



The Civil War in Arizona

The Civil War in Arizona / New Mexico Territory

The **Territory of Arizona** was an organized incorporated territory of the United States that existed from February 24, 1863 until February 14, 1912, when it was admitted to the Union as the 48th state.

A forerunner, identical in name but largely differing in location and size, was the Confederate Territory of Arizona. It existed officially from 1861 until 1863, when it was re-captured by the Union. Interestingly, the government of Confederate Arizona continued to rule in exile until the end of the war in 1865. The two territories played a significant role in the western campaign of the American Civil War.

After the expansion of the New Mexico Territory in 1853 by the Gadsden Purchase, proposals for a division of the territory and the organization of a separate Territory of Arizona were advanced. The Territorial Legislature began petitioning the U.S. Congress (as early as 1856) to divide the huge expanse along an east-west line. The first proposals for the Arizona Territory divided the territory along a line of latitude rather than the later division along a line of longitude that would divide Arizona from New Mexico. The Congress in Washington, deeply involved in the sectional controversies that preceded the Civil War, refused to do this. Insofar as people in the territory were concerned about the Civil War, sympathies in the southern part of the territory tended to favor the Confederate rather than the Union cause. In fact, Arizonans had their own "secession" movement going before the guns even fired at Fort Sumter.



Secession Rosette and Badge

Settlers in the territory felt betrayed by the government in Washington which ignored their pleas for more protection from the Indians, surveys to ensure their claims on the land, and more effective law enforcement. L. Boyd Finch has written a definitive book about the Civil War in the Southwest from the Confederate point of view. It is entitled *Confederate Pathway to the Pacific: Major Sherod Hunter and Arizona Territory, C.S.A.* Finch documents the history of the "provisional" territorial government formed in April 1860 by frustrated citizens who wanted to withdraw from the New Mexico Territory with its far-off capital at Hispanic Santa Fe.

"Months later," Finch writes, "the desperate frontier residents considered it a serendipitous godsend when the states of the South began seceding. The Arizonans immediately allied their cause with that of the new Confederacy." Although the events in the Southwest probably had little effect on the outcome of the war, the war had profound effects on the far Southwest, "redrawing the maps and transforming the culture of the region and the lives of its pioneers."

When Texas seceded from the Union early in 1861, officials in Washington rewrote the Overland Mail contract so that the stages would travel through Nebraska and Utah rather than Texas, New Mexico and Arizona. Effective immediately, the Overland Mail abandoned the Southwest, terminating all operations along the southern route. This was a devastating blow to the settlers in the New Mexico Territory, which included present-day Arizona. The change was quickly obvious to the Apaches who surely watched from the mountains as the wagons, horses and mules were gathered up in an ever-growing caravan heading for California. The ominous parade included more than 200 horses, many mules, wagons, supplies, and twenty-one stagecoaches, empty except for the drivers.

The Overland Mail was moving out lock, stock, and barrel, and the Apaches found themselves unchallenged over the 300 miles of the stage route. They burned stage stations and destroyed coaches, but the worst effect was the loss of countless lives among the pioneers who found themselves abandoned by the very government that had encouraged them to settle this brittle and unforgiving land. The federal government in Washington had done little to claim their loyalty; the settlers repeatedly sent delegates to Congress to plead their cause, but they were not even given a polite hearing.

Some months before reporter Thompson Turner had predicted that the removal of the Overland route would be a "death blow to Arizona." *

The prospect of a withdrawal of the Overland Mail from this route has caused a complete stagnation in business and enterprise. "What will we do? Where shall we go?" is in every man's mouth. ... Private letters from Washington state that it is even in contemplation by the new Administration to withdraw the troops from this country. If this should be done, we are ruined and Arizona will lapse into nothingness. (HL, 192-3)

And, indeed, it was not long before Union soldiers evacuated the territory as well, burning what they could not carry away. Charles Poston described the scene as the Union troops left Fort Buchanan. "The smoke of burning wheat-fields could be seen up and down the Santa Cruz Valley, where the troops were in retreat, destroying everything before and behind them. The government of the United States abandoned the first settlers of Arizona to the merciless Apaches."

According to an article in the Tucson Weekly Arizonian of August 10, 1861, "We are hemmed in on all sides by the unrelenting Apache. Since the withdrawal of the Overland Mail and the garrison troops the chances against life have reached the maximum height. Within six months nine-tenths of the whole male population have been killed off, and every ranch, farm and mine of the country have been abandoned in consequence."

J. Ross Browne, traveling through Arizona in 1864, saw the devastating effects of the abandonment of the territory by the Army and the mail line.

In the full tide of the excitement, Arizona, neglected, suffering, and almost forgotten, received the heaviest blow of all. The rebellion broke out in April, 1861. The Butterfield overland mail line was stopped at the same time, in view of the dangers that threatened it; and an act of

Congress was passed changing the route. During the month of July the only Federal troops in the Territory shamefully and without cause abandoned it, and marched from Forts Breckenridge and Buchanan to Cook's Springs, where they heard the Texan rebels were coming.

Without waiting to ascertain the number or prepare for any defense, they burned all their wagons, spiked their cannon, packed their provisions on mules, and headed over the mountains to Fort Craig. There were four companies, numbering altogether four hundred and fifty men. They had heard of the surrender of Fort Fillmore toward which they were marching, and this caused them to take a different route. At Fort Fillmore, five hundred Federal troops of the regular army surrendered to about two hundred and fifty renegade Texans, ragged, undisciplined, poorly armed, and badly equipped.

