

Confederates in Southern California

By Helen B. Walters

HISTORY BOOKS imply that the pacific coast bore little part in the war opening in 1861. The role of California is dismissed with such bias and inaccurate remarks as: "At the outbreak of the war it seemed that she (California) was in danger of joining the South but she speedily espoused the Union cause . . ." Or, "The Pacific Coast States of California and Oregon were so utterly beyond the range of military operation that filial love furnished the only pledge of abiding loyalty to the Union."²

This point of view was far from the facts. In Southern California, for instance, groups actually planned to join the Confederacy. Wrote General E. V. Sumner in his first report to Washington after arriving in California to take over the Department of the Pacific, "I have no doubt there is some deep scheming to draw California into the Secession movement . . . in the first place as the Republic of the Pacific, expecting afterwards to induce her to join the Southern Confederacy."³ The idea of "filial love" becomes whimsical in the light of a quotation from a letter to the Union Secretary of War, Cameron. This letter complained that most state officials of California were known Secessionists, and the rest hostile to Washington.⁴ That was the real position of California.

Despite the remoteness of California, both North and South determined to possess her. The reason was not sentimental. Said General U. S. Grant: "I do not know what we would do in this great national emergency were it not for the gold sent from California." And how much did California's mines produce? The *Los Angeles Star* of January 12, 1861, states, "the amount of treasure shipped from California during 1860 was \$42,287,839." Small wonder that North and South began dueling for the State.

Fully to understand the struggle for California, we must ex-

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amine the ties binding the South and Southern California. The first man to stress the need for communication between these sections was Lieut. Edward F. Beale, who served in the conquest of California in 1846. Study of the Crimean War convinced him of the superiority of camels in arid regions. A freight camel could travel thirty miles a day carrying cargo up to a thousand pounds. Faster animals could travel a hundred miles a day. These, he felt, would solve the problem of the Arizona desert.

Lieut. Beale laid his plan before Secretary of War, Jefferson Davis, who in turn took it to Congress with his recommendation. By 1858 governmental caravans were moving from California's Fort Tejon to Arizona and New Mexico carrying freight, messages and, more important, supplies for construction of a military road.

When this road was opened, Southern California was linked directly to the South. The San Antonio and San Diego Stage Company began regular service and despite high fares (\$80.00 from Tucson to San Diego) westward travel increased. Citizens from Southern States poured into the West. By 1858 two stages operated weekly between Los Angeles and the Missouri River. The Butterfield Overland Stage Company added new services to Memphis, St. Louis and Yuma. The romance of their Concord coaches, their 1,500 spirited horses and 1,000 interpid drivers form an exciting saga.

Related to the stage line was the mail service. At the close of the Pierce Administration, Congress awakened to the need of subsidizing mail routes. A mail line was costly, due not only to personnel and equipment, but also because of the necessity of maintaining fortified depots in Indian territory.

The Overland California Mail Act authorized the Postmaster-General to select a route and contract for transportation of mail between the Mississippi Valley and San Francisco. He chose a southern route and awarded the contract to the Butterfield Overland Stage Company. From terminals at St. Louis and Memphis, its itinerary crossed Arkansas, Texas, New Mexico and Arizona to Fort Yuma and thence to Los Angeles and San Francisco. Though

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three weeks were required for mail to cover this distance it was a vast improvement over the four to six weeks required by steamship. Soon the Pony Express cut this time in half but also increased the hazards. Riders were often waylaid permanently or temporarily by bullets and arrows.

Besides the bonds of stage and mail between Southern California and the South there was the prospect of a railroad. The Gold Rush of '49 had speeded the clamor for action. While disputes raged concerning routes, engineers drew plans and promoters jingled money. Finally Congress authorized Secretary of War Davis to survey for a route. After two years of preparation Lieut. Beal's caravans began laying the roadbed. Later Beale's Road became Highway 66 and the Santa Fe laid tracks approximately along the original route.

By far the strongest bond between South and Southwest was blood. By 1861 the population of California was 400,000 of which "about three eighths were natives of slave-holding states."⁵ Ambitious sons of the South sought acreage on which to establish plantations similar to their fathers. The Mexican War had publicized California and many veterans, upon being mustered out, sent for their families. Others came for gold. These newcomers settled where they had friends or relatives. Thus Los Angeles became predominantly Southern. One of its suburban towns, El Monte, was settled by Democrats from Texas who became known as the "Monte Boys."

