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THOMPSON, DE WITT C

CALIFORNIA IN THE REBELLION

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WAR PAPER

No. 8,

Commandery

Of the State

—OF—

CALIFORNIA

MILITARY ORDER

—OF THE—

Loyal Legion

—OF THE—

UNITED STATES.

CALIFORNIA
IN THE
REBELLION

A PAPER PREPARED AND READ BEFORE

CALIFORNIA COMMANDERY

OF THE

MILITARY ORDER

OF THE

Loyal Legion of the United States

JULY, 1891

BY COMPANION

DE WITT C. THOMPSON

COMMANDER CALIFORNIA CAVALRY BATTALION

CALIFORNIA

— IN THE —

REBELLION.

Many direful prophecies were made about California at the beginning of the Rebellion. Some predicted that she would secede from the Union and join the insurgent states; others that she would become part of a Pacific Republic, to be composed of the states and territories west of the Rocky Mountains, and still others that she would be forced into the Confederacy through her rebel element. But there was not even a probability that any of these events would happen, for California never indicated, by word or deed, the least intention of deserting the Government, and never desired a western Republic; and, moreover, the rebel strength on this coast was greatly overestimated by the uninformed. In fact, the whole South could not have marched men enough over the mountains and waterless wastes intervening, to have forced her out of the Union. The bold invaders would have met a Thermopylæ in every pass and canyon, and their bones would have bleached on every desert.

California was acquired by the blood and treasure of the Nation. Nature made her a land for the free and a home for the brave, and her rulers consecrated her to Liberty. The first Constitutional Convention, held at Monterey in 1849, declared that she was and always should be a free state; and, to their praise be it said, every Southern man in that assembly heartily concurred in the resolution. Such a legacy, such a trust, her loyal people were bound by honor as well as self-interest to maintain, and they recognized the obligation and accepted the responsibility.

Twelve years or more of constant mingling with Southerners in business, political and social life had given our Northern residents a good comprehension of Southern charac-

ter, and also much information regarding the drift of public feeling in the slave states. At the commencement of the War they were probably better informed than the people of any other free state, as to the strength and intentions of the South, and it was this knowledge that enabled them to checkmate the secessionists in their attempt to control California or obtain even a foothold west of Texas. It is but fair to admit that General Sherman understood the situation better than any other Northern man, through his sojourn in Mississippi subsequent to his ten years' residence here, and much of his good fortune was owing to this fact. Had the North followed his sensible advice instead of calling him visionary, the Rebellion would never have reached the gigantic proportions it afterward attained.

During the Presidential campaign of 1860, many of the more observant and thoughtful of our loyal citizens expressed the conviction that the success of the Republican party would result in secession and civil war; and as soon as it was known that Abraham Lincoln was elected, they began preparations for the approaching contest. In November, a committee of military officers, of which the writer was a member, was chosen to increase and improve the State forces, watch the movements of the disaffected and make ready for every emergency. Through the efforts of this committee, General Halleck was appointed by Governor Downey, commander of the State militia, and Captain Hamilton of the Third United States Artillery was detailed to instruct and drill the uniformed companies. Schools for the training of officers were established and experienced teachers provided. All State troops were required to take the oath of allegiance to the United States Government, and all sympathizers with secession weeded out. New companies were formed as fast as possible and organized into battalions and regiments. The police and firemen were prepared to act as soldiers in case of necessity, and thousands of our most reliable citizens were suitably enrolled as a reserve force. So complete was the surveillance of the committee, that no military book could be bought at the stores or drawn from the libraries without the person and the purpose being known.

During the autumn and winter, the Second Brigade and others attended a course of lectures on military art and science, given in San Francisco by Generals Halleck and Shields,

Colonel Baker and Captains Freelon and Rogers, all distinguished officers in the Mexican War; and on the 22d of February following, at the special request of the committee, Thomas Starr King delivered before the military and citizens of the same city, a powerful and unmistakably Union address. This was the opening gun, the defiant challenge of the loyal people of California to the hosts of secession, whoever and wherever they might be. The substance of this address echoed and re-echoed throughout the State until the voice of that eloquent orator was hushed in death.

