows through New Mexico from north to south, and the valley of the river contains most of the population and is the garden spot of the Territory. The occupied posts in the Department were as follows: Beginning north, on the Rio Grande, were Fort Garland, Albuquerque, Fort Craig, Fort Filmore, and Fort Bliss. The latter post being in Texas, just over the line, sometimes pertained to that Department and sometimes to the Department of New Mexico, as emergencies required. In 1861 it was embraced in the former. East of the Rio Grande were Fort Union, Fort Marcy (Santa Fé) and Fort Stanton; west, were Fort Defiance, Fort Fauntleroy, Fort Breckenridge, and Fort Buchanan. The incoming troops were distributed among the posts named.

The Department was supplied from Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, and Kansas City, Missouri, and the road from the former post was picketed to Fort Union by Fort Larned, Kansas, and Fort Wise—changed to Fort Lyon—Colorado. In those days New Mexico was as distant from Washington—as far as travel was concerned—as the Philippines now are.

Political events in the winter of 1860-'61 had but little effect upon military affairs in the Department of New Mexico. To be sure, secession was openly discussed by Army officers, but the majority entertained the hope that the quarrel would be settled without resort to arms. In the meantime the building of posts continued, and for four months a campaign against the Navajo Indians was carried on, from Fort Defiance as a base, under Major Canby, Tenth Infantry. Orders were issued, obeyed, and

duty performed, as though there was no such idea as secession. The changes in Department Commanders were frequent, there being four in eight months. General Garland, who had been in command for years, was followed by Colonel Fauntleroy, First Dragoons, he by Colonel Bonneville, Third Infantry, and the latter by Colonel W. W. Loring, Mounted Rifles, the youngest Colonel, in years, in the Army. These changes did not appear to make any difference in military affairs, for duty went on just the same. It is to the credit of officers from Southern States, serving in the Department of New Mexico, that but one ever attempted to tamper with the loyalty of the enlisted men, and he made a failure of it. As for the enlisted men, they never wavered in their loyalty to the Union from first to last.

When the news of the fall of Fort Sumter reached New Mexico, all idea of a peaceful solution of the difficulties was given up, and officers who were from Southern States made up their minds to cast their lot with the South. Some resigned, others failed to go through with that formality, considering the Union disrupted forever. Even those who tendered their resignations did not wait for the action of the authorities but left at once. A few took formal leave of their commands on parade and in doing so enjoined enlisted men to remain true to the "Stars and Stripes." A singular proceeding, considering their own action!

Colonel Loring, commanding the Department, in April, determined to resign. Before leaving he ordered Major E. R. S. Canby, then commanding the post at Fort Garland, to report at Headquarters of the Department at Santa Fe. Canby was next in rank to Loring. The latter did not await the arrival of the former in Santa Fe, but left for the South, giving out that he was going on an inspecting tour of the posts on the Rio Grande. With him went several of the Department staff officers.

On assuming command Canby found the affairs of the Department in a chaotic condition; not only were officers resigning, but they were leaving their posts without authority, and, in some instances, without officers. Then it was difficult to tell whom to trust, for officers who ought to have remained loyal to the Union—judging them from their expressed sentiments—went South, while others, who were expected to resign remained true to the flag; and still others got astride the fence and remained there so long that there was no telling on which side they would fall. Of the Department Staff, the adjutant-general, the chief commissary, and three paymasters resigned.

Canby was equal to the times; a student in the art of war, a master in administration, and, above all, with a well balanced and judicial mind, he soon grasped and controlled the situation. His job was a hard one, requiring the genius of a soldier as well as that of a statesman to accomplish. Canby was well equipped for the position he was placed in.

The last of the Southern officers resigning had hardly got out of the country when rumors reached Santa Fé of a contemplated invasion of New Mexico by a Confederate force from Texas. As a matter of fact the Territory was already threatened, for Fort Bliss was in the possession of Texas militia, and their number were being added to every day.

