

With Colonel Carleton *and the* California Column

By Leo P. Kibby



ON JULY 22, 1861, President Lincoln signed an act which authorized the use of volunteers to aid in enforcing federal laws and protecting government property.¹ It was under this act that the California Volunteer Organization, eventually to total over 16,000 men, came into being.²

On August 14, 1861, the War Department requested California's Governor Downey to organize, equip, and muster into service four regiments of infantry and one of cavalry.³ The War Department also indicated that the military purpose of this unit was to be that of protecting the overland mail route between California and the Eastern states by way of Salt Lake City.⁴ The next day, August 15, another order was received from the War Department requesting that James H. Carleton be made a Colonel of a cavalry regiment with authority to organize the regiment immediately.⁵ On September 2, Governor Downey reported to President Lincoln that the first requisition made upon this state for volunteers had been filled and that the command had been given to Colonel Carleton.⁶ Continuing, Governor Downey recommended that Carleton be promoted to Brigadier General for he knew of no one more deserving than Colonel Carleton nor one who would reflect more credit on the state of California.⁷

Regiments of the original force of California volunteers formed at Oakland, California, and by October 1, were ready for active field service. Instead of being sent to guard the overland mail route, as originally ordered, the troops were assigned to Southern California by order of General Sumner, Commander of the Department of the Pacific.⁸ This action had been taken because the spirit of rebellion had become manifest in California, particularly in Southern California and specifically in San Bernardino, "the hotbed of secessionism in California."⁹

In the meantime significant military administrative changes were being made: General Sumner was called east to assume another assignment; on October 20, Colonel Wright, Ninth United States Infantry, in command of the District of Southern California, became Commander of the Department of the Pacific¹⁰ after having transferred command of the Southern District of California to Colonel Carleton.¹¹

It was fast becoming apparent that California and the Pacific Coast were attractions to both the Union and the Confederacy. In the early part of the war, Lieutenant Colonel John R. Baylor, commanding the Confederate army in New Mexico, had made gains through having organized the Confederate Territory of Arizona.¹² It had become known, too, that the Confederates were in control of posts in Arizona and New Mexico.¹³ As early as October, 1861, Carleton had mentioned that Fort Yuma was, from a strategic point of view, an outpost to all of southern California and on the line from whence must come "the only troops which can possibly menace the State from Texas or Arizona overland."¹⁴ In a letter to Colonel West, in command of the First Infantry, California Volunteers, Carleton said: "If you use circumspection, you can never be surprised there [Fort Yuma]. If you are not surprised, your force properly managed, with the desert as an auxiliary, will never be whipped, to say the least."¹⁵ As an added precaution to cope with the threat of Confederate invasion of California Carleton required all persons passing into Sonora, Mexico, or Arizona from California, and those entering California at Fort Yuma, to take an oath of allegiance.¹⁶ Those who would not take the oath were placed in the same category as an avowed enemy of the Government and were to be held in confinement.¹⁷

Learning of the Confederate occupation of New Mexico and Arizona, General Wright on December 9 suggested to the War Department that the Government would be better served if the California troops were thrown into Arizona for the purpose of assisting the federal forces in driving out the rebels. Moreover, this arrangement would serve as a safeguard against any invasion of the Pacific Coast from this quarter.¹⁸ On December 18, General McClellan endorsed General Wright's suggestions,¹⁹ and Colonel Carleton was authorized "to organize and fit out the expedition."²⁰

The resultant expedition, known as the California Column,²¹ was composed of over 2,000 officers and enlisted men. It consisted of the First Regiment of Cavalry,²² the First and Fifth Regiments of Infantry,²³ and Company B of the Second Regiment of Cavalry.²⁴ No records exist of the stations of Company B from February 28,

With Colonel Carleton and the California Column

1862, to January 31, 1863, though most of its time was spent enroute to New Mexico.²⁵ While in New Mexico, Company B spent most of its time at Fort Sumner, being there from January 31, 1863, to February 29, 1864.²⁶ After this last date Company B returned to California and later was sent to Nevada where it remained until April 30, 1866.²⁷ Assigned also to the Column was Company A, Third U.S. Artillery.

