

Operations in California During the Mexican-American War

A Monograph

by

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Abstract

Operations in California During the Mexican-American War, by MAJ Thomas Warren, 89 pages.

The military operation in California illustrated many tenets of US doctrine. Additionally, the campaign demonstrates the utility of several theorists, both military and otherwise, for examining combat operations. Most of all, this campaign demonstrates the tension found in some key doctrinal concepts. These include risks and benefits of Mission Command, the challenges of developing shared understanding, and the importance of understanding the environment, especially the tendencies of a military theater. Tension also resides between the phases of major combat and the stability operations that follow. The operation in California demonstrated that the transition from combat to stability is not a one-way street. Commanders found themselves moving between the two types of operations. In California, commanders found that they were properly resourced to conduct initial combat operations but ill-resourced for stability operations. This caused the operation to slide back into conventional combat and created a situation where the force, after succeeding in major combat operations at the outset, struggled to defeat the enemy a second time. In fact, US forces were defeated in several conventional engagements before adapting to the situation and eventually prevailing.

The operation also demonstrated that in many cases the combination of uncertainty, chance, friction, and the natural environment can combine to challenge, if not defeat, a military force. Sometimes the enemy, while interesting, is not the problem. The US military forces in California encountered this confluence of factors several times. At San Pasqual, it nearly resulted in the complete loss of the Army of the West. At the very least, these variables created conditions that led to operational setbacks for US forces and threatened the strategic success of the entire campaign.

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Introduction

The Mexican-American War took place from April 1846 through February 1848 and was largely driven by two points of friction, the US annexation of Texas and the concept of Manifest Destiny. It is a study in competing civilian and military priorities. The military actions to seize the Mexican province of Alta California were secondary to those of Generals Zachary and Taylor Winfield Scott. However, seizing California was a critical goal of the United States during the war. An examination of the campaign brings forth lessons for the future and demonstrates some of the enduring challenges that persist even in contemporary military operations.

The Texas territory was a part of Mexico until 1836, when it declared independence and defeated the Mexican army sent to reclaim it. This new nation of Texas was recognized by the United States and many other European states. Mexico, though, never accepted the independence of Texas and warned that an annexation attempt by the United States would lead to war. In March of 1845, the US Congress extended the offer of annexation to Texas, and it was accepted. This, more than anything else, placed the United States and Mexico on the road to war.¹

Manifest Destiny was a term coined by John O'Sullivan, a newspaper editor. It encompassed a divinely prearranged plan for the United States to master the continent from the Atlantic to the Pacific. In some minds, it meant the mastery of the entire hemisphere. Manifest Destiny meant that it was America's divine task to remake the world in its own image. When President James Polk entered the White House on March 4, 1845 he fully intended to implement this concept through American territorial expansion. However, Polk was less concerned with the role of Providence. His focus was on how acquiring additional territory would serve American interests on the temporal plain, especially American business interests. Prior to the war he would

¹ Robert Selph Henry, *The Story of the Mexican War* (Indianapolis, IN: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1950), 15,17; Robert W. Merry, *A Country of Vast Designs* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 2009), 7; Helen Haines, *History of New Mexico From the Spanish Conquest to the Present Time, 1530-1890* (New York, NY: New Mexico Historical Publishing Company, 1891), 173. The independent nation of Texas invaded New Mexico in 1841 and was defeated near San Miguel. Providence refers to divine inspiration.

endeavor to acquire New Mexico and California peacefully. His attempts to purchase them, however, were coolly received and armed conflict ended up being the means to fulfill this goal.²

The military operations in California illustrate many tenets of US Army and Joint doctrine. Additionally, the campaign demonstrates the utility of several theorists, both military and otherwise, for examining a combat operation. Most of all, this campaign demonstrates the inherent tension that is found in some of the key doctrinal concepts. These include risks and benefits of Mission Command, the challenges of developing a shared understanding between civilian and military leaders, and the importance of understanding the environment, especially the tendencies and trends inherent in a military theater. Furthermore, there is tension between the conduct of traditional military combat operations and their aftermath. The operations in California demonstrate that the transition from combat to stability and governance is not a one-way street. Commanders can find themselves moving between the two types of operations. Additionally, commanders may find that they were properly resourced to conduct combat operations but ill resourced to conduct stability operations. This may cause the operation to slide back into combat operations and create a situation where the combat force, after succeeding in major combat operations at the outset, now struggles to defeat the enemy a second time.

Finally, in many cases the combination of uncertainty, chance, friction, and the natural environment combine to challenge, if not defeat, a military force. Sometimes the enemy, while interesting, is not the problem. The US military forces in California encountered this confluence of factors several times. In one case, it nearly resulted in the complete loss of a major formation. At the very least, these variables created the conditions that led to several operational setbacks for US forces and threatened the strategic success of the entire campaign.

The campaign to conquer California only lasted eight months. During this time the

² Julius W. Pratt, "John L. O'Sullivan and Manifest Destiny," *New York History* 14, no. 3 (July 1933): 213; Robert J. Miller, *Native America, Discovered and Conquered: Thomas Jefferson, Lewis & Clark, and Manifest Destiny* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2006), 120; Frederick Merk, *Manifest Destiny and Mission in American History: A Reinterpretation* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1963), 24, 61.

theater featured multiple commanders, elements from both the US Army and US Navy, the revolt of foreign citizens, the defeat of a conventional enemy force, the revolt of Mexican citizens, the conventional defeat of US units, and finally the triumph of the American forces. The multiplicity of factors and personalities involved, and the myriad of events across the spectrum of military operations, make this a campaign that demonstrates the challenges and continuities of war and warfare.

Prelude to Conflict

Commodore Jones's War

Commodore Thomas ap Catesby Jones, US Navy, was commanding the Pacific Squadron when a rumor of war between the United States and Mexico arrived. The Pacific Squadron consisted of the sloops-of-war *United States*, *Cyane*, *Dale*, *Yorktown*, *Saint Louis*, the schooner *Shark*, and the storeship *Relief*. His mission was to protect commerce, train, and collect information regarding the situation in California, and to determine the intentions of other interested powers. As a result of intense American interest in California, the US Navy ensured that at least one warship was stationed off the coast at all times. While in port at Callao, Peru, Jones received information from the US consul in Mazatlan that war had broken out with Mexico. He was fully aware of the US Government's interest in California, particularly the need to prevent British or French occupation of the region. Jones immediately departed north for California.³

The squadron arrived off the coast of Monterey on October 18. As there was no explicit

³ Neal Harlow, *California Conquered: War and Peace in the Pacific 1846-1850* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1982), 4-5; G. G. Hatheway, "Commodore Jones's War," *History Today* 16, (1966): 194; K. Jack Bauer, *Surfboats and Horse Marines: U.S. Naval Operations in the Mexican War, 1846-1848* (Annapolis, MD: United States Naval Institute, 1969), 136; Robert Glass Cleland, "The Early Sentiment for the Annexation of California: An Account of the Growth of American Interest in California, 1835-1946, I," *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 18, no. 1 (July 1914): 30. John Parrott was the US consul at Mazatlan. The "ap" in Commodore Jones's name means "son of."

instruction in the official orders to seize any territory in California in the case of war, Jones polled his officers for their thoughts and determined that if war had been declared, they were obligated to seize and hold every California port. Furthermore, there was concern that Britain would use the conflict to occupy California; seizing key ports would forestall British occupation. Captain James Armstrong, commanding the *United States*, went ashore to demand surrender on October 19. Mariano Silva, a captain of artillery, informed Armstrong that Monterey was not capable of mounting a defense. José Abrego and Pedro Narvaez opened negotiations, moderated by a prominent American resident, Thomas O. Larkin. The parties agreed to the surrender of California from San Juan Bautista to San Luis Obispo and the documents were signed on October 20.⁴ Commodore Jones had rapidly and decisively seized a base with which the annexation of California could be negotiated. There was only one problem, however; the year was 1842 and Mexico and the United States were not at war. The US consul at Mazatlan had misinformed Jones.

The day after the surrender, Jones learned that no state of war existed. He immediately wrote to Silva and Juan Bautista Alvarado, the acting governor of Alta California, that he would restore the area to Mexican control immediately. Additionally, a dispatch was sent to General Manuel Micheltorena, who was marching north with six hundred troops, declaring a cessation of hostilities and the restoration of Mexican sovereignty. Micheltorena halted his troops and returned to Los Angeles. Jones and Larkin made considerable efforts to restore good relations, but to little effect. The incident was concluded without bloodshed but suspicion remained.⁵

⁴ K. Jack Bauer, *The Mexican War 1846-1848* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1974), 136; Henry, *The Story of the Mexican War*, 116; Harlow, *California Conquered*, 7; Hubert Howe Bancroft, *The Works of Hubert Howe Bancroft, Volume XXI, History of California, Volume III, 1840-1845* (San Francisco, CA: A. J. Bancroft and Company, 1886), 97. José Abrego was appointed tax collector in 1839 and was one of the few civil officials in Monterey when Jones' forces landed. Lieutenant Pedro Narvaez commanded the Port of Monterey and was the senior military official in the area.

⁵ Harlow, *California Conquered*, 9, 12; Theodore H. Hittell, *History of California Volume II* (San Francisco, CA: N. J. Stone & Company, 1898), 319-320; Gene A. Smith, "The

Commodore Jones's premature seizure of California exposed the ambitions of the United States. Jones exceeded his authority and proceeded without explicit orders. However, his actions were in accord with national objectives. Secretary of the Navy Abel P. Upshaw would confirm this view. Although Commodore Jones was recalled to Washington to testify, Upshaw made it clear to President Tyler that he would not humiliate "an able and well intentioned commander." Unfortunately the hasty seizure of Monterey was a betrayal of national plans, and had significant diplomatic consequences. The suspicious atmosphere that resulted forced the Tyler administration to suspend negotiations for the purchase of California.⁶ The peaceful means for the acquisition of Alta California had been undermined and exhausted.

Mexican Rule

Spanish, and subsequently Mexican, control over California was limited. Spain's nominal rule was hindered by low population density, geographic distance, and rugged terrain. It was spurred more by fears of foreign competition than a natural inclination to dominate the area. These systemic problems persisted when Mexico gained its independence in 1821 and acquired Alta California. With Mexican rule, other problems emerged. The province was racked with regional competition, revolutions, and a rapid increase of foreign populations and business interests.

War That Wasn't: Thomas ap Catesby Jones's Seizure of Monterey," *California History* 66, no. 2 (June 1987): 112. Alta Californian refers to "upper" California, differentiating it from the Baja peninsula. General Micheltorena, a non-native Californian, had been appointed to the governorship and was bringing troops to quell persistent unrest when the Jones landing occurred.

⁶ Theodore Grivas, *Military Governments in California 1846-1850* (Glendale, CA: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1963), 40; Bauer, *The Mexican War*, 13; Hatheway, "Commodore Jones's War," 196, 201; Josiah Royce, *California: A Study of American Character: From the Conquest in 1846 to the Second Vigilance Committee in San Francisco* (Boston, MA: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1886), 50; William Henry Hutchinson, *California: Two Centuries of Man, Land, and Growth in the Golden State* (Palo Alto, CA: American West Publishing Company, 1969), 98. Herman Melville was a member of the crew of the *United States* on this return trip to Washington. Portions of his novel, *White Jacket*, were based on his harsh experiences on the frigate.

The Mexican administration of California was turbulent. Between 1822 and 1846, the province went through twelve governors and experienced four major revolts. The first governor was Lieutenant Colonel José Mariá Echeandía, a non-native Californian, appointed in 1825. His decision to reside in San Diego, with the capital nominally at Monterey, sowed discontent and division between the north and south of the province.⁷ Pío Pico, the senior member of the *diputación* led a successful revolt against the governor, Lieutenant Colonel Manuel Victoria in 1832. Although the revolt was put down, Victoria was wounded and returned to Mexico, leaving California to choose its own leadership until the arrival of another governor. The south backed Pío Pico while the north chose Agustín V. Zamorano. Both men claimed the governorship and furthered the regional divide.⁸

Another revolt occurred in 1836 under the leadership of Juan B. Alvarado and José Castro. Unique to this revolt was the inclusion of a number of foreigners, giving the entire event an international flavor. Foreign participants included Isaac Graham, an American, William R. Garner and John Coppinger, both Englishmen, and Louis Pombert, a Frenchman. The participation of non-citizens stoked fears of foreign intervention into Californian affairs.⁹ The

⁷ Harlow, *California Conquered*, 26-27; Hubert Howe Bancroft, *The Works of Howard Howe Bancroft, Volume XIX, History of California, Volume II, 1801-1824* (San Francisco, CA: A. J. Bancroft and Company, 1885), 550; Hubert Howe Bancroft, *The Works of Hubert Howe Bancroft, Volume XX, History of California, Volume III, 1825-1840* (San Francisco, CA: A. J. Bancroft and Company, 1885), 69; Hittell, *History of California Volume II*, 108-109, 111.

⁸ Harlow, *California Conquered*, 27; Bancroft, *Volume XX*, 417; George L. Harding, *Agustín V. Zamorano: Statesman, Soldier, Craftsman, and California's First Printer* (Los Angeles, CA: The Zamorano Club, 1934), vii. On May 23, 1835, Los Angeles officially became the capital of Alta California. This was not well received by Monterey and the north. Brevet Brigadier General José Figueroa later named José Castro civil governor during his term (1833-1835). Agustín Zamorano was a Mexican military officer who was appointed executive secretary of Alta California in 1825, a position he held for eleven years. Additionally, he served as the military commander of the *presidio* at Monterey before assuming the governorship of northern California for a year. He is most famous for importing the first printing press east of the Rocky Mountains and generating the first printed documents in California.

⁹ Harlow, *California Conquered*, 27; Bancroft, *Volume XX*, 415-416, 420-422; 443, 454-458. During this period there was a debate in Mexico between centralists, who sought greater control of the nation dictated from Mexico City, and the federalists who desired more autonomy,

revolution besieged the governor, Gutierrez, at Monterey and forced his surrender. Jose Castro, as leader of the revolt, assumed the role of governor until December 7, when the *diputación* installed Alvarado as interim governor. The conditional independence of Alta California leveraged concessions from Mexico, most importantly of which was that there would be no more non-Californians appointed as governor. Henceforth, the governor would be chosen from a list provided by the *diputación* and Alta California would remain, for now, under Mexican control.¹⁰

Commandante Vallejo, who had been appointed by his nephew Alvarado, recognized that the situation in Alta California was becoming increasingly tenuous.¹¹ His concerns were over the growing interest and influence of the United States. He requested more Mexican colonists, two hundred troops, and the reunification of the civil and military commands. Mexico responded by dispatching General Manuel Micheltorena to assume the governorship, and three hundred troops. Micheltorena arrived at Los Angeles in August 1842, just in time for Jones' premature seizure of Monterey.¹²

The small army that Micheltorena brought to the province would lead to the undoing of the final Mexican governor of Alta California. They were poorly recruited and often former, or current, criminals who alienated the population in short order. Another revolt began in November,

especially in the farther flung provinces. Lieutenant Colonel Nicholas Gutierrez had been appointed military *commandante* in 1833 by Governor General José Figueroa. After Figueroa succumbed to illness in 1835, Gutierrez assumed the governorship on an interim basis. Colonel Mariano Chico was appointed governor in May 1836 and Gutierrez left public service. Chico's stewardship was marked by widespread unrest and he only lasted three months as governor. When he fled the province, Gutierrez once again assumed the role of governor.

¹⁰ Bancroft, *Volume XX*, 462-463, 474; Harlow, *California Conquered*, 27-28. Gutierrez and his small party departed by ship for Mexico after the surrender on November 5, 1836. The term "Californians" will be used to identify Mexican citizens residing in Alta California as well as the forces resisting the American military.

¹¹ Bancroft, *Volume XX*, 462-463, 474; Harlow, *California Conquered*, 27-28.

¹² Harlow, *California Conquered*, 29-30; Bancroft, *Volume XXI*, 293. Unbeknownst to Alvarado, Micheltorena was under orders to assume the governorship as well as the military command. This bitterly disappointed Alvarado and was a breach of the understanding of local governors that had been reached with the central government.

1845. The combination of disdain for the occupying troops and personal ambition provided more than enough fuel for Alvarado and Castro to once again lead an uprising. By December, Micheltorena, realizing the difficulty of forcefully putting down the revolt with his limited resources, agreed to send the Mexican troops back home. The agreement was never carried out. Once again, foreign citizens intervened, this time on behalf of Micheltorena. Isaac Graham and John Sutter resolved to march to his aid. In spite of the pledged support, Sutter's men refused to fight when the forces collided at Cahuenga. Without the support of foreign militia, Micheltorena's cause collapsed and he signed a treaty at San Fernando on February 22, 1845. The treaty named Pío Pico the governor and Castro the *commandante*. The two aspiring leaders immediately parted company, the former residing in the capital, Los Angeles, while the latter established himself at Monterey, further exacerbating the divisions between the north and south.¹³

Transitory Success: The War Begins

Frémont and the Incident at Pico Gavilan

Into the milieu of revolt, unrest, and chaos came a US Army officer, Captain John Charles Frémont. Frémont's subsequent actions would demonstrate the inherent dangers of empowering a subordinate military officer to make decisions far from oversight and out of communication. Frémont was an Army officer assigned to the US Topographical Engineers, who had undertaken several exploratory expeditions of the American west. In 1845 Frémont was undertaking his third expedition. Frémont was well connected to the political elite in the United States. Senator Thomas H. Benton, a powerful legislator who had taken a great interest in the Pacific coast and how it could be acquired by the United States, was his father-in-law. This

¹³ Harlow, *California Conquered*, 18, 30; Bancroft, *Volume XXI*, 455-456, 469, 474, 485, 506-508; Henry, *The Story of the Mexican War*, 108; Hubert Howe Bancroft, *The Works of Hubert Howe Bancroft, Volume XXII, History of California, Volume III, 1846-1848* (San Francisco, CA: A. J. Bancroft and Company, 1886), 643. Sutter was hoping for additional land grants by supporting the legitimate governor. After his defeat, Micheltorena departed for Mexico in March 1845, leaving California in the hands of the revolutionaries.

interest filtered down to Frémont and may have helped inspire his actions in California.

Frémont was under very limited orders when he embarked on his expedition. He was to survey the Arkansas and Red Rivers, document the geography within a reasonable distance of Bent's Fort, and determine the streams that flowed east from the Rocky Mountains. There was no mention of California in these orders and it was implied that the appearance of a political or military mission was to be avoided. Even had this point been explicit in Frémont's orders, his own thoughts imply that he placed his own desires and those of Senator Benton ahead of his orders. Frémont's memoirs record that "California stood out as the chief object in the impending war; and with Mr. Benton and other governing men at Washington it became a firm resolve to hold it for the United States."¹⁴

Frémont arrived at Sutter's Fort in December, 1845 after a six-month expedition originating at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. While on his expedition, tensions between the growing American immigrant population and the California government were rising. In July, 1845 the Mexican government, alarmed by the rapid increase of foreign citizens, primarily Americans, directed that every means be used to stop the flow. More than half the population of California were foreign citizens by 1846. In January 1846, rumors broke out that an order was given to drive out Americans who had established themselves in the province. This turned out to be false; however, it increased the apprehension of foreign residents. In this tense atmosphere, Frémont, with a Mexican passport issued by Sutter, and accompanied by William Leidesdorff, the US vice-consul in Monterey, departed the fort for Monterey.¹⁵

¹⁴ Donald Jackson and Mary Lee Spence, ed., *The Expeditions of John Charles Frémont, Volume 1, Travels from 1838 to 1844* (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1970), 395-397; Hittell, *History of California Volume II*, 415-417; Mary Lee Spence and Donald Jackson, ed., *The Expeditions of John Charles Frémont, Volume 2: The Bear Flag Revolt and the Court-Martial* (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1973), 3-4; Bancroft, *Volume XXII*, 643.

¹⁵ John S.D. Eisenhower, *So Far From God: The U.S. War With Mexico 1846-1848* (New York, NY: Random House, Inc., 1989), 211; Hittell, *History of California Volume II*, 417-418; Harlow, *California Conquered*, 62; Spence and Jackson, *The Expeditions of John Charles Frémont, Volume 2*, 63; Bancroft, *Volume XXI*, 604. Sutter, a Mexican citizen, had been

Upon arriving at Monterey, Frémont, called upon Thomas O. Larkin, the US consul, José Castro, and Juan Alvarado. The meeting with Larkin, in addition to securing supplies, was to discuss the political situation. Larkin also attempted to allay the concern over an armed American group operating on Mexican soil. Larkin was under confidential instructions to prepare the people of California for a hopefully peaceful annexation. In a meeting with Castro and Alvarado, Frémont explained the scientific nature of his mission and requested his party be allowed to remain in the Sacramento Valley through the winter. There is debate as to whether he received this permission; however, in his memoirs, he asserts that it was granted. The meeting did little to lessen the central and provincial government's deep concern over Frémont's presence, especially when he spoke of ten thousand American immigrants gathering in Missouri to begin moving to California the following May. There were also false accusations against Frémont's men regarding stolen property and violence against Mexican citizens. Although inaccurate, they were widely accepted as true and hardened feelings against the armed explorers and the foreign residents.¹⁶

At the meeting with Larkin and Castro, Frémont had made clear that he intended to winter in the Sacramento Valley and then proceed to Oregon. When his party turned toward the Santa Clara Valley in March, opposite the direction of the road to Oregon, it caused great alarm. This was combined with a rumor, likely spread by Sutter, that the country was "about to be delivered to the U. States." Larkin was confused and the Californians were alarmed. José Castro, the *commandante*, dispatched explicit instructions to Frémont's camp on March 5, "You, and the party under your command, have entered the towns of this Department, and such being prohibited by our laws... you will immediately retire beyond the limits of this same department." The same correspondence was sent to Larkin, who forwarded it to the US government. Larkin also ordered

appointed a magistrate by the local government and was authorized to issue travel documents.

¹⁶ Spence and Jackson, *The Expeditions of John Charles Frémont, Volume 2*, 64; Harlow, *California Conquered*, 7; Bancroft, *Volume XXII*, 4; Hittell, *History of California Volume II*, 418; Bauer, *Surfboats and Horse Marines*, 138. Thomas O. Larkin had arrived in April 1832, nine years after his half-brother, who was a prominent resident, and Mexican citizen. Larkin had also been part of the mediating team during Jones' invasion. He was appointed consul in 1844.

Frémont out of the department the following day.¹⁷

Frémont took Castro's demand as a personal insult and an affront to the United States. He broke camp the day he received the demand, moved several miles to the summit of Pico Gavilan, and established a strong defensive position. In further defiance, he raised the American flag in a province of Mexico. Gauging Frémont's tone when communicating with Larkin, it is reasonable to infer that he was attempting to provoke the Californians to provide a pretext for war. "I am making myself as strong as possible... if we are unjustly attacked we will fight to extremity and refuse quarter, trusting our country to avenge our death." For his part, Larkin pleaded ignorance to what orders Frémont possessed. There has been significant speculation that either secret orders existed to generate a war, or that he was operating with Senator Benton's consent.¹⁸

Frémont, although enthusiastic for a pitched battle, was not eager to be destroyed, despite his rhetoric. From his vantage point, he saw an increasingly large force gathering at the base of the mountain. Larkin confirmed that Castro's forces were growing and could number over two hundred in short order. Additionally, Castro issued a proclamation imploring the country to rise up and resist the "band of robbers." Under this increasing pressure, Frémont began to waver; when the flagpole holding the American flag fell to the ground, he told his men it was a sign to quit the endeavor. On the night of March 9, he grudgingly retired. Castro discovered that the camp had been abandoned and although Frémont only moved three miles north, no pursuit was attempted. For his part, Frémont came away extremely hostile to the provincial and Mexican

¹⁷ Harlow, *California Conquered*, 66-67; John A. Sutter, *The Diary of Johann August Sutter* (San Francisco, CA: Grabhorn Press, 1932), 56; Hittell, *History of California Volume II*, 418; Spence and Jackson, *The Expeditions of John Charles Frémont, Volume 2*, 74-75; Bancroft, *Volume XXII*, 9-10. The Mexican government had reprimanded General Castro for not driving Frémont out of Mexican territory during his 1844 expedition.

