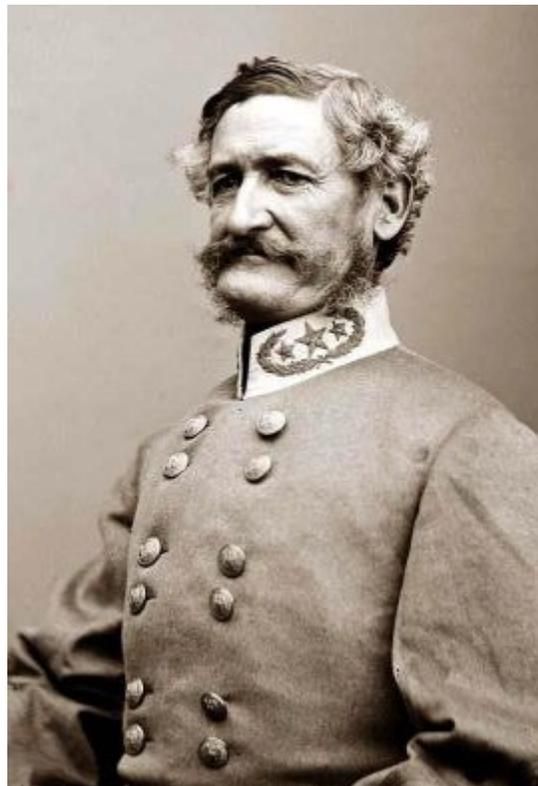




Sibley Expedition New Mexico

The Sibley Expedition into New Mexico is one of the most obscure yet important aspects of War Between the States history. Confederate General Henry Hopkins Sibley devised a brilliant plan to move a Brigade sized element through New Mexico to capture U.S. forts and re-supply his troops along the way. His ultimate target being the Colorado gold-fields and the Southern sympathetic miners he surmised were in Denver City. Once he secured the gold-fields for the Confederate Cause, he would flesh out his command with volunteers and then march on California and seize warm water ports to circumvent the Union blockade that was starting to take effect on the Eastern Seaboard.



Confederate General Henry H. Sibley

In December 1861, General Sibley, commanding the Army of New Mexico, issued a proclamation that indicated intention to claim New Mexico in the name of the Confederacy. Within two months, Sibley advanced into New Mexico with intentions to take Santa Fe and the Union storehouses at Ft. Union. The invasion route closely followed the west bank of the Rio Grande. An obstacle facing the Sibley Expedition was Ft. Craig with its 3800-man Garrison. Sibley faced a dilemma; he could not bypass Ft. Craig and leave a sizeable Union force behind

him. The worst case scenario was this force could easily cut off his supply line and his way back into Texas. Further it allowed this sizable force to attack him at will. Sibley attempted to lure Canby and his Northerners out of Ft. Craig to do battle on Sibley's terms. On 19 February 1862, Sibley camped at the sand hills east of Ft Craig. It was assumed this would cut communications between Ft Craig and Union troops in Santa Fe.