Among the first officers to resign, serving in New Mexico, was Captain Henry H. Sibley, of the Second Dragoons. He was a man of ability and had a distinguished record in the United States Army, dating back to the Mexican War. He conceived a scheme of conquering New Mexico, taking possession of Arizona, thereby influencing California to join the Southern Confederacy. His plan was submitted to the Confederate government and was approved. There was no one better qualified to carry out the scheme than Sibley was. He had from long service a good

knowledge of the topography of the country to be invaded. He knew, and was popular with, the Mexican population, and he had every reason to believe that the sympathy of the latter would be with the cause of the South on account of the geographical position of the country, the temperament of the people, and their ideas as to slavery. The plan was not a wild one by any means. There was little in common between California and the Atlantic States. The former had a mixed population, was self-supporting, and had no use for money other than gold. Trans-continental railroads were not in existence. However, before Sibley's expedition materialized, the status of California was settled, and that State did its share for the preservation of the Union in spite of its gold standard.

Canby decided upon a defensive policy. He could expect but little assistance from the general Government; his main dependence would be the few regulars in his department; and above all, to avoid antagonizing the Mexican population it was necessary that the latter should suffer as little as possible from the horrors of war. If it must suffer, let it be at the hands of the Confederates. This, in brief, was Canby's plan and policy, and to the end they remained unaltered. That he met with losses never contemplated was due to the fighting proclivities of his juniors, and not to any orders issued by him.

Canby's first move to resist the invasion was to abandon every post west of the Rio Grande, concentrating the troops in the valley of the river, that being the natural route the enemy would take in entering the Territory. Fort Filmore, the most southern post, was placed in a state of defense with a garrison consisting of the Seventh Infantry and about one-half of the Mounted Rifles, the whole under the command of Major Isaac Lynde of the former regiment. Fort Stanton, about two hundred miles east of the Rio Grande, was also placed in a state for defending with a

garrison consisting of two companies of the Fifth Infantry and three troops of the Mounted Rifles, Brevet Lieutenant-Colonel B. S. Roberts, captain of the latter regiment, commanding. Stanton was situated on a road—seldom used—from El Paso to Santa Fé; there was also a road from the post to Albuquerque. At Fort Union, the depot of supplies for the Department, an earthwork was constructed, this post being the most important on account of its situation on the road to Fort Leavenworth. The orders to the commanding officers of Forts Filmore and Stanton were to act on the defensive; not to risk a general engagement unless success was certain; to hold their positions as long as possible anyway, and then to fall back—the first garrison to Fort Craig and the last to Albuquerque. In other words, the enemy was to be delayed and harassed as much as possible. In the meantime, the organization of four regiments of Mexican Volunteers was begun. It may as well be stated now that Canby felt that the native regiments could not be relied on to fight the Confederates; he proposed to use them against Indians if necessary, to construct fortifications, and to insure their loyalty to the Union by feeding, clothing, and paying them. The result exhibited the wisdom of Canby's course. The majority of the educated Mexicans espoused the cause of the Union from the first, but these were few in number. They were commissioned in the Volunteers—at least, all who were capable of service. The masses were indifferent to the trouble between the North and South as being a matter that didn't concern them.

Such was the state of affairs when, in July, 1861, a force of five or six hundred Texan troops, under Colonel Baylor, appeared at Fort Filmore and demanded its surrender. The Union commander declined the demand, then withdrew the garrison and retreated a few miles, then changed his mind and surrendered. This unnecessary act caused the loss of one-third of the regular

troops in the department, for they were disarmed, paroled, and allowed to go to Fort Leavenworth until exchanged. Baylor followed up this success by sending a force of about three hundred to capture Fort Stanton. The news of the approach of this force and that of the loss of Fort Filmore, reached Stanton at the same time, and the commanding officer, after destroying all the property that could not be carried away, abandoned the post and marched the garrison to Albuquerque.

The Confederates, satisfied with their successes, did not attempt anything more, but waited until the main body under Sibley arrived. Six months elapsed before the latter made his appearance, and the period was utilized by Canby in preparing for his reception. Fort Craig's garrison was strengthened to about four thousand men, the majority being Mexican Volunteers, and Canby, with Headquarters of the Department, here took station. The posts in New Mexico were reduced to four: Fort Craig, Albuquerque, Santa Fé, and Fort Union. The first, the most southern, and the last, the most northern post, were to be defended; the other two were to be abandoned, the garrisons retreating to Union.