¹⁸ Harlow, *California Conquered*, 68; Henry, *The Story of the Mexican War*, 109; Hittell, *History of California Volume II*, 419; Spence and Jackson, *The Expeditions of John Charles Frémont, Volume 2*, 78, 81-82.

governments. He slowly moved his force north and arrived at Sutter's Fort on March 21.¹⁹

Another armed incident between Mexico and the United States had come to a close, this time on land, and again without a declaration of war.

Gillespie Arrives and California in Chaos

Lieutenant Archibald H. Gillespie, United States Marine Corps, met Frémont near North Klamath Lake, in the Oregon territory, on May 8, 1846. Gillespie passed through Monterey and carried with him explicit instructions from President James Polk. Larkin and Gillespie were directed to "assist the Californians in throwing off Mexican rule, and to endeavor to keep them from accepting the protection of any foreign power; other than the United States." In order to deliver this and other messages to Larkin, and subsequently Frémont, he had been traveling for over six months.²⁰

Gillespie left Washington on November 3, 1845 for Monterey. He possessed a letter of introduction to Henry Mellus, of William Appleton & Company in California, to allay suspicion and support the assertion that he was on private business. On December 10, 1845 he arrived at Vera Cruz and proceeded overland to Mexico City where the Paredes revolution was in progress, delaying him for a month. He finally reached Monterrey, where he was able to meet the commander of the Pacific Squadron, Commodore John D. Sloat.²¹

Gillespie would not reveal much to Sloat, but did produce the orders that he should be transported to Monterey at once. On February 22, 1846 he departed aboard the *Cyane* and arrived on March 17th. The crew of the *Cyane* was ordered to keep its destination secret and sail by way

¹⁹ Henry, *The Story of the Mexican War*, 109; Harlow, *California Conquered*, 71-72; Spence and Jackson, *The Expeditions of John Charles Frémont, Volume 2*, 78, 81, 131.

²⁰ Harlow, *California Conquered*, 77. Bauer, *Surfboats and Horse Marines*, 139-140.

²¹ Harlow, *California Conquered*, 57, 77. President José Joaquín de Herrera had been seeking a peaceful alternative to war with the United States. Mariano Paredes y Arrillaga, arguing that this was a sign of weakness, led a revolt and assumed the head of government.

of Honolulu in order to conceal their true movements from Rear Admiral Sir George F. Seymour's British fleet. Seymour's fleet was stationed outside of Monterey and was keeping consistent observation on the Pacific Squadron.²²

When Gillespie had departed from Washington on his courier duties, Micheltorena had been governor of California and on the surface the north and south were united. By the time of his arrival, things had changed considerably. Pico and Castro had begun an increasingly tense competition for supremacy. In late March, 1845 Castro held a *junta* and Monterey had affirmed its support for the Mexican leader Paredes, while denouncing the appointments of his predecessor, Herrera. This included the appointment of Pico as civil governor. In response to this, Pico called a meeting in the south, which ordered elections held to form a *consejo general* to unify the province against the impending threat of foreign invasion. These were held, but those elected in the north refused to serve and rejected the authority of Pico's decrees. Pico saw these actions as a virtual act of war against the south.²³

On May 25, Pico received word from Manuel Castro, the prefect at Monterey, that a band of foreigners instigated by Frémont, was about to seize the settlement. Instead of unifying against the perceived threat, Pico had the assembly in Los Angeles secretly suspend Castro until order could be restored. In fact, Pico dismissed the threat of Frémont and focused on dispatching his rival. He had now determined that coexistence with Castro was impossible and on June 16 set off north with a military force. For his part, Castro was struggling to raise a force of his own and was greatly annoyed by Pico's refusal to send support to him against the threat of foreign invasion. Frustrated by the course of events, Castro declared martial law, pressed a small force into service, and departed Monterey. Pico had received a report that Castro's force had taken to the field and became convinced that Los Angeles was in danger. He thought Castro was moving to seize the

²² Bauer, *Surfboats and Horse Marines*, 142-143; Alfred Hoyt Bill, *Rehearsal for Conflict: The War with Mexico* (New York, NY: Cooper Square Publishers, Inc., 1969), 170.

²³ Bancroft, *Volume XXII*, 41-42, 44-45, 47; Hittell, *History of California Volume II*, 402.

capital and suspended his march north. With these forces in the field and the leaders poised to fall on each other, they received word that armed Americans had captured Sonoma on June 14.²⁴

Gillespie and Frémont met against this backdrop of impending war and internal disorder in California. The instructions to Gillespie and Larkin are a matter of historical record. The personal letters from Senator Benton to his son-in-law have been lost to history and there has been much debate regarding the contents of them. Frémont himself thought the correspondence was obscure. However, he combined his personal ambition with the clear overall goal of acquiring California to justify his future actions. "I had learned with certainty from the Secretary of the Navy that the President's plan of war included the taking of California, and under his confidential instructions I had my warrant." Senator Benton would later testify that there were no explicit instructions to start a revolt. Regardless of the facts, Frémont believed he had a warrant to undertake military actions in California. The result was an incident that was "ill-timed, ill-advised, and extraordinary in all its phases."²⁵

The Bear Flag Revolt

The Bear Flag Revolt, as it came to be called, began in June, 1846. Frémont's role in the revolt demonstrates the benefits of individual initiative and the application of emergent strategy. War had finally been declared by the United States on May 13, 1846, however, no one in California, least of all Frémont, was aware of it. The causes of the revolt are popularly said to be one of self-defense on the part of American settlers, a move against their expulsion by mercurial Mexican policy, and the hostile intentions of Castro. The facts are more complicated. Castro had

²⁴ Harlow, *California Conquered*, 89-90; Bancroft, *Volume XXII*, 47, 51-52; Hittell, *History of California Volume II*, 410-412.

²⁵ John Charles Frémont, *Memoirs of My Life* (New York, NY: Belford, Clarke & Company, 1887), 649-650; George Tays, "Frémont Had No Secret Instructions," *Pacific Historical Review* 9, no. 2 (June 1940): 170; John Adam Hussey, "The Origin of the Gillespie Mission," *California Historical Society Quarterly* 19, no. 1 (March 1940): 51; Hittell, *History of California Volume II*, 421; Bancroft, *Volume XXII*, 77.

not issued the expulsion proclamations that had been transmitted to him by the central government, nor did he order the settlers to leave, or raise forces against them. However, this did not stop the spread of rumors that the *commandante* was attempting to do all of these things. In reality the Bear Flag party consisted of opportunists who used a mixture of personal gain, glory, patriotism, and a stretching of truth to achieve unity of effort. Into this tense environment, Castro picked the most inopportune time to send a benign party north to acquire several hundred horses on June 9. William B. Ide, who became a leader in the Bears, received a report of more than two hundred and fifty armed men moving north, pillaging crops and raising the inhabitants to march against Frémont.²⁶

This movement north was interpreted as a hostile act toward the American inhabitants, and on June 10, Ide met with and relayed the report to Frémont. During the meeting, Frémont had advised that a raiding party be formed to relieve the “hostile” party of their horses and perhaps gain some prominent prisoners. Although he could not participate, he saw an opportunity if Castro could be provoked into an attack, which would justify actions through self-defense. Ezekiel Merritt was elected to lead the raid, which was highly successful. The horses were acquired and another party moved against Sonoma on the night of the June 13. Mariano Vallejo, the *commandante*, awoke the following morning to find his house surrounded by a hostile party. Once Vallejo understood that no personal violence was to be offered, he invited the ringleaders into his home for drinks. This quickly escalated and the inebriated crowd produced articles of capitulation, which amounted to a declaration. As parts of the group broke away, and once it became clear that Frémont had not ordered the Sonoma action, Ide and his compatriots set about declaring independence. They gathered a piece of white cloth, attached a red stripe of wool, painted a bear and a star on it, and ran it up a pole bearing the words “California Republic.”

²⁶ Harlow, *California Conquered*, 57, 93; Bancroft, *Volume XXII*, 80-83; Hittell, *History of California Volume II*, 422; Simeon Ide, *A Biographical Sketch of William B. Ide* (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, 1880), 48.

Sonoma had been seized.²⁷

Frémont wrote Captain John B. Montgomery, commanding the *Portsmouth* near Monterey. His June 16 letter informed Montgomery of the revolt, “people here have made some movements with the view of establishing a settled & stable Government.” What Frémont left unsaid was his participation in planning and providing tacit support to the raid that resulted in a nascent republic. When Castro demanded Montgomery’s explanation for Frémont’s conduct, he was able to reply in good faith that Frémont was not involved in the upheaval. Frémont may have purposely omitted this from his correspondence. However, his forces had not yet thrown in with the revolutionaries. This changed on June 25.²⁸

Frémont had decided to answer the “urgent appeals made by the settlers for assistance” and started for Sonoma. Castro had managed to gather over one hundred and fifty men and intended to attack Ide. A grisly incident may have helped spur Frémont to action. Ide had sent two men to pick up a keg of powder; they were captured by 22-year-old Juan Padilla, a leader in Castro’s force, tied to trees and butchered. The killings further riled up the foreigners living in the area, and the Bear forces at Sonoma quickly swelled to over two hundred. A small skirmish occurred on June 24 near Sonoma and Castro’s forces withdrew toward Santa Clara. Frémont arrived the following day and attempted to pursue them. However, he was provided false information indicating another attack on Sonoma, fell for the ruse, set off to defend Sonoma, leaving Castro’s forces to escape. Frustrated in his pursuit, he took a small raiding party to the fort at the mouth of San Francisco Bay. Ferried by Captain William D. Phelps of the American merchant ship *Moscow*, the party climbed the heights and spiked ten abandoned brass cannon

²⁷ Hittell, *History of California Volume II*, 422-424, 429-432; Harlow, *California Conquered*, 97-98; Ide, *A Biographical Sketch*, 48; Bancroft, *Volume XXII*, 111-112.

²⁸ Bauer, *Surfboats and Horse Marines*, 146-147. Harlow, *California Conquered*, 80; Spence and Jackson, *The Expeditions of John Charles Frémont, Volume 2*, 151-153. During the Gavilan incident, Larkin wrote John Parrott, US consul in Mazatlan, urgently requesting a US Navy vessel to protect American citizens against retaliation. Frémont had been in contact with Montgomery prior and had requested supplies. These had been furnished on June 7.

without interruption, returning to Sonoma on July 4. With the retreat of Castro's men, the Californians had abandoned the territory north of Monterey to Sutter's Fort.²⁹

Frémont called a meeting the day after a large festival celebrating the American Independence Day on July 4. A committee was formed, three Bears and two of Frémont's men, to determine further courses of action. Over the objections of Ide, Frémont was appointed commander with Gillespie as his second. Independence day for the Bears was declared to be July 5. Despite his personal objections, Ide drew up conditions for annexation to the United States. Under the eyes of the Bears, some scattered members of the US Navy from the *Portsmouth*, and his own men, Frémont was now in charge of the new "nation." His authority would be short-lived; by sheer luck, the United States was finally at war and Commodore Sloat seized Monterey on July 6. This fact, at least in the short term, would give validation to his actions.³⁰

Commodore Sloat's Conquest

John Drake Sloat arrived at Mazatlán in November of 1845 to take command of the US Pacific Squadron. Secretary of the Navy George Bancroft had instructed him that it "is the earnest desire of the President to pursue the policy of peace... and every part of your squadron should be... careful to avoid any act which can be construed as an act of aggression." However, because of the imminence of war, the Secretary went on to say "should you ascertain beyond a shadow of a doubt that the Mexican government has declared war on us, you will at once... possess yourself of the port of San Francisco and... occupy such other ports as your force may permit." Furthermore, if occupation ensued, he was to preserve the friendliest possible relations with the

²⁹ Frémont, *Memoirs of My Life*, 525; Harlow, *California Conquered*, 108-111; Bauer, *Surfboats and Horse Marines*, 147; Bancroft, *Volume XXII*, 177.

³⁰ Harlow, *California Conquered* 112; Bancroft, *Volume XXII*, 177-181; Frémont, *Memoirs of My Life*, 526-527.

inhabitants.³¹

The Pacific Squadron consisted of six vessels: the flagship *Savannah*, the sloops-of-war, *Portsmouth*, *Levant*, and *Warren*, the schooner *Shark*, and the storeship *Erie*. Two other ships were en route to join the fleet, the sloop-of-war *Cyane*, and the largest frigate in the US Navy, the *Congress*, with Captain Robert F. Stockton aboard. Those ships left Norfolk on August 10 and Hampton Roads on October 30, respectively. Stockton carried dispatches identical to Gillespie's, should he fail to arrive. Stockton had also been instructed to assume command should the sixty-five year old Sloat experience health problems.³²

Sloat had concerns with Britain as well as Mexico. During the early part of 1846, tensions over the Oregon territory were growing. At any moment, the US could be engaged in war with either country and a British squadron was stationed in the Pacific. The belief was that should war break out, Britain would seize Oregon and potentially California.³³ The concerns over foreign interference would inform his future actions.

On May 17, 1846 Sloat received news of a clash between US and Mexican forces on the Rio Grande. He ordered Captain William Mervine and the *Cyane* to Monterey to provide Larkin with notice of hostilities. Being exceptionally concerned over security, he kept the news from his officers and took no further action. He was well aware of the embarrassing incident four years earlier by Jones and refused to let this same thing happen to him. Sloat would continue to hesitate and focused on one line of his orders, "should you ascertain beyond a shadow of a doubt that the Mexican government has declared war on us." Without a clear declaration of war in hand, Sloat hesitated and remained at Mazatlan.³⁴

³¹ Harlow, *California Conquered*, 38; Bauer, *Surfboats and Horse Marines*, 138-139.

³² Bauer, *Surfboats and Horse Marines*, 138-139; Bauer, *The Mexican War*, 172.

³³ Bauer, *Surfboats and Horse Marines*, 141-142.

³⁴ Harlow, *California Conquered*, 38, 118; Bauer, *Surfboats and Horse Marines*, 138-139.

Larkin received the *Cyane* and the letter from Sloat on or about June 20, almost a week after the Bear Flaggers had seized Sonoma. It informed him of the hostilities as well as Sloat's intentions, when it stated that he would arrive as quickly as possible to take possession of Monterey and perhaps more of the country. Larkin assumed that Sloat would arrive in just a few days. Although Sloat did put to sea for a short period, he quickly returned to port, a maneuver that was designed to confuse the local British fleet. The Commodore hesitated until June 7, almost three weeks after he first received word of hostilities. He finally arrived off the coast of Monterey between July 1-2.³⁵

Sloat met with Larkin on July 2 and Larkin provided Sloat with all of the information he had, informing him of the Bear revolt, the actions of Frémont and Gillespie, as well as Pico's desire for an English protectorate. Additionally, the consul hoped that the inhabitants would request the protection of the Commodore and his fleet. Larkin did not sympathize with the Bears, had hoped for a peaceful annexation, and although unaware of Frémont's direct involvement, he admitted that the country was in their hands and their occupation of Monterey was expected within days. Sloat continued to hesitate, surprising the inhabitants of Monterey. Eventually, Sloat became convinced that Frémont and Gillespie had been operating on legitimate orders. Additionally, he feared the appearance of the British fleet, including the seventy-four gun *Collingwood*. Finally disposed for action, Larkin was summoned onboard the flagship and Sloat informed him that he was determined to raise the flag of the United States over Monterey. Additionally, he directed Montgomery, at San Francisco, to coordinate with Frémont to take the fort at Yerba Buena if possible. The following day at seven-thirty in the morning, Captain Mervine went ashore, with a small landing party, and approached Monterey.³⁶

³⁵ Bancroft, *Volume XXII*, 203, 206; Harlow, *California Conquered*, 118-119, 121; Hittell, *History of California Volume II*, 459. This hesitation would earn Sloat a reprimand and a relief of command from Secretary Bancroft. However, his actions saved his reputation and neither order reached him before he quit the theater to return home.

³⁶ Bancroft, *Volume XXII*, 226-227, 230; Harlow, *California Conquered*, 123; Bauer,

Captain Mervine presented Artillery Captain Mariano Silva with Sloat's surrender demand. This man, Mariano Silva, was the same soldier who received Jones's surrender demand four years prior. Silva informed Mervine that he had no authority to surrender the settlement and referred him to the commandante-general, Jose Castro, who had been summoned. For his part, Silva withdrew from the town without arms or soldiers. It was near ten o'clock when Sloat received his reply. The Commodore immediately ordered two hundred and fifty marines and sailors ashore to seize the port. Captain Mervine marched the force to the customs house and took possession of the government building. There was no opposition; however, the entire spectacle drew a crowd of local inhabitants that gathered to watch the proceedings.³⁷

Sloat was, from the outset, focused on maintaining good order and discipline in his forces, as well as good relations with the civilians. His orders were specific; he was to preserve the "friendly relations with the inhabitants." Prior to the landings, he issued detailed general orders to his troops. "It is not only our duty to take California but to preserve it afterwards as a part of the United States... it is of the first importance to cultivate the good opinion of the inhabitants." Plundering was to be severely punished, no private residence was to be entered without the order of an officer, no indignities were to be offered to females, supplies would be promptly paid for, and even personal weapons were not to be discharged without an officer's order.³⁸

Sloat came ashore after the seizure of the customs house in order to address the inhabitants. His orders were to "occupy San Francisco and other Mexican ports." At this point, Sloat exceeded his orders. His proclamation explained that hostilities had commenced and that he

Surfboats and Horse Marines, 150.

³⁷ Harlow, *California Conquered*, 123; Bancroft, *Volume XXII*, 230-231; Hittell, *History of California Volume II*, 462-463; Henry, *The Story of the Mexican War*, 116-117; Grivas, *Military Governments in California*, 45; Bauer, *Surfboats and Horse Marines*, 151-152. Silva did not even have a Mexican flag to surrender.

³⁸ Bauer, *Surfboats and Horse Marines*, 139, 150-151; Henry, *The Story of the Mexican War*, 117; Harlow, *California Conquered*, 123; Hittell, *History of California Volume II*, 463.

intended to raise the flag of the United States over Monterey and carry it throughout California. Furthermore, he came as their friend and that personal and property rights would be respected. Finally, he went on to state that “henceforward California would be a portion of the United States and its peaceful inhabitants will enjoy the same rights and privileges as the citizens of any portion of that territory.” Commodore Sloat had annexed California, exceeding his orders of occupying ports, but nevertheless, maintained good relations with the citizenry.³⁹

Fortunately for the Commodore, his orders had been amended. After the declaration of war, Secretary Bancroft dispatched new orders on July 12, 1846. These new instructions would not reach Sloat before the actions of July 7, making explicit what had been implicit. The expectation for the Pacific Squadron was now to possess all of Upper California and establish a civil administration. Although not bestowing the Commodore with the authority to annex the province, it was considerably closer than his original instructions. Authority or not, Alta California had been annexed by Commodore Sloat and the territory was to be a war prize of the United States.⁴⁰

Sloat had taken Monterey, but he had yet to find an authority that could, or would, officially surrender Alta California. As soon as Monterey was secured, the Commodore dispatched letters to *Commandante* Castro and Governor Pico, seeking their cooperation in bringing the province under American control. Both refused, not only due to national pride, but because the Bear Flag incident had so angered many Californians that the leaders now refused to even discuss a cessation of hostilities with the United States.

Castro and Pico had assumed —Frémont had been operating under the direction of the United States. Sloat shared this belief and that played a role in his decision to begin operations in California. The *commandante* responded to Sloat’s summons by stating that he would spare no

³⁹ Bauer, *Surfboats and Horse Marines*, 139, 152; Bancroft, *Volume XXII*, 235-237; Henry, *The Story of the Mexican War*, 45-46; Hittell, *History of California Volume II*, 464-465.

⁴⁰ Grivas, *Military Governments in California*, 43.

sacrifice to preserve his country. In order to resist the United States, Pico and Castro put aside their differences, gathered a force, and consolidated at Los Angeles to defend the sovereignty of their nation.⁴¹

Calm was quickly restored in Monterey and precautionary defensive preparations were undertaken. Police regulations were issued and sailors patrolled the streets. A thirty-five-horseman company was authorized. It was to be raised from the local population in order to patrol the more remote areas. Two of Sloat's officers were appointed to serve as justices of the peace as the Californians who held the positions previously refused to serve. Blockhouses were constructed to protect the harbor and quarters were acquired for garrisoning the troops. Captain Mervine had been appointed as the commander of the garrison. Larkin, always concerned with the mood of the people, reported that the local citizens were fast becoming calm.⁴²

Sloat, the night prior to the occupation, wrote Captain Montgomery aboard the *Portsmouth*, near Yerba Buena. Montgomery was informed that the war had begun, that Monterey would be seized, and that Yerba Buena should be taken if sufficient forces were available. These forces could be Montgomery's alone, Frémont's, or a combination. Additionally, the Commodore was eager to discover whether Frémont would cooperate with the naval forces. The letters were received on July 8; and Montgomery prepared to take Yerba Buena and notified the US vice-consul Leidesdorff at Monterey that the landing would take place the following morning.⁴³

Early on July 9, in full dress uniform, seventy sailors and marines landed at Clark's point

⁴¹ Henry, *The Story of the Mexican War*, 117-118; Grivas, *Military Governments in California*, 48-49; Harlow, *California Conquered*, 125-126.

⁴² Harlow, *California Conquered*, 124, Bauer, *Surfboats and Horse Marines*, 152.

⁴³ Spence and Jackson, *The Expeditions of John Charles Frémont, Volume 2*, 164-165, Harlow, *California Conquered*, 126-128; Henry, *The Story of the Mexican War*, 117; W. Sherman Savage, "The Influence of William Alexander Leidesdorff on the History of California," *The Journal of Negro History* 38, no. 3 (July 1953): 328-329; Bauer, *Surfboats and Horse Marines*, 154; Bauer, *The War With Mexico*, 171.

near Yerba Buena and marched to the plaza in the center of town. There was no opposition. A twenty-one-gun salute from the *Portsmouth* accompanied the raising of the American flag at Yerba Buena. Montgomery searched in vain for someone who could surrender the town. During the night, Leidesdorff had translated Sloat's proclamation into Spanish for distribution. Montgomery addressed several dozen inhabitants of the town and informed them that the American flag was flying over Monterey and that he hoped it would soon replace the revolutionary flag at Sonoma. To this end, Montgomery wrote Frémont, requesting on behalf of Sloat, that he move to Monterey as soon as possible to arrange future actions and cooperation. Lieutenant Joseph W. Revere was dispatched as a courier with the letters and an American flag to be raised at Sonoma. Lieutenant Henry B. Watson was left ashore with a small garrison of fourteen marines and instructions to raise a local defensive force of thirty-two men.⁴⁴

Frémont received Revere the same day with the correspondence from Montgomery, Sloat and Larkin. Each informed him of the most current events and requested that he present himself and his force at Monterey. Frémont, who was now the head of the Bears, placed the movement at the disposal of the United States. The Bear Flag was replaced with the American flag, bringing the California Republic to an end. On July 11, Montgomery reported that the American flag was flying over Yerba Buena, Sonoma, and Sutter's Fort. Frémont, along with one hundred and sixty men and two cannon, departed Sonoma, and arrived at Monterey on July 19.⁴⁵

Sloat had summoned Frémont with the intention of cooperating with the rebels and, potentially, placing them under his command. He was extremely disturbed to discover that

⁴⁴ Hittell, *History of California Volume II*, 467, 477; Harlow, *California Conquered*, 126-127; Henry, *The Story of the Mexican War*, 117; Bancroft, *Volume XXII*, 238-240; Bauer, *Surfboats and Horse Marines*, 155-157; Spence and Jackson, *The Expeditions of John Charles Frémont, Volume 2*, 166-168; Douglas S. Watson "The First Mail Contract in California," *California Historical Quarterly* 10, no. 4 (December 1931): 354. Lieutenant Revere was the grandson of Paul Revere of the Revolutionary War.

⁴⁵ Harlow, *California Conquered*, 128; Henry, *The Story of the Mexican War*, 118; Hittell, *History of California Volume II*, 467-468; Spence and Jackson, *The Expeditions of John Charles Frémont, Volume 2*, 166-170.