The history of the experiences and hardships, the struggles, uncertainties, and risks of the California Column read like modern fiction. It left Los Angeles on April 13, 1862,²⁸ and troops in the advance Guard first reached the Rio Grande River on July 4, 1862.²⁹ In spite of great odds the expedition was indeed a great success — a fitting tribute both to the leadership of the Column's commander, Carleton, and to the perseverance and integrity of the men themselves.

From Los Angeles to the Rio Grande River it was necessary to cover a distance of nearly a thousand miles and fight constantly not only with the Indians, but with the forces of nature also. Starting with the situation in California, "not for twenty years had a winter of such severity occurred . . . The whole country was flooded; hundreds of horses and cattle mired down in the plains and were lost."³⁰ From Los Angeles the troops were first moved toward Fort Yuma by companies of twos and threes. One hundred and twenty miles from Los Angeles enroute to Fort Yuma, Camp Wright was formed as a sub-depot near the Yuma desert.³¹ From Camp Wright to Fort Yuma, a distance of 180 miles, it was continuous desert, without vegetation, and with a scarcity of water. Available water was of inferior quality and sometimes brackish. Carleton made it a practice to send out advance parties to clean out existing wells and dig new ones before marching the troops.³²

Absence of pasturage along the way did not allow the livestock to forage; thus additional travel problems ensued. Nor were these problems solved upon reaching Fort Yuma. Marching troops of the Column continued to experience hunger, thirst, and fatigue as they journeyed eastward. On one occasion they marched all night until 12:30 P.M. the following day with but one cup of coffee to sustain each man. This experience was further aggravated by the fact that a portion of the march was through mud and water half knee-deep and by having two fights with unfriendly Indians.³³ Even the cavalry horses had nothing to eat for two days and nights.³⁴ Perhaps Carleton's remarks summarize the situation adequately when he indicated that the march of the California Column across the desert from the Pacific to the Rio Grande River "was not ac-

complished without immense toil and great hardships or without many privations and much suffering from heat and want of water."³⁵ It was, indeed, Carleton continued, "a military achievement creditable to the soldiers of the American Army."³⁶

Along the route over which the California Column marched to El Paso were unfriendly Indians. On July 19, 1862, Captain Roberts³⁷ of the First Infantry reported from San Simon Station that he had found the Apache Indians to be hostile. The Indians had actually attacked and killed California troops. Carleton, also, had found similar conditions to exist and in one report told how he had established a post in the summer of 1862 at Apache Pass to be known as Fort Bowie, because of the hostile attitude of the Chi-ri-ca-hua Indians.³⁸

From Fort Yuma the next leg of the march was to Pima Villages, a journey which proved to be most fatiguing because of the intense heat suffered and the ever-present alkali dust. Here at Pima Village lived friendly Indians who engaged in agriculture, and who cultivated large quantities of wheat, some of which Carleton was able to purchase.

About half way between Fort Yuma and the Rio Grande River lay the important city of Tucson, Arizona, with a population of 400 or 500 people, mostly Mexicans. A few Americans and foreigners lived there, "principally gamblers and ruffians, traitors to their country — Secessionists."³⁹

By May 25, 1862, Carleton was able to report that not only had Colonel West taken possession of Tucson on May 20 "without firing a shot" but that all secessionists in the Territory apparently had fled.⁴⁰ It was here that Carleton on June 8, proclaimed the Territory of Arizona, occupied by the Column from California, to be under martial law with himself as military governor.⁴¹ On June 28, General Wright approved and confirmed Carleton's proclamation and noted that it was to "remain in force until the civil authority shall be reestablished in the Territory."⁴²

At Tucson Carleton sought to enforce law and order. It was his wish to arrange matters in such fashion "so that when a man does have his throat cut, his house robbed, or his fields ravaged, he may at least have the consolation of knowing there is some law that will reach him who does the injury."⁴³ Even now Carleton was sending to Fort Yuma for confinement "nine of the cutthroats, gamblers, and loafers who have infested this town to the great bodily fear of all good citizens."⁴⁴