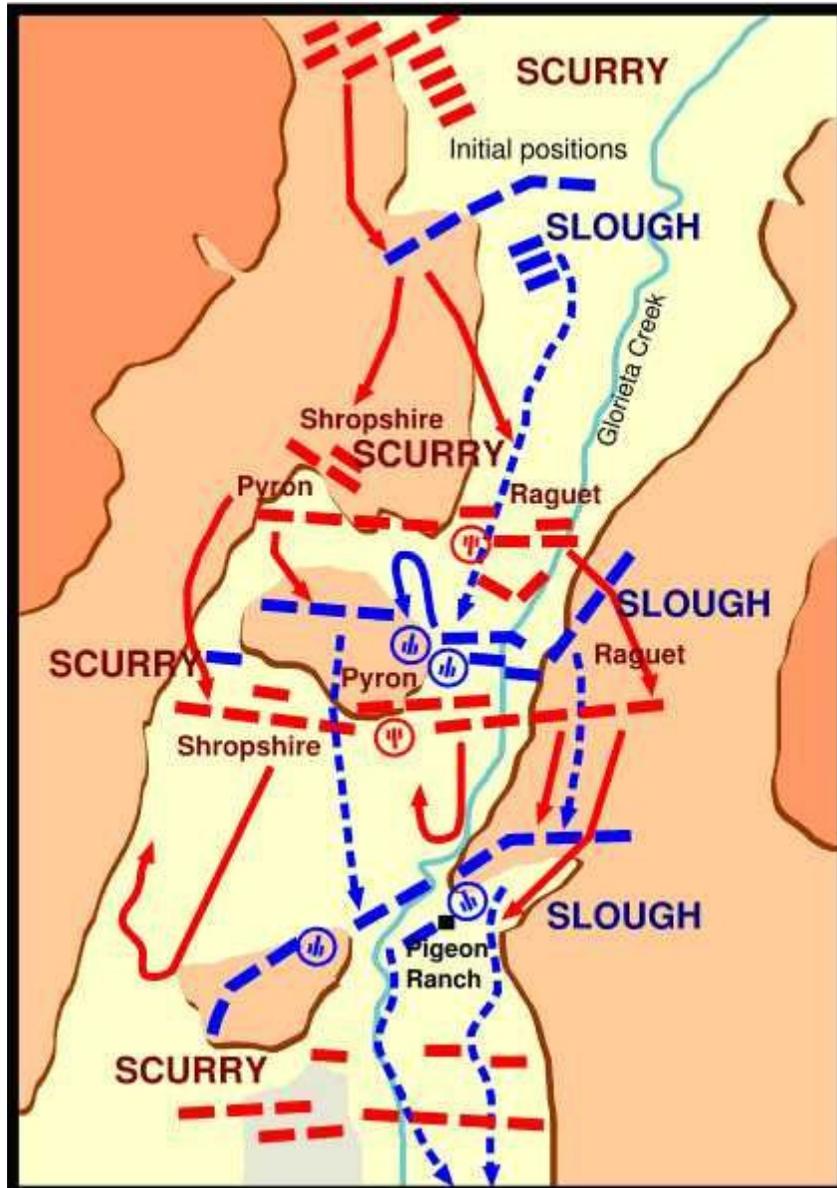
The next day, Union troops mounted a sortie from the fort but were repulsed by a ferocious Confederate artillery barrage. The Confederates then moved their position about six miles north to Valeverde Ford. The Union once again mounted an attack but was eventually repelled by Col. Tom Green who took command while Sibley recuperated from illness. Canby's troops returned to Ft Craig, whipped but refusing to surrender.

Sibley formally entered Santa Fe on 11 March 1862. Union troops garrisoned there had destroyed a vast amount of provisions Sibley had hoped to secure for resupply of his forces. Add to this, advance elements of Sibley's own command had eaten or used up supplies that the Union had not managed to destroy.

Short of food and a variety of other supplies, Sibley sent elements of his command out in several directions to forage food from less than cooperative locals and keep tabs on Canby's movements.

On March 26th, Confederates following the Santa Fe Trail were attacked in Apache Canyon by mounted Colorado Volunteers under the infamous John Chivington. After a short but fierce engagement, Confederate troops under Charles Pyron were forced to withdraw back down the trail. A courier was sent to Col "Dirty Shirt" Scurry to come up with reinforcements and the Battle for Glorieta Pass was underway.

No fighting took place on the 27th, as both sides were awaiting reinforcements, not to mention fighting exhaustion aggravated by snow. By the 27th, Confederate forces swelled to around 1100 men. The Union forces were also reinforced bringing their total force to around 1300. On the 27th, Confederates under the command of Col William Scurry attacked the main Federal positions at Pigeons Ranch. After heavy fighting throughout the day, the Union forces were driven back and forced to retreat to Kozlowskis Trading Post. This would have been a Confederate victory at this point, had Maj. Chivington not managed to locate and burn the Confederate supply wagons.



Without supplies, facing starvation and hypothermia, the Confederates reluctantly retreated back to Santa Fe. Ultimately, Sibley began a withdrawal back to Texas, thus ending the Confederate attempts to invade the American West.

An unsung hero of the Sibley Expedition -



Major John S. Shropshire

Major Shropshire exhibited the finest attributes of a Confederate Officer. During heavy fighting at Valeverde he managed to lead a trapped Confederate force to safety by shooting his way through the lines, organizing the bewildered men and then shooting his way out again. At the Battle of Glorieta Pass he led several charges into impregnable Union positions before finally being shot dead. Major Shropshire was buried in proximity of Pigeons Ranch prior to the Confederate Retreat. His grave was lost until 1989, when he and a number of other interred Confederates were discovered.