Frémont had no explicit orders to take military action in California. Frémont informed him that he “had acted solely on my own responsibility, and without any expressed authority from the Government to justify hostilities.” Sloat explained, before abruptly terminating the interview, that his seizure of Monterey was predicated on the assumption that Frémont’s operations in the north were based on written orders. Frémont was not given the opportunity to justify his actions. Furthermore, Frémont was confused as to why an officer in command of a naval squadron was relying upon him to justify his actions. Sloat was so unnerved that he dismissed Frémont and his force, refusing to bring them under his command.⁴⁶

On July 16, the British ship *Collingwood* sailed into Monterey. Sir George Seymour had arrived to assess the situation as it related to British interests. The British had been watching the events in California with great interest; however, Seymour had been forbidden to interfere in the conflict. He was only authorized to encourage the Californians to reject control by a foreign power. When he arrived and saw the American flag flying at Monterey he said, “I am sorry for it but it is no business of mine.” Seymour did write to the British vice-consul James Alexander Forbes, challenging the legality of Sloat’s annexation of California. His view was that it was against international law and possibly contrary to the US Constitution. Nonetheless, he recognized the legality of the seizure, if not annexation, on military grounds. Additionally, he believed that the occupation was temporary due to the distance from the American capital and that California was destined to be an independent nation.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Grivas, *Military Governments in California*, 50; Spence and Jackson, *The Expeditions of John Charles Frémont, Volume 2* 168-170; Frémont, 534-535; Harlow, *California Conquered* 131-132; Bauer, *Surfboats and Horse Marines*, 158-160.

⁴⁷ Harlow, *California Conquered*, 53-54, 134; Samuel Francis DuPont, *Extracts From Private Journal-Letters of Captain S. F. DuPont, While in Command of the Cyane, During the War With Mexico, 1846-1848* (Wilmington, DE: Ferris Brothers, 1885), 30; Henry, *The Story of the Mexican War*, 118; Spence and Jackson, *The Expeditions of John Charles Frémont, Volume 2*, 555-556; Fred Walpole, *Four Years in the Pacific. In Her Majesty’s Ship “Collingwood” From 1844-1848* (Paris, France: E. Brière, rue Sainte-Anne, 1850), 162-163. The policy of non-interference toward California was approved by Lord Aberdeen, the British ambassador to Mexico, and was unknown to the United States. At this point, there was still concern regarding a

Robert Field Stockton, commander of the US ship *Congress* arrived at Monterey on July 15, 1846. “Fighting Bob” was a veteran of the War of 1812 and had a propensity for dueling; he was brash and aggressive. Captain Stockton was the complete opposite of Commodore Sloat. The Commodore had undertaken no plan to bring the interior of Alta California under American control. Stockton, however, had met with Gillespie and was so impressed with the actions of the soldier and the marine, that he came away aggressively in favor of additional land campaigns to seize Castro, defeat his forces, and bring all of California under the flag of the United States. Additionally, Frémont met with Stockton on July 22 and found him very favorable to a land campaign. Sloat had already requested relief from his command on May 6, 1846 before leaving Mazatlan, pleading poor health. At the first meeting with Stockton, he articulated his intention to relinquish control of land operations on July 23 and full command three days later; Sloat boarded the *Levant* and sailed for the United States. Sloat’s conquest would now become Stockton’s campaign.⁴⁸

Commodore Stockton’s Campaign

Commodore Stockton would radically redirect the passive means and limited goals of Commodore Sloat. Informed by Jones’s actions four years previously, Sloat had moved cautiously, only commencing offensive operations after much deliberation. He never had any intention to seize the interior of Alta California. The orders in hand stated that he was to capture Monterey and conduct other operations as resources permitted. Sloat felt that he had accomplished this and that his resources were insufficient to conduct further offensive operations.

British occupation of California and this fear was one of the factors that drove Sloat to take the halting actions he did.

⁴⁸ Henry, *The Story of the Mexican War*, 50-53; Harlow, *California Conquered*, 137-138; Bauer, *Surfboats and Horse Marines*, 161-162; Bancroft, *Volume XXII*, 233-234.

Similarly, the past would provide a motivation for Stockton's aggressive actions.⁴⁹

Stockton was attempting to reinvigorate his career after an unfortunate lethal accident. He had overseen the development of an advanced steamship equipped with a screw propeller and large bore wrought iron guns. On February 28, 1844, Stockton was demonstrating a large-caliber cannon nicknamed the "Peacemaker." The demonstration took place in front of a crowd of nearly four hundred, including John Tyler, the President of the United States, Abel P. Upshur, the Secretary of State, and Thomas W. Gilmer, the Secretary of the Navy. After several successful firings, the cannon exploded, engulfing the *Princeton* in smoke and showering the deck with lethal fragments. Gilmer and Upshur were killed immediately along with Colonel David Gardner, the father of the President's fiancée. In total, seven were killed and nine wounded, including Stockton.⁵⁰

Stockton had hoped to build his career as a pioneer in naval construction and technology. Within a week of the explosion, the House Committee on Naval Affairs suspended further construction of *Princeton*-style steamships and large, wrought iron, cannon testing. Stockton, working through the President directly, asked for a court of inquiry into the incident, both to exonerate him and reverse the decision of the committee. Both the President and the court of inquiry exonerated Stockton and pointed toward a simple accident inherent in testing any new technology. Although officially cleared of fault, Stockton's public reputation suffered and his personal pride was deeply affected. Two years later, his command in Alta California offered an opportunity for fame, glory, and a restoration of personal pride.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Bancroft, *Volume XXII*, 250-251.

⁵⁰ Lee M. Pearson, "The Princeton and the Peacemaker: A Study in Nineteenth-Century Naval Research and Development Procedures," *Technology and Culture* 7, no. 2 (Spring, 1966): 163, 166, 176-177; St. George L. Sioussat, "The Accident on Board the U.S.S. Princeton, February 28, 1844, A Contemporary News Letter," *Pennsylvania* 4, no 3. (July 1937): 161; R. John Brockmann, *Commodore Robert F. Stockton: Protean Man for a Protean Nation* (Amherst, NY: Cambria Press, 2009), 123-124.

⁵¹ Brockmann, *Commodore Robert F. Stockton*, 125-126; 129, 143. Pearson, "The

Stockton publicly articulated his radical departure from Sloat's policies with his July 29, 1846 proclamation to the people of Alta California. He spoke of the Mexican government's initiation of hostilities, attacking US forces in Texas, and the hostile actions against Frémont's men at Gavilan, who were merely on a peaceful scientific survey. Castro and Pico were keeping the country in a state of anarchy by taking up arms, while other members of the civil administration had fled. The population was tired of military usurpers and they "invoke[d] my protection." He was receiving "daily reports from the interior of scenes of rapine, blood and murder." Stockton resolved to "march against those boasting and abusive chiefs" beyond the confines of Monterey and San Francisco. His statement closed with an articulation of consequences for civil disobedience and that civil government would be restored when the public administrators returned to their posts. Finally, Stockton injected additional confusion into the entire operation by implying that when Castro was defeated, the US forces would be withdrawn. The harsh language and aggressive charges against the Californians was a departure from the reasoning and initial administration of Sloat. Before his departure, Sloat had been provided a copy of Stockton's proclamation but left it unread until August 10, 1846. When he did examine the document, he found that it "does not contain my reasons for taking possession... or my views or intentions towards the country; consequently it does not meet my approbation."⁵²

Sloat was not the only one who expressed concerns with the new direction of the military occupation and administration. Larkin forwarded the statement to the Secretary of State including a note saying he had no idea where Stockton had gotten the ideas contained in it. Captain Montgomery, appointed the commander of the district of San Francisco, was extremely hesitant to publish it. The surgeon of the *Portsmouth* found it nearly unintelligible and another American at Valparaiso thought Stockton had taken a step backwards by unnecessarily stoking hostilities.

Princeton and the Peacemaker," 178.

⁵² Bancroft, *Volume XXII*, 255-257; Harlow, *California Conquered*, 141; Henry, *The Story of the Mexican War*, 118-119.

The skeptical parties were concerned by the influence of Gillespie and Frémont. The proclamation served to confuse, frighten, and anger the Californians.⁵³

Stockton had begun preparations for the offensive campaign as soon as he received command of land operations on July 23, 1846. He elevated Frémont to the rank of major and appointed Gillespie as his deputy. Frémont was to command the “California Battalion” consisting of just over one hundred and sixty members of the Bear Flaggers mustered into service as volunteers. Additionally, Frémont was to increase his numbers to three hundred. This was another reversal of Sloat’s policy; he had refused Frémont personally and would not accept his revolutionaries in any official capacity. Stockton ordered the California Battalion to board the *Cyane*, and proceed to San Diego, cutting off Castro’s route to the south from Los Angeles. Concurrently, Stockton would land a force at San Pedro and march south; Castro would be trapped between the two forces and the resistance crushed. On July 26, Frémont’s forces boarded the ship and arrived at San Diego three days later.⁵⁴

Castro, after the skirmish on June 24, had moved south toward Santa Clara, arriving on June 30. His goal was to affect some form of reconciliation with Pico, combine forces, and attempt to eject the invaders. After refusing Sloat’s surrender demand on July 8, he wrote Pico and urged a combined effort against the Americans while warning that Frémont’s forces would soon move south. Pico had been ordering forces north from Los Angeles to support him against Castro. Upon receiving Castro’s letter, he stopped the flow of men north and ordered Los Angeles to prepare a defense against the Americans. Castro’s force numbered approximately two hundred while Pico’s contained less than one hundred. The two met at Santa Margarita on July 12,

⁵³ Harlow, *California Conquered*, 142; Bancroft, *Volume XXII*, 257-258; Grivas, *Military Governments in California*, 53-54.

⁵⁴ Harlow, *California Conquered*, 139-140; Bancroft, *Volume XXII*, 253; Henry, *The Story of the Mexican War*, 119; Mary Lee Spence and Donald Jackson, ed., *The Expeditions of John Charles Frémont, Volume 2*, 174-178; K. Jack Bauer, *Surfboats and Horse Marines*, 162; DuPont, *Extracts From Private Journal-Letters of Captain S. F. DuPont*, 40. It was unclear, even to his subordinates, upon what authority Stockton had promoted Frémont and Gillespie.

publically reconciled, and marched their two armies toward Los Angeles, separately, and twenty-four hours apart.⁵⁵

Governor Pico issued decrees to the citizens of California and wrote the Mexican Minister of Foreign Relations in reaction to the emergency. He informed the central government that they would resist to the best of their ability but as their resources were insufficient to mount a successful defense, more troops were needed immediately. For the citizens of California, all men between the ages of fifteen and sixty were to be organized and placed under arms for the defense of the nation. These requests and appeals to patriotism were, however, largely ignored.⁵⁶

The turbulent history of the country and several other factors conspired against a coherent defense of Los Angeles, let alone the entire department. The latent sectionalism continued to undermine a unified effort. The militia of the south would only obey Pico, while Castro's forces considered themselves the regular army and would not cooperate with the militia. The civic force mobilized to defend Los Angeles refused to fight a foreign foe and was more concerned with repelling Castro. Additionally, Americans and other foreigners in the area were actively sympathizing with the intruders. The recruits that could be raised flowed in slowly, desertion was constant, and neither Pico nor Castro had the funds or resources to maintain pay or sustenance. The only unanimity of opinion in California was that the government was incompetent and a fight against the Americans was hopeless.⁵⁷

By the end of August, the Californian forces had been halved by attrition and numbered perhaps one hundred. Castro consolidated his forces on August 4, 1846 at the Campo de la Mesa, south of Los Angeles. Here he learned of the impending approach of Frémont and Stockton. Although his small force was outnumbered, ill equipped, under-fed, and demoralized, it prepared

⁵⁵ Bancroft, *Volume XXII*, 261-262; Harlow, *California Conquered*, 143.

⁵⁶ Bancroft, *Volume XXII*, 263, 265; Harlow, *California Conquered*, 143.

⁵⁷ Bancroft, *Volume XXII*, 265-266; Harlow, *California Conquered*, 143-144.

to meet the California Battalion and Stockton's landing force.⁵⁸

Frémont and his forces, aboard the *Cyane*, commanded by Samuel H. DuPont, arrived at San Diego on July 29, 1846. While entering the harbor, the Mexican brig *Juanita* was spotted and seized, resulting in the capture of forty thousand percussion caps. Once the brig was seized, a small landing party of marines, under Lieutenant Rowan, entered the town and found no opposition. DuPont proposed that the civic officials raise the American flag, but they declined and the small detachment of marines did so instead. Frémont's battalion was brought ashore that evening. The local citizens were well disposed toward US forces. Juan Bandini a leading citizen, Santiago Argüello, captain of the port, and Pedro Carrillo, the customs official, all rendered logistical and informational assistance to the Americans. However, none would serve in any official capacity, fearing retribution should the occupation be defeated or withdrawn.⁵⁹

Frémont spent nearly a week gathering the horses for a move toward Los Angeles. There were rumors of a July 31 attack, and DuPont reinforced the party ashore. The attack never materialized and there was no further resistance. After only being able to gather eighty-three horses of the two hundred desired, Frémont was chafing for a move on Los Angeles. His orders from Stockton were to get "between Castro and the Colorado [River]." This contradicted those of DuPont, which read, "the battalion was not to move until it heard from him [Stockton]." The naval captain sympathized with Frémont. Had the roles been reversed, DuPont would not have placed himself under the command of the Navy, but having done so, Frémont must abide by his instructions. The California Battalion remained at San Diego and awaited further orders.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Bancroft, *Volume XXII*, 266-267; Harlow, *California Conquered*, 144.

⁵⁹ Bauer, *Surfboats and Horse Marines*, 166-167; Bancroft, *Volume XXII*, 267; Harlow, *California Conquered*, 144-145; DuPont, *Extracts From Private Journal-Letters of Captain S. F. DuPont*, 39-40; Frémont, *Memoirs of My Life*, 563-564. Elections were held; however, like their predecessors, the newly elected also refused to serve.

⁶⁰ DuPont, *Extracts From Private Journal-Letters of Captain S. F. DuPont*, 40; Frémont, *Memoirs of My Life* 563-564; Spence and Jackson, *The Expeditions of John Charles Frémont*, Volume 2, 178; Harlow, *California Conquered*, 145-146; Bauer, *Surfboats and Horse Marines*,

Stockton departed Monterey on August 1, 1846 aboard the *Congress*, now commanded by Lieutenant J. W. Livingston. The vessel carried Larkin as well as three hundred-sixty sailors and marines made available for land combat. These forces were not fully equipped. They carried only ninety muskets and one small cannon. The remaining troops were armed with boarding-pikes, cutlasses, pistols, and anything else that could be fashioned into a weapon. On the way to San Pedro, Stockton landed at Santa Barbara on August 6. A small landing party found no resistance and the American flag was raised on a makeshift flagpole as the village did not have one of its own. A garrison of sixteen men was left at Santa Barbara under the command of Midshipman William Mitchell.⁶¹

Stockton arrived at San Pedro, twenty-five miles from Los Angeles, on August 6, 1846. A landing party of marines under First Lieutenant Jacob Zeilin landed, met no resistance, and hoisted the American flag. Stockton was now in position to implement the second part of his plan, move south and squeeze Castro between his forces and those of Frémont. Additionally, he found himself in a unique situation. He was a naval officer about to embark upon an extended land campaign with an ad hoc force comprised mainly of under-equipped sailors. The Commodore immediately began drilling his troops in basic land maneuvers and managed to expand his small artillery force. Three six-pounders were taken from the *Don Quixote*, a Hawaiian bark found in the harbor; additionally, a thirty-two pounder was taken from the *Congress* and modified for land operations.⁶²

As soon as he was established ashore, he sent a courier to Frémont informing him of his seizure of San Pedro and for him to march north and join him at Temple's Farm. This message

167.

⁶¹ Bancroft, *Volume XXII*, 267; Harlow, *California Conquered*, 146; Bauer, *Surfboats and Horse Marines*, 167; Bauer, *The Mexican War*, 174.

⁶² Bauer, *Surfboats and Horse Marines*, 167; Bancroft, *Volume XXII*, 267-268; Harlow, *California Conquered*, 146.

was received on August 8, and one hundred twenty men of the California Battalion began their march north. The battalion encountered no opposition during its movement, save a few mounted horsemen that scattered quickly. Stockton, though, was under the impression that he was greatly outnumbered. He felt compelled to drill his troops and await the arrival of Frémont prior to any large-scale action. This allowed time for Larkin, and envoys from Castro, to work for a peaceful resolution while martial preparations continued.⁶³

Larkin remained unconvinced that war had broken out and endeavored to work out a peaceful end of the conflict, ideally under the control of the Americans. Larkin, while en route to San Pedro aboard the *Congress*, had been dispatching letters to his friend and prominent Mexican citizen, Abel Stearns. Larkin had maintained consistent correspondence with Stearns since his appointment as US consul, informing him of American policy and soliciting his views regarding the interests of the local population. As early as May, Stearns relayed his view that most citizens would favor US rule if protection from Castro and the Mexican government could be guaranteed. Larkin now informed him of Frémont's San Diego force and Stockton's San Pedro army. He explained that the combined force could mean over two thousand US troops marching through California. Larkin urged Stearns to go to the Los Angeles assembly and persuade them to declare California independent to avoid bloodshed. Stearns responded quickly that his efforts "amounted to nothing." Larkin lamented the violence that would follow with Castro and the Californians determined to resist.⁶⁴

Castro also made attempts to negotiate an end to hostilities. On August 7, he sent José M. Flores and Pablo de la Guerra to San Pedro with a message for Stockton. It requested an

⁶³ Spence and Jackson, *The Expeditions of John Charles Frémont, Volume 2*, 188; Bancroft, *Volume XXII*, 267; Frémont, *Memoirs of My Life*, 566; Bauer, *Surfboats and Horse Marines*, 167.

⁶⁴ Bauer, *Surfboats and Horse Marines*, 167; Harlow, *California Conquered*, 26, 79, 89, 146-147. Stearns was a naturalized Mexican citizen of eighteen years who had emigrated from the United States in 1829. He married a daughter of Juan Bandini, of San Diego, acquired land, and became an important and influential member of California society.

explanation of the Commodore's actions and implied a willingness to suspend hostilities while a conference was arranged. This offer to suspend hostilities included a demand that no further inland incursion of US forces be attempted. Stockton replied that he would suspend hostilities if California declared its independence from Mexico under American protection and agreed to "hoist the American flag" in the district. Stockton was eschewing negotiation and demanding surrender. Castro replied to Stockton, on August 10, deploring the "insidious" demands and declaring that he would "not withhold any sacrifice" to oppose the invaders.⁶⁵

Castro enclosed copies of the correspondence to Pico with a letter explaining that he had tried to prepare a defense and oppose the invasion but could do neither. After holding a council of war with his meager force, they concluded that there was no justification to present the force to be slaughtered by the Americans. Castro refused to expose his command to a hopeless engagement and would instead leave the country and report to the central government; he invited Pico to join him. Castro also distributed a grief-filled proclamation to his fellow citizens lamenting his departure from his birthplace, but promising a return to "punish this usurpation."⁶⁶

Pico submitted Castro's communication to the Los Angeles assembly on August 10, made his own proclamation, and addressed long announcements to the British, Spanish, and French consuls. None of the foreign governments, however, were inclined to render assistance. Pico, in a speech to the assembly, admitted the impossibility of a successful defense and saw no other course than to quit California and report to the central government. He advised the assembly to disband, which was done, denying the enemy an acting authority to surrender California. After

⁶⁵ Bancroft, *Volume XXII*, 268, 280; *Report of the Secretary of the Navy Communicating Copies of Commodore Stockton's Despatches, Relating to the Military and Naval Operations in California*. 30th Cong., 2nd sess., February 16, 1849, 4-6; Harlow, *California Conquered*, 147-148; Hittell, *History of California Volume II*, 583-584. Stockton utilized deception to increase the apparent strength of his force. This included efforts to make all of his cannon appear to be 32-pounders by covering them with skins. Guerra and Flores were deliberately shown this false artillery train; they dutifully reported the "large-caliber" guns to Castro.

⁶⁶ Harlow, *California Conquered*, 148-149; Bancroft, *Volume XXII*, 272-273; Bauer, *The Mexican War*, 176.

issuing a proclamation to the population, relating the same sentiment as Castro, the two separately departed that evening. The government in California had collapsed and with it, organized opposition.⁶⁷

Stockton, having rejected negotiations, began his march south on August 11. He moved almost his entire force, although once it was discovered that the opposing force had dispersed, half the force returned to San Pedro. Once the force reached Temple's rancho on August 12, Larkin and Midshipman Charles H. Baldwin, under a flag of truce, entered the town with the Commodore's reply to Castro's August 10 letter. They found nothing but empty streets and occupied the government house. Meanwhile, two Americans, Benjamin D. Wilson and John Rowland, rode out to meet Stockton and informed him that Castro and Pico had quit the capital. Preparations were made to enter the town on August 13.⁶⁸

Stockton's force linked up with the California Battalion on the afternoon of August 13 and the combined force entered the town, led by the band from the *Congress*. Stockton wasted no time explaining to the Secretary of the Navy the exploits of his force. In his eyes, the march had been one of the longest and most successful inland operations made by sailors in history. The only criticism he leveled was at Frémont. He blamed the escape of Castro on Frémont's tardy departure from San Diego, a delay that his own orders to DuPont had created. Several expeditions were launched to try and apprehend Castro and Pico. Several of Castro and Pico's subordinates were captured and released with a pledge not to take up arms against the United States. However, it was soon determined that the officials had moved beyond the reach of Stockton. Nevertheless, the inland campaign had successfully dispersed the organized resistance of Mexico. California

⁶⁷ Harlow, *California Conquered*, 150-151; Bancroft, *Volume XXII*, 274-275; Henry, *The Story of the Mexican War*, 119. Castro's camp was discovered and ten buried pieces of artillery were recovered.

⁶⁸ Bancroft, *Volume XXII*, 280; Hittell, *History of California Volume II*, 584-585; Bauer, *The Mexican War*, 176; Harlow, *California Conquered*, 150-151; Frémont, *Memoirs of My Life*, 566.

had been brought under the control of the United States without a major engagement.⁶⁹

Stockton began organizing an administrative structure to manage the conquered area. On August 17 he issued a general proclamation informing the citizens that the country now belonged to the United States and that it would be governed in a similar manner to any other American territory. Stockton issued the proclamation the same day official word of war reached the territory. Captain Joseph B. Hull, aboard the *Warren*, arrived at San Pedro with the official correspondence. This definitive declaration of war allowed Stockton to blockade the Californian coast to all but neutral vessels. Additionally, he sent the *Cyane* and the *Warren* to blockade Mazatlan. Stockton imposed import and port taxes to generate revenue, planned elections, and created elected and appointed offices.⁷⁰

Stockton began establishing a civil government. He created the offices of governor and secretary, each to be appointed by the President to four-year terms. Initially, Stockton named himself governor but promised Frémont the office upon his departure. The first legislative council would be appointed by the governor and, subsequently, by election. Existing Mexican law and governmental offices would remain in effect until changed by the legislature. On August 22, Stockton set the first elections for September 15 to fill *alcaldes* and municipal offices throughout California. Stockton, by appointing himself governor, setting elections, and creating administrative offices, had created a civil, not military government, without approval by the US Congress or the President of the United States.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Bancroft, *Volume XXII*, 281; Harlow, *California Conquered*, 150-151; Hittell, *History of California Volume II*, 585. These subordinates included Jose Maria Flores, *commandante* of Los Angeles and Andres Pico, the governor's brother.

⁷⁰ Grivas, *Military Governments in California*, 55; Bancroft, *Volume XXII*, 283; Harlow, *California Conquered*, 241; Bauer, *Surfboats and Horse Marines*, 169-170; Henry, *The Story of the Mexican War*, 209. The *Warren* had initially put in at Monterey on August 12. Captain Mervine, in command of the area, instructed Hull to hasten to San Pedro and inform Commodore Stockton.

⁷¹ Harlow, *California Conquered*, 153; DuPont, *Extracts From Private Journal-Letters of Captain S. F. DuPont*, 49; Bauer, *Surfboats and Horse Marines*, 169-170. An *alcalde* is a

The conquest was considered complete and successful. Stockton departed on September 5, 1846 aboard the *Congress* for San Francisco. He took almost his entire command and stopped at Santa Barbara to collect the garrison there. On August 31, he had ordered Frémont's battalion north with instructions to increase its ranks to three hundred. These orders, however, contradicted Stockton's earlier promise to the population that the California Battalion would remain in Los Angeles to prevent and punish aggression. In less than a month, US forces in southern California dwindled to only fifty marines under Gillespie in Los Angeles. This was the lone garrison in the area; San Diego and San Pedro were left empty.⁷²

Stockton was already looking beyond California for additional military successes. He prepared for operations against Mazatlan or Acapulco, followed by a march on Mexico City to "shake hands with General [Zachary] Taylor." Frémont soon began to receive multiple and contradictory orders. Stockton appointed Frémont Military Commandant of California on September 2. On September 28, Stockton instructed Frémont to increase his force to one thousand and was ordered to bring his force San Francisco with the implication that he would accompany Stockton on his assault against the Mexican coast. Frémont found settlers willing to help secure California but found little enthusiasm and few volunteers for a campaign in Mexico. Frémont himself had little confidence in the endeavor.⁷³

The Commodore's plan of meeting General Taylor at Mexico City came to an abrupt end with the arrival of a courier from Los Angeles. Juan "Flaco" Brown, having departed Los Angeles on September 24, brought a simple message written on cigarette paper. It read, "Believe

magistrate or mayor.