There was reason for Southerners liking Southern California. They found life there similar to "home." Both lands possessed pastoral contentment where time weighed lightly. Whereas they left an economic system based on plantations, they found one based on *ranchos*. They exchanged raising cotton for raising cattle. At "home" work was done by Negroes; in the West by Indians. In both places the natives were friendly, food abundant, money easy and opportunities awaiting.

It is impossible to ascertain the exact number of Southern sympathizers in California. When General Sumner assumed command in the spring of '61 he wrote, "The Secession Party numbers

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about 32,000 men.”⁶ He apparently counted only males able to bear arms excluding their families which would have doubtlessly doubled or tripled that figure.

As early as 1849 there was open talk of organizing the West Coast into a Pacific Republic. It will be recalled that the so-called California Chivalry Party recommended a separate administration for the Pacific States as a precaution in case the original federation of Atlantic states proved unwieldy. Talk of a rift in the Union was not adjudged disloyal or traitorous. In 1859, Andrew Moulder, State Superintendent of Public Instruction, openly urged the State Legislature to establish a Pacific University which, if the nation split, could be converted into a West Point for the Pacific.

Along with dissatisfaction over the national status was strife between the northern and southern parts of the State. The north, with San Francisco as its hub, had developed commerce and manufacturing and delighted in dubing the southern section “the cow counties.” Rancheros resented this and demanded legislation equally favorable to agriculture. But money and the balance of power clung to the northern half.

Southern California was also plagued by labor trouble. Indians formed the bulk of laborers and contrasted unfavorably with Negro slaves. Whereas Negroes as a race were happy and loyal, Indians were regarded as sullen and treacherous. The Indian was mentally dull, unaffected by religion, lazy, shiftless, addicted to drunkenness and willing to work for the price of a night’s debauché. Agricultural counties wanted Negro labor which was impossible against votes of northern counties. Thus grew the idea of dividing the State.

In 1859 Andrés Pico introduced into the California Legislature a bill authorizing an election to determine the status of southern counties. They could vote to remain with the north or to secede and form the Territory of Colorado.

Feelings ran high. Ballots were counted. By a two-thirds vote secession carried. Southern counties were free to set up their own

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economic system favorable to *ranchos*, vineyards and citrus groves. The plan was rushed to Washington for endorsement.

While Southern California made plans for celebration history accelerated its pace and “separation” swept the South. Washington was plunged into confusion and Southern California’s peaceful vote for withdrawal was forgotten.

Approximately ten days later the Pony Express brought news of the fall of Fort Sumter. In Southern California the war at once became a holy crusade. Northern sympathizers put up flags. Southern sympathizers, having no emblem, used the Bear Flag as evidence of their stand for States’ Rights. In Los Angeles, the center of resistance, the Bella Union Hotel hung up a huge painting of General Beauregard.

State newspapers took sides. The *Los Angeles Star* boldly placed responsibility for the war on Lincoln. Atrocity tales grow. Union men were pictured as fiends who schemed to ruin the South and who indulged in such pastimes as rape and “tar and feathering.” On the other hand, Southerners became monsters with invisible hoof and tail who also enjoyed “tarring parties” and who incited Indians to harvest Union scalps.

Small communities declared their fealties and intimidated dissenters. San Bernardino became a center of Secessionists. Bear and Holcomb Valleys established Southern enlistment camps where volunteers were organized, equipped and marched to the Confederacy. El Monte opened a training camp for Southern recruits where drilling was carried on in an open field not ten miles from Los Angeles. So quick on the trigger were the “Monte Boys” under their Bear Flag that Union authorities preferred to look the other way and live.

Schools were disrupted. When it was discovered that most teachers were Secession sympathizers, Federal authorities demanded an oath of loyalty. Many teachers refused and fled to the South. Those remaining found themselves in the embarrassing position of having no pupils. Southerners refused to have their children taught by Union teachers.

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Courts were plunged into confusion and dockets cluttered with cases against citizens accused of loyalty to the South. Local authorities resorted to the practice of hailing disloyal persons into court and forcing them to take the oath of allegiance to the Union. Lawyers indulged in vigorous defense and demurs; judges of Secessionist sentiment delayed sentence. In desperation came forth an order requiring the oath from all persons using the courts.