In February "Sibley's column" arrived before Fort Craig. Having demanded, and been refused, the surrender of the post, and as Canby would not come out and give battle, he concluded that he could not take the place without a protracted siege, and as he had no base of supplies, he could not afford the time. He determined, therefore, to move up the country, thus cutting off Fort Craig from the rest of Canby's command. In carrying out this intention, the Confederates crossed to the east bank of the Rio Grande, going into camp on a high "mesa" directly opposite the post.

February 21st, the Confederates broke camp and started. Canby, by means of spies, was kept informed of the enemy's

movements. The travelled road from Craig to Albuquerque is on the west bank of the river to a point twenty miles below that town when it crosses to the east. It was necessary for Sibley to take this road, and to get on it his command had to march about four miles to a ford. At the time the Confederates moved, a force of about twelve hundred regulars, two companies of Colorado volunteers that had just joined, and Kit Carson's regiment of New Mexican volunteers, the whole under the command of Brevet Lieutenant-Colonel B. S. Roberts, left Fort Craig with orders to move on the west bank of the river parallel to the enemy; to watch his movements; to prevent his crossing; to harass him, and if possible to capture and destroy his train. A good deal was left to Roberts' judgment, and that officer being full of fight, and, possibly, actuated by his disapproval of Canby's policy, arriving at the ford first, immediately crossed his command, but before he could get into position the enemy appeared and attacked him. The battle—known as Val Verde—raged for several hours, and for the numbers engaged was as severe as was ever fought. Finally, it was brought to an end by the capture of Roberts' (McRae's) battery. Canby arrived on the field at this moment; perceiving at once that the victory was with the Confederates, he ordered a retreat; and due to his care and good judgment the troops were withdrawn across the river and returned to Fort Craig. The loss on the Union side was three hundred and fifteen, including six officers.

The result of the battle of Val Verde made Canby more determined than ever to pursue a defensive policy. Sibley, believing that Canby was now hermetically sealed up in Fort Craig, and that his surrender was only a question of a very short time, continued his march up the valley. He was too slow in his movements; by his victory he appeared to think the country conquered; so, instead of acting quickly, he consumed more than a month in marching

to Santa Fe, which he could have easily accomplished in ten days. Less time spent in attending balls and other amusements would have enabled him to attack Fort Union before reinforcements reached that post. In the meantime, while he was picknicking *en route*, the authorities in Washington, aroused by the result of the battle of Val Verde, issued orders for the organization at Fort Leavenworth of an expedition to march to Canby's relief; also for another in California for the same purpose. The first was to have been under the command of General O. M. Mitchell, the latter under Colonel James H. Carleton, First California Volunteers.

The delay in Sibley's movements enabled Canby to communicate with Fort Union and to perfect a plan for the reception of the Confederates, and by the time the latter arrived in Santa Fe the Union troops were ready for them. The plan was as follows:

At the time Sibley left Santa Fe a force was to leave Fort Union. The march of the latter was to be so arranged as to meet the enemy in Apache Cañon. The Union troops, giving battle, were to fall back slowly toward their base, disputing every inch of ground, thereby delaying the enemy as much as possible, until Canby, who had already left Fort Craig, came up to attack the enemy from the rear.

Colonel Paul was in command at Fort Union and was to have commanded the troops in the field, but two days before starting the First Colorado Volunteers arrived at the post from Denver. The colonel of that regiment, Stough, was senior to Paul, and he insisted upon taking command of the expedition about to take the field, much to Paul's disgust.

March 28th, the advance guards of the Union and Confederate troops met at Pidgeon's Rancho, Apache Cañon. After a sharp engagement the latter fell back to their main body. On the 30th

both Armies met on the same ground, that on which the fight of the 28th had taken place. Here the battle of Glorietta was fought, and it was a magnificent fight on both sides. Stough, true to his orders, after the engagement had lasted about two hours, fell back slowly from one position to another until the enemy thought that the victory was his. Unfortunately, for him, Stough had, early in the morning, detached a force of about five hundred men under the command of Major Chivington, to pass unperceived by the enemy's right flank and attack his rear guard. This expedition was entirely successful; the rear guard was surprised, defeated, and the Confederate entire supply train destroyed. In the meantime, the fighting was going on at the front, and at the very moment the enemy felt certain of victory, word was brought to him of the attack in rear. Believing that Canby had come up and that he was now between two fires, a retreat was ordered, resulting in a stampede for Santa Fé. Stough, satisfied with his success, bivouacked at Kosloski's Rancho, five miles from the battle-field, where he was joined that night by Chivington's command, and then, by easy marches, he returned to Fort Union. Having made his report to Canby, he relinquished command and went to Washington to receive his reward.

