

FORT TEJON

AND CALIFORNIA IN THE CIVIL WAR

by: Sean T. Malis, State Park Interpreter I

California and the rest of the Pacific and Southwest played an important and largely ignored role in securing the region for the Union during the Civil War. Prior to the war, Californians had formed many a volunteer and militia company, mostly in the northern part of the State to deal with conflicts with Indians. These militia units, along with the Regular Army, helped to form a sense of order and authority in a new state with a rapidly expanding citizenry resulting from the "Gold Rush."

In Lincoln's initial call for 75,000 volunteers to quell the secessionist uprising in the South, the State of California was not asked to supply any troops. But by July 24, 1861, California was asked to provide one regiment of infantry and five companies of cavalry to guard the overland mail. A second request for California volunteers was sent on August 14, 1861. This request was responsible for the 2nd through 5th Infantry, and the 2nd Cavalry Regiments. In 1863, and again in 1864, further calls produced three more infantry regiments, and a battalion of native (Californios) cavalry from the Santa Barbara and Los Angeles areas. All total, California provided 17,500 troops for the Union, more troops per capita than any other state.

Early in the war, California Volunteers in Federal service helped to take over responsibilities from the Regular Army that was being recalled to the East. Californians served along the entire western coast from Washington Territory to the Mexican state of Sonora, and campaigned as far east as Utah and Texas and throughout New Mexico and Arizona Territories. The Californians primary enemy was the Indian and the environment. They did meet and close with Confederate troops in the



Regulation U.S. Army uniform circa 1862. by Michael McAfee, after a photograph.

Southwest as part of the "California Column." The California Volunteers served their country from July, 1861 to January, 1867, when the last troops were mustered out of service.

Californians that fought in the East did so as volunteers from other states, primarily Massachusetts, New York and Pennsylvania. Most notable of these troops was the *entry* California Hundred (Co. A, 2nd *in* Mass. Cav.), part of the California Battalion of the 2nd Mass. These men were organized in California and paid their own way back east to fight.

THE 2ND INFANTRY REGIMENT

From the August, 1861 request for troops, the 2nd California Volunteer Infantry was formed. Colonel Francis J. Lippitt was appointed as commander of the regiment. Lippitt had been

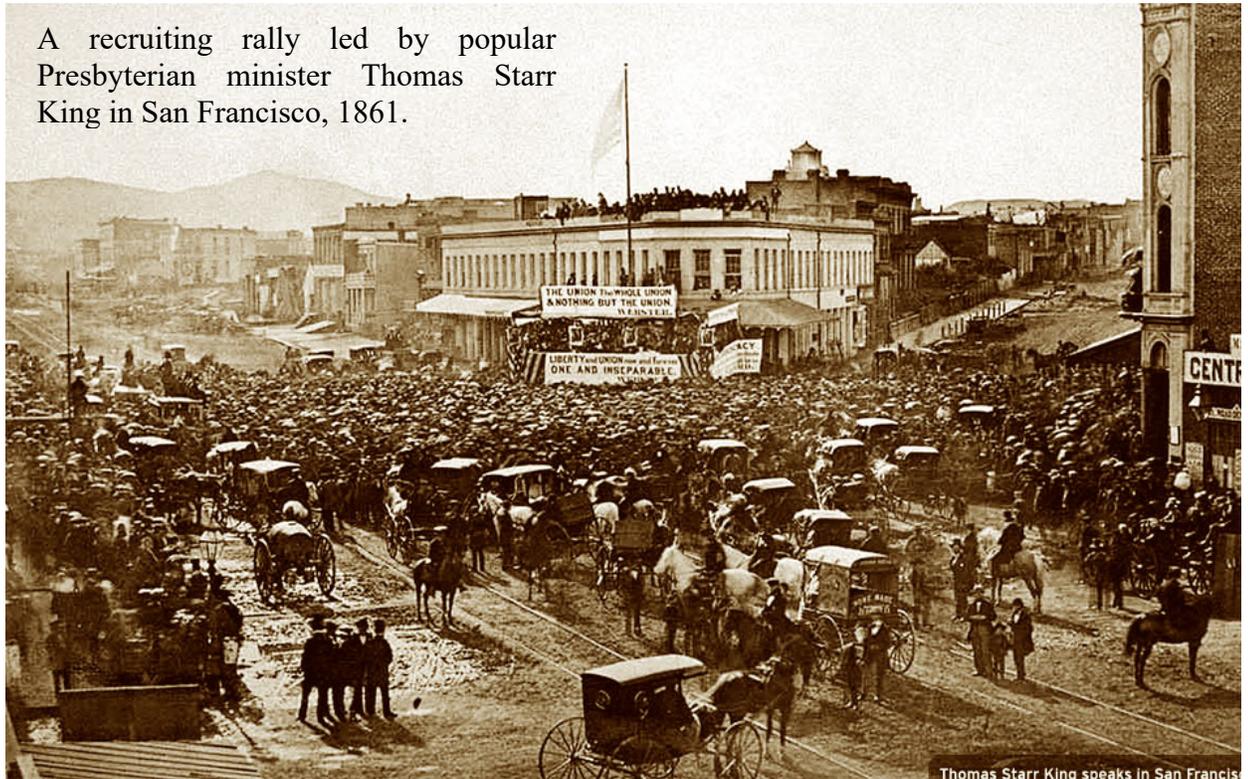
a member of Stevenson's 1st New York Volunteers that came to California in 1846 to help wrest California away from Mexico in the Mexican-American War.

