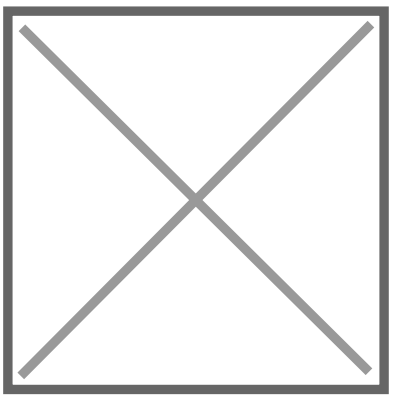
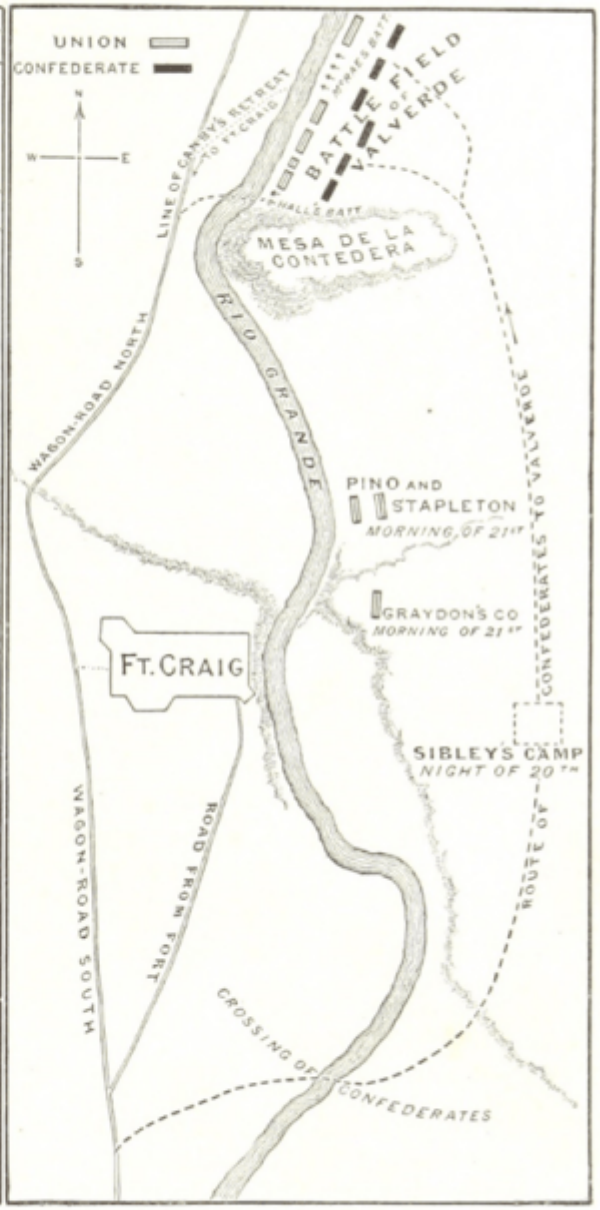


Making Sense of Santa Feâ??s Soldiersâ?? Monument: Part Two

Description

MAP OF THE CAMPAIGN AND OF SIBLEY'S RETREAT.



MAP OF FORT CRAIG AND VALVERDE.

battery and commenced firing, whereupon the Union artillery and cavalry

Part Two: The Civil War in the West

Two of the tablets affixed to the Soldiersâ?? Monument commemorate the â??heroesâ?• who died fighting with â??rebelsâ?• at the battles of â??Valverde,â?• â??CaÃ±on del Apache,â?• â??Pigeonâ??s Rancho (La Glorieta),â?• and â??Peralta.â?• For most observers, the meaning of these texts is utterly opaque. Few have any idea that Civil War battles were fought this far west, and even New Mexicans who have a passing familiarity with the battle that took place near Glorieta would be hard-pressed to locate any of the other locations on a map. Moreover, few

would be able to describe who fought in any of these battles or how many died. In order to understand these texts, then, it is necessary to have a clear understanding of what took place in each of these locations.