Passing weeks sharpened lines of fealty. Stores suffered. Southern sympathizers boycotted Union shopkeepers and vice versa. Churches divided, ministers praying for each president and his army. Pulpits were draped to denote the sentiment of the congregation. Sunday School children wore buttons to proclaim their loyalty.

Los Angeles became the hub of Secession sentiment. In April 1861 wrote General Sumner: "I have found it necessary to withdraw troops from Fort Mojave and place them at Los Angeles. There is more danger of dissatisfaction at that place than any other in the State."⁷ Two companies of dragoons were sent to curb San Bernardino's cavalry who habitually cheered for President Davis. From Fort Tejon Lieut. Carr requested reinforcements against the Indians who, he claimed, were being incited to rise against the Union. San Diego begged for guns and ammunition. Santa Barbara wanted troops to put down local Secessionists. Fort Yuma needed men to check a Confederate force reported advancing from Texas. Since Yuma was the gateway to Southern California the General sent scouts to investigate. When they reported that troops commanded by Confederate General Silby were pushing toward the Colorado River, he rushed two companies of infantry.

Then the War Department at Washington beckoned the regular Army from California and General Sumner found himself with the problem of recruiting men to defend the State. Baffled, he wrote the War Department: "It is very difficult thing to raise volunteers in a State where there is a strong party opposed to the Government."⁸

By September 1861, Southern California seemed so near the

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Confederacy that General Sumner wrote: "Dissatisfaction in the southern part of the State is increasing and becoming dangerous and it is necessary to throw reinforcement into that section immediately. The rebels are organizing, collecting supplies and evidently preparing to receive a force from Texas."⁹ His fears were justified because the previous July the Confederacy had authorized an expedition from Texas to conquer New Mexico and Arizona. Texas lost no time getting into saddles and on the march.

Not only was General Sumner distraught over the pleas for aid but he was rendered almost helpless by disruption of his army personnel. Within two months after Lincoln's inauguration a third (some books state a half) of the officers of the Sixth California Regiment resigned to take positions in the Confederate Army. Their exodus not merely stranded the rank and file of Union troops but cast a doubt on the loyalty of remaining officers. One such was Capt. W. S. Hancock, a promising young officer with a southern wife. Sent to Los Angeles by Washington to protect Federal property his allegiance was sought by both sides. The North based its claim on his military training and record; the South pushed its claim through his wife. Confederate arguments were even presented by Albert Sidney Johnston (later a Confederate General) who was in Los Angeles secretly recruiting Southern volunteers. It was reported that Richmond proffered the Captain the rank of Major General but to no avail.

Although California Secessionists were contemptuously dubbed "rebels" they were far from being an ignorant and penniless fringe of society. They were citizens of ability and respectability as revealed by a letter to General Sumner from a group of San Francisco businessmen: "A vast majority of our present State officials are avowed Secessionists . . . Every appointment made by our governor within the last three months indicates his entire sympathy and cooperation with those plotting to sever California from her allegiance to the Union."¹⁰

The Governor had allies in his pro-Southern sympathy. Assemblyman Morrison of Los Angeles spoke in the Legislature "in favor of letting rebellious States take their own course." Another

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assemblyman proclaimed that 30,000 California men were ready to defend Secession if the Government attempted to enforce Federal laws. Representative Kungle of Yorba offered a speech defending slavery. These men spoke not from the shadows of society but from the spotlight. They were sufficiently confident of public approval to defy Federal authority.

It was natural that citizens of definite sentiment organize. One strong group was the Methodist Church South. Said Bancroft in his *History of California*, "The Methodist Church South formed a factor in anti-war, anti-administration and pro-slavery."¹¹

Small communities organized secret societies to secure confederate volunteers, equip and train them. At Oroville a company of two hundred was raised ostensibly to join the Union. By a ruse the North was tricked into defraying their cost. Then the men marched off to the Confederate Army. Many schemes were used to raise money for equipment. If barbecues and jollifications did not succeed a shotgun did. Bullion being transported by stagecoach was deemed a donation beyond resistance. In one instance the robbers sent Wells Fargo Company a receipt for their loot plus a note of thanks for the Confederate contribution.

