

THE ROAD TO GLORIETA



COLORADO VOLUNTEERS



"Soon I had buried my melancholy and found around our campfire the boys who know no fear nor sorrow!"
- Ovando J. Hollister

After Sibley's Texans retreated from New Mexico, the Colorado troops commanded by Colonel John M. Chivington spent the first part of May of 1862 camped at Valverde, along the banks of the Rio Grande. They lived on half rations of flour and beef, but still found the downtime pleasant. The weather was fine, duty light, and discipline neither too lax nor too binding. According to Ovando Hollister; "The greatest trouble [was] want of tobacco. There [was] none in the country and two plugs per week per company [was] the allowance." During this time, General Canby was still considering active operations against the Texans, and about the middle of May the Coloradoans were advanced to a more barren campsite, below Fort Craig. The new camp, situated on a bluff, half a mile above the river channel, was a disagreeable change. "It was covered with wild locust, grease-wood and numerous varieties of thorn bushes, populated by rattlesnakes, centipedes, tarantulas, lizards and horned toads, while the air was alive with mosquitoes, gnats and house-flies." Here the regiments spent the next couple of months in relative inactivity, broken only by occasional rumors of Texan movement or reports of hostile Indians. (1)

The immediate reason for the Coloradoans' idleness was a continued shortage of supplies. General Canby wanted to move against Colonel Steele's troops in Confederate Arizona, but was well aware of the destitute condition of the Mesilla Valley. Intelligence reports clearly warned the Federal commander, that no army could subsist in the valley unless it brought its own provisions. Sibley and Steele had pressed all available supplies on the American side of the river, and it was believed, that there would "be a famine among the people at Mesilla, Las Cruces, Doña Ana, and Picacho." Taking this into account, Canby felt, that Chivington's troops needed at least a forty day supply of rations, before they could advance. The General confidently expected to be prepared in

this respect by the 1st of June. Several factors, however, worked against him. The destitution of the New Mexico Territory, inefficient local flour contractors, and flooding of the Rio Grande, which inundated long stretches of valley roads, all delayed his plans. (2)

In mid-June, two Mexicans reported to Colonel Chivington that forces from California were advancing on Tucson. Several days later five men arrived, from the Pino Alto mining district in Arizona, and confirmed the rumor. These five said they saw Sherod Hunter's Confederates, with a captured Union captain (See *the Road to Glorieta p.363*). The captain was identified as William McCleave, and his captured party were reported as advance scouts for a column from California, commanded by General James H. Carleton. Chivington quickly forwarded the intelligence to General Canby, who found the news conceivable, but circumstantial. This was the first word Canby received of General Carleton's approach, and he was having difficulty accepting it. Replying to Chivington, Canby wrote; "I cannot think that any large force would have been sent from California without [my] being advised of it. It is more probable it is a detachment from the force at Fort Yuma, sent to Tucson for the purpose of acquiring information." (3)

Largely ignorant of the approach of General Carleton's California Column, Edward Canby continued to promulgate his plans to move against Steele's Texans. He ordered Chivington to prepare an expeditionary force, consisting of sixteen companies of infantry, eight companies of cavalry, and one or two batteries. This force, wrote Canby, was to "be put in the most perfect condition for the field that is possible, so that there may be no delay in the movement after the supplies have been received." Abundant provisions from the East were now near at hand, and with them, considerable means of transportation. The Union commander felt his preparations were nearly complete and told Chivington to hold his troops in readiness. Mule transportation for the baggage train was being rapidly prepared and would be sent down as soon as possible. Corn for the cavalry and artillery horses were also on their way, as was clothing, which was expected at Fort Union in a matter of days. (4)

On June 20, 1862, Canby received a telegram containing his first hard evidence of the California Column's approach. After, that things moved quickly. By early July, a party sent from Fort Craig met with Carleton's advance at Ojo de la Vaca, about 140 miles southwest of the fort. As more reliable information became available, General Canby revised his plans. It was soon obvious that Carleton's force was more than sufficient for the reoccupation of Arizona. On July 4th, Colonel Marshall S. Howe, 3rd U.S. Cavalry, arrived at Fort Craig with a squad of officers from the East,

and assumed command of the Southern Military District. Relieved of responsibility, Colonel Chivington immediately proceeded to Santa Fe. There, he met with General Canby, and the two agreed that the Colorado troops could now better serve the Union elsewhere. Canby proposed, that as soon as Carleton's men took position, the 1st and 2nd Regiments Colorado Volunteers be marched northward. Feeling that there was some threat to communications with Fort Wise and Kansas, he suggested that the 1st Regiment occupy that area. From there they could protect the route to Fort Leavenworth, and keep Indians in check in the Colorado Territory. He felt the 2nd Regiment should garrison Fort Union and the northern part of New Mexico. (5)

Waiting at Fort Craig, Colonel Howe was unaware of the change of plans. During the last days of July, he put the long awaited movement southward into motion. With five companies of the 1st Regiment Colorado Volunteers and eight companies of the 5th U.S. Infantry, he started for the Mesilla Valley. Three days out, an express from General Canby overtook him with orders to return to Craig. As quickly as practicable the Coloradoans were put on the road to Albuquerque and Santa Fe. By the end of August, the "Pikes Peakers" were once again near Fort Union. (6)

About this time, Colonel Chivington obtained a leave of absence and proceeded to Washington, where he petitioned to have his regiment converted to cavalry and transferred to the Army of the Potomac. He failed to obtain the transfer, but by great persistence and tenacity managed to get the regiment designated as cavalry. He also succeeded in getting his troops released from further service in New Mexico and reassigned to Colorado. The "Pet Lambs" arrived home in detachments around the 1st of January, 1863. Shortly after their return, they were reorganized. The men received horses, equipment, and new arms, and were assigned to various frontier posts and camps across the region. Throughout the rest of the war, the Volunteers continued in service in Colorado and the adjacent territories. "There were no further glories, no more battlefields, for the First Colorado. Though some of its detached companies rendered efficient service in the Indian wars which ensued, as a whole its record ended with the flight of Sibley." Largely ignored in the East, the hardy miners and frontiersmen, of the 1st and 2nd Colorado Volunteers unquestionably turned the tide of the Confederacy in the Far West. Today, they are remembered by an elegant memorial that stands proudly in front of the state capital in Denver. (7)

Footnotes (See *The Road to Glorieta* for bibliography)

1. Hollister, *Boldly They Rode*, p.121.

2. OR,I,IX,p.678, Enclosure in report of J.M. Chivington to Brig. Gen. E.R.S. Canby; OR,I,IX,pp.678-679, ED.R.S. Canby to Col. J. M. Chivington.
3. Ibid.
4. OR,I,IX,p.679, ED.R.S. Canby to Col. J. M. Chivington.
5. OR,I,IX,p.689, ED.R.S. Canby to Adjutant-General of the Army, Washington, D.C.; Hollister, Boldly They Rode, p.126.
6. Ibid.
7. Whitford, Battle of Glorieta Pass, p.153, as quoted in.



The Road to Glorieta; A Confederate Army Marches through New Mexico



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