When Captain Sherod Hunter and his company entered Tucson on February 27, 1862 they encountered no resistance as they raised the stars and bars over the presidio. J. Ross Browne presents the Yankee view of the events that followed:

"A scattered company of these roving bandits under the command of the guerrilla chief Captain Hunter, numbering about one hundred, reached Tucson on the 27th of February, 1862, and took possession of the place. Most of the inhabitants had fled to Sonora for safety, or stood ready to join the rebels. It was a secession stronghold, composed almost entirely of Southern outlaws, whose sympathies were naturally opposed to the existing Government. Hunter and his party held possession of the Territory, advancing as far as the Pimo villages and even threatening Fort Yuma, till the advance of the California column in May, when they retreated to the Rio Grande.



Raising the Confederate Flag over Tucson

March 1, 1862

"The few citizens and traders who remained loyal to the Government and the managers and workmen employed at the mines being thus left at the mercy of lawless desperadoes, roving bands of Apaches and Sonorians, fled from the country as fast as they could procure the means of escape. Many of them were imprisoned, and some were murdered. The hostile Indians, ignorant of our domestic disturbance, believed they had at length stampeded the entire white population. On the public highways they fell upon small parties and slaughtered them. It was their boast, and is still their belief, that they had conquered the American nation."

The Affair at the Picacho

While Captain Hunter had his company at Tucson he knew that Union forces were heading east from California. In mid-April (various exact dates are given) Hunter sent a picket of nine privates under the command of Sergeant Holmes. He describes the action as follows:

On the 16th Inst. at 2 o'clock pm my picket, consisting of a sergeant and nine privates, were attacked at El Picacho, 40 miles from this place by the advance guard of the enemy. After fighting desperately for one hour and a half the federals withdrew leaving a Lieutenant and two men dead on the field and carrying off several wounded. Three of my pickets are missing. Supposed to have been taken prisoners, having been cut off by the enemy before the fighting opened.**

The three Rebels who were taken prisoner were Sergeant Holmes, who commanded the party, and privates Dwyer and Hill. The lieutenant in charge of the Union party, Barrett, was killed at the start of the skirmish, possibly due to his own rashness. Private George Johnson was also killed and Private William Leonard died of his wounds the following morning.



According to Captain Calloway, Barrett's superior officer in charge of the advance party heading to Tucson, Barrett had the drop on the Rebels and should have taken them "without firing a shot, if the thing had been conducted properly." Instead...

The lieutenant led his men into the thicket single file without dismounting them, after having been requested twice by Mr. Jones (their guide) to do so. The first fire from the enemy emptied four saddles, when the enemy retired farther into the dense thicket and had time to reload...Barrett followed them, calling on his men to follow him. ... Lieut. Barrett was as brave a man as ever was, but rashness sacrificed his own life and the lives of his men, and lost all chances of taking by surprise Tucson and the enemy.

Hunter's delaying strategy won a little time for the Confederates, but ultimately he was not able to withstand the force heading his way from California, especially since the reinforcements that were promised him never materialized.



When Lieutenant Colonel Joseph R. West, heading east in the van of the California Column, stopped and built an entrenched post at the Pima Villages, the post was named Fort Barrett to honor the slain officer, and it was further declared that "The names of Private Johnson of Company A and Leonard who fell by his side, will until the end of the war be called at every stated roll call of their respective companies, and a comrade shall always respond, He died for his country! (CC, 26-7)

Four Confederates buried at Dragoon Springs

According to Finch's diligent research, the four "Rebels" who are buried at Dragoon Springs died when they were ambushed by Apaches as they brought in a herd of cattle to Tucson from the east. Sylvester Mowry wrote the following obituary for John Donaldson:

Killed by the Apache Indians, May 5, 1862, near Tucson, Arizona, Captain John Donaldson [who joined] Hunter's small Confederate force. Returning to Tucson from a short expedition, he fell in the rear of the troops to accompany a friend [Sam Ford] who had charge of a large herd of beeves. The Indians ambushed the party and Donaldson was killed at the first fire.

Of the four grave mounds at Dragoon Springs, one is unidentified, one was marked "Richardo" and the two remaining are those of John Donaldson and Sam Ford.



Confederate Private

The Union Army took Tucson near the end of May, some five weeks after the skirmish at Picacho. The Confederate forces fell back to Mesilla and soon were engaged in the battle for Louisiana.

Pioneer Joseph Fish commented: "The retreat of Hunter again left Arizona to the United States and the Indians, the latter having decidedly the advantage."

During the rest of the war, the western half of the New Mexico Territory was virtually cut off from communication with the outside world. In 1863 a bill was finally passed by Congress and signed into law by President Abraham Lincoln creating the Arizona Territory by dividing the New Mexico Territory along a north-south line. This put the territorial boundary substantially where the state boundary is today.

The first public mail to reach Tucson after the Butterfield shut-down came from California on horseback September 1, 1865. Once the war was over a renewed interest in ranching and mining brought newcomers into the fledgling territory both from the east and from California. In the early 1880s the Southern Pacific Railroad completed the work the mountain men, Mormon volunteers, and army surveyors had begun.

http://www.discoverseaz.com/History/Civil_War.html