The story of the Civil War in the West begins in 1861 when the Southern states seceded and formed the Confederate States of America with the intent of ensuring the extension of slavery into new states and territories. It was not immediately clear which side New Mexico would take in the ensuing war. The Constitutional Convention of 1850 had rejected slavery in New Mexico, but the appointment of Southerners as officials in the new territory caused attitudes towards slavery to change. In 1856 the territorial legislature passed an act that prevented â??free Negroesâ?• from remaining in New Mexico for more than thirty days.[1] Then in 1859, with territorial congressional delegate Miguel Otero aligning with Southern political leaders, New Mexico adopted a slave code.[2] This act â??was accepted generally as New Mexicoâ??s final alignment with Southern principles. For these reasons, it appeared in 1860 that New Mexico would follow the leadership of the Southern states.â?•[3] And indeed, in March 1861, a citizenâ??s convention was held in Mesilla, New Mexico, â??declaring in favor of the Confederacy.â?•[4]

The Confederacy was thus emboldened to invade and capture the entire New Mexico Territory, with the ultimate ambition of taking control of the entire Southwest: acquiring the mining wealth in Colorado for the Confederacy, and then seizing possession of the Pacific Coast and the land in between, thereby securing access to the western seaports as well as the transcontinental railroad route, all of which was necessary to support the expansion of the Southern slave economy.

In July 1861, Texas soldiers under the command of Lt. Col. John R. Baylor crossed the border and captured Fort Fillmore in southern New Mexico and proclaimed the â??Confederate Territory of Arizonaâ?• for the Confederacy, comprising all the land in present-day New Mexico and Arizona south of the 34th parallel (i.e., just south of San Antonio), with Mesilla as its capital. Additional Confederate military forces under the command of General Henry Hopkins Sibley (who had resigned from his post with the United States Army and joined the Confederacy) massed nearby. Sibleyâ??s plan was to attack the Union forces defending Fort Craig (just north of the territory claimed by the Confederacy), take the fort and its supplies, continue northward to take Albuquerque, then Santa Fe, and then Fort Union. Once having secured these areas and their supplies, they would then capture the Colorado Territory and proceed westward to fulfill the ultimate goal of establishing Confederate control all the way to the Pacific Ocean.

As it turned out, New Mexicans were not as receptive to the Southern secessionists as had been hoped. Territorial Governor Henry Connelly urged New Mexicans to â??take up arms in defense your homes, firesides and families.â?•[5] Governor Connelly left no doubt who they were fighting against: â??The enemy is Texas and the Texans. [They threaten] under the pretense that they are under the authority of a new arrangement they call a Confederacy, but in truth is a rebel organization.â?•[6] Shortly thereafter Connelly demanded and received the repeal of the 1859 Slave Act, declaring, â??We have condemned, and put slavery from among our laws. It is not congenial with our historyâ?¦â?•[7] Connelly then left Santa Fe for Fort Craig to confront the invaders.[8]

Fort Craig was under the command of Union General Edward R.S. Canby. In addition to Army Regulars, Canbyâ??s troops consisted of a regiment of Colorado Volunteers and five regiments of New Mexico Volunteers: the First New Mexico Volunteers under the command of Colonel Christopher â??Kitâ?• Carson; the Second New Mexico Volunteers under Colonel Miguel Pino; the Third New Mexico Volunteers under Colonel JosÃ© Gallegos; the Fourth New Mexico Volunteers under Colonel Gabriel Paul; and the Fifth New Mexico Volunteers under Lieutenant Colonel Benjamin Roberts. Also garrisoned at Fort Union were two regiments of New Mexico Militia: the First New Mexico Militia under Colonel Manuel Armijo; and the Second New Mexico Militia under Colonel Nicholas Pino. Finally, a company of New Mexican irregulars known as â??Graydonâ??s Spy Companyâ?• under Captain James â??Paddyâ?• Graydon was also present.[9]

In the second week of February 1862, Sibley launched his campaign and began moving his Army of the West north. By February 20, the Confederates had made camp to the northeast of Fort Craig, setting the stage for an intense and bloody confrontation that would take place the next day near Valverde Ford, a crossing on the Rio Grande about 25 miles south of Socorro.

The Battle of Valverde was fought on February 21, 1862. At the height of battle both sides deployed virtually the entirety of the forces at their disposal, some 2,800 troops on the Union side[10] and Sibleyâ??s entire Confederate Army of the West on the Confederate side, numbering 2,590.[11] In total, over 5,000 soldiers faced off against each other along both sides of the Rio Grande in this small open space of about one-half of a square mile, consisting of a sandy flood plain with a cottonwood bosque. It was then, and remains today, the largest battle ever fought in New Mexico.

