



A SHORT HISTORY
OF
THE 1st COLORADO VOLUNTEERS
COLORADO TERRITORIAL MILITIA
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Shortly after the start of the Civil War, the Confederacy set in motion a plan developed by Brig. Gen. Henry Sibley and President Jefferson Davis. It called for Sibley's Texas troops to march from Texas up into the Rio Grande valley of New Mexico, and to gain control of Albuquerque and Santa Fe. Then they would move toward Fort Union in northeast New Mexico, capturing its large supplies of ammunition, medical goods, etc. Once Ft. Union was taken, its supplies would enable the Confederates to march north along the front range of the Rockies, taking Denver City, and controlling the precious-metal mining fields of Colorado. The wealth from the mines would be used to finance a Confederate drive through Arizona to the California coast, breaking the Union naval blockade, and, hopefully, gaining foreign-power recognition of the Confederacy.

That dream was never to be realized. The main cause of its failure was a man named William Gilpin. He was a West Point graduate whom President Lincoln had appointed as Governor of Colorado Territory, on March 22, 1861. Gilpin, deeply concerned about the threat posed by large numbers of Confederate sympathizers in Colorado, began to raise a regiment of volunteers for the Union cause. He did this in spite of uncertain authorization to do so from the War Dept., and in spite of a depleted Territorial Treasury. By late August of 1861, regimental and company officers had been commissioned for the 1st Colorado Volunteer Infantry, and recruiting had begun for the 2nd Colorado Regiment.

In December 1861, Sibley's Confederates had moved from Ft. Bliss into what is now New Mexico. In response, elements of the 1st and 2nd Colorado Regiments had been sent south to Ft. Garland, Ft. Craig, Ft. Union, and Ft. Wise (later Ft. Lyons).

Sibley moved on north, orders were sent to Colorado by Maj. Gen. David Hunter, (commanding the Dept. of Kansas), for all available Colorado troops to be sent south to aid Col. E.R.S. Canby, commanding the Dept. of New Mexico at Ft. Craig.

On Feb. 22nd, the day after Canby's men were defeated by Sibley at the battle at Verde, elements of the 1st Colorado left Denver, marching an average of 40 miles a day, in winter snows, they pushed up with other companies of the 1st Colorado from Ft. Wise. They reached Raton Pass on Mar. 5th. From there, they pushed on to Ft. Union, covering 92 miles in no 36 hour stretch. They reached Ft. Union on Mar. 11th, and Col. John Slough of the 1st Colorado assumed command of all Union forces there.

Learning that the Confederates had occupied Albuquerque, but were now resting in Santa Fe, Col. Slough gave his men a much-needed rest.

But on Mar. 22nd, they set out on the road to Santa Fe. On March 25th, they reached Koslowski's Ranch, at the eastern end of Glorieta Pass. Col. Slough then directed Maj. John Chivington to take 400 men of the 1432 Union troops available, and advance up the Pass toward Santa Fe.

In the meantime, the Confederates had left part of their men to occupy Albuquerque. Two columns moved on from there: Maj. Charles Pyron took Santa Fe, then later moved up Glorieta Pass toward Ft. Union; Lt. Col. W.F. Scurry led his column through Galisteo, heading toward Glorieta Pass from the south, and planning to unite with Pyron there.

On March 26, 1862, Chivington's men ran headlong into Pyron's 5th Texas troops at Apache Canyon, on the western slope of Glorieta Pass. The "Little Gettysburg of the West" had begun.

Chivington attacked the Confederates so fiercely that they were forced to retreat, and Pyron called on Col Scurry for help. Chivington, knowing he was outnumbered, regrouped his men, and pulled back to Pigeon's Ranch, just east of the summit of the pass. There he waited for the rest of Col. Slough's men to arrive.

Lt. Col. Scurry reached Pyron early on the 27th, but because of the vigor of Chivington's attack, Scurry expected to be attacked by a large Union force, and Scurry went into a defensive position! This was not a totally illogical act, since one Confederate trooper who experienced Chivington's attack at first hand described the "Pikes Peakers" as "Regular Demons!"

Early on the 28th, both forces began to grope toward each other. But Col. Slough had again detached Chivington's Battalion; this time they marched over and around the mountains to the south of the pass, seeking to fall on the Confederate rear guard. In the meantime, Slough and Scurry had begun the battle just west of Pigeon's Ranch. The fighting was furious, and the Confederate charges forced the Union troops to fall back twice to new positions. Slough had committed all his men, and hoped that Scurry would not suspect that Chivington's detachment was missing. Late in the afternoon, a stand-off had developed, with both sides nearly worn-out.