Besides small subversive groups there were three large secret societies. The aims of the Committee of Thirty, the Knights of the Golden Circle and Knights of the Columbian Star were approximately identical. All strove to cripple support of the Union. Their success was largely due to the demoralizing fear they engendered by oath, grip, password, and surreptitious sign of recognition. They operated like a modern propaganda machine. By whispering campaign they discouraged enlistment in the "lost" Union cause, they fomented distrust in Union officers. They praised Union desertion. So effective was their work that whole communities stood solid for the South. In Los Angeles one Charlie Jenkins had to ride to San Francisco before he dared enlist in the Union Army.

Knights of both the Golden Circle and Columbian Star kept firearms and ammunition for a so-called hunting trip of several days duration. It was known that they planned to seize Federal

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offices and equipment as soon as a Confederate force crossed the State's border. Eagerly they watched the Yuma gateway. Despite the Union threat that "any man who put his feet into a Golden Circle would put his head in a hempen one" membership in the Knights increased. By August '61 there were reputed to be 20,000 Knights of the Golden Circle. Hunt in his *New California the Golden* asserts that by the end of the war the combined membership of Knights was around 50,000.

Secessionists used other ways to hamper the Union cause. They refused to accept U. S. legal tender. California's Legislature even nullified the Federal Legal Tender Act by passing a "specific contract act" permitting parties to specify the type of money involved. Although Attorney-General Pixley condemned as traitors those who refused to accept greenbacks at face value Californians continued to discount them according to battle reports. With each Confederate victory they fell until in 1863 they reached the low of thirty-five cents.

Southern sympathizers waged more than a negative warfare. They organized guerrilla bands to operate on land and sea. In 1856 the Declaration of Paris had abolished privateering by signature of all major nations except the U. S. So, when President Davis announced that he would issue letters of marque and reprisal to vessels willing to privateer, the Union shuddered and geared for trouble. When came the rumor that a privateering ship was being equipped in China, Union prows turned in that direction. Then came similar rumors from San Diego, Los Angeles, Manila, South America, Canada. The western fleet was distraught.

Responding to a report of mysterious activity on Santa Catalina Island off Los Angeles, the Union Navy found a strange assortment of machinery labelled gold mining equipment. Already jittery it was easy for the officers to believe local rumors that the mining tale was a cloak to cover Confederate privateering. Much as the Federal Government needed the gold the military men dared not risk privateering so laborers and machinery were removed to the mainland. To make the clean-up permanent a Union camp, The Isthmus, was established on the island.

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As rumors assailed the fleet, General Sumner issued an edict to end all privateering. "Any vessel sailing under the Secessionist flag, so-called, which shall enter or attempt to enter any of the waters of the U. S. on this coast will be immediately captured by troops stationed there. Any such vessel which shall fail to come to or surrender on being duly warned, or which shall attempt to escape will be fired into and sunk if necessary."¹²

Soon a new problem arose. American sympathy with Mexicans in their fight against Maximilian prompted contributions of arms and ammunitions. These were loaded on clipper ships and sent to Mexico. Then came the reports that the ships did not arrive. Not until the seizure of the clipper *J. W. Chapman* did the mystery clear. The vessel was part of a scheme to capture a coastwise steamer, outfit and use her to capture others thus build up a fleet of privateers designed to waylay gold marked for Washington.

Though the scheme failed its results were far reaching. Union steamers bearing cargo that might have aided the Confederacy refused to put to sea. Insurance rates mounted to a prohibitive peak. In desperation Washington ordered all gold shipments suspended.

Southern guerrillas went after California gold from another angle. Wagonloads of ore or metal coming from mines were strangely bogged down or detoured or vanished entirely. This resulted in Union officers setting up an elaborate and costly guard system.

These guards had to be quartered in camps. At Drum Barracks in San Pedro (now Wilmington) the Federal Government spent \$1,000,000 for equipment. There was also Camp Latham in Baldwin Hills which had the assignment to prevent a Confederate landing on Ballona Creek. These were only two of many.

Guerrilla bands had a spy system which informed them of gold shipments. Despite the fact that stages carried armed guards a volley from ambush often transferred the bullion to Confederate destination.

Guerrillas fully comprehended the demoralizing effect upon

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an enemy of having his communications disrupted. They incited Indians of Arizona to prey upon mail routes. Pony Express riders and stages accordingly fell. However, the Indians failed to note the distinction between Northern and Southern riders. Apaches almost completely halted mail service.