Among the officers who took an active part in these early preparations were gallant General Hooker, who entered heart and soul into the work; Lucius H. Allen, graduate and instructor of West Point and eight years Major-General of California after Halleck went East; Colonel Charles Doane, later commander of the Second Brigade, and Colonel J. D. Stevenson, both, like Halleck and Hooker, veterans of the Mexican War; also John S. Ellis, John W. McKenzie, Archibald Wasson and Frederick Tittel, Colonels respectively of the First, Second, Third and Fourth Regiments of California militia; T. D. Johns, Captain of the First California Guard, afterward Colonel of the Seventh Massachusetts Infantry and a brigade commander in the Army of the Potomac; J. Sewell Reed, Captain of the First Light Dragoons and the lamented commander of the California Hundred; and Colonels Eyre, Brown, Evans, McGarry, West, Rigg, Lippet, Curtis, Connor, Pollock, Moore, Judah and Bowie, all subsequently able commanders of California volunteer regiments.

Of the population here at this exciting period, it may be estimated that two-thirds of the Americans were from the Northern states, and almost to a man, loyal to the Government—the few copperheads to be found here and there, remaining very quiet owing to the well-known propensity of our people to Hamanize pesteriferous characters. A few of the remaining third, those from the Southern states, rose above sectional feeling and remained true to the National policy, some even joining the Federal army and fighting bravely under the old flag; but as a rule, and very naturally so, our Southern-born citizens sympathized with their native states and their kindred at home. The oldest and most intelligent, however, being too honorable to intrigue and too sensible to wish their adopted

state plunged into the horrors of civil war, maintained through the conflict a neutral and dignified position, and received the respect and sympathy of their Northern neighbors; but too many others, enthusiastic and reckless, were ready for any scheme that promised to help their beloved South and what they deemed her sacred cause. When these ardent young gentlemen found themselves forestalled in their designs upon the allegiance of California, many hastened away to the Southern armies, and some now rest in their gray uniforms on the battle-fields around their boyhood homes. They at least had the courage of their convictions. Unhappily there existed in the Southern set, a third class. In strongest contrast to the honorable and the brave, were the braggarts—the men who prophesied the destruction of the Republic and the annihilation of the Yankees, who created enmity and alarm, whose mouthings sent abroad throughout the land the impression that California would be lost to the Union; but who, when the hour of battle came, skulked away—too cowardly to fight, too mean to be reconstructed and despised alike by North and South.

As in the East, the greater portion of the foreigners was also favorable to the Republic; only the English showing positive animosity—following therein the lead of their British brethren, whose sentiments were clearly expressed by their extensive investments in Confederate bonds, their blockade runners filled with arms and contraband supplies and their piratical vessels sailing under Slavery's flag, and just was the retribution that overtook their hostile acts.

The *native* Californians evidenced their good will toward our Government by recruiting from their comparatively small numbers a battalion of about 400 dashing horsemen, which was officered by descendants of soldiers conspicuous in the service of Spain and Mexico, and proved of great assistance to our troops in the pathless regions of Arizona and New Mexico.

While the secessionists were chiefly engaged in proclaiming the Quaker-like character of the Yankees and boasting of Southern invincibility, the more practical Northern men, as already shown, had been doing some very effective work, and felt no doubts of the result, knowing that all the advantages were on their side. The army and navy, forts, arsenals, arms and munitions of war; the Custom-house, Treasury, Mint, Postoffice, United States Courts and Federal officers; the

ships, steamboats and all lines of communication ; the State, county, city and town governments and local authorities ; the militia and State arms and equipments ; the Police and Fire Departments ; the Home Guards and Union League and more than two-thirds of the fighting men of the State were under Union control. On the contrary, the secessionists had comparatively nothing—no acknowledged leaders, no organization but a secret affair, only a few shot guns, squirrel rifles and bowie knives for weapons, no money for war purposes and no law or justice on their side. Without cause of complaint against the National or local governments, and living in a free state which had supplied them with homes, positions and wealth far beyond their chance of acquirement elsewhere, their plotting was the basest ingratitude and treason.

When the sound of the rebel cannon around Fort Sumter came booming over the land, California stood like Minerva, her own stately goddess, panoplied for war. United States naval vessels protected the coast and inland waters ; the lion-hearted General Sumner commanded the Federal forces ; General Wright, with the splendid Ninth Infantry, guarded the northern line ; General Hancock, afterward the idol of the Army of the Potomac, was stationed at Los Angeles, where no one presumed to talk secession in his presence ; General Halleck was in charge of the State troops, and " Fighting Joe Hooker " had been selected to lead the auxiliary forces.