July 17, 1862, was an unusual occasion for Carleton and the California Column. On this date Carleton ordered the Column from

With Colonel Carleton and the California Column

California to move from Tucson to the Rio Grande. Moreover, he expressed the view that this was now "the time when every soldier in this column looks forward with a confident hope that he, too, will have the distinguished honor of striking a blow for the Old Stars and Stripes" and when he also feels "that he is the champion of the holiest cause that has ever yet nerved the arm of a patriot."⁴⁵ Carleton himself must have been intrigued for on this occasion he observed that all, especially those who from their own guilt had been so unfortunate as to be prisoners, should remember this occasion. Therefore, he ordered all soldiers under his command now being held in confinement to be released immediately.⁴⁶

In spite of great handicaps the advance guard of the California Column under Lieutenant Colonel E. E. Eyre had succeeded in reaching the Rio Grande in good order on July 4, 1862, and had occupied Fort Thorn, near El Paso, on the following day.⁴⁷ For this feat Carleton expressed great praise, saying,⁴⁸

The energy, enterprise, and resources of Colonel Eyre, as exhibited in his rapid march from Tucson to the Rio Grande; his crossing of that river, and his unlooked-for presence directly upon the heels of the retreating rebels, cannot be too highly appreciated. He exhibited some of the finest qualities of a soldier . . . But for his timely arrival on the Rio Grande, Las Cruces and Mesilla would have both been laid in ashes by the enemy.

Carleton was an extremely able military leader. It will be recalled that the War Department especially requested that he be placed in command of the California Cavalry regiment,⁴⁹ and Governor Downey had informed Lincoln that in his opinion no one would reflect more credit on the State of California than Carleton.⁵⁰ Carleton's position was no doubt due in part to the high esteem he held for the men under his command. Writing to General Canby, Commander of the Department of New Mexico, Carleton reported that his men were "as fine material as any in the service."⁵¹ Again, on June 15, he said that his men were "the finest material I have ever seen and anxious to strike a blow for the cause [of the Union]."⁵²

Looking after his men, Carleton stressed health first, then discipline.⁵³ The success of this philosophy was reflected in the fact that in the march from the Pacific to the Rio Grande from April 13, 1862, to August 8, of the same year, not a single death occurred and there was little sickness.⁵⁴

Carleton's qualities were reflected in other ways. While encamped on the Miembres River in Arizona he learned that some twenty families of men, women, and children at the Pino Alto mines were in want of food because of having been robbed by In-

THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

dians and secessionists. To these people Carleton ordered that provisions consisting of beef, pemmican, flour, and sugar be sent.⁵⁵

In another matter Carleton, in a directive from Franklin, Texas, to the commander of the Confederate troops then at San Antonio, Texas, stated that he had found upon his arrival at this position some twenty odd sick and wounded soldiers of the Confederate army. Moreover, he had been ordered by his superior officer, General Canby, to make these soldiers prisoners of war.⁵⁶ Now, he paroled them, furnished them with forty days rations and medicines, transportation, and a protective escort to guard them from Mexicans or Indians who might attack them. The escort would remain "until a sufficient force from your army is met, to whom they may be transferred, or until they reach some point near San Antonio, where from thence onward they can travel with safety."⁵⁷

Carleton had great faith in his men. In a report to General Canby he said:⁵⁸

We have not crossed the continent thus far to split hairs, but with an earnest resolution to do our duty whatever be our geographical position . . . it would be a sad disappointment to those from California if they should be obliged to retrace their steps without feeling the enemy.

On August 26, 1862, Carleton was sent special orders directing him to relieve General Canby as Commander of the Department of New Mexico.⁵⁹ On September 5, Carleton issued orders transferring his command of the District of Arizona to Colonel Joseph R. West.⁶⁰ On September 21, after entering upon the duties of the new assignment which would remove him from his former association with the California Column,⁶¹ Carleton expressed grateful acknowledgment to the officers and men of that command. He commented as follows:⁶²

Traversing a desert country, that has heretofore been regarded as impracticable for the operations of large bodies of troops, they have reached their destination, and accomplished the object assigned them, not only without loss of any kind, but improved in discipline, in morale, and in every other element of efficiency . . . California has reason to be proud of the sons she has sent across the continent to assist in the great struggle in which our country is now engaged.