The battle was fought in classic Napoleonic fashion, with infantry, cavalries, heavy artillery, and even mounted lancers; the men fought with muskets, rifles, pistols, bayonets, knives, and cannons. Companies of hundreds of soldiers were moved around the battlefield to engage with the enemy in line formations, or to defend in hollow square formations. The fighting was fierce and savage and the carnage was great; it was â??said to be perhaps the bloodiest battle for the number engaged in the whole war.â?•[12]

The day unfolded in two parts, with intense fighting in the morning during which the Union forces had the upper hand, a break by both sides at noon, and then a resumption of fighting in the afternoon at the end of which the Confederates managed to alter the course of the battle by boldly seizing one of the Unionâ??s batteries of cannons, forcing the Union soldiers to retreat from the battlefield. Canby famously blamed the loss on the Second New Mexico Volunteer infantry which, Canby claimed, had failed to defend the Union battery. (Canby also later accused many of the New Mexico Volunteers of desertion and dismissed most of the New Mexico Militia after the battle â?? which Canby sneered â??adds to rather than diminishes our strength.â?•)[13]

The two sides agreed to a truce to gather their dead. Captain Rafael ChacÃ³n of the First New Mexico Volunteers described the scene: â??The field was covered with blood, horses, torn and dismembered limbs, and heads separated from their bodiesâ??a spectacle that was horrible.â?•[14] The Union forces lost nearly one of every five troops that had engaged in the battle: a total of 111 dead, 160 wounded, and 204 missing.[15] Among the Union dead were 31 Mexico Volunteers.[16] Confederate casualties were 36 dead, 150 wounded, and one missing, and nearly 1,000 dead horses and mules[17]

Following this bloody but indecisive confrontation, the Confederate army marched northwards and seized control of Albuquerque. Two days later, Governor Connelly and the federal troops in Santa Fe abandoned the capital and retreated to Las Vegas and Fort Union. On March 23, Santa Fe fell to the Confederate army. The Confederate flag was raised, and the citizens were ordered to swear allegiance to the Confederacy.[18]

News of the defeat at Valverde reached the rest of the Colorado Volunteers training in Denver under Colonel John Potts Slough. Slough and his men then made a forced march through snow-covered Raton Pass and arrived at Fort Union on March 11.[19] Despite Canbyâ??s explicit orders, issued from Fort Craig, that there be no movement from Fort Craig until he advised, Slough marched out of Fort Union on March 22 and arrived several days later in Bernal Springs, a resting place on the Old Santa Fe Trail about 17 miles south of Las Vegas.

Slough sent a detachment of 418 Colorado Volunteers under the command of Major John Chivington ahead towards Santa Fe. Also under Chivingtonâ??s overall command were some 30 New Mexicans of the Second New Mexico Volunteers under Lt. Col. Manuel Chaves.[20]

Chivington and his men reached Kozlowskiâ??s Ranch just outside of Pecos on March 25. On the same day, several columns of Confederate soldiers arrived at Apache Canyon (aka â??CaÃ±on del Apacheâ?•) and set up camp near Johnsonâ??s Ranch at CanoÃ±cito. Unbeknownst to each other, the two forces were now less than 15 miles apart, with Glorieta Pass midway in between.

The next morning, March 26, Chivingtonâ??s men captured four Confederate scouts. Learning that the Confederates were camped just ahead, Chivington led his federal troops forward over Glorieta Pass and down towards Apache Canyon, preparing to engage the enemy. There they came into contact with the Confederates at the northern end of Apache Canyon. Both sides rushed back with the news that their respective enemies were near and prepared to engage in the battle memorialized on the Soldiersâ?? Monument as the battle of â??CaÃ±on del Apache.â?•

The forces consisted of just over 400 troops under the command of Chivington on the Union side and between 250 and 300 troops on the Confederate side under the command of Lt. Col. William R. Scurry. The Confederate forces set their line a mile to the south of the pass, with two six-pound field artillery.[21] The Union forces engaged and forced the Confederates to retreat another mile and a half to the lower part of the canyon where they formed a new line of battle. Chivington engaged again and succeeded in capturing a number of Confederate soldiers. The Confederates retreated once again and set up a final position just north of Johnsonâ??s Ranch (near the present location of the CaÃ±oncito exit on I-25). When darkness fell, the sides agreed to a truce to gather the dead: three or four on the Confederate side, and five on the side of the Union â?? all Colorado Volunteers.