Of the regular army we had the First Regiment of Dragoons (now the First United States Cavalry), the Third of Artillery and Fourth, Sixth and Ninth of Infantry, with good ordnance, quartermaster, commissary, paymaster and medical departments. Of the State militia, about fifty uniformed and drilled companies, including infantry, artillery and cavalry ; besides several miscellaneous organizations. In addition were many thousand strong, brave men accustomed to the saddle, the rifle and frontier life, anxious to aid the Government and capable of crushing alone any rebel demonstration within our borders. Our forts, arsenals and armories were guarded ; our cities and towns picketed, and scouts were in every part of the State noting the names and watching the movements of the secessionists. In this emergency California surpassed herself. She was not taken by surprise, for she had acted upon the wise sayings, " In time of peace prepare for war " and " Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty."

Hence when the rebel guns at Charleston signaled to the secessionists throughout the country, the hour for action, our fellow-citizens who had expected to deliver California, a golden prize, to the Southern oligarchy, took no second look at the frowning batteries, the glistening bayonets, the flashing sabres and the embattled ranks of the Union forces, but quietly said among themselves: "It can't be done; we'd better go home." Thus the war cloud rolled away from the Pacific coast; thus the hopes of the fire-eaters, the braggarts and their allies were blasted, and the faint-hearted of the Northerners took courage, and the fence-straddlers knew which side to get down on.

California went on her way rejoicing. No hostile armies marched and countermarched through her fertile valleys; no ruthless raiders destroyed her lines of communication, her mills and storehouses and her growing crops; no hungry foragers appropriated her flocks and herds and bountiful harvests; no bloody battle-fields marred the beauty of her landscapes; no horrors of war came to her happy homes. She was not even burdened with the care of the intelligent contraband or perplexed with his "important and reliable information." Everywhere, over fields and forts, cities and towns, schools and churches, the Star-Spangled Banner, more loved than ever, waved in her gentle breezes.

And California was as generous as she was brave. She sent her golden grain, her golden fruit, her golden coin and her gallant volunteers to assist her loyal sister states; and when the terrible war was ended, when the Nation's flag floated again over a united country, she gave full pardon to her erring Southern sons and welcomed them back with their kindred and friends. She was zealous to heal the wounds of the contest and bring peace and love into the National family. She harbored no hatred; knew no North, no South, no East, no West—only one land, one government, one flag, one destiny.

To her loyal people, especially the pioneers who brought her into the Union and the patriots who protected her from traitors within and foes without, it was extremely gratifying that within her limits no officer of the regular army surrendered any fort, camp, garrison or public property to the rebels, or in any way betrayed a trust or disobeyed an order of the Government. The standard of the army here was too high to permit such shameful acts, and even had it been otherwise

our citizens, as a body, would never have tolerated the official miscreants who disgraced some sections of our country. High-minded Southerners would have united with loyal Northerners in hanging any officer guilty of such conduct.

It has been charged, and believed to some extent, that General Albert Sidney Johnston was engaged with other Southerners in a conspiracy to secure California, with her rich mines and invaluable harbors, for the Confederacy; but there was no truth in this report. General Johnston was an officer of the highest honor who had served long and well in the United States army, and whose great abilities had gained him the command of the force sent to Utah to suppress the Mormon rebellion, a mission which he successfully accomplished. On the death of General Clark, in 1860, he was assigned to the Department of the Pacific, coming direct from Salt Lake. Incapable of a dishonorable act, he would have given his life, if necessary, to defend the Government property and territory intrusted to his care; but after the secession of Texas he considered it his duty as a citizen of that state, to resign his commission in the United States army. This he did on the 9th of April, 1861; but took extra precautions to protect the forts and arsenals and maintain the authority of the Government while awaiting his successor. General Sumner arrived on the 24th, and the following day the formal transfer of the command took place, General Johnston turning over all the effects, defenses and forces under his charge in excellent order.

The writer was familiar with his military acts and private views from the day of his arrival in California till his departure, and knows that he in no way aided to bring about the War and sincerely hoped that civil strife would be avoided. It is greatly to be regretted that so many noble men and able officers were lost to the service of the United States through the false theories of state rights and state allegiance.