⁷² Bancroft, *Volume XXII*, 286-287; Frémont, *Memoirs of My Life*, 569; Spence and Jackson, *The Expeditions of John Charles Frémont, Volume 2*, 198-199; Harlow, *California Conquered*, 152.

⁷³ Harlow, *California Conquered*, 155-156; Bauer, *Surfboats and Horse Marines*, 170; *Report of the Secretary of the Navy*, 10; Spence and Jackson, *The Expeditions of John Charles Frémont, Volume 2*, 200, 204-206; Frémont, *Memoirs of My Life*, 572-573.

the bearer” and was stamped with the seal of Lieutenant Gillespie. Los Angeles was in full revolt. Gillespie and his small force were besieged at the government house.⁷⁴

Analysis

The opening actions of the campaign illustrate several Army and Joint doctrinal constructs. These include Mission Command, the challenge of developing shared understanding, and the importance of tendencies in an operational environment. Furthermore, Sloat’s initial handling of military operations track very closely with the phasing concepts of modern doctrine and the execution of stability tasks following major combat operations. Finally, Stockton reversed the momentum that Sloat had gained in administering California. His lack of understanding and desire to open a new theater of operations created a situation where the entire operation moved toward failure.

Frémont’s actions at Gavilan demonstrate the inherent risks involved in the Army’s concept of Mission Command, which requires a consideration of the subordinate and an understanding between military and civilian agencies. The modern concept of Mission Command has its foundations in the Prussian theory of *Auftragstaktik*. *Auftragstaktik* stresses the use of decentralized initiative within an overall strategic design.⁷⁵ The larger strategic design of the United States was to acquire California from Mexico. Frémont’s actions at Gavilan, if designed to

⁷⁴ Bancroft, *Volume XXII*, 303-304; Harlow, *California Conquered*, 156; Bauer, *Surfboats and Horse Marines*, 175; Henry, *The Story of the Mexican War*, 211; J. M. Guinn, “Siege and Capture of Los Angeles, September, 1846,” *Annual Publication of the Historical Society of Southern California, Los Angeles* 3, no. 1 (1893): 52; George Walcott Ames Jr. and Archibald H. Gillespie, “Gillespie and the Conquest of California: From Letters Dated February 11, 1846 to July 8, 1848 to the Secretary of the Navy (Concluded),” *California Historical Society* 17, no. 4 (December 1938): 328-329.

⁷⁵ Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 6-0. *Mission Command* (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 2012), v, 1-1; Hajo Holborn, “The Prusso-German School: Moltke and the Rise of the General Staff,” in *Makers of Modern Strategy from Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age*, ed. Peter Paret, Gordon A. Craig, and Felix Gilbert (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986): 296. The Army defines Mission Command as the exercise of authority and direction by the commander using mission orders to enable disciplined initiative within the commander’s intent to empower agile and adaptive leaders in the conduct of unified land operations.

provoke a war, were in keeping with this overarching national goal. However, his actions interfered with Larkin's confidential instructions to attempt a peaceful acquisition. Additionally, he violated the spirit of his orders, which were to avoid the appearance of a military, versus scientific, mission. When empowering subordinates, it is important to understand their personal ambitions and goals. Frémont's political connections with the expansionist Senator Benton drove the impetuous actions at Gavilan. In this case, Frémont required more specific orders explicitly denying him the freedom to enter the territory of California.

The lack of understanding between Larkin, the diplomat, and Frémont, the military representative, resulted in each working at cross-purposes. Frémont's reckless actions directly undermined Larkin's subtle diplomatic initiatives. Joint and Army doctrine acknowledges the requirement for military and civilian agencies to work in concert to achieve national goals. Unified action is the doctrinal term for this, defined as "the synchronization, coordination, and/or integration of the activities of governmental and nongovernmental entities with military operations to achieve unity of effort."⁷⁶ Shared understanding is a fundamental requirement for unified action. In this case, the diplomatic and military efforts were not synchronized. Frémont was unaware of Larkin's initiatives and Larkin ignorant of Frémont's orders. This created an environment where a lack of shared understanding prevented, and in fact hindered, unity of effort.

In contrast to the Gavilan incident, Frémont's actions during the Bear Flag Revolt demonstrate the role of Mission Command in emergent strategy. Frémont, after meeting with Gillespie, received new information. It was now the role of the Americans to help the Californians throw off Mexican rule.⁷⁷ This comprised the deliberate part of Frémont's strategy.

⁷⁶ Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 3-0, *Unified Land Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2012), 1-3, 1-6; Joint Publication (JP) 1, *Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2013), II-7.

⁷⁷ Harlow, *California Conquered*, 77. Bauer, *Surfboats and Horse Marines*, 139-140; Henry Mintzberg; *The Rise and Fall of Strategic Planning: Reconceiving Roles for Planning, Plans, Planners* (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1994), 24-25. Henry Mintzberg describes

He turned his forces south to take overt military action against the government of California. However, an opportunity arose in the form of Ide and the Bear Flaggers. This opportunity allowed Frémont to support and instigate a third party rather than initiate action himself; this was the emergent component of the strategy. Once Castro took action against Ide's forces, Frémont felt justified in taking actions to assist them. The end point of Frémont's strategy, freeing an area of California from Mexican rule, did not change; however, the way with which he went about it did. He combined his deliberate approach of moving his force into California, with the emergent approach of supporting the revolt, to achieve the ends of removing Mexican rule.

Frémont would not have been able to seize the opportunity without individual initiative and clear guidance. The broad guidance of assisting California in ending Mexican rule allowed for wide interpretation. In this case, Frémont's support of the Bear Flag Revolt, in spite of its opportunistic nature, was within the strategic designs of the United States. What doctrine now calls Mission Command allowed Frémont to exercise disciplined initiative with broad guidance. The Bear Flag Revolt would continue to spur emergent strategies as Commodore Sloat arrived off the coast of California.

Joint doctrine provides a basic phasing framework for the application of military force. The five phases are deter, seize the initiative, dominate, stabilize, and enable civil authority; these are referred to as phases one through five.⁷⁸ The actions of Sloat and Frémont demonstrate phases

strategy as a plan for the future, a guide from how to get from here to there. Furthermore, strategy consists of deliberate and emergent components. Deliberate strategies are intentions that are fully realized. Emergent strategies are realized outcomes that were not expressly intended, they occur when individual events or actions converge in time to produce an unforeseen outcome.

⁷⁸ Joint Publication (JP) 5-0, *Joint Operational Planning* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2011), III-39, III-42 – 44. In joint doctrine, the "Deter," or phase one, is designed to deter undesirable adversary action by demonstrating the capabilities and resolve of the joint force. Phase two, or "Seize the Initiative," seeks to seize the initiative through the application of appropriate joint force capabilities. The third phase, "Dominate," focuses on breaking the enemy's will for organized resistance or, in noncombat situations, control of the operational environment. The final two phases are "Stabilize" and "Enable Civil Authority." The stabilize phase is required when there is no fully functional, legitimate civil governing authority present while the enable civil authority phase is characterized by joint force support to legitimate civil

two, three, and four. Frémont's actions, formally sanctioned or not, seized the initiative from Castro, Pico, and the Mexican government; they were reactionary for the remainder of their time in California. The support of the Bear Flag Revolt seized the initiative at the beginning of the campaign and was illustrative of the doctrinal phase two. Sloat, spurred on by the assumption that Frémont was under orders, entered the dominate phase by seizing Monterey and San Francisco, the two critical towns in northern California. He then moved rapidly into the stabilization phase by re-establishing the civil administration of the coastal towns. It was less than one month between the outbreak of the Bear Flag Revolt and the beginning of the stabilization phase.

Sloat's initial handling of the stabilize phase tracks closely with the five primary tasks outlined in current Army doctrine, which are to establish civil security, civil control, restore essential services, support governance, and support economic and infrastructure development. Sloat rapidly established security by issuing police regulations, providing forces to patrol the towns, and authorizing the recruitment of local forces. Additionally, he appointed military officers to serve in government positions when some local civil servants refused to cooperate. In essence, he largely left the existing government structure in place and only made changes where absolutely necessary.⁷⁹

The primary criticism of Sloat is his hesitation to execute orders when hostilities broke out, while he sought certain information. Frémont's initiative, not Sloat's, drove the actions that led to the seizure of Monterey and San Francisco. However, this was the result of poorly-worded orders. On the contrary, Sloat's orders were very clear in that he could only act when he was absolutely certain that war had broken out. Although this seems like prudent wording, it belays the uncertain nature of military conflict. Carl von Clausewitz, the Prussian military theorist, saw uncertainty as a fundamental component of war. Uncertainty cannot be an excuse for inaction. By

governance in theater.

⁷⁹ Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 3-07, *Stability* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2012), 2-11; Harlow, *California Conquered*, 124.

demanding certainty as a requirement for action, Sloat's orders denied him the ability to exercise the disciplined initiative that the modern concept of Mission Command requires. Given the communication difficulties of the time, and the real possibility that foreign powers could seize California, Sloat should have been afforded the authority to act in the face of uncertainty.⁸⁰

Stockton's conquest of southern California followed much the same pattern as Sloat's in the north. With essentially no organized resistance, Stockton found his forces in the stabilization phase almost immediately. Similar to Sloat, Stockton established civil security, civil control, and established governance. Once these tasks were accomplished, Stockton began preparations to conduct offensive operations against the coast of Mexico. This diverted resources away from the stabilization tasks. It appears that Stockton believed that once organized resistance was defeated, there was little or no requirement for his additional attention or significant military resources.

Stockton did differ from Sloat in one critical way, his informational approach to the population. Sloat took great pains to follow his orders by making every effort to maintain good relations with the Californians. His initial proclamation assured the local population that although he came with a powerful force, he would protect the rights of Californians as he would any other Americans. In fact, as Sloat declared that California was a part of the United States, he had essentially made all Californians, American citizens. Sloat was trying to maintain calm and alleviate the fears that the Americans were coming as brutal conquerors. When Stockton took command, he immediately reversed course. His proclamation was filled with fictitious accounts of wanton unrest and threatened the population with severe repercussions for any transgression. Most importantly, he stated that once Castro and Pico were defeated, US forces would be withdrawn. The threats spread fear, and the idea of an American withdrawal created confusion.⁸¹

⁸⁰ Harlow, *California Conquered*, 38; Bauer, *Surfboats and Horse Marines*, 138-139; Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. by Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), 86.

⁸¹ Bancroft, *Volume XXII*, 234-237, 255-257; Harlow, *California Conquered*, 141; Henry, *The Story of the Mexican War*, 118-119.

When conducting operations in the stabilization phase, Army doctrine offers several stability mechanisms to focus efforts. Stability mechanisms are the way through which friendly forces affect civilians in order to attain stable and durable peaceful conditions. There are four of these mechanisms: compel, control, influence, and support. Stockton's confusing informing activities undermined his control of the population. By aggressively threatening the population, he was stoking their fears, and by implying an American withdrawal, there was no reason not to resist the temporary occupiers. Stockton had limited forces to control the California territory. He required the support of at least a portion of the population to maintain order. The combination of limited forces and no public support would eventually have massive effects on the campaign, especially in Los Angeles.⁸²

The persistent chaos in California is a key factor to understanding the operational environment. Army and joint doctrine defines the operational environment as "composite of the conditions, circumstances, and influences that affect the employment of capabilities and bear on the decisions of the commander." At this point in the operation, there was no single commander. However, part of understanding the operational environment involves projecting how it will trend in the future, or, identifying tendencies. The tendency in California was a state of unrest and periodic revolt. Tendencies in an operational environment have the most momentum and require significant effort and resources to change. The predilection toward unrest and armed resistance

⁸² ADRP 3-0, 2-10, 3-3; ADRP 3-07, 4-9. A stability mechanism is the primary method through which friendly forces affect civilians in order to attain conditions that support establishing a lasting, stable peace. The compel mechanism involves maintaining the threat—or actual use—of lethal force to establish control and dominance, effect behavioral change, or enforce cessation of hostilities, peace agreements, or other arrangements. The mechanism of control refers to establishing public order and safety; securing borders, routes, sensitive sites, population centers, and individuals; and physically occupying key terrain and facilities. Influence involves altering the opinions and attitudes of the host-nation population through inform and influence activities, presence, and conduct. Finally, support involves establishing, reinforcing, or setting the conditions necessary for the other instruments of national power to function effectively; coordinating and cooperating closely with host nation civilian agencies; and assisting aid organizations as necessary to secure humanitarian access to vulnerable populations.

would continue throughout the operation.⁸³

Stockton failed to recognize a key component of his operational environment. According to Army doctrine, understanding the environment is a requirement for making appropriate decisions and designing operations. A key aspect of understanding the environment is making an educated attempt to project how an environment may trend in the future. Historical tendencies help provide a logical foundation for projecting environmental trends. Natural tendencies have a momentum requiring significant effort to change.⁸⁴ One dominant tendency in California was to resist outside rule by unrest and armed revolt. This was the trend under Mexican rule. Stockton either was ignorant of the systemic unrest in California or was too focused on his plan to raid the Mexican coast. Either way, he pulled nearly all of his resources from the Los Angeles area and, as a result, failed to consolidate his gains. The result was a revolt against US forces.

Reversals and Defeats

Los Angeles Lost – The War Begins Again

Lieutenant Gillespie had been left to administer Los Angeles and the neighboring territory, on August 8, 1846, with approximately fifty marines. The total civilian population of Los Angeles was nearly fifteen hundred. Gillespie, fluent in Spanish, had developed a deep distrust and disdain for the Californians, referring to them as cowardly and inert. This negative attitude spread to his men who looked down on the local population. Furthermore, Gillespie held his own forces in low regard. He called his garrison “discontented... unaccustomed to control,” and “perfect drunkards.” The Californians had little respect for this undisciplined and abusive force. Gillespie was unable to enforce discipline in his troops, despite trying every “means in my power.” With this small and ill-suited force, he was to maintain military rule in accordance with

⁸³ JP 5-0, III-8; Army Techniques Publication (ATP) 5-0.1, *Army Design Methodology* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2015), 3-4 – 3-5.

⁸⁴ ATP 5-0.1, 3-2, 3-4 – 3-5.

Stockton's August 17 proclamation. He was empowered to grant exceptions to the more onerous elements of martial law in order to quiet discontent or resistance. However, his negative attitude and restive force created a situation where he was not inclined to offer accommodation, and instead did the opposite.⁸⁵

Los Angeles was the heart of pro-Mexican feeling in California. In spite of this, the population was not initially inclined to revolt against American rule. Frémont described the citizens of Los Angeles as "Healthy and good-tempered." Furthermore, prior to American occupation, they had been orderly and self-governing with very few curbs on individual freedoms. There was a restive element that may have been inclined to armed revolt, but to spur the uprising, additional segments of the population had to be alienated. Gillespie began instituting harsh and onerous policies. Two measures that generated the most discontent were a curfew and a ban on carrying firearms. Exceptions to these policies required a personal appeal to, and authorization of, Gillespie himself. Additionally, no two persons were permitted to walk the streets together, meetings in homes were forbidden, liquor was not to be sold without permission, and the commandant decided legal cases by decree instead of through the existing legal system. These were instituted with little regard to the cultural norms. Many Californians saw these regulations as a challenge to their honor, and saw Gillespie's rule as oppressive, unnecessary, and contrary to Sloat's earlier promises. Searches of homes began, arrests, both proper and arbitrary, increased and rumors of uprising began to flow freely. Gillespie was all too ready to increase his authoritarian measures when these rumors occurred. By the middle of September, Gillespie believed that the Californians were "determined to attack" and he put his forces in a constant state

⁸⁵ Bauer, *The Mexican War*, 183-184; Bancroft, *Volume XXII*, 305-306; Bauer, *Surfboats and Horse Marines*, 174; George Walcott Ames Jr., and Archibald H. Gillespie, "Gillespie and the Conquest of California: From Letters Dated February 11, 1846 to July 8, 1848 to the Secretary of the Navy," *California Historical Society* 17, no. 2 (June 1938): 139; George Walcott Ames Jr., and Archibald H. Gillespie, "Gillespie and the Conquest of California: From Letters Dated February 11, 1846 to July 8, 1848 to the Secretary of the Navy (Concluded)," *California Historical Society* 17, no. 4 Part 1 (December 1938): 325-326.

of defensive preparedness.⁸⁶

Século Varela led the first armed assault on Gillespie's men on September 23, 1846. Varela already had a history as a revolutionary. He was involved in the uprising against General Micheltorena in 1845 and was jailed by Pico that same year as part of another conspiracy against the governor. Varela refused to submit to Gillespie's authority and began resisting in petty, but non-violent ways. Joined by about a dozen other like-minded men, they remained a step ahead and out of reach of the garrison. The small group began to contemplate raising a force to eject Gillespie. As the reactionary Gillespie attempted to tighten control, the more moderate citizens began to flee Los Angeles. In response to the increasing disorder, Gillespie ordered Ezekiel Merritt of the Bear Flag Revolt and twenty-five men to San Diego, leaving between twenty-one and twenty-five troops in Los Angeles. Just before daylight on September 23, Varela and about twenty followers attacked the garrison. Gillespie's men repelled Varela's 3 a.m. assault. Although he considered many of his men undisciplined drunkards, they were good riflemen and scattered the attackers. Though they won that particular skirmish rather handily, the armed uprising had begun.⁸⁷

Most of the civilian population had already fled in the face of the deteriorating situation. Those who had not fled the harsh and arbitrary rule of Gillespie were now convinced that the war had resumed. Residents rallied to each side, but primarily to Varela. Gillespie saw a few foreign residents join his small band, raising his number to fifty-nine. Varela's opposing force rapidly grew to over one hundred and fifty. Gillespie launched a futile pursuit that led to a small skirmish and few prisoners, but no conclusive action. By September 24, the Californians had entrenched themselves on the commanding heights of Paredon Blanco (White Bluff) and began a siege of

⁸⁶ Bancroft, *Volume XXII*, 305-308; Frémont, *Memoirs of My Life*, 574-575; Henry, *Story of the Mexican War*, 210; Harlow, *California Conquered*, 161.

⁸⁷ J. M. Guinn, *A History of California and an Extended History of Los Angeles and Environs, Volume I* (Los Angeles, CA: Historic Record Company, 1915), 113, 126-127; Bancroft, *Volume XXII*, 307-309; Bauer, *The Mexican War*, 183-184.

Gillespie's small garrison.⁸⁸

The nascent rebellion issued a proclamation and chose new leadership. Captain José Flores was elected to lead the force, with Andrés Pico and José Antonio Carrillo as lieutenants. These men had all been involved with the initial resistance to Stockton's forces. Flores had already been captured and paroled prior to this. Although he had sworn not to take up arms as a condition of his parole, he now accepted the mantle of command. Valera, for his part, drafted and issued a proclamation signed by Flores. It railed against the cowardice of the original authorities that had fled the department while pointing to the "arbitrary and despotic laws" of the Americans as justification for armed revolt. Furthermore, it called all Californians between the ages of fifteen and sixty to arms and outlined harsh punishments for those neutral or hostile to the cause. Concurrently, two local citizens, Eulogio Célis and Francisco Figueroa, proposed a cessation of hostilities. Gillespie, although implying that he would accept the proposal, thought it should come from Flores. When the intermediaries returned with Flores's signature, the proposal now demanded unconditional surrender. Gillespie rejected the proposal stating that he would "die at [his] post rather than permit his country's arms to be disgraced."⁸⁹

Gillespie dispatched Juan Brown with his message to Stockton on September 24 and made preparations to resist the rebellion. Gillespie ordered Benito D. Wilson and his small band

⁸⁸ Harlow, *California Conquered*, 162; Ames Jr. and Gillespie, "Gillespie and the Conquest of California" *California Historical Society* 17, no. 4 Part 1 (December 1938): 326; Bancroft, *Volume XXII*, 308-309; Guinn, *A History of California, Volume I*, 126-127.

⁸⁹ Harlow, *California Conquered*, 163; Bancroft, *Volume XXII*, 309-310; Guinn, *A History of California, Volume I*, 127; Bauer, *Surfboats and Horse Marines*, 175; *Report of the Secretary of the Navy Communicating Copies of Commodore Stockton's Despatches*, 10, 15-16; Ames Jr. and Gillespie, "Gillespie and the Conquest of California" *California Historical Society* 17, no. 4 Part 1 (December 1938): 327-328; Guinn, *A History of California and an Extended History of Los Angeles and Environs, Volume I*, 270; Brent C. Dickerson, *Narciso Botello's Annals of Southern California, 1833-1847* (Bloomington, IN: iUniverse, LLC, 2014), 140; Bancroft, *Volume XX*, 236. Andreas Pico was Pío Pico's brother. Eulogio Célis was a prominent Los Angeles citizen and major landowner. Francisco Figueroa was the brother of José Figueroa, who had been appointed governor in 1833. He served as auditor for his brother and remained a prominent citizen after José's death in 1835. Francisco went on to be elected treasurer of Los Angeles in 1850.

of twenty troops to join him. Stockton had stationed Wilson's force of volunteers to protect the San Bernardino frontier. Varela intercepted Wilson who surrendered on September 26-27. Only the intervention of Varela prevented the massacre of the prisoners. Meanwhile, Stockton had left Gillespie with no artillery when he moved the major formations north. Gillespie was left to muster what firepower he could. He gathered all the powder he could find and set to work refurbishing four small cannon that had been deemed unusable. Gillespie's men were eventually able to bring two of the guns back into action and manufacture a limited supply of grape and musket shot. However, he was outnumbered by the Californians and did not feel capable of attempting to break out of the siege.⁹⁰

Flores proposed an armistice to negotiate the surrender of Gillespie's force on September 26. Hoping to buy time for his message to reach Stockton and for relief to arrive, Gillespie agreed to the conference. Dr. Edward Gilchrist, a surgeon from the *Congress*, and Nathaniel Pryor, a Kentucky native and long-time California resident, were dispatched as representatives. The conference reached an impasse and dragged on through the 27th. Finally, Flores demanded that Gillespie and his force march out of Los Angeles the next day to San Pedro. There, they were to embark and sail out of the area. Significantly, the demand allowed his force to leave with their arms. With this demand, a note from the captured Wilson was attached; he advised surrender to the superior force. If this proposal was rejected, Flores refused to take responsibility for the bloody onslaught that would ensue. Despite the ultimatum, Gillespie moved his small force to the nearby heights of Fort Hill. Unfortunately, this improved position possessed no water source inside the fortification. Outnumbered, outgunned, and now without water, Gillespie signed the finalized articles of capitulation on September 29. Gillespie's men marched out of Los Angeles the following day and embarked on the American merchantman *Vandalia* on October 4. As a

⁹⁰ Bauer, *Surfboats and Horse Marines*, 175; Ames Jr. and Gillespie, "Gillespie and the Conquest of California" *California Historical Society* 17, no. 4 Part 1 (December 1938): 326-327; Bancroft, *Volume XXII*, 312; Guinn, "Siege and Capture of Los Angeles, September, 1846," 53-54.

final and futile act of defiance, the two cannons were left spiked, in violation of the surrender agreement. Los Angeles had been wrested from Stockton.⁹¹

Reinforcements and Setbacks

Captain Mervine and the *Savannah* had been dispatched immediately after Stockton received word of the uprising on September 30. Stockton himself would not leave Yerba Buena until October 13; his attention was focused on attending a gala in his honor, thrown by the local citizens. On October 6, the *Savannah* arrived near San Pedro and found the *Vandalia* offshore; Gillespie had delayed sailing in hopes of linking up with reinforcements. Gillespie and Dr. Gilchrist boarded the *Savannah* and advised Mervine of the situation. Mervine was determined to land a force and attack Los Angeles immediately. Gillespie advised caution, at least for a few days to prepare, specifically, to download two cannon from the *Vandalia* to form a small artillery train. Mervine, against the advice of Gillespie and Gilchrist, ordered a landing for the next day. On the morning of October 7, a force of nearly three hundred sailors and marines from the *Savannah*, as well as Gillespie's men, landed near San Pedro. They began a march to Los Angeles without artillery and completely dismounted. They had no supply train and no means of moving any wounded should they take casualties. Mervine was determined to recapture Los Angeles before the arrival of Stockton.⁹²

Mervine's force moved about fifteen miles inland and made camp near Rancho Palos Verdes. Just before nightfall, they encountered the Californians, who then forced Mervine to

⁹¹ Harlow, *California Conquered*, 163-165, 167; Bauer, *Surfboats and Horse Marines*, 175; Guinn, *A History of California, Volume I*, 128-129; Ames Jr. and Gillespie, "Gillespie and the Conquest of California" *California Historical Society* 17, no. 4 Part 1 (December 1938): 330-331; Bauer, *The Mexican War*, 184.