Without doubt many guerrillas were plain highwaymen but most of them were motivated by patriotism with nothing to gain and everything to lose. Each guerrilla bore the cost of his horse, weapon, ammunition and possible surgical fees. His risk was great and his only reward the satisfaction of serving a Cause dear to his heart.

Union men detailed to oppose the guerrillas were enlisted as California Volunteers and garrisoned in the camps previously mentioned. Their main operations were in Los Angeles. It was common to see Union sentinels pacing verandas of hotels where Southerners congregated. One such hotel was the Bella Union and, for a time, the United States Hotel. Union soldiers were forbidden to enter these portals when off duty.

The California Volunteers resented their constant guard duty. They found no glory in pacing a hotel veranda to an obligato of insults. Nor were they insensible to local hatred which was so intense that soldiers dared not saunter about town singly and at night not even in pairs. They were well aware of the armed status of the citizenry for by 1860 all men boldly wore weapons of some sort.

Southern California's contribution to the Confederacy was not entirely obstructionist work. The State contributed men. There is no complete record of rank and file soldiers who joined the Confederate Army because enlistments were secret. Secret centers formed volunteers into troops, equipped them and sent them South destroying all records as a safety precaution. Bolder towns openly drilled recruits and escorted them South. Many *ranchos* equipped small bands without bothering to report their number. In Los Angeles County alone well over 250 men were known to have joined the Confederate Army. Fort Yuma reported groups

varying in size from twelve to 185 passing through enroute to Texas. Then fell the order that all Confederate reinforcements attempting to cross the Colorado River should be interned. Thereafter Southern recruits moved at night and in disguise.

Aside from enlisted personnel southern California supplied many officers. With Albert Sidney Johnston went ranking men from dragoon and infantry. Between one third and one half of the officers of the Sixth California Regiment resigned to accept Confederate positions. When General Winfield Scott was asked where he expected to find generals for the Union Army he replied, "That is our great problem. Unfortunately for us the South has taken most of the higher officers."¹³

California contributed three generals and a diplomat. Joseph Lancaster Brent, authority on land titles, sailed in '61 to offer his services to President Davis. By accident, on the same steamer, was General Sumner with his staff; and also Senator Gwin. Mutual allegiance to the South drew Brent and Gwin together. General Sumner became suspicious and ordered both arrested. However, the two men dumped overboard their documents and deprived the Union of evidence. Accordingly both men were eventually released. Brent joined the Southern Army and rose to be Brigadier General.

Washington made an effort to hold Senator Gwin by offering him the rank of Major General. Though a similar offer came from President Davis, Gwin preferred diplomatic service. He accepted an appointment to represent the South in Europe, where he almost gained French recognition for the Confederate States.

Colonel John Bankhead Magruder was a popular military idol in Southern California who had earned the titles of "Galoping Magruder" and "Prince John." He cast his lot with the South and was given the rating of Major General.

California's most famous contribution was Albert Sidney Johnston. Commander of the Department of the Pacific at the outbreak of war he was torn between two loyalties, one of blood and one of duty. Though history records no overt act of disloyalty rumors bombarded Washington. When General Sumner was

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ordered to the coast, General Johnston resigned and returned to his home in Los Angeles.

In Southern California, Johnston recruited for the South. Finally with fanfare he led a troop of men from town. Though Fort Yuma had been alerted to trap him he maneuvered them safely to Richmond. Recognizing his ability, President Davis promoted him to Department Commander.

No other section of the country — not the acknowledged territory of the North or of the South — was more keenly coveted than was California. In the Southland, the struggle though but a miniature reflection of the deadly contest being waged between the States, was intense and extremely bitter.

NOTES :

1. Rhodes, *History of U. S.* Vol 5, PP 255, 256.
2. Schouler, *History of U. S.* Vol 6, p 90.
3. Kennedy, *Contest for California in 1861*, p 210.
4. *Ibid.*, p 218.
5. *Ibid.*
6. *Rebellion Records*, Series 1, Vol L, Part 1, p 363.
7. California Adjutant-General's Office 1861-1867, p 16.
8. *Ibid.*, p 24.
9. *Ibid.*
10. Kennedy, *Contest for California in 1861*, p 218.
11. Vol 7., 309.
12. California Adjutant-General's Office 1861-1867, p 16.
13. Foster, *Abraham Lincoln's World*, p 291.

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