Neither side pressed any further that day or the next. Chivington withdrew his forces to Pigeonâ??s Ranch which he commandeered as a field hospital for the Union wounded. The Confederates remained at Johnsonâ??s Ranch, where they were joined by additional forces from Galisteo.[22] Slough marched with his troops from Bernal Springs on the 27th and covered 34 miles over the next 18 hours, arriving at Kozlowskiâ??s Ranch at 3:00 a.m. on the 28th.[23] With the arrival of these additional troops on each side, the forces were now amassed that would meet in decisive battle later that day.

Slough split his forces into two. He sent Chivington with 500 men to cut across Glorieta Mesa to the northwest, with the goal of arriving at the rear of the Confederate forces where they were encamped at Johnsonâ??s Ranch. He himself led the remainder of the troops, some 900 men, up the Santa Fe Trail to meet the enemy head on.[24]

Scurryâ??s Confederates numbered about 600.[25] He advanced his troops and set up a line of battle across the trail, just north of Pigeonâ??s Ranch. Sloughâ??s advance guard arrived at Pigeonâ??s Ranch at 9:30 a.m. and the remainder of Sloughâ??s forces arrived an hour later.[26] Slough sent scouts ahead who soon encountered Scurryâ??s advance guard just one-half mile up the road.[27]

The forces engaged in battle shortly thereafter. The fighting took place in the narrow valley through which the Santa Fe Trail ran alongside Glorieta Creek, with the heart of the battle taking place in and around Pigeonâ??s Ranch. The Union forces were steadily pushed back until they were finally forced to retreat altogether.[28] They regrouped at Kozlowskiâ??s Ranch, where they buried their dead. 47 Union soldiers were killed, 78 were wounded, and 11 were captured.[29] As far as can be determined from the records, none of the Union losses were New Mexico soldiers, nor does it appear that any of the New Mexico regiments participated in the battle. The Confederates suffered 42 killed, 61 wounded, and 14 captured.[30] This battle would be commemorated on the Soldiersâ?? Monumentâ??s west-facing tablet as the battle of â??Pigeonâ??s Rancho (La Glorieta).â?•

This battle on the Glorieta did not result in a decisive victory for either side, although the Confederates had clearly won a tactical victory in driving the Union forces to retreat. However, the Union would gain victory through the actions of Chivingtonâ??s detachment. Chivingtonâ??s flanking column numbered some 488 infantry and

mounted scouts, including a detachment of New Mexico volunteers under Lt. Col. Manuel A. Chaves.[31] While the fighting was taking place at Pigeonâ??s Ranch, Chivingtonâ??s detachment crossed Glorieta Mesa and found itself looking down on the Confederateâ??s 70-wagon supply train at Johnsonâ??s Ranch. After several hours of apparent indecision, Chivington ordered an attack on the lightly guarded encampment and succeeded in taking the camp and destroying all of the Confederatesâ?? supplies.

This surprise maneuver left Scurry, who had thought he had won the battle that day, with no choice but to retreat to Santa Fe to regroup. However, supplies in Santa Fe were also used up. Meanwhile, Canby began a march from Fort Craig to retake Albuquerque, placing the Confederate army in a vice between Union forces to the south and north. By April 12, the decision was made to withdraw all Confederate forces from New Mexico and the remnants of the Confederate Army of the West began a long march south back to Texas.

The Union Army engaged the retreating Confederate army a final time on April 15, 1862, near the small village of Peralta, just south of Albuquerque. The Confederates had halted at the village the night before and taken possession of Governor Connellyâ??s hacienda.[32] Canby, who had been pursuing the Confederates as they retreated south, encamped nearby, and surprised the Confederates at daybreak. A battle raged throughout the day in and around the Peralta church, primarily waged by artillery fire on both sides. Once again, the ubiquitous Manuel Chaves of the Second New Mexico Volunteers participated in the fighting.[33] The battle ended indecisively when a â??howling sandstorm descended on the opposing armies.â?•[34] Federal losses at the battle of Peralta, the fourth and final Civil War battle commemorated on the Soldiersâ?? Monument, were about eight killed and wounded.[35] None of the Federal losses included New Mexicans.