And now as to the gallant volunteers referred to lately. As proved by the Adjutant-General's reports, California furnished, without a draft, all the soldiers called for by the Government—about 17,000—the best fighting men who ever wore the National uniform. After the regulars went East, in 1861, her troops garrisoned the forts and camps on this slope, kept the Indians in subjection and held Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Nevada, Utah, Arizona and New Mexico for the

Union. They guarded the country from British Columbia to Mexico, from the shores of the Pacific to the Rocky Mountains—an empire in extent. They fought the stalwart aborigines of the north and the treacherous Apaches of the south. They made the longest marches and performed the hardest services of any troops of the War, and from Utah to Texas they stopped and turned back the western wave of the Rebellion. General Connor's brigade marched from Sacramento to Salt Lake, put the Mormons on their good behavior and severely whipped the Indians in the battle of Bear River. General Carleton's column moved from Los Angeles, through Arizona and New Mexico, to the Rio Grande, re-establishing the United States military posts and driving the rebels back into Texas. This latter march is accounted by military judges as the longest, most fatiguing and dangerous ever made, and establishes the endurance and bravery of the California soldiers.

Many of these volunteers remained on hard duty in the territories until relieved by the regulars in 1866. Though all had desired and hoped to serve in the Army of the Potomac, the Government, on account of the Indian depredations and Mormon troubles, the disloyal element west of the Rocky Mountains, the delicate condition of her foreign relations and the possibility of foreign war at any time, decided it necessary to keep a strong force in this region, and these ambitious Californians were detained here for that purpose. Could they have been organized as a division of infantry, a brigade of cavalry and a battalion of artillery and combined under a Hooker, a Hancock or a Sheridan in the Army of the Potomac, the question, "What did California do in the Rebellion?" would never have been asked, for they would have made a record unsurpassed in the annals of war.

After every effort had failed to get these regiments ordered East, through special request and great influence, permission was obtained from Secretary Stanton to raise five companies of cavalry—one known as the "California Hundred" and four as the "California Cavalry Battalion"—for a representative force at the front. They were organized in October, 1862—500 mustered in; discharged August, 1865—182 mustered out. They served in the Armies of the Potomac, Shenandoah and James, under Grant, Halleck, Hooker, Meade, Sheridan and Ord; more or less with Keyes of the Fourth Corps, Warren of the Fifth.

Wright of the Sixth, Crook of the Eighth, Slocum of the Twelfth, Emery of the Nineteenth, Augur of the Twenty-second and Gibbon of the Twenty-fourth, and in the cavalry under Sheridan, Stoneman, Pleasonton, Torbert, Averell, Merritt, Custer, Devin and Gibbs.

They hunted Mosby and his command in the mountains of Virginia; worried Stuart's Cavalry on their way from Muddy Branch Ford on the Potomac, through Maryland and Pennsylvania, to the battle of Gettysburg; helped delay and repulse Early's army in his attack on Washington in July, 1864; led in Sheridan's great cavalry charge on the enemy's flank, which sent "Early's army whirling through Winchester," and rode with Merritt and Custer in the sabre charges at the Woodstock Races in the Shenandoah Valley. From daylight till dark, their carbines and sabres flashed in the faces of the enemy at the hard-fought battle of Cedar Creek, Sheridan's greatest victory. They marched and fought with the hero of Winchester in his long raid up the Shenandoah, through Waynesboro and down the James River to Petersburg, during the month of March, 1865. They were foremost in Devin's Division, referred to by President Lincoln in the following dispatch: "The Five Forks, strongly barricaded, were carried by Devin's First Division of Cavalry." They were engaged under Sheridan in daily contests with the Army of Northern Virginia on its retreat from Petersburg and Richmond, and at Appomattox, on the morning of the 9th of April, 1865, they were deployed as skirmishers in front of the Union cavalry formed across the rebel advance, and thus fired the last volley before the surrender of Lee, and had the opportunity of witnessing the meeting of Grant and Lee—victor and vanquished—and of seeing the Confederate army that had fought well but vainly for four long years, lay down its arms.

At the Grand Review in Washington, May 23, 1865, their colors were greeted with enthusiasm by the bravest and highest in the land. Six of their company officers were killed in action—Captains Reed, Eigenbrodt and Smith and Lieutenants Meader, Woodman and Munger; and many of their comrades sleep in the red burial of war on the battle-grounds between the Potomac and the Alleghanies, Gettysburg and Appomattox. The superior quality of these volunteer soldiers is further shown by the fact that before the War closed, fifty-

eight of the enlisted men had been promoted to the rank of commissioned officers in other commands, some becoming field officers.