The 2nd Regiment was first organized at the Presidio in San Francisco. After completing its organization, five companies were sent to Northern California, Oregon and Washington Territory to relieve Regular troops, while two companies were sent to Santa Barbara. Most of the companies were organized from San Francisco, Cal. and Carson City, Nev., with the earliest enlistments having been made on September 2, 1861.

Company G was first organized on September 21, 1861, at a meeting held in the theater at Angels Camp, Cal., by Captain William W. Stuart. On October 9, 1861, the company arrived in San Francisco where more men joined, the company being officially mustered into service on November 29, 1861. Company G spent the next month in camp at Camp Sumner at the Presidio, moving to Alcatraz Island on December 20, 1861. On March 8, 1862, Company G set sail for Crescent City on board the steamer *Oregon*. Upon reaching Crescent City, the company marched to Fort Ter-Waw and then to Camp Lincoln where it would remain until being ordered to report to Benicia [near San Francisco] on June 16, 1863.

At Benicia, Company G traded its old M1816 converted smoothbores for new M1855/1861 Springfield rifles. The company remained at Benicia for two months until it received orders to march southward through the

A recruiting rally led by popular Presbyterian minister Thomas Starr King in San Francisco, 1861.



San Joaquin Valley to Camp Babbitt in Visalia, on August 12, 1863. On its march south, the company passed through Camp Stanford and Fort Miller, now under Lake Millerton near Fresno.

Company G reached Camp Babbitt on August 28, 1863, where it was garrisoned for just over three months, and then was ordered to Fort Tejon, arriving there on January 16, 1864, one day after Company B.

Company B was first mustered into United States service on September 5, 1861 in San Francisco, Cal. The company remained in San Francisco only a short time before being shipped to Washington Territory on September 17, 1861. In Washington Territory, the company concerned itself with Indian trouble until July 31, 1862 when it arrived back in San Francisco. The company was sent to Alcatraz Island for only 3 days before being sent to Fort Humboldt

in Northern California on August 3, 1862.

Company B was engaged in chasing after Indians in Klamath and Humboldt counties for almost a year. Their scouting missions took them through the most rugged of terrain and the company was employed in hacking out a 15 mile road through this wilderness. On June 15, 1863 the company sailed on the steamer *Panama* for Benicia, where the company was rearmed and refitted before marching for Fort Miller in route to Fort Tejon. The company marched 60 miles from Fort Miller to Camp Babbitt in only two days, arriving at the latter on December 30, 1863. Company B finally arrived at Fort Tejon on January 15, 1864 after marching 140 miles in six days.

FORT TEJON

Fort Tejon was founded in 1854 on Grapevine Creek, 17 miles from its originally intended location on Tejon Creek. Maj. Donaldson of the 1st U.S. Dragoons selected the site for the new Fort at its present location because of the ready availability of water, fuel and forage. Originally called *Camp Canada de Las Uvas* for the wild grapes in the area, it was officially christened *F 011 Tejon*, (*Tejon* meaning Badger in Spanish), over the objection of Brevet Lt. Col. Benjamin L. Beall, 1st Dragoons, who suggested "Fort Le Beck," after a trapper who had been killed by a bear there.

The primary purpose of the garrison at Fort Tejon was to protect and control the Indians on the Sebastian Indian Reservation, and to control the major north-south road through Grapevine Canyon. Fort Tejon was garrisoned by various companies of the 1st Dragoons, and briefly from late 1857 to 1858 by a detachment of the 3rd Artillery, serving as infantry. In December, 1856, the regimental headquarters of the 1st Dragoons was moved from Fort Union, New Mexico Terr., to Fort Tejon, where it remained until the post was abandoned on June 15, 1861.