About the time the Confederates reached Santa Fé from their disaster at Apache Cañon, Sibley must have received intelligence of the organization of the expeditions for Canby's relief, for he suddenly determined to return to Texas—saving his command if possible. Spies reported every movement of the enemy to Canby and Paul, and this enabled the Union commanders to act in conjunction with one another.

Early in April, Colonel Paul, now in command at Fort Union, left that post with nearly the entire garrison. He joined Canby in the mountains twenty miles east of Albuquerque,

April 11th. The Confederate column from Santa Fe, in full retreat south, arrived at the former place the same day. The next day the Confederates continued their retreat to Peralto, a small Mexican town twenty miles below Albuquerque. Here the road crosses to the west bank of the Rio Grande. The Confederates, believing that Canby would dispute the ford, determined to offer battle, and accordingly took position in the town—naturally a strong one. Canby, on coming up, made a demonstration as though about to assault, and, in fact, his troops were in line for hours, momentarily expecting the command to charge. The command was never given, and at nightfall the troops were ordered to bivouac on the ground where they stood. This was on the north side of the town, the back door of the latter—south—being open for the enemy to escape. All night long the Confederates could be heard fording the river, and by daylight the town was free of them.

And now occurred the most remarkable event of the whole campaign. Here was the enemy hastening out of the country on the west bank of the river escorted by Canby's army on the east bank. For several nights both armies, with batteries in position, bivouacked in plain view of one another with the river between them. Finally, the retreat of the Confederates became a stampede, and as they approached Texas they abandoned everything that impeded their progress, undoubtedly thinking that Canby had some deep laid scheme for their destruction. In reality, he only wanted them *to get out*. By May, with the exception of the wounded and sick, who could not travel, the Confederates were out of New Mexico, and Sibley's expedition was a thing of the past. The order for the expedition from Fort Leavenworth was countermanded, but the "California Column," then on the march, was allowed to proceed, and it arrived in New Mexico in September, clearing Arizona of the disloyal as it advanced

Before the end of the year every post in the Department was reoccupied by U. S. troops.

The successful conclusion of the campaign for the Union cause justified Canby in the course he pursued, but during its continuance his cross was a heavy one. While he had the respect of his juniors, and their heartiest support when called upon, very few agreed with him in his plans. His avoidance of battle was the great cause of complaint, and when Roberts brought on the battle of Val Verde, he (Roberts) had the sympathy and support of all under his command. It was not until the campaign was over that Canby's wisdom was fully appreciated.

Canby saved New Mexico to the Union, and by his statesmanship made the Mexican population loyal—at the beginning a doubtful problem.

In conclusion, a few words about General Canby may not be inappropriate.

On graduating at West Point he was assigned to the Second Infantry. He was brevetted several times for distinguished services and gallantry in the war with Mexico; was an Assistant Adjutant-General when, in 1855, the Army was increased by two regiments of cavalry and two of infantry, he being appointed a major in the latter and to fill an original vacancy. In 1861 he was appointed Colonel of the Nineteenth Infantry, and his appointment of Brigadier-General of Volunteers followed. Before the end of the war he was a Major-General of Volunteers, and at its conclusion, a Brigadier-General in the regular Army.

General Canby was pure in life, religious and charitable, without making a parade of either. He had unlimited confidence in himself; seldom sought advice: was not afraid of responsibility, and assumed it when he could properly have placed it upon others, particularly his juniors. He never exhibited temper, never uttered a complaint, and bore all his trials and tribulations

in a perfectly placid manner. His watchword was *duty*, and no thought of personal aggrandizement ever swerved him from the line he had marked out.

Honors came to General Canby unsought for, his advancement in rank being due to genuine merit. It is sad to think that the life of such a man should have been brought to a close by the act of one who belonged to the very scum of the earth.

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