⁹² Guinn, *A History of California, Volume I*, 127; Harlow, *California Conquered*, 156-157; Bauer, *Surfboats and Horse Marines*, 175; Guinn, *A History of California, Volume I*, 128-129; Ames Jr. and Gillespie, "Gillespie and the Conquest of California" *California Historical Society* 17, no. 4 Part 1 (December 1938): 334-335; Henry, *The Story of the Mexican War*, 211; Bauer, *Surfboats and Horse Marines*, 177-178.

muster his force repeatedly during the night through false attacks and harassing fire. Gillespie related that Mervine was “acting like an insane man”, issuing orders without purpose or coherence. A four-pounder fired into the camp throughout the night, and Mervine, without cannon of his own, could not respond. At first light on October 8, the exhausted force resumed its march toward Los Angeles. After an hour’s march they encountered the Californians in force, under the command of José Carrillo. Carrillo’s force consisted of the four-pound cannon and over one hundred horsemen.⁹³

Mervine organized his men into a column and ordered a charge. Carrillo was under orders from Flores to harass and delay, not to risk a general engagement. Instead of accepting the charge, Carrillo simply fired several rounds from the cannon and let his men fire a volley before galloping out of musket and rifle range. After Mervine’s first failed charge, he ordered two more. The results were four dead and six wounded, no casualties among Carrillo’s men, and the cannon remained in enemy hands. Mervine called a council of war. It was determined that further attacks against the mounted force would be futile and the march to Los Angeles would have to be abandoned. Without ambulances for the wounded, or horses to move them, crude carts were fashioned and the wounded dragged alongside the column. Five hours after the battle, the battered force returned to San Pedro. Mervine had the men board the ships and, after another council, resolved to wait until Stockton arrived before taking any further action. The *Vandalia* was sent north to inform Stockton of the situation.⁹⁴

⁹³ Harlow, *California Conquered*, 167-168; *Surfboats and Horse Marines*, 178-179; Guinn, *A History of California, Volume I*, 130; Ames Jr. and Gillespie, “Gillespie and the Conquest of California” *California Historical Society* 17, no. 4 Part 1 (December 1938): 334-335.

⁹⁴ Bauer, *Surfboats and Horse Marines*, 178-179; Bancroft, *Volume XXII*, 319-320; Harlow, *California Conquered*, 168; Guinn, *A History of California, Volume I*, 130-131; Ames Jr. and Gillespie, “Gillespie and the Conquest of California” *California Historical Society* 17, no. 4 Part 1 (December 1938): 338-339. After the battle, Carrillo’s force was desperately low on powder. This fact remained unknown to Mervine. After the debacle, Mervine was inclined to sail north and abandon the whole endeavor. Gillespie, though, was able to convince him to stay and await Stockton.

Stockton was making preparations to depart Yerba Buena for San Pedro. On October 1, he had sent a dispatch to Frémont at Sonoma ordering him and his battalion to join him immediately at Yerba Buena. Frémont arrived on October 13 with one hundred-seventy men and enough equipment to mount his men on horses that he had yet to acquire. Stockton ordered the California Battalion to board the chartered ship *Sterling* for Santa Barbara. He intended to have Frémont land at Santa Barbara while he took forces further south to San Pedro. Frémont would then gather horses and commence a march south toward Los Angeles. The enemy would be trapped between two forces. The *Congress* and *Sterling* departed Yerba Buena on October 14.⁹⁵

Flores, having expelled the occupying forces, made attempts to reorganize civil government and formulate a cohesive resistance strategy. Flores intended to wage a guerrilla war that would keep US forces contained within the port cities. He believed that as long as the United States could not control the entire territory and an opposition government was in power, the department would be returned to Mexico at the conclusion of the war. The departmental *diputación* was reconstituted on October 26. Flores was elected governor and military *commandante*. Manuel Castro, formally the prefect of Monterey, was selected to lead the resistance in the north. The assembly members who elected Flores, though, were all from southern California. Flores himself was Mexican-born and fiercely loyal to the central government. This allegiance and his non-Californian heritage would eventually cause mistrust and jealousy. In the near-term, however, the surrender of Gillespie and the defeat of Mervine elevated the spirit of the resistant Californians, giving them hope they could successfully resist the Americans.⁹⁶

Finally, after delays at Monterey and Santa Barbara, Stockton arrived at San Pedro on

⁹⁵ Harlow, *California Conquered*, 169; Spence and Jackson, *The Expeditions of John Charles Frémont, Volume 2*, 206; Frémont, *Memoirs of My Life*, 577; *Surfboats and Horse Marines*, 180.

⁹⁶ Bancroft, *Volume XXII*, 320-323; Guinn, *A History of California, Volume I*, 132-133; Eisenhower, *So Far From God*, 219.

October 25. The *Congress*, while in transit, met the civilian ship *Barnstable*, which was carrying a dispatch from Monterey. Lieutenant Maddox informed Stockton that the town was under imminent threat of attack and that reinforcements were needed. The Commodore provided fifty men and stayed in the area from October 15-19, although no attack materialized. When he passed Santa Barbara, he expected to find the *Sterling* and *Frémont*. He found neither and also failed to notice that the town was in enemy hands. Stockton received a full report of Mervine's defeat upon arrival. The Commodore was as displeased with the reckless lack of preparation as the defeat itself. Since the ill-fated attempt at Los Angeles, Mervine and the *Savannah* had been under observation by around one hundred enemy cavalry. This small force had made it a point to conduct demonstrations toward Mervine, putting him in constant state of excitement. Stockton resolved to conduct a landing and scatter the irregular forces.⁹⁷

On October 27, the combined force of Gillespie's men, and sailors and marines from the *Savannah* and *Congress*, boarded boats to conduct the landing. Gillespie's men saw scattered enemy on the beach, assumed their landing was going to be opposed, and hesitated. To Commodore Stockton's delight, the naval force did not hesitate and was first ashore. Resistance was nothing more than scattered gunfire. Within an hour, San Pedro was back in US hands. Stockton had between seven hundred-fifty and eight hundred men with nine pieces of field artillery between the *Congress* and *Savannah*. An insurgent force of less than one hundred was between Stockton and Los Angeles though Stockton believed it to be eight times that size. The Californians executed a ruse to facilitate this illusion. José Carrillo, in command of the local force, utilized rider-less horses to create clouds of dust to signal large movements of men and supplies. Additionally, he displayed his men on the surrounding hills sequentially, causing Stockton's men to double and triple count the enemy. In the face of this seemingly huge force,

⁹⁷ Harlow, *California Conquered*, 170-171; *Report of the Secretary of the Navy Communicating Copies of Commodore Stockton's Despatches*, 10-11; Bancroft, *Volume XXII*, 320, 322-323.

and questionable anchorage of San Pedro, Stockton opted to withdraw his force and move to San Diego where another attempt on Los Angeles would be made. The *Congress* departed on October 30, leaving the *Savannah* to watch for Frémont.⁹⁸

Frémont, having heard of Gillespie's surrender and Mervine's defeat, felt Stockton's orders could not be executed. The Californians had driven the coastal livestock into the interior to deny their use by the Americans. Upon hearing this, he assumed that he could not acquire the necessary horses at Santa Barbara, and that Monterey would offer a greater chance of success. Furthermore, he had left horses to water along the Cosumné River. Frémont had the *Sterling* put in a Monterey on October 28 to retrieve horses left at Cosumné, recruit men, and obtain more armaments. Once these had been acquired, he intended to march overland from Monterey to Los Angeles. Just before landing at Monterey, on October 27, he sent a dispatch informing Stockton of the plan and suggested that he sail north to join forces.⁹⁹

Stockton and the *Congress* arrived at San Diego on October 30. After temporarily running the *Congress* aground on a sand bar, Stockton anchored the vessel and prepared a landing force for the next day. San Diego had remained in US hands but was under siege. Merritt commanded the surrounded force, having been dispatched by Gillespie prior to his surrender. Mervine, responding to Merritt's request, had sent Lieutenant George Minor and fifty-two men to reinforce San Diego aboard the *Magnolia* on October 9. Despite the reinforcements, the Americans could not drive off the besieging Californians. Stockton's landing force, consisting of forty marines and Gillespie's volunteers landed on November 1, bringing much-needed supplies

⁹⁸ Harlow, *California Conquered*, 170-171; Bauer, *Surfboats and Horse Marines*, 181; Bancroft, *Volume XXII*, 324. Stockton would later blame Frémont's late arrival for his withdrawal. He was unaware of Frémont's movements until November 1st. He departed for San Diego two days earlier.

⁹⁹ Bauer, *Surfboats and Horse Marines*, 180; Frémont, *Memoirs of My Life*, 579-580; Bancroft, *Volume XXII*, 323; Hittell, *History of California*, 601; Spence and Jackson, *The Expeditions of John Charles Frémont, Volume 2*, 211-212; Harlow, *California Conquered*, 172.

to the besieged force.¹⁰⁰

Lieutenant William B. Renshaw, commanding the captured ship *Malek Adhel*, arrived at San Diego November 1, carrying Frémont's letter. The *Malek Adhel* had intended to meet Stockton at Monterey and, finding only Frémont, volunteered to take the correspondence to San Pedro and subsequently, San Diego. Stockton, with the new information in hand, immediately sailed for San Pedro, arriving on November 4. He ordered Mervine and the *Savannah* to Monterey in order to render assistance and speed the progress of the California Battalion. Stockton was growing increasingly frustrated with Frémont's independence and, in his eyes, slow progress. The *Congress* accompanied the *Savannah* as far as Santa Barbara in hopes of encountering Frémont. With no sign of Frémont, the *Congress* turned south and arrived back at San Diego on November 15.¹⁰¹

Stockton once again failed to enter the harbor, running aground on a sand bar, and placing the ship in great danger. As the tide went out, the ship threatened to heel over. The crew struggled desperately to stabilize the ship using spars. Seeing an opportunity, the Californians attacked San Diego. Stockton sent as many men as he could spare to help repel the assault. With the reinforcements, the garrison defeated the attack, and eventually the tide returned and refloated the *Congress*. With the ship afloat, its guns added to the defensive firepower of the garrison and deterred further attack. With the town secure, Stockton moved his headquarters ashore and began preparations for the recapture of Los Angeles.¹⁰²

Stockton's primary concern was a lack of horses and livestock. Without mounting at least

¹⁰⁰ Bauer, *Surfboats and Horse Marines*, 181; Harlow, *California Conquered*, 170,172; Ames Jr. and Gillespie, "Gillespie and the Conquest of California" *California Historical Society* 17, no. 4 Part 1 (December 1938): 339-340; Bancroft, *Volume XXII*, 324-327.

¹⁰¹ Bauer, *Surfboats and Horse Marines*, 171-172, 181-182; The *Malek Adhel*, a Mexican prize brig, had been captured in the Mazatlan harbor by the *Cyane* on September 7.

¹⁰² Harlow, *California Conquered*, 172-173; Bauer, *Surfboats and Horse Marines*, 182-183.

a portion of his men, he could not combat the Californians. As part of Flores's strategy, all local cattle and horses had been driven inland, beyond the reach of the port city garrisons. As a result, Stockton organized a group of volunteers under Captain Samuel Gibson and sent it to Baja California aboard the whaler *Stonington* to gather whatever animals they could. The *Stonington* returned with two hundred cattle and ninety horses, all in marginal or poor condition. Meanwhile, Frémont had succeeded in raising four hundred twenty-eight men but continued to suffer from a lack of horses. He seized those he could find, leaving promissory notes with their owners. On November 17 he left the smallest garrison he could at Monterey and began the march south with three hundred men. They marched to San Juan Bautista and again paused until the end of the month.¹⁰³

Stockton slowly prepared his operation against Los Angeles. Fortifications were built, sailors were drilled in land combat, saddles were manufactured, and gun carriages were fashioned. He employed Gillespie's men in foraging and raiding activities against the outlying enemy forces. While this activity was taking place, another party was about to enter the theater. On December 3, 1846 Stockton received a dispatch from Brigadier General Stephen Watts Kearny. The Army of the West, such as it was, had arrived.¹⁰⁴

The Approach of the Army of the West

On May 26, 1846, then-Colonel Stephen Watts Kearny was ordered to organize and lead an expedition from Fort Leavenworth Kansas, down the Santa Fe Trail to seize New Mexico. Eventually, his orders would be amended to include the occupation of Upper California. Kearny,

¹⁰³ Harlow, *California Conquered*, 173; Ames Jr. and Gillespie, "Gillespie and the Conquest of California" *California Historical Society* 17, no. 4 Part 1 (December 1938): 340; Bauer, *Surfboats and Horse Marines*, 182-183; Frémont, *Memoirs of My Life*, 580; Bancroft, *Volume XXII*, 327-328.

¹⁰⁴ Bauer, *Surfboats and Horse Marines*, 182; Ames Jr. and Gillespie, "Gillespie and the Conquest of California" *California Historical Society* 17, no. 4 Part 1 (December 1938): 339-340; Frémont, *Memoirs of My Life*, 580.

a War of 1812 veteran with extensive frontier experience, began organizing his force but realized that he needed more trained men than just his own 1st US Dragoons formation, consisting of only three hundred men. Fortunately, his orders arrived with an addendum meant for Missouri Governor John C. Edwards, calling for volunteers. The First Missouri Mounted Volunteers were raised and elected a private, Alexander Doniphan, as commander; he was elevated to volunteer Colonel. A battalion of artillery was recruited and commanded by Major Meriwether Lewis Clark, the son of William Clark; and Lieutenant William Hensley Emory commanded a detachment of US Topographical Engineers. The Army of the West would consist of almost seventeen hundred men.¹⁰⁵

Kearny trained his force and received amended orders in June, 1846. He was now directed to not only take possession of New Mexico, but to continue on to conquer Upper California. Additionally, Governor Edwards was directed to raise another thousand mounted volunteers and Kearny was instructed to muster in a battalion of Mormons, not to exceed one-third of his force. Colonel Sterling Price would command the Second Missouri Mounted Volunteers. Lieutenant Colonel James Allen would command the Mormon Battalion. These formations would take time to organize, and would follow the initial forces to Santa Fe and California. Finally, Kearny was promoted to Brevet Brigadier General. The volunteers were well-versed in individual marksmanship and could certainly handle horses. However, they were slow and resistant to the more mundane requirements of military operations. A lieutenant observed that

¹⁰⁵ Dwight Clarke, *Stephen Watts Kearny: Soldier of the West* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1961), 3, 10, 15, 69, 104; Haines, *History of New Mexico*, 169-187. Colonel Kearny was born in Newark, New Jersey in August 1794. At the age of sixteen he was appointed as an ensign in the Fifth Regiment of the First Brigade of Militia of the City and County of New York. Two years later, he was appointed a first lieutenant of infantry in the United States Army. During the War of 1812 he was assigned to the Thirteenth Infantry. He fought in the Niagara campaigns and was wounded at Queenstown Heights and taken prisoner. Kearny was exchanged in 1813. Following the war he gained extensive frontier experience, first as a part of the Yellowstone Expeditions and then establishing frontier outposts. On July 5, 1836, President Andrew Jackson appointed Kearny a colonel and commander of the First US Dragoons, a position he held at the outbreak of war.

the “raw material [was] good enough, but it is... very raw.” The volunteers were eager to kill Mexicans, not conduct drills.¹⁰⁶

Brigadier General Kearny considered the distance and terrain the true obstacle to the success of the Army of the West. It was over nine hundred miles from Fort Leavenworth to Santa Fe, the capital of New Mexico. This was arid, rough, and eventually mountainous terrain with little water or forage. A mounted force required significant wild grass and brush to feed the livestock. Furthermore, Captain Thomas Swords, the quartermaster, estimated that over fifteen hundred wagons, four hundred horses, thirty-five hundred draft mules, five hundred pack mules, and nearly fifteen hundred cattle and oxen would be required to support the Army of the West. After drafting every supply wagon and teamster, and acquiring all available livestock in the area, only one hundred wagons and eight hundred beef cattle were amassed. Kearny attempted to mitigate this massive shortage by segmenting his forces. Since he did not expect Mexican resistance before Bent’s Fort, some five hundred miles west, Kearny hoped that spreading out the force would allow for the scarce water and forage to sustain his force.¹⁰⁷

The Army of the West began its departure on June 6, 1846 when two companies departed. Another followed on June 12. Doniphan departed, with part of his force, on June 16, and the remainder followed the next day. The First Missouri conveyed the wagons and cattle. By June 29, over fifteen hundred men were on the Santa Fe Trail. Kearny, and the artillery, departed on June 30. Several common themes emerged from the Army of the West’s move to Bent’s Fort. Rolling stock was often mired in the soft earth, inexperienced teamsters pushed the animals too hard, poorly-fitting harness harmed the animals, hastily-acquired wagon axles made of green wood broke, and units lost their way. Sparse grass, heat, and fatigue took their toll on the animals,

¹⁰⁶ Clarke, *Stephen Watts Kearny*, 107, 100, 113; Anderson, *History of New Mexico, Volume I*, 76.

¹⁰⁷ Clarke, *Stephen Watts Kearny*, 108-109, 111, 160; Haines, *History of New Mexico*, 171; Prince, *A Concise History of New Mexico Volume I*, 178.

water was scarce, often diseased when it was available, and swarms of mosquitoes plagued the expedition. Sudden cloudbursts resulted in several drowned soldiers and illness was a constant companion. The few wagons available were unsuitable to be used as ambulances for the sick. The companies of volunteer infantry almost all developed foot problems. Despite these numerous issues, Kearny kept the columns moving forward. The last element arrived at Bent's Fort on July 29, after having moved five hundred and sixty-six miles in only thirty days.¹⁰⁸

After a brief rest, Kearny prepared to resume his march. He requested that Charles Bent furnish scouts to reconnoiter Raton's Pass on August 1. The Army of the West broke camp at Bent's Fort and moved south on August 2. En route, the column met Bent's scouts, learning that the pass was undefended. The route south was increasingly rough and sparse. Once again heat, a lack of water, and little forage for the livestock plagued the Army on the long climb to Raton Pass. Conditions did not improve when the pass was crossed on August 7, and the descent proved even more hazardous than the ascent. Progress slowed to a half-mile a day due to rough terrain, which was barely passable for wagons. Many wagons were destroyed during the descent and control was often lost despite men securing them with ropes. The arduous march toward Santa Fe continued for another two weeks.¹⁰⁹

Kearny prepared to enter Santa Fe on August 18, 1846. Before the final march commenced, he issued a general order to his troops, once again explaining to them the importance

¹⁰⁸ Clarke, *Stephen Watts Kearny*, 113, 117-120; Haines, *History of New Mexico*, 171. One unit started its movement east and made it to Westport before discovering their mistake.

¹⁰⁹ Clarke, *Stephen Watts Kearny*, 108-109, 111, 125, 130-131, 160; William H. Emory, *Notes of a Military Reconnaissance from Fort Leavenworth, in Missouri, to San Diego, in California* (Washington, DC: Wendell and Van Benthuysen Printers, 1848), 15; Bauer, *The Mexican War*, 131; Caruso, *The Mexican Spy Company*, 96-97; Haines, *History of New Mexico*, 171; Prince, *A Concise History of New Mexico Volume I*, 178. At Bent's Fort, Kearny met James Magoffin, who spoke Spanish and had long been involved with trade between Santa Fe and Chihuahua. Magoffin had a personal audience with President Polk and Secretary of War Marcy while he was in Washington, DC. Polk believed Magoffin could provide valuable services to the Army of the West and the conquest of New Mexico. Magoffin proceeded to head west in mid-June and arrived at Bent's Fort on July 27, meeting up with Kearny on the 31st.

of respecting the rights of New Mexicans, who would soon be Americans. As the column approached the capital of New Mexico, two Mexicans were received. Lieutenant Governor Juan Bautista Vigil y Alared had dispatched Nicholas Quintaro, the Secretary of State, with a message for Kearny. When received by the General, Quintaro exclaimed that “Armijo and his troops have gone to Hell and the canyon is clear.” Additionally, the message expressed a willingness to receive Kearny and promised him the utmost hospitality. Kearny, and the Army of the West, entered Santa Fe at three o’clock in the afternoon. He addressed the crowd and once again delivered his proclamation. Lieutenant Governor Vigil surrendered the district. General Kearny, at the head of the Army of the West, had conquered New Mexico without firing a shot.¹¹⁰

Kearny, on August 22, issued another proclamation and began work on establishing local legal codes. His proclamation called on all citizens to return home or be considered enemies, promised protection against raids by the Navaho and Ute tribes, and signed it as the governor of New Mexico. He then summoned Colonel Doniphan and Willard P. Hall, both of the First Missouri Volunteers, and charged them with reviewing the laws of New Mexico, to make recommendations that would bring the local code into compliance with the US Constitution. Doniphan called on two other members of the regiment, Privates, Francis P. Blair Jr. and John T. Hughes, and produced the “Organic Laws and Constitution” a combination of Missouri, Texas, and US Federal law for the government of New Mexico. It was approved by Kearny and became known as the “Kearny Code.” While the code was being drafted, Kearny abolished the onerous

¹¹⁰ Clarke, *Stephen Watts Kearny*, 142-143; Emory, *Notes of a Military Reconnaissance*, 31-32; Bauer, *The Mexican War*, 134. Stephen G. Hyslop, *Bound for Santa Fe: The Road to New Mexico and the American Conquest* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2002), 33, 48. When Kearny entered Santa Fe Magoffin reminded him of the promise he had made to Archuleta. Kearny ignored the request, dismissed any promises that Magoffin made, and never sent for, nor communicated with, Archuleta. His orders were to conquer the entire province. Trade along the Santa Fe Trail had begun with the independence of Mexico in 1821. The route from Missouri was quickly surveyed. In 1825 Senator Benton passed a bill that provided US government funds to clear and mark the Trail, which led deep into Mexican territory. Trade between Santa Fe and the US quickly outpaced that moving to and from central Mexico.

stamp tax, set fixed prices for merchants, and appointed a city treasurer and tax collector.¹¹¹

The “Kearny Code” was issued on September 22, along with the appointment of several civil officers: Charles Bent as governor and, Donaciano Vigil as secretary. Vigil had held the same position under Armijo. Francis Blair was appointed the US District Attorney for the territory. Kearny also appointed three judges of the district supreme court, which included a native New Mexican. Kearny’s approach to governance was to balance the new government between the New Mexican population and the newly-arrived Americans.¹¹²

With a civil government in place and calm restored, Kearny prepared to leave New Mexico and move the Army of the West to California. Supply problems slowed his preparation; items of military use were in short supply and little hard currency was available to purchase them. Additionally, the route to California would be extremely rugged and offer little in the way of forage or water for troops or livestock. Kearny determined that taking a large, horse-based force one thousand miles, over unforgiving and sparse terrain, was out of the question. He decided to limit his force to only three hundred dragoons mounted on mules.¹¹³

Kearny decided to leave Colonel Doniphan in command of the defense of New Mexico. This arrangement was to last until the arrival of Colonel Price, commanding the Second Missouri Volunteers, and the Mormon Battalion. Doniphan was to take the First Missouri south to support

¹¹¹ Clarke, *Stephen Watts Kearny*, 148-149, 152; Anderson, *History of New Mexico, Volume I*, 80, 82-83; Haines, *History of New Mexico*, 175. Colonel Doniphan and Willard Hall both had been practicing lawyers prior to the war. Hall had even been elected to the state congress in Missouri. Much of the Kearny Code remains in the New Mexico state constitution.