Through the whole term of their service, these Californians never forgot the people they represented, and wherever they marched, camped or fought, they were a credit to the State they loved. On the thundering charge and amid whizzing shot and bursting shell, "Remember California!" was their battle-cry. How proudly they bore her name in more than half a hundred contests, how well they upheld the honor of their brothers-in-arms far away on the Pacific coast, how faithfully they served their country in her time of need is attested by their battle-flag, now emblazoned with the names of fifty engagements in which they participated and a brief but eloquent record of their patriotic services. This cherished relic, made by loyal ladies of San Francisco and presented to the Battalion, on its departure for the seat of war, by General George Wright, the Department commander, is now the property of the people of California, and will be displayed in the Armory Hall of the Cadet Battalion of the State University—the West Point of the Pacific.

But to California belongs another and a greater honor. If she had but few in the lower ranks to represent her on the fields of glory, she had the largest share of those who won and wore the stars, for more than sixty of the most distinguished Generals on the Union side were citizens of this State or had long been resident on the coast. Grant, Sherman, Sheridan, Thomas, McPherson, Hooker and Hancock lead the immortal list. Virginia has been called the mother of Presidents, and it might also be said that California is the mother of Generals. There was much in her genial climate, broad valleys, lofty mountains, deep canyons, mammoth forests and grand ocean front and in the excitement and perils of her early days to expand the minds and develop the courage of these heroes of the War. They had hunted over her great ranges, had tracked the savage grizzly and the wily Indian to her mountain fastnesses, had explored new regions and helped found new states. Accustomed to great and successful operations, they had become self-reliant and qualified to command, and when their country sounded the long roll, they responded to her call and led her armies to battle and to victory. Their names are

enshrined in the hearts of a grateful people. Their achievements will never be effaced from History's page. California claims them as her adopted sons, and their fame is the brightest jewel in her diadem.

What memories cling around those days of gallant deeds ! How difficult to realize that a quarter-century has passed away since that stirring time ! And yet, whatever the future brings for our native sons, for the patriots of '61 the call to arms, the partings, the beating drum, the bugle's clarion voice, the marching regiment, the tented field, the reconnoissance, the skirmish, the battle, the shout of victory and the sorrowful retreat will come no more. The drums are gathering dust in the garrets, and the bugles, the sabres, the muskets hang over the mantels in the old homesteads; or with the tattered flags have been collected into Memorial Halls, where they will teach to later generations a lesson of patriotism, bravery and devotion to duty. The brazen cannon that sent death and destruction through the ranks of the foe, have been cast into monuments and tablets to commemorate the valor of the dead, while the noble steeds, with the fire of battle in their eyes, that brought the death-dealing batteries into action on the run, that bore the charging squadrons into the thickest of the fight, have gone to their well-earned rest.

And the great actors in this greatest of tragedies, who once walked our streets and mingled in our daily life, where are they ? Grant, Sherman and Sheridan, that grand triumvirate, have passed from earthly scenes crowned with imperishable laurels ; Halleck sleeps with his illustrious kindred in the Empire State ; Thomas, the " Rock of Chickamauga," the conqueror at Nashville, lies on the banks of the beautiful Hudson ; Hooker, the hero of Antietam and Lookout Mountain, whose white charger and waving sword were always where the fight raged hottest, rests in the Queen City of the West ; Reynolds, long here with the Third Artillery and commander of the First Corps and right wing at Gettysburg, was killed on the opening day of the fight, and a monument now marks the spot where he fell far in the advance ; Hancock, the hero of Gettysburg and many other engagements, reposes at his birthplace in Pennsylvania ; McPherson, whose genius is still seen in the forts and defenses of this coast, after a glorious record at Donaldson, Shiloh, Vicksburg and through the

To the present and future soldiers of our land, the love of country, the dauntless courage and the inspiring leadership of these commanders will ever be a noble example. On their tombs and those of her other gallant volunteers who have gone to the realms where heroes dwell, California lays her garlands of immortelles.

For them—

“The neighing troop, the flashing blade,
 The bugle’s stirring blast,
 The charge, the dreadful cannonade,
 The din, the shout are passed.
 On Fame’s eternal camping ground
 Their silent tents are spread;
 But Glory guards, with solemn round,
 The bivouac of the Dead.

“Nor shall their glory be forgot
 While Fame her record keeps,
 Or Honor points the hallowed spot
 Where Valor proudly sleeps.
 Nor change, nor wreck, nor winter’s blight,
 Nor Time’s remorseless doom
 Shall dim one ray of golden light
 That gilds their deathless tomb.”

DE WITT C. THOMPSON,

Late Commander California Cavalry Battalion
 and late Major-General of California.