CHRONOLOGY — 1861

July 22 — Act authorizing use of volunteers signed by President Lincoln.

August 14 — War Department requested California's Governor Downey for military assistance.

September 2 — Governor Downey reported that the first request for volunteers had been filled and that Colonel James H. Carleton had been assigned to command the unit.

October 14 — Colonel Carleton assumed command of the Southern District of California.

December 18 — Formation of expedition known as the California Column; the command was authorized by General McClellan and assigned to Colonel Carleton.

With Colonel Carleton and the California Column

1862

- April 13 — Expedition left Los Angeles for the Rio Grande River and El Paso, Texas.
 April 29 — Carleton arrived at Fort Yuma, Arizona.
 May 20 — Tucson fell to Colonel Joseph R. West.
 June 8 — Territory of Arizona placed under martial law by Colonel Carleton.
 June 8 — Carleton assigned himself as military Governor of the Territory of Arizona.
 June 22 — Advance Column, under Lieutenant Colonel Edward E. Eyre, was dispatched by Colonel Carleton.
 July 4 — Advance Column arrived at the Rio Grande River.
 July 5 — Advance Guard occupied Fort Thorn, near El Paso.
 July 17 — Carleton ordered the remainder of the California Column at Tucson to move to the Rio Grande River.
 August 8 — Column arrived at the Rio Grande.
 September 2 — Carleton received orders to relieve General Edward R. S. Canby as Commander of the Department of New Mexico.
 September 5 — Colonel West succeeded Carleton as Commander of the District of Arizona.
 September 16 — Carleton arrived at Santa Fé.
 September 18 — Carleton relieved General Canby as Commander of the Department of New Mexico.

ROUTE OF THE CALIFORNIA COLUMN¹

From Los Angeles the California Column traveled easterly through Monte (El Monte) to Riverside, then southeasterly to Temecula, thence to Camp Wright at Oak Grove, then to Warner's Ranch at Warner's Springs. From Warner's Springs the Column proceeded into Mexico at a point near Calexico, eastward through Algodones, then to Fort Yuma. From Fort Yuma the Column journeyed to Gila Bend and continued beyond for another sixty miles to Pima Villages. From Pima Villages the Column marched southeasterly to Tucson, thence easterly (marked by present day highway 80) to Benson, Willcox, and San Simon. After crossing into New Mexico the Column continued through Lordsburg to Cooke's Springs, then to Mesilla just across the Rio Grande River (near the present city of Las Cruces), and finally to El Paso.

1. Colonel Carleton's marching orders to all troops and trains, April 21, 1862. *O. R.* 50, part 1, pp. 1017-1018.

APPROXIMATE DISTANCES

<i>from one main camp to another in the March of the California Column.</i>		
From	To	Miles
Los Angeles	Camp Wright	120 ¹
Camp Wright	Fort Yuma, Arizona	180 ¹
Fort Yuma	Pima Villages, Arizona	200 ²
Pima Villages	Tucson, Arizona	81 ²
Tucson	El Paso, Texas	369 ²
TOTAL		950

¹ As reported by: McNulty Report, *O.R.*, p. 138.

² As reported by: J. Ross Browne, *Adventures in the Apache Country*. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1869, p. 292.

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2. *Ibid.* See also Richard H. Orton, comp. *Records of California Men in the War of the Rebellion, 1861-1867* (Sacramento: State Office, 1890), p. 5.
3. Cameron to Downey, August 14, 1861, Orton, *op. cit.*, p. 322.
4. Report of Surgeon McNulty, *Official Records, loc. cit.*
5. Cameron to Downey, August 15, 1861, Orton, *op. cit.*, p. 322.
6. Downey to Lincoln, September 2, 1861, *Ibid.*
7. *Ibid.*
8. Report of Surgeon McNulty, *Official Records, loc. cit.*
9. *Ibid.*
10. General Orders No. 28, October 20, 1861, *Official Records, op. cit.*, p. 666.

THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

11. General Orders No. 2, October 14, 1861, *Official Records, op. cit.*, p. 659.
12. Editor's note, *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War* (4 vols.; Grant-Lee Edition; New York: The Century Co., 1884-1888), Vol. I, Pt. 1, p. 33.
13. Wright to Thomas, December 9, 1861, Orton, *op. cit.*, p. 46.
14. Carleton to West, October 6, 1861, Orton, *op. cit.*, p. 323.
15. *Ibid.*
16. *Ibid.*
17. *Ibid.*
18. Wright to Thomas, December 9, 1861, *Official Records, op. cit.*, pp. 752-53; Orton, *op. cit.*, p. 46.
19. McClellan's authorization, December 18, 1861, *Official Records, op. cit.*, p. 753; Orton, *ibid.*
20. Report of Surgeon McNulty, *Official Records, loc. cit.*
21. Orton, *op. cit.*, p. 32 ff.
22. *Ibid.*, pp. 68-167.
23. *Ibid.*, pp. 321-380; 668-719.
24. *Ibid.*, pp. 209-217.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 188.
26. *Ibid.*
27. *Ibid.*
28. Editor's note *Battles and Leaders op. cit.*, Vol. II, Pt. 2, p. 698.
29. Eyre to Cutler, July 6, 1862, Orton, *op. cit.*, pp. 58-60.
30. Report of Surgeon McNulty, *Official Records, loc. cit.*
31. *Ibid.*
32. *Ibid.*
33. Roberts to Cutler, July 19, 1862, *Official Records, op. cit.*, pp. 128-29.
34. *Ibid.*
35. Carleton to Drum, September 20, 1862, *Official Records, op. cit.*, pp. 100-105; Orton, *op. cit.*, pp. 64-67.
36. *Ibid.*; *ibid.*
37. Roberts to Cutler, July 19, 1862, *Official Records, loc. cit.*
38. Carleton to Drum, September 20, 1862, *Official Records, loc. cit.*, Orton, *loc. cit.*
39. Report of Surgeon McNulty, *Official Records, loc. cit.*
40. Carleton to Drum, May 25, 1862, *Official Records, op. cit.*, pp. 88-89; Orton, *op. cit.*, pp. 51-52.
41. Carleton's Proclamation, June 8, 1862, *Official Records, op. cit.*, pp. 96-97; Orton, *op. cit.*, pp. 55-56.
42. Orton, *op. cit.*, p. 56.
43. Carleton to Drum, June 10, 1862, Orton, *op. cit.*, pp. 52-53.
44. *Ibid.*
45. Carleton's General Orders No. 10, July 17, 1862, *Official Records, op. cit.*, pp. 90-91; Orton, *op. cit.*, pp. 62-63.
46. *Ibid.*; *ibid.*
47. Eyre to Cutler, July 6, 1862, *Official Records, op. cit.*, pp. 120-124; Orton, *op. cit.*, pp. 58-60.
48. Carleton to Drum, September 20, 1862, *Official Records, loc. cit.*; Orton, *loc. cit.*
49. *Supra* p. 1 (See footnote 5).
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51. Carleton to Canby, May 3, 1862, *Official Records, op. cit.*, p. 95.
52. Carleton to Canby, June 15, 1862, *Official Records, op. cit.*, pp. 97-98.
53. Report of Surgeon McNulty, *Official Records, loc. cit.*
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57. *Ibid.*
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60. Carleton's General Orders No. 20, September 5, 1862, *Official Records, op. cit.*, pp. 115-16.
61. Carleton's General Orders No. 84, September 18, 1862, *Official Records, op. cit.*, p. 116.
62. Carleton's General Orders No. 85, September 21, 1862, *Official Records, op. cit.*, p. 145.