Canby allowed the defeated Confederate Army of the West to continue their retreat to Texas, ending the Confederate invasion which had lasted scarcely longer than two months. The Union had won a decisive victory through the combined efforts of the regular U.S. Army, the Colorado Volunteers, and the New Mexico Volunteers and never again would the Confederacy attempt to gain control of the West.

Taking all four Civil War battles into account, a total of 170 soldiers died fighting for the Union. 31 of these were members of the New Mexico volunteers; all of the others were U.S. Army regulars and Colorado volunteers. These are the soldiers commemorated on the Soldiersâ?? Monument as those heroes who fell at the battles fought with the rebels in the Territory of New Mexico.

Next: Making Sense of Santa Feâ??s Soldiersâ?? Monument Part Three

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[1] Calvin Horn, *New Mexicoâ??s Troubled Years: The Story of the Early Territorial Governors* (Albuquerque: Horn & Wallace Publishers, 1963), 85.

[2] Ibid., 86.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid., 87.

[5] Ibid., 99.

[6] Ibid., 99-100.

[7] Ibid., 100

[8] Ibid.

[9] John Taylor, *Bloody Valverde: A Civil War Battle on the Rio Grande, February 21, 1862* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995), 128, 130-131.

[10] Ibid., 104.

[11] Ibid., 124.

[12] Horn, *New Mexicoâ??s Troubled Years*, 101. More recent scholarship has questioned Canbyâ??s claims and begun to rehabilitate the honor of the New Mexicans in the battle. See Charles and Jacqueline Meketa, â??The New Mexico Volunteers: A New Look at the Battle of Valverde,â?• in Charles Carroll and Lynne Sebastian, editors, *Fort Craig: The United States Fort on the Camino Real* (Socorro: U.S. Department of the Interior, 2000), 135-147.

[13] Taylor, *Bloody Valverde*, 105. However, recent scholarship has questioned Canbyâ??s claims and begun to rehabilitate the honor of the New Mexicans in the battle. See Charles and Jacqueline Meketa, â??The New Mexico Volunteers: A New Look at the Battle of Valverde,â?• in Charles Carroll and Lynne Sebastian, editors, *Fort Craig: The United States Fort on the Camino Real* (Socorro: U.S. Department of the Interior, 2000), 135-147.

[14] Taylor, *Bloody Valverde*, 102.

[15] Ibid., 104. Donald S. Frazier provides slightly different figures for Union casualties: 110 dead. 240 wounded, and 35 missing. Donald S. Frazier, *Blood and Treasure: Confederate Empire in the Southwest* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1995), 180.

[16] Taylor, *Bloody Valverde*, 141-142.

[17] Frazier, *Blood and Treasure*, 180.

[18] Horn, *New Mexicoâ??s Troubled Years*, 102.

[19] Thomas S. Edrington and John Taylor, *The Battle of Glorieta Pass: A Gettysburg in the West, March 26-28, 1862* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1998), 31.

[20] Ibid., 124, 147n8.

[21] Ibid., 43.

[22] Eldrington and Taylor, *The Battle of Glorieta Pass*, 6.

[23] Ibid., 63.

[24] Ibid., 64.

[25] Ibid., 68, 132.

[26] Ibid., 7.

[27] Ibid., 71.

[28] Ibid., 86.

[29] Ibid., 131, 104.

[30] Ibid., 137, 103.

[31] Alberts, *The Battle of Glorieta*, 128-129, 176.

[32] Frazier, *Blood and Treasure*, 242.

[33] Marc Simmons, *The Little Lion of the Southwest: A Life of Manuel Antonio Chaves* (Chicago: Swallow Press, 1973), 187.

[34] Ibid., 247.

[35] Miles Mathews, *Sibleyâ??s New Mexico Campaign*, Essential Civil War Curriculum, March 2016, https://www.essentialcivilwarcurriculum.com/sibleys-new-mexico-campaign.html, citing Martin Hardwick Hall, *Sibleyâ??s New Mexico Campaign* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2000), 13.