The rapidly expanding war in the eastern United States forced the government to recall the Army to the new seat of hostilities as fast as possible. This need for troops back in the East along with a growing fear of pro-secessionist activities in the Los Angeles and San Bernardino areas, ultimately forced the closure of Fort Tejon.

FORT TEJON AND THE CIVIL WAR

As discussed above, much of the Californians' time was concerned with battling the so-called Indian menace. In 1863, it was deemed necessary to reoccupy Fort Tejon. On July 24, 1863, Fort Tejon was again garrisoned by Companies D and E of the 2nd California Cavalry under the command of Capt. James M. Ropes.

The 2nd Cavalry reactivated Fort Tejon with approximately 300 Paiute Indians camping near the Post. When the Paiutes were forcibly marched from the Owens Valley by the 2nd Cav., they numbered 1000, a third of them being sent to Fort Tejon. The Indians were kept in a camp down Grapevine Canyon from the Fort called the "Pot Holes." After the arrival of the 2nd Infantry, the garrison provided the Paiutes with a meager ration to keep them in place and to keep them from starving [which the Volunteers were not supposed to do; Capt. Schmidt satisfied headquarters by deeming the rations for "Prisoners of War"].

The government Indian Bureau agents refused to assume responsibility for their care.

As the two Infantry companies settled into their new home, their time was occupied at repairing and maintaining the Fort's buildings that had fallen into disrepair during the two years that the post had been abandoned. There were frequent patrols mounted from the Fort to keep track of unruly whites and to maintain control over the Paiutes encamped nearby. There were always duties to perform in the garrison relating to the maintenance of the Fort. There

was wood to be hauled and cut, rations to be prepared, inspections and endless drills on the parade ground. In short, "Army Life."

Life at Fort Tejon was dismal to say the least. 1st. Sgt. Curtis Greenleaf, Co. G, complained in his journal that Fort Tejon was worthless because the local town was devoid of a whorehouse. Of some intrigue, however, Pvt. James Anderson of Co. B, was murdered one evening while returning from a night out in town. The investigation turned up one James Conrad, Co. G, as a suspect, but the subsequent court-martial could not confirm guilt.

Company G left Fort Tejon on June 4, 1864 for Drum Barracks in Wilmington. Fort Tejon would finally be closed when Company B left the post on September 11, 1864, ending the last period of military occupation of the Post, lasting from 1854 to 1864.

After serving at Fort Tejon, Companies B & G were ordered to Arizona Territory, from August, 1865 until March 31, 1866. The two companies were mustered out at the Presidio, San Francisco in May 10, 1866.

UNIFORMS OF THE 2ND INFANTRY

When the War broke out, the State of California had no plan for providing its volunteers with uniforming and equipment. In fact, the State's adjutant-general could not even account for the arms and equipment that had been issued to the pre-war militia organizations. The Federal government had to open up its Arsenal at Benicia to the California Volunteers.

This evidence, along with photographs of California Volunteers, would suggest that the 2nd Infantry wore the standard regulation Federal uniform.

A letter from the quartermaster at Camp Babbitt asking what to do with surplus property of the 2nd Infantry lists:

- Metallic Scales, mostly broken
- Knapsacks, M1858

- Tin canteens and cloth straps, M1858
- Haversacks

Some of these items would suggest that the regiment had the full dress uniform at Fort Tejon.

Some Pertinent Leaders in 1864

- Fort Tejon Garrison
- Post Com'd'r Capt. John C. Schmidt (Co. B)
- Co. A, 1st Lieut. John E. Hill Commander

Government Officials

- Governor Frederick F. Low (Repub.; '63-'67)
- James A. McDougall (Douglas Dem; '61-)
- John Conness (Union Dem., '63-)

Sources:

Eldredge, Zoeth S., *History of California*, 1914.

Kibbe, William C., Adjutant-General. *Annual Report Of The Adjutant- General Of The State Of California. 1861-65, 1862-1866.* .

Orton, Brig. Gen'l. Richard H. *Records Of California Men In The War Of The Rebellion, 1861 To 1867.*, 1890.

Rodgers, Fred B. "Early Military Posts of Del Norte County," *California Historical Society Quarterly*, Vol XXVI, 1947

Stammerjohan, George, *Fort Tejon State Historic Park, A Short Interpretive History*, 1993.

Stammerjohan, George, State Historian II. Numerous conversations and readings of his monographs.