Meanwhile, Chivington caught the entire Confederate supply train at Johnson's Ranch. His men burned and destroyed the

of wagons, horses, and supplies, and they withdrew back over the mountains taking with them their prisoners.

When Scurry heard of this disaster, he called for a cease-fire, which Slough was glad to grant. The Confederates held the field, with Slough pulling his outnumbered men back to Koslowski's Ranch. For losing the supply train was such a blow that Scurry felt compelled to draw back to Santa Fe.

The loss of the supply train was crucial, because the people of the country-side had proved hostile to Sibley's attempts to gain needed supplemental food. They were now in hostile country, with their own supplies gone, and little chance to replenish them.

Sibley was forced to head back towards Texas, and the Confederates faced a brutal and tragic retreat, with many of the brave men dying from hunger, thirst and heat. The Confederates never again mounted any serious threat to New Mexico and Colorado. The dream of marching to the western sea was dead.

There is an ironic aftermath to the whole campaign. Gov. Gilpin was removed from office because he had issued unauthorized warrants on the Federal Treasury to equip and train the Colorado troops. Yet it is likely that these same troops were responsible for saving the West for the Union! They also may well have prevented the Confederacy from gaining foreign recognition by Britain and France. But while the Union was ungrateful to him, Coloradoans never forgot what Gov. Gilpin had done, and they honored him until his death.

After the Battle of Glorieta Pass, Col. Slough had resigned in protest over Canby's

... Sibley vigorously, and Chivington was elected Colonel of the 1st Colorado Regt. (Vol. 1).

For the balance of the Civil War, elements of the 1st Colo. were detached over the whole South West, protecting the settlers from Indian attacks. Chivington was later appointed Commander of all Indian forces in Colorado. Eventually, the 1st Colorado was re-organized as a Cavalry Regt.

In later years, Chivington was in command of the 3rd Colorado and 3 companies of the 1st Colo. at the tragedy of Sand Creek. The resulting scandalous reaction by many left a blot on his name that is unresolved to this day.

Following the end of the Civil War, the 1st Colorado was "mustered out" of Federal service.

Many historians have paid little attention to the Civil War in the western territories, and have failed to appreciate the importance of these Territorial soldiers. Yet, they had an effect on the course of the War far out of proportion to their numbers. Without the bravery of the men of the 1st and 2nd Colorado Regiments, and the leadership of men like Gilpin, Slough, and Chivington, the South might well have won its independence, and American history would have been far different from what it was.

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In 1977, as a result of the renewed interest in Colorado history after the Centennial and Bi-Centennial celebrations, the 1st Colorado Volunteer Regiment was reactivated, as part of the Colorado Territorial Militia. The new group is a non-profit organization of those people who are interested in recreating and preserving the history and values of those brave men who were such an integral part of early Colorado history.

The C.T.M. includes both active and inactive supporters. Some active members form the 1st Colorado Regt., made up of the 117th Cavalry, the 146th Field Artillery, and the 157th Infantry. Others are members of the 3rd Cavalry Regiment, from the Indian Wars period. Both Regiments fit themselves out in authentic period uniforms and equipment, and take part in drill, parades, honor guards, school presentations, and many other activities.

The inactive members form a "reserve" unit, or are members of the "Colorado Colonels" and support the Militia financially, and through participation in programs and social events. Many wives are supporters, and actively help plan social events and parties for the children of members.

The first Commander of the reactivated 1st Colorado Regiment was Colonel Ron Bramstedt. Presently commanding is Col. Leo Butcher.

The Colorado Territorial Militia invites interested persons to join with us in this exciting re-creation of our State's history.

REFERENCE WORK:

The best single volume book on the battle of Glorieta Pass is:

Colorado Volunteers In The Civil War,

"The New Mexico Campaign In 1862"

by William Clarke Whitford.

First published in 1906, it was re-issued by Rio Grande Press in 1971.

See also:

"The Confederate Invasion Of New Mexico and Arizona", by George H. Pettis, in Battles And Leaders Of The Civil War, Vol. II, pp. 103-111. New York: Thomas Yoseloff, Inc.; 1956,