¹¹² Anderson, *History of New Mexico, Volume I*, 83; Clarke, *Stephen Watts Kearny*, 150, 152; Prince, *A Concise History of New Mexico*, 182; Bancroft, Hubert Howe, *The Works of Hubert Howe Bancroft, Volume XXVII, History of New Mexico, 1530-1888* (San Francisco, CA: The History Company, 1889). 419. When Secretary of War Marcy received word of the Kearny Code in January 1847, he rebuked the General, stating that President Polk had not approved it because only Congress could create a territorial government and grant citizenship. Despite the rebuke, Marcy would later defend Kearny’s actions as a necessity of conquest. Furthermore, in his June 1846 orders, Marcy had implied that civil government needed to be set up and Kearny assumed this authority was granted to him.

¹¹³ Clarke, *Stephen Watts Kearny*, 158, 161.

General Wool's operations near Chihuahua and turn command over to Price, whose Second Missouri was near the Arkansas River crossing on August 10. Kearny sent his final report from Santa Fe to Washington on September 24, and with the much-reduced Army of the West divided into five dragoon companies and a small artillery train he departed Santa Fe.¹¹⁴

From the start, the Army of the West was plagued by a lack of information, transportation, and hostile Navaho actions. Kearny was completely reliant on native guides for navigation, as he possessed no maps. The mules were far slower than horses and the broken terrain further complicated matters. Furthermore, as the column turned toward the Gila River, the hired teamsters refused to enter the hills due to a fear of Apache raids. Major Swords, the quartermaster, seized what he could and dismissed the teamsters. With their dismissal, the column lost its most experienced wagon handlers. Additionally, Navaho raiding parties hovered a few miles in front of the column and destroyed any potential forage in a wide swath. Kearny approved a Pueblo request to conduct a punitive expedition against the Navaho and advised Price to delay his departure until the route had been cleared.¹¹⁵

The Army of the West was able to remain in contact with Santa Fe during the early portion of the movement and even received some fateful information from California. Price had arrived on October 2 and the Mormon Battalion a week later. However, the Mormon Battalion commander had succumbed to illness along the route and Captain Cooke, made a volunteer lieutenant colonel, was ordered to return to Santa Fe and take command of the formation. Kearny was losing one of his most competent and experienced officers. Kit Carson reached the column on October 6 from California. Carson, an experienced explorer and capable soldier, had been a member of Frémont's expedition and the Bear Flag Revolt. Stockton had sent him with

¹¹⁴ Anderson, *History of New Mexico, Volume I*, 83; Clarke, *Stephen Watts Kearny*. 148, 161; Harlow, *California Conquered*, 174.

¹¹⁵ Clarke, *Stephen Watts Kearny*, 163-166; Emory, *Notes of a Military Reconnaissance*, 52.

dispatches for General Kearny and Washington.¹¹⁶

Carson brought news that would trigger a critical decision by Kearny. Carson reported that California had surrendered without a fight and that all ports and major towns were in Stockton's control. Carson had departed September 15, more than a week prior to the revolt in Los Angeles, and had no knowledge of the current state of the rebellion in California. Thus, Kearny made a critical decision with outdated information. The problem of moving and feeding three hundred dragoons was a continual problem, and with California in US hands, Kearny felt he needed only a skeleton escort to move to the territory and assume control. A small force would move faster and require fewer supplies. Additionally, Doniphan could use the reinforcements in support of General Wool's operations. Therefore, Kearny reduced the Army of the West to only two companies and a small staff totaling one hundred and twenty-one men.¹¹⁷

On October 7, the reduced Army of the West resumed traveling to California. The rugged terrain continued to take a toll. The pack mules were very slow and on October 9, Kearny ordered the abandonment of the wagons as they simply could not navigate the terrain. On October 19, they crossed the Continental Divide and finally approached the mouth of the Gila River on November 22. Here they found an abandoned military camp. The loose organization of the column vanished and was replaced with strict discipline. Carson was ordered to take an advance guard to find the enemy; which was assumed to be General Castro's force. Kearny believed that only surprise and an aggressive attack could lead to success. He felt his small force was inadequate for a defense or a set-piece battle. Kearny appeared to assume this transient enemy

¹¹⁶ Clarke, *Stephen Watts Kearny*, 164-166; Emory, *Notes of a Military Reconnaissance*, 52; Spence and Jackson, *The Expeditions of John Charles Frémont, Volume 2*, 13; Harlow, *California Conquered*, 110, 174.

¹¹⁷ Emory, *Notes of a Military Reconnaissance*, 53; Harlow, *California Conquered*, 175-176; Clarke, *Stephen Watts Kearny*, 166-168; Anderson, *History of New Mexico, Volume I*, 84; Carson's arrival solved another of Kearny's problems; the lack of maps. Kearny ordered Carson to act as a guide to California. After protesting that he was under orders to take Stockton's dispatches to Washington, he acquiesced and led the Army of the West across the wilderness.

force was a part of the Mexican resistance. No enemy force was located, but this aggressive mentality foreshadowed future events.¹¹⁸

On November 23, Kearny intercepted Mexican dispatches from California, which were addressed to Castro and contained updated information. Kearny discovered that Flores had pushed US forces out of Los Angeles and defeated a large force under Mervine at San Pedro. Only San Diego then remained in American hands. Kearny was advised by a local Mexican not to press on with such a small force; however, he opted to continue, citing the impracticality of returning to Santa Fe or calling for reinforcements. Carson advised that little forage or water would be available once they crossed the Colorado River. A larger force would only exacerbate his supply problems, even if it were practical to bring in reinforcements.¹¹⁹

The column forded the Colorado River on November 25 and entered a rugged desert. Progress slowed to a crawl as it become oppressively hot and the column encountered deep sand. Several mules dropped dead as a result of the extreme climate and lack of forage. Food could not be found for the livestock, soldiers were down to the last of the rations, and there was no water to be found.¹²⁰

The exhausted and starving Army of the West finally found relief on December 2 when they arrived at Warner's Ranch, sixty-five miles northeast of San Diego. Kearny was able to feed his soldiers and animals, and acquire some very limited supplies. Unfortunately, just as Stockton had discovered, all of the useful livestock and horses had been driven from the area. Edward Stokes, a local Englishman, confirmed that only San Diego, Monterey, and San Francisco remained in US hands. He was on his way to San Diego and offered to act as a courier for

¹¹⁸ Clarke, *Stephen Watts Kearny*, 180, 182-183, 186-187; Emory, *Notes of a Military Reconnaissance*, 94; Harlow, *California Conquered*, 177-178.

¹¹⁹ Harlow, *California Conquered*, 177-179; Emory, *Notes of a Military Reconnaissance*, 96-97; Clarke, *Stephen Watts Kearny*, 188-189.

¹²⁰ Emory, *Notes of a Military Reconnaissance*, 100; Harlow, *California Conquered*, 179-180; Clarke, *Stephen Watts Kearny*, 189, 193.

Kearny. Kearny sent a dispatch to Stockton informing him that he had annexed New Mexico and established civil government. He asked Stockton to send a party to meet with him as soon as possible. Stockton immediately responded and sent Gillespie and thirty-seven volunteers, and one cannon, to meet the Army of the West on December 3.¹²¹

On December 5, they linked up near Santa Maria. Gillespie reported that one hundred-fifty of Flores' men were stationed outside San Diego and Pico was present with one hundred men near San Pasqual. Stockton's written response urged Kearny to "beat up the camp" near San Pasqual. Pico's sister had spotted Gillespie's force on the trail and subsequently informed her brother. Although Pico had received reports from Flores of Americans near the Gila, he misread the information, thinking instead that it was Gillespie on a foraging mission. He set up his force to ambush the small force on its return to San Diego at San Pasqual. Meanwhile, the Army of the West was eager for a fight, and since his force had a very low opinion of the Californian's ability to fight, Kearny decided to take to the offensive and attack Pico at San Pasqual.¹²²

San Pasqual

Kearny held a council of war on December 5 with his senior officers and resolved to attack the following day. Over the objections of Captain Benjamin Moore, who feared that a scouting party could compromise the element of surprise, he directed Lieutenant Hammond to

¹²¹ Clarke, *Stephen Watts Kearny*, 190, Harlow, *California Conquered*, 181-182; Emory, *Notes of a Military Reconnaissance*, 105-106; Groom, *Kearny's March*, 201-202. Kearny also sent a party back to Santa Fe to guide Cooke and the Mormon Battalion to California, further reducing his force. Gillespie's cannon was known as the "Sutter Gun". It had been forged in St. Petersburg in 1804 and used against Napoleon's forces. It was then transferred across Siberia and sent to an outpost in Alaska. It found its way to Fort Ross near Sonoma. John Sutter bought the property in 1841 and with it acquired the cannon. In 1845, Sutter brought the gun to Los Angeles to assist Micheltorena in putting down Pico and Castro's revolt. It was left there in a garden and Gillespie found it while he was garrisoning the town. He was able to restore it to working order.

¹²² Clarke, *Stephen Watts Kearny*, 192-194; Emory, *Notes of a Military Reconnaissance*, 106; Ames and Gillespie, "Gillespie and the Conquest of California: From Letters Dated February 11, 1846 to July 8, 1848 to the Secretary of the Navy (Concluded)," *California Historical Society* 17, no. 4 (December 1938): 340.

conduct a reconnaissance. Moore wanted to catch the enemy dismounted and have the entire column arrive together. He went on to explain that Pico had rested horses, his lancers would have greater speed and mobility, and the mules would be no match for the Californians. When a reconnaissance was decided upon, Gillespie offered his men up for the job, arguing they would be stealthier. Kearny dismissed the concerns and ordered the Army of the West to prepare for an attack.¹²³

Lieutenant Hammond departed to reconnoiter the enemy position with a small force. Pico had taken few precautions. No sentries were posted and the horses had been sent to graze several miles away. As Moore predicted, Hammond's reconnaissance alerted the enemy. Sabers clanged as the party descended the heights and a barking dog raised the alarm. Additionally, as they fled, a blanket marked "US" and dragoon coats were left behind, further confirming their presence. Pico was thus able to concentrate his force and ordered his men to mount and prepare to meet the enemy. Hammond returned just before midnight and reported that his party had been sighted and the enemy alerted. Despite the complications, Kearny moved out before dawn to attack Pico.¹²⁴

The column conducted the movement in a driving rain. The cold made it difficult to grip weapons and the deluge soaked the men and their powder. Dr. John S. Griffin, the surgeon, noted that the weapons had been left unloaded in the downpour. The force quickly became spread out over several miles on a narrow trail. Captain A. R. Johnston led a twelve-man advanced guard mounted on the best available animals. Kearny, Emory, and William H. Warner of the engineers followed them. Captain Moore followed with fifty dragoons mounted on the broken pack mules. Gillespie and his men guarded Lieutenant John Davidson's artillery train near the end of the

¹²³ Clarke, *Stephen Watts Kearny*, 198-199; Harlow, *California Conquered*, 182-183; Ames and Gillespie, "Gillespie and the Conquest of California: From Letters Dated February 11, 1846 to July 8, 1848 to the Secretary of the Navy (Concluded)," *California Historical Society* 17, no. 4 (December 1938): 341. Gillespie noted the exhausted state of the dragoons and the poor state of the animals.

¹²⁴ Clarke, *Stephen Watts Kearny*, 200-201; Bancroft, *Volume XXII*, 342-343, Emory, *Notes of a Military Reconnaissance*, 108; Harlow, *California Conquered*, 182-183.

column. Major Swords brought up the rear with the baggage train. Only eighty-five men were in the planned attacking force. By the time the column approached San Pasqual, the rain had stopped and the moon was providing light.¹²⁵

With his column strung out with large gaps, Kearny had the order to trot sounded as Johnston's force reached the valley floor. They were within a mile of Pico's camp and mounted force. Things immediately began to fall apart. Johnston misunderstood the call and ordered a charge. The Californians, seeing only twelve men charging, held their ground; Pico ordered, "one shot and the lance!" Pico's men loosed a volley and Captain Johnston was killed immediately. The Californians then lost some of their nerve and began a retreat. Captain Moore saw the enemy moving to the rear and ordered his own charge to pursue. After about a mile, the Californians saw that the Americans were on mules or poor horses, wheeled and charged with lances. As the forces clashed, Moore saw Pico and attempted a pistol shot that missed. Seeing this, he was quickly lanced and killed by two Californians. The wet firearms refused to fire for the dragoons and were used mostly as clubs. An uncontrolled melee ensued and confusion reigned.¹²⁶

Kearny brought up the remaining force as quickly as possible; Gillespie dismounted his men, and desperately tried to bring the few cannons into action. Kearny, covering the mile between the battlefield and the remaining column, arrived just in time for Pico's countercharge. He fenced with a lancer, was wounded and almost killed. Lieutenant Emory was able to chase away the assailant and save the general. Kearny, though, had been seriously wounded and Captain Turner took command. Gillespie's men dismounted and tried to drive the Californians from the brush near the battlefield. In the process, he captured Pablo Vejar, Pico's second-in-command. Once Gillespie was spotted, the Californians rushed his position; the animosity he

¹²⁵ Harlow, *California Conquered*, 183-184; Clarke, *Stephen Watts Kearny*, 201-202; Bauer, *The Mexican War*, 188.

¹²⁶ Clarke, *Stephen Watts Kearny*, 202, 208-209, Harlow, *California Conquered*, 185-186.

generated in Los Angeles was still fresh. Gillespie's men fought off the charge but he was wounded by a lance that pierced his lung, and narrowly missed his heart. Despite his wounds, he moved to the rear and attempted to bring the cannons into action.¹²⁷

Lieutenants Davidson and Gillespie brought up the artillery. During the move, one of the pack mules towing a cannon was spooked and bolted into enemy lines. The Californians, upon seizing the cannon, became distracted and some took the capture as a sign of victory. Removing the cannon from the field took some forces away from the field of battle. The American artillery finally unleashed a round of grapeshot toward the Californians. Pico was unwilling to face cannon fire and began a retreat. Kearny was inclined to order another charge to drive the Californians out, but he was restrained. The bloodiest encounter in the California territory had lasted only fifteen minutes, but its effect was catastrophic. The Army of the West had been stopped cold at San Pasqual.¹²⁸

Lieutenant Emory succinctly summarized the situation after the battle, "our provisions were exhausted, our horses dead, our mules on their last legs, and our men, now reduced by one third...were ragged, worn down by fatigue, and emaciated." Dr. Griffin reported a total of thirty-five casualties, including Kearny, with seventeen killed. Four of the wounded died in the next few days. Only Captain Johnston had been killed by firearm, all others died by the lance. Pico admitted one killed and twelve wounded. Because his Army held the field at the end, Kearny reported that, "we gained a victory, but paid dearly for it." Captain Turner and Lieutenant Davidson were the only officers that survived unscathed. Turner remained in command until

¹²⁷ Clarke, *Stephen Watts Kearny*, 209-213, Harlow, *California Conquered*, 187; Ames and Gillespie, "Gillespie and the Conquest of California: From Letters Dated February 11, 1846 to July 8, 1848 to the Secretary of the Navy (Concluded)," *California Historical Society* 17, no. 4 (December 1938): 342-343.

¹²⁸ Clarke, *Stephen Watts Kearny*, 213; Ames and Gillespie, "Gillespie and the Conquest of California: From Letters Dated February 11, 1846 to July 8, 1848 to the Secretary of the Navy (Concluded)," *California Historical Society* 17, no. 4 (December 1938): 343; Bauer, *The Mexican War*, 188; Harlow, *California Conquered*, 187.

Kearny recovered sufficiently. Turner, with Kearny's permission, sent a dispatch to Stockton reporting the battle and appealing for help. The Americans remained encamped on the battlefield for the remainder of December 6. They set about burying their dead and trying to fashion carts for moving the wounded; to replace long abandoned wagons and their capacity as ambulances.¹²⁹

On December 7, the Army of West began to march, trying to cover the thirty-nine miles to San Diego. Kearny had resumed command and consolidated the remaining dragoons under Captain Turner. Crude sleds had been fashioned to drag the wounded. Pico's men shadowed the column and threatened to block the march, hovering in sight but refusing to approach within musket or rifle range. The force came across a large herd of cattle at the rancheria of San Bernardo and took possession of it. During the delay, the Californians took a position on a hill that commanded a narrow pass. Kearny ordered an advance as Pico's position did not allow for rapid horse movement and use of the lance. After one American volley, Pico retreated. While the skirmish occurred, a small party of Californians circled around and drove off the entire herd of cattle. Kearny, though, had no means of pursuit. As Captain DuPont reported, the Army of the West "wanted the other two hundred dragoons that those wretched dispatches [those from Stockton] had turned around." With the cattle gone, the column was forced to slaughter their mules for food and realized that, encumbered by the wounded, they could go no further. They took up defensive positions and waited for Stockton's reply.¹³⁰

Stockton's reply arrived on December 8. He had refused to send aid to Kearny. Kearny received the news through a prisoner exchange with Pico. The Californians had arrived that morning under a flag of truce to request the exchange. The prisoners that Kearny received were

¹²⁹ Emory, *Notes of a Military Reconnaissance*, 109; Clarke, *Stephen Watts Kearny*, 216-218, 220; Harlow, *California Conquered*, 187-188; Bancroft, *Volume XXII*, 346-347. Kearny received lance wounds to his arm and a deep gash in the buttocks that prevented him from mounting a horse or mule for several days.

¹³⁰ Emory, *Notes of a Military Reconnaissance*, 109; Clarke, *Stephen Watts Kearny*, 221-223; Harlow, *California Conquered*, 188-189; DuPont, *Extracts From Private Journal-Letters of Captain S. F. DuPont*, 104.

the emissaries to Stockton, who had been captured on the return trip from San Diego; they delivered the disheartening news. Lieutenant Edward F. Beale, a sailor that had accompanied Gillespie, Carson, and a native guide volunteered to go to San Diego to meet with Stockton and appeal for help a second time. This was approved and the two departed separately in an attempt to evade the enemy who surrounded the camp.¹³¹

By December 9, the situation was becoming increasingly desperate. As Pico's forces had the Americans hemmed in and unable to forage, the food supply was almost exhausted. Dr. Griffin reported that all but two of the wounded could mount mules and be moved. Kearny ordered all non-essential equipment burned and prepared to march on the morning of December 11. There was no expectation for Beale, Carson, and the scout to persuade Stockton. Unbeknownst to Kearny, though, they had all been successful. The scout arrived on December 9, with Beale and Carson arriving the next day. Stockton finally grasped the desperate nature of the situation and ordered Lieutenant Andrew F.V. Gray to gather a relief force and march for Kearny's position. Gillespie credited a marine, Captain Jacob Zeilin, with convincing Stockton to finally send relief.¹³²

Just after midnight on December 11, one of the sentries heard someone outside the perimeter speaking English. Lieutenant Gray, commanding a column of one hundred sailors and eighty marines, entered the camp. The relief force had arrived. When dawn broke, Pico saw that the American force had trebled in size. His opportunity to destroy the Army of the West had

¹³¹ Harlow, *California Conquered*, 189-191; Clarke, *Stephen Watts Kearny*, 189; Emory, *Notes of a Military Reconnaissance*, 111.

¹³² Clarke, *Stephen Watts Kearny*, 225-227; DuPont, *Extracts From Private Journal-Letters of Captain S. F. DuPont*, 104; Emory, *Notes of a Military Reconnaissance*, 111-112; Bancroft, *Volume XXII*, 350-351; Ames and Gillespie, "Gillespie and the Conquest of California: From Letters Dated February 11, 1846 to July 8, 1848 to the Secretary of the Navy (Concluded)," *California Historical Society* 17, no. 4 (December 1938): 344. Carson and Beale, departing under the cover of darkness, found their shoes made too much noise on the rocks. They removed them and tied them to their belt. Both subsequently lost the shoes and covered most of the twenty-nine miles to San Diego barefoot.

passed and his force retired toward Los Angeles. The combined American column set out for San Diego the same day. On December 12, an exhausted, half-starved, and battered Army of the West arrived in San Diego during a torrential rainstorm, and after a fifteen hundred mile journey from Fort Leavenworth.¹³³

Analysis

The actions during the intermediate part of the campaign continue to illustrate doctrinal and military theoretical concepts. Gillespie's surrender in Los Angeles shows the importance of resources and environmental understanding. Additionally, Stockton became distracted by the glory of operations beyond California. When he did turn his attention to the revolt, he consistently encountered the friction inherent in operations. Mervine's defeat demonstrates the role of personality in Mission Command and how superior numbers can become irrelevant when deficient in firepower and mobility. Finally, Kearny's Army of the West demonstrates that in some cases the enemy is not the primary factor in success or failure. Bad information, chance, and a failure to correctly set initial conditions can force a military operation to culminate.

Gillespie was under-resourced to garrison Los Angeles and the surrounding area. However, his actions, and the actions of his forces, contributed to the unrest by alienating the population. The revolt defeated US forces in Los Angeles and went on to remove Stockton's control of southern California.¹³⁴ Gillespie's force had lost the capacity and will to resist while Stockton could no longer continue with his expanded operational concept to land on the Mexican

¹³³ Emory, *Notes of a Military Reconnaissance*, 111-112; Bancroft, *Volume XXII*, 351-352; Harlow, *California Conquered*, 190-191; Clarke, *Stephen Watts Kearny*, 226.

¹³⁴ Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 1-02, *Terms and Military Symbols* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2015), 1-24. Army doctrine defines defeat as occurring when an enemy force has temporarily or permanently lost the physical means or the will to fight. The defeated force's commander is unwilling or unable to pursue his adopted course of action, thereby yielding to the friendly commander's will, and can no longer interfere to a significant degree with the actions of friendly forces. Defeat results from the use of force or the threat of its use.

coast. The operational approach would have to change and Flores' forces had the initiative.

Stockton had originally promised to leave Frémont and his battalion in Los Angeles to assist in maintaining order. Once he decided to expand his intent to conduct operations beyond California, he had ordered this force north, leaving only Gillespie and the fifty marines. Stockton's ambition left Gillespie with a lack of forces to secure the area. When conducting conventional operations Army doctrine, calls for a one to three friendly to enemy force ratio to conduct a deliberate defense.¹³⁵ Flores' forces grew to over one hundred-fifty and Gillespie diluted his force by sending a detachment to San Diego. This left him below the minimum force to conduct a defense. Furthermore, Flores's forces were mounted and possessed superior tactical mobility should Gillespie have attempted to break-out. If Frémont and his one hundred and sixty man battalion had been left in Los Angeles, the revolt, even had it broken out, would have been unlikely to defeat and force the surrender of US forces.¹³⁶

Gillespie's defeat was not exclusively about resources. The operations of Flores's forces can be classified as both conventional and insurgent. Gillespie's approach to the population seems to have contributed to the rise of Flores's insurgency, which grew to a point where it was able to deal US forces a conventional defeat. Gillespie took draconian actions against the populations. These actions were seen as unnecessary and an insult to the honor of the local people. Army doctrine discusses the role popular perceptions play in an insurgency. Although the grievances of the population usually are not solely responsible for the development of an insurgency, it provides a suitable environment. Varela and Flores were able to capitalize on this environment to

¹³⁵ Field Manual (FM) 6-0, *Commander and Staff Organization and Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2015), 9-20.

¹³⁶ Bancroft, *Volume XXII*, 286-287, 309-310; Frémont, *Memoirs of My Life*, 569; Spence and Jackson, *The Expeditions of John Charles Frémont, Volume 2*, 198-199; Harlow, *California Conquered*, 152, 163; *A History of California, Volume I*, 127; Bauer, *Surfboats and Horse Marines*, 175; *Report of the Secretary of the Navy Communicating Copies of Commodore Stockton's Despatches*, 10, 15-16; Ames Jr. and Gillespie, "Gillespie and the Conquest of California" *California Historical Society* 17, no. 4 Part 1 (December 1938): 327-328.

raise a force and remove US forces from Los Angeles. In many cases, the number of troops is not as important as developing an understanding of the environment. Gillespie failed to recognize the impact his actions were having on the population and how he was driving the formation of the revolt that would result in his embarrassing capitulation. Gillespie, with minimal resources at his disposal, could not afford to alienate the population and foment a revolt; when it occurred, he lacked the forces necessary to recover from his error.¹³⁷

Mervine was defeated because he lacked the appropriate tactical tool to engage the Californians and ignored the advice of Gillespie. When Gillespie was ejected from Los Angeles, the operation in California found itself back in phase three of the joint doctrinal construct, conducting conventional combat operations. Although Mervine had the appropriate force ratio to defeat Carillo's horsemen, he was deficient in several warfighting functions, specifically firepower and movement. Carillo's forces were outnumbered; however, he possessed an artillery train and his force was mounted. Mervine's dismounted force was unable to engage the horsemen effectively. The result was a wasted effort and an embarrassing defeat for the naval force.¹³⁸

Mervine ignored the advice of Gillespie and Dr. Gilchrist. They both had superior understanding of the situation and knew that the dismounted force would struggle with the superior mobility and firepower of the Californians. Mervine's aggressive personality overruled

¹³⁷ ADRP 1-02, 1-20, 1-45; Field Manual (FM) 3-24, *Insurgencies and Countering Insurgencies* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2014), 4-3, 6-4 – 6-5. Army doctrine broadly defines conventional forces as those forces capable of conducting operations using non-nuclear weapons. It goes on to define an insurgency as the organized use of subversion and violence to seize, nullify, or challenge political control of a region. Insurgency can also refer to the group itself.

