

CIVIL WAR IN ARIZONA

Both the Union and the Confederacy wanted California because of its rich mineral resources and its vital access to the Pacific Ocean. Its conquest would help the Confederates gain European recognition.

The Confederacy believed they could conquer the region of New Mexico Territory, which then included both Arizona and New Mexico, because its citizens were pro-Southern.



One of the most important defections was Major Henry H. Sibley, commander at

Fort Union, N.M., who returned to New Mexico as a Confederate general. Sibley arrived in San Antonio in August, where he organized three regiments of the Texas Volunteer Cavalry.

Tucson was looming ever more important. In 1862, Sibley detached a company of mounted rifles under Captain Sherod Hunter to take Tucson for the Confederacy. On March 3, 1862, Hunter led his command to the Pima Indian villages on the Gila River. He arrested Ammi M. White, a miller who has been buying grain and supplies for the Union troops. He learned that every station of the Butterfield Overland Mail had been provided with hay for Colonel James H. Carleton's California soldiers; he burned six of these stations. Meanwhile, Colonel Carleton's California Column, of at least 2,000 soldiers, was concentrating on the invasion of Arizona. Carleton sent Captain William McCleave with the 1st California Dragoons to recon the Confederate forces.

He ordered him to stop at the Pima villages and construct a new building to store wheat and flour from Ammi White's mill and to reconnoiter Tucson and retake the town. McCleave and his scouts fell into a trap. McCleave knocked at White's door and was greeted by Hunter posing as White, until Confederates captured the Federals. Lieutenant Jack Swilling then escorted McCleave and White to Tucson. Carleton dispatched Captain William P. Galloway, with 272 men and a battery of two 12-pounder howitzers, to establish a base at the Pima villages and to head to Tucson to recapture McCleave. Galloway dispatched Lieutenant James Barrett to circle the Rebels from the east with about a dozen cavalrymen.

On April 15, 1862, Barrett's detachment approached Picacho Pass about 45 miles northwest of Tucson, and discovered three Confederate pickets at their base camp.

Barrett charged the three dismounted Confederates. Shots were fired, and the gunfire alerted the other seven Confederate pickets who took defensive positions in the heavy chaparral. Barrett led his men single file through the thicket. Rebel fire hit four Union soldiers; the Federals regrouped; and the Rebels retired into the thicket and reloaded. Barrett followed them in and was shot in the neck and killed instantly. After 90 minutes of fighting, the Union troops disengaged and took their wounded and the three captured prisoners with them. The Rebels removed their wounded, and rode to Tucson to warn Hunter.

No support was coming for Hunter, and soon Carleton and the California Column would be occupying Tucson. Hunter knew Carleton had overwhelming forces and decided to remove his troops to Texas.

Picacho Pass was thought to be the westernmost battle of the Civil War, but there was a skirmish at Stanwix Station, and farther west, the confrontation at La Paz on the Colorado River occurred. Blood was shed there in May 1863, when Union soldiers from Fort Yuma under the command of Lieutenant James Hale were ambushed in front of Michael Goldwater's store. A Confederate soldier killed two Union soldiers and wounded one.