¹³⁸ FM 6-0, 9-20; ADRP 3-0, 1-9, 3-3 – 3-4. The six Army doctrinal warfighting functions are movement and maneuver, fires, intelligence, sustainment, mission command, and protection. The Army defines the fires warfighting function as the related tasks and systems that provide collective and coordinated use of Army indirect fires, air and missile defense, and joint fires through the targeting process. In this case, it refers to the fact that Mervine possessed no artillery while Carillo was able to harass and engage him with consistent cannon fire. Doctrine defines the movement and maneuver warfighting function as the related tasks and systems that move and employ forces to achieve a position of relative advantage over the enemy and other threats. Mervine was foot-bound while Carillo was able to maneuver his mounted forces on the battlefield much more rapidly.

the sound advice and the attack was launched. The role personality plays is critical and often overlooked. When operating under broad guidance, or Mission Command, the personality of the commander has significant influence in how those orders are executed. In this case, Mervine may have wanted to impress or outdo his immediate commander, Stockton. The result was an ill-advised and poorly-executed attack that resulted in another embarrassing American defeat in southern California.

Stockton, uncharacteristically, took a much more cautious approach to the subsequent operations due to incorrect intelligence and the friction inherent in military operations. After rapidly taking San Pedro, he did not press on to Los Angeles. Instead he returned to his ships and moved to San Diego. Faulty intelligence played into the decision. Stockton believed he was facing a force of more than eight hundred when only about one hundred were present. Clausewitz points out that in war, intelligence reports are usually contradictory, often uncertain, and usually just plain wrong. In this case, the enemy helped reinforce Stockton's assumption that he was facing a force of equal or superior strength. Carillo executed a demonstration, as part of a military deception operation, to reinforce this incorrect perception. Carillo used numerous rider-less horses in a demonstration, kicking up clouds of dust and providing the appearance of a large mounted force. This fed Stockton's fear of a large force and resulted in the withdrawal of the US force to San Diego. Carillo's actions degraded the accuracy of Stockton's information and caused a misallocation of operational resources. It helped forestall the re-capture of Los Angeles for several months.¹³⁹

Stockton encountered friction as a result of faulty information, the actions of

¹³⁹ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. by Michael Howard and Peter Paret. Princeton (NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), 117; Joint Publication (JP) 3-13.4, *Military Deception* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2012), I-3; ADRP 1-02, 1-26, 1-56. A demonstration is defined as a show of force in an area where a decision is not sought that is made to deceive an adversary. It is similar to a feint but no actual contact with the adversary is intended. Military deception is defined as actions executed to deliberately mislead adversary military decision makers as to friendly military capabilities, intentions, and operations, thereby causing the adversary to take specific actions (or inactions) that will contribute to the accomplishment of the friendly mission.

subordinates, and a lack of critical resources. Clausewitz points out that in war everything is simple but the simplest thing becomes hard due to the accumulation of difficulties, or friction. Stockton's concept was simple. Frémont would land at Santa Barbara and move south to Los Angeles. Stockton would land at San Pedro and move north. Flores's forces would be caught in a pincer and defeated through a dual-pronged attack. The operation, though, fell apart rapidly. As noted above, Stockton abandoned his march north from San Pedro due to faulty information on Carillo's force. Additionally, based on his own assessment, Frémont abandoned the approach to Santa Barbara. His actions represent the friction that subordinate actions can introduce into an operational plan. He abandoned the Santa Barbara option due to, in his opinion, a lack of horses. Additionally, the enemy can increase the friction inherent in operations. Tactical mobility was a key deficiency of the US force. They were unable to mount sufficient men on horses and the Californians recognized this and drove all the coastal horses and livestock inland. This deprived the Americans of a key resource, introducing friction into Stockton's operations. Furthermore, it helped drive the defeat of Mervine, caused Frémont to adopt a course of action contrary to Stockton's plan, and may have played a role in the Commodore's decision to abandon San Pedro for the more secure town of San Diego.¹⁴⁰

The problem for the Army of the West, until San Pasqual, was not the enemy; it was sustaining a force through the harsh and unforgiving terrain. This was one of the primary reasons that Kearny arrived at San Pasqual with less than two hundred dragoons. Throughout the movement from Fort Leavenworth, Kearny was aware of the limited opportunities for sustaining the force along the route. In this case, the warfighting function of sustainment limited every other component. Movement and maneuver were limited to mules due to the region's inability to support horses. The lack of horses also limited the ability of the force to collect intelligence

¹⁴⁰ Clausewitz, *On War*, 119; Harlow, *California Conquered*, 169; Spence and Jackson, *The Expeditions of John Charles Frémont, Volume 2*, 206; Frémont, *Memoirs of My Life*, 577; *Surfboats and Horse Marines*, 180.

rapidly. Firepower was limited due to ammunition carrying capacity; the wagons had been abandoned due to the rough terrain. The limited mobility also hindered force protection, as the column was unable to deploy mounted scouts as a screening force. The ability to sustain the force also helped drive the decision to send two thirds of the force back to Santa Fe. When Stockton informed Kearny that California had been conquered, it allowed him the freedom to send the bulk of his force to the rear in order to alleviate his sustainment issues.¹⁴¹

Information in war is often incorrect, or is only accurate for a limited amount of time. Kearny made the critical decision to reduce his force based on information from Stockton that was outdated. When Stockton sent Kit Carson east with the information that California was in US hands, it was correct. However, by the time it reached Kearny, southern California was in revolt and the Americans had been pushed out of every major town except for San Diego, which was then under siege. This event also shows the tension and link between facts and assumptions. Kearny treated the information from Stockton as a fact when it was an assumption. Although an assumption is supposed to be true, resources must be leveraged to determine whether it is a fact. Treating the information as a fact, Kearny undertook no effort to verify it. Instead he moved forward and ended up basing a decision on faulty information. What remained of the Army of the West would pay a price for this at San Pasqual.¹⁴²

The tactical action at San Pasqual forced the Army of the West to culminate. Kearny's force was no longer capable of conducting offensive operations and was, shortly after, not able to

¹⁴¹ Harlow, *California Conquered*, 177-179; Emory, *Notes of a Military Reconnaissance*, 96-97; Clarke, *Stephen Watts Kearny*, 188-189; ADRP 3-0, 3-1 – 3-5.

¹⁴² Clausewitz, *On War*, 117; Emory, *Notes of a Military Reconnaissance*, 53; Harlow, *California Conquered*, 175-176; Clarke, *Stephen Watts Kearny*, 166-168; Anderson, *History of New Mexico, Volume I*, 84; FM 6-0, 4-2; JP 5-0, IV-7. Army doctrine defines a fact as a verifiable piece of information that has objective reality. Facts are the foundation upon which leaders base solutions to problems. An assumption is a supposition on the current situation or a presupposition on the future course of events, either or both assumed to be true in the absence of positive proof, necessary to enable the commander in the process of planning to complete an estimate of the situation and make a decision on the course of action.

move at all. Only the relief force from Stockton restored mobility and allowed the Army of the West to reach San Diego. Several components combined to cause culmination at San Pasqual. These included Kearny's decision to reduce his force during the march from Santa Fe, the elements of chance and friction, the failure to set the initial conditions for the tactical action, and the inability to mass the forces due to terrain.¹⁴³

The elements of chance and friction are omnipresent in war. Clausewitz stated that no human activity is more intertwined with chance than warfare. Lieutenant Hammond's reconnaissance alerted the Californians by the clanking of a saber. This simple unforeseen event removed the element of surprise from the engagement. Prior to this, Kearny had considered surprise to be the primary requirement for the success of his small force. Why then did he disregard this chance event and attack anyway? It was likely due to the desperate supply state of his force. They were exhausted and depleted; a successful engagement would possibly result in captured supplies and equipment, perhaps even horses. However, the chance discovery of Lieutenant Hammond's party removed the element of surprise.¹⁴⁴

Decades after the Mexican-American War, Helmuth von Moltke, a Prussian general, would argue that the initial conditions of a campaign or engagement determine the outcome. Moltke argued that a commander makes a series of decisions based on sets of conditions that cannot be foreseen. Therefore, the initial setup and deployment of a force is absolutely paramount. It is the only time that a commander could truly control things without the uncertainty of combat. Moltke felt that even a "single error in the original assembly... can hardly ever be made good again." San Pasqual demonstrated this. Kearny moved his column out in small parties spread out over more than a mile. His scattered force was not deployed correctly to engage the

¹⁴³ ADRP 3-0, 4-8. Culmination is that point in time and space at which a force no longer possesses the capability to continue its current form of operations.

¹⁴⁴ Clausewitz, *On War*, 85; ADRP 3-0, 4-2. Surprise can be a force multiplier. It is especially important when a force is outnumbered or lacks tactical mobility. Kearny's force was likely outnumbered and certainly lacked the mobility of the Californian horsemen.

enemy when the combatants met. The entire engagement was fought, therefore, at a disadvantage to the Americans, which contributed to the bloody outcome.¹⁴⁵

The scattered deployment violated the joint principle of mass as articulated by Antoine-Hernri Jomini and further showed the effects of the terrain, and again chance, on a military engagement. Mass is one of the twelve joint principles. Jomini argued for the importance of mass in his influential work, *The Art of War*. It was often required for success and involved the synchronization of combat power at the critical time in place. In Kearny's case, he needed to have his forces physically concentrated to maximize his combat power. He failed to do this at San Pasqual. Chance and environmental effects also contributed to the inability of Kearny to mass his force. The terrain approaching the battlefield was steep and canalizing as it approached the San Pasqual valley floor. When the first forces engaged the Californians, the others were still crawling down the trail in pairs, over a mile from the fight. Finally, the role of chance again had a disproportionate effect. When Captain Johnston misunderstood the order to trot and charged instead, the die was cast. The best mounted force Kearny had engaged the Californians without support and were quickly overwhelmed. It was several minutes before help could arrive. A misunderstanding guaranteed that Kearny would not be able to mass his forces at San Pasqual and the result was culmination and a plea to Stockton for help.¹⁴⁶

Stockton's initial refusal to help the Army of the West is difficult to defend. As stated

¹⁴⁵ Daniel J. Hughes, *Moltke on the Art of War* (New York, NY: Ballantine Books, 1993), 45, 91.

¹⁴⁶ Henri Antoine Jomini, *The Art of War* trans. by G.H. Mendell and W.P. Craighill (Philadelphia, PA: J. B. Lippencott and Company, 1862), 70; JP 5-0, I-2, A-2; Michael A. Bonura, *Under the Shadow of Napoleon: French Influence on the American Way of Warfare from the War of 1812 to the Outbreak of WWII* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 56-64. The joint principles are objective, offensive, mass, maneuver, economy of force, unity of command, security, surprise, simplicity, restraint, perseverance, and legitimacy. Jomini's work greatly influenced the American Army in the 19th century. From 1825-1835 General Winfield Scott was an influential member of the panel developing Army regulations. He was instrumental in ensuring the French way of warfare and Jomini's principles were enshrined in US regulations. It was these principals that guided the conduct of the US Army during the Mexican-American War.

before, he thought he was facing a much larger force and was concerned about the mounted capability of the Californians. However, Gillespie had been able to move in and out of the lines to forage for supplies and livestock. Additionally, Gillespie had successfully linked up with the Army of the West without enemy interference. Stockton may not have understood the desperation of the situation when he received the first dispatch, which has unfortunately been lost to history, Only a second dispatch, delivered by a naval officer, and the prodding of the marine, Captain Zeilin, convinced Stockton to send help.¹⁴⁷ The eventual rivalry for power between Stockton and Kearny may shed light on this initial refusal to help. Stockton may simply have not wanted Kearny to interfere with his governorship of California. Nonetheless, the two men were eventually able to work together to prepare a force to retake Los Angeles and southern California.

California Conquered

Preparations and Command Challenges

The Army of the West and Stockton's force, now combined in San Diego, paused for several weeks in order to prepare for the march on Los Angeles. During the pause, Stockton and Kearny drilled the sailors in land combat.. Stockton had brought together over four hundred sailors and marines to create the nucleus of a land force. Combined with Gillespie and Kearny's men, the US force was nearly six hundred. This pause was not only driven by the training needs of converting sailors to soldiers, but also by the lack of horses and livestock, which continued to slow preparations. Given the mounted composition of the Californians, it was critical to mount at

¹⁴⁷ Ames Jr. and Gillespie, "Gillespie and the Conquest of California: From Letters Dated February 11, 1846 to July 8, 1848 to the Secretary of the Navy (Concluded)," *California Historical Society* 17, no. 4 (December 1938): 344, 349; Clarke, *Stephen Watts Kearny*, 225-227; DuPont, *Extracts From Private Journal-Letters of Captain S. F. DuPont*, 104; Emory, *Notes of a Military Reconnaissance*, 111-112; Bancroft, *Volume XXII*, 350-351.

least a portion of the force to combat them.¹⁴⁸

Conflict arose almost immediately between Stockton and Kearny regarding orders and authority. Stockton, who had declared himself governor, saw the arrival of Kearny as an intrusion. Both men claimed the mantle of command in California by way of their orders. Stockton was the commander who had taken possession of most of California; he claimed that this fact afforded him authority over the territory. He acknowledged that Kearny had orders that specified occupation of California, but ignored this and continued to exercise the role of governor and military commander. Although Kearny outranked Stockton he was in a precarious position. He had been rescued by Stockton's naval force and commanded only a fraction of the available forces. Kearny avoided a public breach with Stockton, but began compiling a written record of events when the time came to resolve the conflicted command.¹⁴⁹

Kearny and Stockton debated how to go about attacking Los Angeles, which is captured in correspondence between December 22-24, 1846. Stockton planned to march only forty-five miles to San Luis Rey. Once there, the location of the enemy and the movement of Frémont's Battalion would guide his actions, which included a potential retreat back to San Diego. Kearny voiced several concerns. First, he wanted Stockton to plan an advance to Los Angeles from the outset. He felt that another American retreat, no matter what enemy forces were encountered, was unacceptable. It would permanently damage the image of the US military in California. Second, San Luis Rey was far inland with no local harbor. The support of the Pacific Squadron would be completely out of reach. Finally, he felt that Frémont should not be left unsupported in the north. Stockton feared the threat to his line of communication to San Diego when on the march, and

¹⁴⁸ Harlow, *California Conquered*, 201; John Douglas Tanner, "Campaign for Los Angeles: December 29, 1846, to January 10, 1847," *California Historical Quarterly*, no. 3 (September 1969): 221; Bancroft, *Volume XXII*, 386; Clarke, *Stephen Watts Kearny*, 233-235.

¹⁴⁹ Harlow, *Conquering California*. 199; Clarke, *Stephen Watts Kearny*, 236-240; Bauer, *The Mexican War*, 189. Commodore was an honorary rank that denoted the command of multiple ships; for seniority purposes Stockton was a naval Captain. Kearny's rank as a Brigadier General was senior to Stockton's.

resisted Kearny's advice. Eventually, Kearny was able to convince the naval commander to adopt a more aggressive course and make Los Angeles the objective. Kearny felt the large force would be able to handle any enemy forces encountered along the one hundred and forty-five miles to Los Angeles.¹⁵⁰

Stockton did extend an offer to Kearny to command the forces in the field. However, Stockton would exercise overall control as commander-in-chief. After refusing this offer twice, Kearny finally accepted prior to the march on Los Angeles. Just prior to departure, Stockton directed Frémont to bring his force south to San Luis Rey. He was to avoid a decisive engagement with the Californians and endeavor to join the combined force for the attack on Los Angeles. The command tension, for the moment, had been alleviated and the combined army was ready to march north.¹⁵¹

Kearny and Stockton marched the column out of San Diego on December 29, 1846, for Los Angeles. The force totaled five hundred fifty-three soldiers, sailors, and mariners, led by forty-four officers. Captain Turner commanded the remaining dragoons and Lieutenant Emory was elevated to serve as Kearny's adjutant. Captain Montgomery, of the *Portsmouth*, was left in command of the San Diego garrison. After an extended parade, with pomp and circumstance, the army marched out of San Diego, led by the band from the *Congress*.¹⁵²

Final Victory

The column arrived at San Luis Rey on January 1, 1847. Although there was no enemy action during the forty-five mile march, logistical issues plagued the force and made for a slow

¹⁵⁰ Spence and Jackson, *The Expeditions of John Charles Frémont, Volume 2*, 241-246; Clarke, *Stephen Watts Kearny*, 237-239; Bauer, *The Mexican War*, 189.

¹⁵¹ Clarke, *Stephen Watts Kearny*, 240; Spence and Jackson, *The Expeditions of John Charles Frémont, Volume 2*, 247; Tanner, "Campaign for Los Angeles", 221.

¹⁵² Clarke, *Stephen Watts Kearny*, 242; Tanner, "Campaign for Los Angeles", 221; Bancroft, *Volume XXII*, 356.

movement. Gillespie's volunteers were the only part of the force that was mounted due to the lack of horses. Only a few oxen had been procured and these were of poor quality. The men often had to push or drag oxen carts up steep inclines as the animals lacked strength and endurance. Stockton reported that his men were badly clothed, and many had makeshift shoes fashioned from canvas. Despite the hardship, the soldiers, sailors, and marines were said to have been in high spirits, ready to bring Los Angeles back into American hands.¹⁵³

At San Luis Rey, Stockton received information regarding Frémont's movements. It was reported that Frémont had left Santa Barbara on December 27, and was approaching Los Angeles from the north. Pico was moving north with six hundred men to oppose him. It was believed that Frémont could muster less than two hundred men to oppose the Californians. The report of Frémont's movement was accurate; the strength of his force was not. He had augmented his battalion with additional volunteers and native scouts. Frémont's California Battalion now numbered about four hundred and thirty men. The California Battalion, though, encountered hardships similar to Stockton and Kearny's force. Horses and livestock were few and of poor quality, and progress south was halting and difficult.¹⁵⁴

Stockton's army continued to move north, arriving at Las Flores on January 4. There,

¹⁵³ Bancroft, *Volume XXII*, 386; Tanner, "Campaign for Los Angeles", 223; George Walcott Ames Jr., and John S. Griffin, "A Doctor Comes to California: The Diary of John S. Griffin, Assistant Surgeon with Kearny's Dragoons, 1846-47 (Continued)," *California Historical Quarterly* 21, no. 4 (December 1942): 345; Joseph T. Downey, *The Cruise of the Portsmouth, 1845-1847* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1958), 194. Dr. Griffin reported that Stockton used precious transportation capacity to transport his large tent, table furniture, and bedstead. This ensured he had the elaborate headquarters commensurate with his station as governor. In contrast, Kearny resided with his soldiers, carrying only the common tent and bedroll of a dragoon. Kearny's leadership helped maintain the morale of the men. When Kearny observed the naval tradition of flogging to enforce discipline, he intervened. He took the "cat" (a leather whip with multiple tails) and cut it up in front of the men. Kearny felt that discipline should not require such a "murderous" instrument and banned its use while he was in command.

¹⁵⁴ Bancroft, *Volume XXII*, 386-387; Ames and Griffin, "A Doctor Comes to California," 346; Frémont, *Memoirs of My Life*, 597-601. On January 9, Frémont received a dispatch from Stockton outlining his movement to San Luis Rey and instructing him to join forces as soon as practical.

they encountered three men under a flag of truce: William Workman, Charles Flügge, and Domingo Olivas. They brought a letter from Flores, dated January 1, proposing a truce. Flores had received rumors of a peace between the United States and Mexico and implied he was trying to prevent unnecessary bloodshed. Stockton rejected the overture without even reading the letter or consulting with Kearny. Stockton was incensed that Flores, having violated his parole, would ask for terms. He instructed the bearers of the letter that if Flores were captured he would be treated “as a rebel, and an officer who has taken up arms against the U. States in violation of his *parole*.” Dr. Griffin believed that Flores’s use of the title ‘governor’ was what truly enraged Stockton, who saw it as a personal challenge to his assumption of the office.¹⁵⁵

Flores initially moved his force north, believing that Frémont’s force constituted the greater threat.. By January 6, he reversed himself and concluded that Stockton’s approach was more dangerous and turned back south. He prepared to engage the Americans along the San Gabriel River. The La Jaboneria Ford on the San Gabriel was the easiest crossing point, and Flores fortified his forces on the far side of the river. He placed two hundred men and two small cannon in a position to command the Ford while one hundred to one hundred and fifty horsemen were positioned several hundred meters away on the flank. The north side of the river was comprised of the high ground; low hills of around fifty feet that commanded the crossing. There, the Californians awaited the arrival of Stockton and the Americans.¹⁵⁶

Stockton’s force crossed the Santa Ana River on the morning of January 7. The commodore then ordered scouts to move forward of the position, assuming that the enemy would be close. During the night of January 7-8, the scouts located the enemy positions on the San Gabriel, nine miles from Stockton’s encampment. Stockton decided to make a crossing further

¹⁵⁵ Bancroft, *Volume XXII*, 387; Clarke, *Stephen Watts Kearny*, 244; Tanner, “Campaign for Los Angeles,” 225-226; Ames and Griffin, “A Doctor Comes to California,” 348.

¹⁵⁶ Bauer, *The Mexican War*, 190; Bancroft, *Volume XXII*, 388; Tanner, “Campaign for Los Angeles,” 229; Clarke, *Stephen Watts Kearny*, 244.

north on the San Gabriel, at Pasa de Bartolo, to outflank Flores's men. The engagement was planned for January 8. Stockton would take command of the artillery while Kearny would command the infantry formations.¹⁵⁷

Stockton's army moved toward the Pasa de Bartolo crossing site, halting in the early afternoon to eat lunch. Flores discovered that the crossing site would be north of the La Jaboneria Ford and quickly moved his forces to oppose the crossing. Flores's men, however, were spotted on the north side of the river, spurring the Americans into action. Stockton's force formed into a square with the baggage and livestock in the center. This was designed to provide all-around defense, a hedge against the superior mobility of the California horsemen. About a quarter mile from the river, Stockton halted the force and deployed small groups of skirmishers. Flores sent his horsemen charging against the American square. They failed to break it, and were driven off by massed musket and rifle fire. Even their artillery was ineffective.¹⁵⁸

As the Americans reached the riverbank, Kearny ordered the artillery emplaced to provide covering fire for the infantry who would effect the crossing. Stockton immediately countermanded this order and demanded the artillery be pushed across first. The soft bottom of the river slowed the crossing of the artillery to a crawl. Eventually, the cannons were successfully dragged across the San Gabriel, unlimbered, and emplaced. They were immediately employed, and in short order silenced Flores' battery. The infantry was then able to cross, uninhibited by enemy artillery fire.¹⁵⁹

Gillespie's mounted riflemen crossed the river and drove off the Californians holding

¹⁵⁷ Bauer, *The Mexican War*, 190; Bancroft, *Volume XXII*, 390; Tanner, "Campaign for Los Angeles," 228-229; Clarke, *Stephen Watts Kearny*, 245-246.

¹⁵⁸ Tanner, "Campaign for Los Angeles," 230; Bancroft, *Volume XXII*, 390, 394. Low quality powder and poor cannon gunnery plagued the Californians. The cannons missed their targets by hundreds of yards, drawing laughter from the Americans.

¹⁵⁹ Bauer, *The Mexican War*, 191; Tanner, "Campaign for Los Angeles," 230-231; Bancroft, *Volume XXII*, 392-394. During the crossing, one sailor from the *Portsmouth*, Frederick Strauss, was killed.

Flores' left flank. Desperately, Flores ordered a counterattack. However, confusion reigned and the orders were misunderstood. The left wing retired instead of counterattacking. The right wing threw itself against the Americans, but was driven off by a combination of American artillery and the withering fire from the ground abandoned by the left wing. Stockton, sensing the fragmentation of Flores' force, ordered a charge, yelling "New Orleans" in honor of Andrew Jackson's victory thirty-one years before. Kearny took his dragoons, the musketeers from the *Congress* and *Savannah*, and charged the heights in the center of the enemy line. Flores' men resisted for but a few minutes before the defense collapsed and his men retreated. In a final act of desperation, Flores sent his horsemen against the Americans to cover the withdrawal but, accurate cannon and musket fire again drove them off. Lacking the horsemen to conduct a pursuit, Stockton was content to hold his position and make camp for the night. The battle of San Gabriel lasted about ninety minutes and resulted in nine US casualties, two of them killed. The losses inflicted upon the Californians were not reported, but are assumed to be similar to the Americans.¹⁶⁰

Stockton's force resumed the march on the morning of January 9. On a dry plain, between the Los Angeles and San Gabriel River called La Mesa, they encountered Flores and nearly three hundred Californians. The engagement began just before noon. Flores' artillery began firing on Stockton's formation; once again it was inaccurate and ineffective. Stockton's battery responded and quickly drove the Californian artillery out of range. Flores' cannons exhausted their limited powder in the exchange. He again sent his horsemen against the American square. Kearny's men held their fire until the Californian lancers were at one hundred paces and then opened up with three volleys from three ranks. The concentrated fire broke the charge and caused the lancers to flee in disorder. Seeing the horsemen driven back, the Californians scattered and abandoned the field. Flores had suffered one killed and several wounded, while the

¹⁶⁰ Bauer, *The Mexican War*, 191; Tanner, "Campaign for Los Angeles," 231-232; Bancroft, *XXII*, 295; Clarke, *Stephen Watts Kearny*, 249-250.

Americans had four wounded. Stockton then continued his march to Los Angeles, halting three miles outside the town. He resolved to wait until the following day to enter it.¹⁶¹

On the morning of January 10, three men, including William Workman, entered the camp under a flag of truce. They said that no resistance would be encountered as long as the Angelinos were not mistreated. Although Stockton accepted the assurance, he did not trust Flores. The column remained alert and ready for a fight while they marched to, and entered, Los Angeles. There were no incidents or resistance. Gillespie proceeded to the Government House that he had been forced to abandon, and raised the American flag. It was the same flag he had been forced to lower four months prior. Los Angeles was back in the hands of US forces. The following day, Stockton issued a proclamation congratulating the American forces for the victories over Flores' rebellion. The soldiers, sailors, and marines had completed a movement of over one hundred and forty miles in less than two weeks.¹⁶²

Los Angeles had been recaptured, but Flores' remaining forces were still in the field and Frémont's location was unknown. Stockton had dispatched instructions to Frémont, received on January 9, to join forces near Los Angeles. Kearny, on January 10, sent another note, informing Frémont that Los Angeles had been captured and that he should join them as soon as possible. Frémont had not responded. Kearny feared that Frémont did not realize that Los Angeles had been retaken and that the California Battalion would retire to the north in the face of Flores' superior numbers. He offered to take half the command to find Frémont and bring him into the fold. Before Kearny could gather a force, Frémont made contact on January 13 and marched into Los Angeles the following day. Frémont brought a very surprising piece of news; he had accepted the surrender of Andreas Pico, now commanding the Californians, and offered a general amnesty for the enemy forces. Unbeknownst to Stockton and Kearny, Frémont had ended the war in

¹⁶¹ Bauer, *The Mexican War*, 190-192; Bancroft, *Volume XXII*, 395-396; Tanner, "Campaign for Los Angeles", 233-235.

¹⁶² Bancroft, *Volume XXII*, 396-397; Tanner, "Campaign for Los Angeles", 234-235.

California.¹⁶³

Frémont had been working his way south since the end of November, 1846. He expected resistance at San Luis Obispo but took the town without incident. Outside the town, Frémont's men captured Jesus Pico, the local Californian commander. Frémont convened a court-martial; Jesus Pico had been previously captured and released. By taking up arms, he was in violation of his parole. He was convicted and sentenced to death. Frémont then intervened and pardoned the prisoner. As an expression of gratitude, Jesus Pico offered to accompany the expedition.¹⁶⁴

Frémont continued his march southward, departing San Luis Obispo on December 17 and reaching Santa Barbara on the 27. On January 5, 1847 there was a short skirmish with a few enemy horsemen near the Mission of San Buenaventura. That was the only enemy action. Four days later, he received Stockton's note ordering him south to join forces near Los Angeles. On January 11, Frémont received Kearny's note that Los Angeles had been captured and the instructions to join him there. The same day, he discovered Flores and around one hundred of his men camped nearby.¹⁶⁵

Frémont sent Jesus Pico into the camp to try to elicit surrender. Through his cousin, Andreas Pico, was able to convince them to do just that. Fearing for his life, Flores transferred command to Andreas Pico and fled for Sonora. Learning that Flores had fled, Frémont granted a truce to allow for a negotiated surrender. The parties met at Rancho Cahuenga on January 12 and drew up articles of capitulation, that were signed later in the day. The terms were generous. The Californians were paroled and could return home. They were promised protection from retaliation. They were not obliged to take an oath of allegiance during the war, but they were guaranteed the rights of American citizens. They were also granted the right to leave the country

¹⁶³ Bauer, *The Mexican War*, 192-193; Bancroft, *Volume XXII*, 398-399.

¹⁶⁴ Frémont, *Memoirs of My Life*, 597; Bauer, *The Mexican War*, 192-193.

¹⁶⁵ Bauer, *The Mexican War*, 193; Bancroft, *Volume XXII*, 399-402; Frémont, *Memoirs of My Life*, 601.

should they choose to do so. These were almost identical to the terms that Stockton had summarily rejected weeks earlier. The Cahuenga document concluded the military campaign in California, which ended, as it had begun, due to the actions of John Charles Frémont.¹⁶⁶

Analysis

The closing operations of the California campaign demonstrate several military concepts. Kearny and Stockton arranged operations using an operational pause. This was driven by the culmination at San Pasqual as well as training and logistical preparations for the Los Angeles operation. This pause also allowed for the US forces to implement tactical adaptation, which built an operationally durable force. The tactical innovations were successful against Flores. In part, this was due to a change in enemy tactics. Flores, perhaps out of desperation to repeat the defeats of Mervine and Kearny, abandoned the high mobility mounted operations for set piece engagements. This greatly contributed to the final victory of US forces.

Stockton, and Kearny once he arrived, conducted an operational pause at San Diego. Stockton and Kearny's force paused for six and three weeks respectively. Joint doctrine discusses operational pauses as a form of arranging operations, often to prevent culmination or extend operational reach. In Stockton's case, the operational pause allowed him to synchronize sustainment and operations. It allowed him to gather horses and livestock, and although not in the numbers desired, increased his mobility and extended his operational reach. Stockton, with the defeat of Mervine fresh in his mind, sought to hedge against culmination due to a lack of mobility or supplies. Additionally, it allowed the Commodore time to increase his force's readiness to conduct land operations. This was designed to mitigate the risk of using sailors in sustained

¹⁶⁶ Bancroft, *Volume XXII*, 402-407; Bauer, *The Mexican War*, 193; Spence and Jackson, *The Expeditions of John Charles Frémont, Volume 2*, 253-255, 259; Clarke, *Stephen Watts Kearny*, 254. Stockton was furious with Frémont for accepting the surrender and offering such generous terms.

ground combat.¹⁶⁷

Kearny's operational pause was driven by his culmination at San Pasqual. The pause at San Diego was required for the Army of the West to rest and refit. Similar to Stockton, Kearny was attempting to synchronize sustainment and operations. This helped restore his ability to conduct offensive operations as a part of the combined force. Taking an operational pause risks loss of operational or strategic initiative. However, in this case, operational momentum and initiative had already been lost at San Pasqual, by Gillespie at Los Angeles, and with Mervine's abortive attempt to defeat Flores.¹⁶⁸

The closing operations in California demonstrate tactical adaptation of the American force and an enemy that could not recreate its previous success. Kearny, while conducting the operational pause at San Diego, had drilled the troops extensively. This included the square formation that would be used to great effect against Flores' forces. Both Stockton, through Mervine's defeat, and Kearny from first hand experience, had seen the superior mobility of the lancers. The US force did not have access to enough quality horses to develop a like capability to combat them. They therefore, they focused on tactical innovation to maximize firepower in all directions. This was combined with an increase in sustainment capability. Unlike Mervine, the combined force that left San Diego possessed livestock to move howitzers, supplies, and wounded. This created an operationally-durable force.¹⁶⁹ When Stockton and Kearny again met Flores, the lancers could not break up the square formation. The Californians had lost the tactical

¹⁶⁷ JP 5-0, III-34 – III-35, III-37; Joint Publication (JP), 1-02, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2016), 176; ADRP 3-0, 4-3, 4-5. Joint doctrine defines an operational pause as a temporary halt to military operations. Army doctrine identifies operational reach as an element of operational art and defines it as the distance and duration across which a joint force can successfully employ military capabilities.

¹⁶⁸ JP 5-0, III-37.

¹⁶⁹ James Schneider, *Vulcan's Anvil: The American Civil War and the Foundations of Operational Art* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Presidio Press, 1994), 50.

edge that had previously led to operational success.

Flores began employing his forces in a new way at San Gabriel and La Mesa. His initial intent was to conduct a guerrilla war against the Americans.¹⁷⁰ However, his lancers had experienced great success against Mervine, and subsequently against Kearny at San Pasqual. By employing his superior mobility against the Americans, he had been able to defeat them in tactical engagements. At San Gabriel, he attempted to fight a set-piece engagement from a fortified position. He surrendered much of his mobility advantage and allowed superior American artillery and small arms to hammer his fixed positions. At La Mesa, he engaged Stockton's forces in an artillery duel. The proficiency of his gunners and the quality of his cannons were low. He was ill-equipped to fight the Americans in this manner and he was again defeated. Flores failed to put his force into a position of advantage and thus suffered a string of defeats resulting in operational defeat and the end of resistance in California.

Conclusion

The California campaign illustrates many tenets that are resident in Army and Joint doctrine. It also demonstrates the tension that exists between many of these tenets. Frémont's actions at Gavilan and during the Bear Flag Revolt show the risks and rewards of the Mission Command concept, especially how the individual initiative inspired by Mission Command can serve to undermine unified efforts to achieve a national goal. On the other hand, Mission Command allows for the seizure of opportunities, such as a local revolt, to further national strategy and inspire the actions of adjacent commanders, as was the case with Commodore Sloat.

The campaign also demonstrates the tensions inherent when transitioning from combat to stability operations and the risk of moving between those two phases. Conventional combat operations in California were initially minimal. Sloat, then Stockton, rapidly defeated the

¹⁷⁰ Bancroft, *Volume XXII*, 320-323; Guinn, *A History of California, Volume I*, 132-133; Eisenhower, *So Far From God*, 219.

Californians and moved into stability operations. Stockton, though, ignored the tendencies of the environment, which indicated a propensity for revolt and unrest, and under-resourced the stability operations in Los Angeles. There is an underlying assumption in doctrine that once the stability phase is entered, the situation will not move back into major combat operations. When major combat operations resumed in southern California, they led to the culmination of the Army of the West, the defeat of Mervine's column, and five more months of conventional combat. It is critical to understand that a conflict can move between stability and major combat operations. When an operation reverts to conventional operations, a force may find that it lacks the resources and tactical tools to defeat a resurgent enemy.

In general, military campaigns focus on the opposing enemy force. However, in this campaign, the enemy was not always the issue. Sustainment issues, hostile terrain, long distances, and limited mobility were often the reasons for slow progress and operational struggles. The lack of horses and livestock were persistent throughout the campaign. In the case of Kearny's force, hostile terrain limited the size of his force and removed the operational durability of his Army of the West. Mervine found that his lack of mobility prevented him from defeating Flores in their initial encounter. Frémont's California Battalion was always in need of additional horses and livestock, which often slowed his movement and limited his aggressiveness. Most of these factors had very little to do with the enemy. In California, the key to victory was more often about overcoming the environmental obstacles than dealing with an armed belligerent.

Finally, the campaign demonstrates the continuities of uncertainty, chance, and friction. Clausewitz consistently articulates these factors, which provide the intellectual underpinnings of Army and Joint doctrine.¹⁷¹ Stockton and Kearny consistently experienced uncertainty. Much of the information they received, especially regarding the enemy, was wrong. This challenged their ability to make sound decisions. Stockton failed to press on to Los Angeles after seizing San Pedro based on reports that vastly inflated the enemy force. Chance and friction also permeated

¹⁷¹ ADRP 3-0, 1-2, 2-3, 2-11 4-9; JP 3-0, xi.

the campaign. A revolt, with Frémont at the head, provided Commodore Sloat with a clear reason to take actions and begin operations along the California coast. The chance arrival of incorrect information drove Kearny to send two-thirds of his force back to Santa Fe, dragoons that would be sorely missed later. A misunderstood order sent the Army of the West into battle at San Pasqual in a fragmented manner, leading to their culmination. These are continuities that continue to permeate the conduct of war and warfare.

The California campaign encompasses the entire spectrum of warfare. It highlights doctrinal tensions while validating many of its concepts. The friction, uncertainty, and chance of war are omnipresent in this campaign pointing to them as continuities of war. The campaign also demonstrates the difficulty in transitioning from combat to stability operations and the risks involved when an operation regresses into conventional combat. These lessons continue to ring true and are reflected in the contemporary experience of the US military.

Appendix A: Spanish Exploration and Rule

Spanish exploration of Alta California began with Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo in 1542. Weather forced him to take refuge in a harbor he named Bahia de Pinos, which would become Monterey. Although the Englishman, Sir Francis Drake, would use the same harbor for raiding Spanish commerce, in 1579, the preponderance of activity in the area was conducted by Hapsburg Spain. Sebastian Rodriguez Cermeno entered a natural harbor in 1595, naming it San Francisco and Sebastian Vizcaino followed in 1602 with orders to find a suitable area for a colony, although he failed to establish one. Additional expeditions also failed to establish colonies in Alta California and it would remain uninhabited by Europeans for another 160 years.¹⁷²

The permanent Spanish occupation of Alta California was inspired by fears of Russian and British incursions into the territory. There were rumors of Russian expeditions in 1764 and 1768, and by 1784 a permanent colony was established at Three Saints Harbor on Kodiak Island. Russian movement continued south and by 1812 Fort Ross, was founded in northern California. To establish Spanish control of the area, and begin the spread of enduring settlements northward, San Diego was founded in 1769 and Monterey was established the following year.¹⁷³ This expansion established a sustained Spanish claim to Alta California.

Rugged terrain and long sea routes limited more extensive colonization of California. The settlements were not self-sufficient and relied on outside support. A land route, the Sonora route, was opened in 1774 but the Yuma Indians cut it seven years later. With the southern route closed, supplies had to be shipped from San Blas to Monterey. With support far away, Californians became increasingly disaffected and felt neglected by the Spanish. This issue would be

¹⁷² Harlow, *California Conquered*, 15-16.

¹⁷³ Harlow, *California Conquered*, 18; James R. Gibson, "Russian Expansion in Siberia and America," *Geographical Review* 70, no. 2 (April 1980): 127; George Edinger, "Russia in California," *History Today* 1, no. 11 (November 1951): 49.

compounded during the wars of independence, which would sever ties from Spain in 1810.¹⁷⁴

Spanish control of Alta California formally came to a close when news of Mexican independence reached Monterey in January of 1822. The neglect grew worse under Mexican rule. The area remained remote, unprofitable, and the central government saw little reason to devote resources toward supporting its northern coastal province. In order to alleviate some of these issues, the Mexican government reversed a Spanish policy prohibiting trade with the United States and California.¹⁷⁵ This helped spur the interest of American citizens, commercial interests, and eventually migration into the region.

¹⁷⁴ Henry, *The Story of the Mexican War*, 107; Harlow, *California Conquered*, 18-20.

¹⁷⁵ Harlow, *California Conquered*, 22; Eisenhower, *So Far From*, 197.

Appendix B: Mexico's Turbulent Rule

The Mexican administration of California was turbulent. Between 1822 and 1846, the province went through twelve governors and experienced four major revolts. The first governor was Lieutenant Colonel José Mariá Echeandía, a non-native Californian, appointed in 1825. His decision to reside in San Diego, with the capital nominally at Monterey, sowed discontent and division between the north and south of the province. The Solis Revolt began in Monterey on the night of November 12 1829. The rebels, including some former government officials, soldiers, and convicts seized the presidio at Monterey and detained several government officials. They claimed the revolt was in response to neglect by the central government and the administration of Echeandía. The governor marched a small force north from San Diego, defeated the rebels, and their leader, Joaquin Solis, in January 1830.¹⁷⁶

Lieutenant Colonel Manuel Victoria, another non-Californian, assumed the governorship in 1831. He had no tolerance for dissent or discord and used the death penalty liberally. Furthermore, he suspended the *diputación*, or legislature, causing great consternation with the local elites. This time, the southern portion of the province rose up, including the former governor, Echeandía. Although the revolt was put down, Victoria was wounded in the fighting and returned to Mexico. It was left to the Californians to choose their leadership until the arrival of a new governor. Pío Pico, the senior member of the *diputación*, was favored in the south, but was unacceptable to Echeandía, while in the north, Agustín V. Zamorano was the choice. At an impasse, the two regions retained both Echeandía and Zamorano furthering the regional divide.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁶ Harlow, *California Conquered*, 26-27; Bancroft, *Volume XIX*, 550; Bancroft, *Volume XX*, 69; Hittell, *History of California Volume II*, 108-109, 111.

¹⁷⁷ Harlow, *California Conquered*, 27; Bancroft, *Volume XX*, 417; Harding, vii. On May 23, 1835, Los Angeles officially became the capital of Alta California. This was not well received by Monterey and the north. Brevet Brigadier General José Figueroa later named José Castro civil governor during his term (1833-1835). Agustín Zamorano was a Mexican military officer who was appointed executive secretary of Alta California in 1825, a position he held for eleven years. Additionally, he served as the military commander of the *presidio* at Monterey before assuming the governorship of northern California for a year. He is most famous for importing the first

Another revolt occurred in 1836 under the leadership of Juan B. Alvarado and José Castro. Central to the uprising was the governor, Lieutenant Colonel Nicolas Gutierrez's, support for the centralist movement in Mexico. According to the revolutionaries, centralism undermined the rights of the people and the power of the local *diputación*. Unique to this revolt was the inclusion of a number of foreigners, giving the entire event an international flavor. Isaac Graham, a Tennessean, had arrived in 1833 and pledged his seventy-five riflemen to the cause. Other foreign participants included William R. Garner and John Coppinger, both Englishmen, and Louis Pombert, a Frenchman. The participation of non-citizens stoked fears of foreign intervention into Californian affairs.¹⁷⁸

On November 3, 1836, the revolutionary party besieged Monterey and Gutierrez. Due to a lack of facilities in Los Angeles, the governor had not yet moved to the new capital. After negotiations, Gutierrez and his small garrison surrendered to Castro's force of two hundred composed of "nearly all foreigners, and chiefly Americans." Alvarado moved quickly, appointed his uncle, Mariano Vallejo, as *commandante general*, and persuaded the *diputación* to declare California a free and independent state until centralism was abandoned. Jose Castro, as leader of the revolt, assumed the role of governor until December 7, when the *diputación* installed Alvarado as interim governor. These appointments were met with resistance in the south. The revolutionaries conducted an armed march to Los Angeles to temper the views and, at least on the surface, unify the Alta California as it experimented with local rule. The conditional

printing press east of the Rocky Mountains and generating the first printed documents in California.

¹⁷⁸ Harlow, *California Conquered*, 27; Bancroft, *Volume XX*, 415-416, 420-422; 443, 454-458. During this period there was a debate in Mexico between centralists, who sought greater control of the nation dictated from Mexico City, and the federalists who desired more autonomy, especially in the farther flung provinces. Lieutenant Colonel Nicholas Gutierrez had been appointed military *commandante* in 1833 by Governor General José Figueroa. After Figueroa succumbed to illness in 1835, Gutierrez assumed the governorship on an interim basis. Colonel Mariano Chico was appointed governor in May 1836 and Gutierrez left public service. Chico's stewardship was marked by widespread unrest and he only lasted three months as governor. When he fled the province, Gutierrez once again assumed the role of governor.

independence of Alta California leveraged concessions from Mexico, most importantly of which was that there would be no more non-Californians appointed as governor. Henceforth, the governor would be chosen from a list provided by the *diputación* and Alta California would remain, for now, under Mexican control.¹⁷⁹

Commandante Vallejo recognized that the situation in Alta California was becoming increasingly tenuous. His concerns were over the growing interest and influence of the United States. He witnessed growing immigration of Americans from the west, US Navy ships surveying the Sacramento River, increasing foreign commercial interests, and large foreign land acquisitions, such as the purchase of Fort Ross by John Sutter. He requested more Mexican colonists, two hundred troops, and the reunification of the civil and military commands. Mexico responded by dispatching General Manuel Micheltorena to assume the governorship, and three hundred troops. Micheltorena arrived at Los Angeles in August 1842, just in time for Jones' premature seizure of Monterey.¹⁸⁰

The small army that Micheltorena brought to the province would lead to the undoing of the final Mexican governor of Alta California. They were poorly recruited and often former, or current, criminals who alienated the population in short order. Another revolt began in November 1845. The combination of disdain for the occupying troops and personal ambition provided more than enough fuel for Alvarado and Castro to once again lead an uprising. By December, realizing the difficulty of forcefully putting down the revolt with his limited resources, Micheltorena agreed to send the Mexican troops back home. The agreement was never carried out. Once again, foreign citizens intervened, this time on behalf of Micheltorena. Isaac Graham and John Sutter resolved to march to his aid. In spite of the pledged support, Sutter's men refused to fight when

¹⁷⁹ Bancroft, *Volume XX*, 462-463, 474; Harlow, *California Conquered*, 27-28. Gutierrez and his small party departed by ship for Mexico after the surrender on November 5, 1836.

¹⁸⁰ Harlow, *California Conquered*, 29-30; Bancroft, *Volume XXI*, 293. Unbeknownst to Alvarado, Micheltorena was under orders to assume the governorship as well as the military command. This bitterly disappointed Alvarado and was a breach of the understanding of local governors that had been reached with the central government.

the forces collided at Cahuenga. Without the support of foreign militia, Micheltorena's cause collapsed and he signed a treaty at San Fernando on February 22, 1845. The treaty named Pío Pico the governor and Castro the *commandante*. The two aspiring leaders immediately parted company, the former residing in the capital, Los Angeles, while the latter established himself at Monterey, further exacerbating the divisions between the north and south.¹⁸¹

¹⁸¹ Harlow, *California Conquered*, 18, 30; Bancroft, *Volume XXI*, 455-456, 469, 474, 485, 506-508; Henry, *The Story of the Mexican War*, 108; Jeffrey Ira Herbst, *States and Power in Africa: Comparative Lessons in Authority and Control* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 3, 11-12; Hubert Howe Bancroft, *The Works of Hubert Howe Bancroft, Volume XXII, History of California, Volume III, 1846-1848* (San Francisco, CA: A. J. Bancroft and Company, 1886), 643. Sutter was hoping for additional land grants by supporting the legitimate governor. After his defeat, Micheltorena departed for Mexico in March 1845, leaving California in the hands of the revolutionaries. Jeffrey Herbst offers a view of state formation and control that helps explain the difficulties encountered by Spain and Mexico in California. According to Herbst, states are only viable if they possess the ability to control the territory defined by their borders. This control is achieved by developing infrastructure to broadcast power and gain, or coerce, the loyalty of the population. Furthermore, he argues that low population densities and geographical impediments further hinder the establishment of control. Spain, then Mexico, saw no major economic resources in California and never attempted to construct an infrastructure of control. They were content to provide minimal support to the province to prevent exploitation by other powers. Furthermore, the reported population of California in 1846 was less than fifteen thousand, a density of less than one person per ten square miles. Low population density drives up the cost of exerting control. Finally, after the Yuma tribes cut the Sonora land route in 1774, a two thousand mile sea voyage was the only tether to the Mexican state. The California province demonstrates many of the challenges that hinder state control. These factors fed the unrest in California and increased its vulnerability to foreign conquest.

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