

First Military Action in Colorado

Submitted by Gary Parrott

On October 14, 1861, Captain Eli Long (Company F, 4th US Cavalry) intercepted and captured a detachment of Captain Joel McKee's Company-CSA along the Arkansas River between Fort Wise and Bent's Fort. It was believed this detachment had participated in an earlier raid on a US Army Supply Wagon Train commanded by Captain John H. Mink (New Mexico Mounted Volunteers-USA) en-route from Fort Craig, New Mexico, to Fort Wise, Colorado.

Reportedly, as many as 60 Rebels, 100 guns and various supplies were seized and later transported to Fort Wise. However, approximately 15 to 20 members of the Confederate force escaped capture. No casualties were reported by either side. A few days later, all Rebel prisoners were transferred to the Territorial Prison in Denver.

Local newspapers reported this to be the "First Victory in Colorado" involving Union Troops and local Rebels. Additionally, the newspapers reported this incident vindicated Governor William Gilpin's actions in raising two companies of infantry for local defense.

On October 26, 1861, Chief Justice Benjamin F. Hall of the Colorado Territorial Supreme Court wrote to President Abraham Lincoln in regard to the unrest in the territory and asked for direction on how to legally handle the prisoners (Were they POWs, criminals or political prisoners ?). However, before final disposition was made, all the prisoners, including Captain McKee (who had been captured prior to this incident) escaped. Most, eventually, joined other CSA units in Missouri, New Mexico or Texas.

Although this event was a minor affair, it was the first military action involving an organized CSA military unit and the US Army in the Colorado Territory.

Note: the above was compiled from information found in the October 26 & 28, 1861, issues of the *Daily Colorado Republican and Rocky Mountain Herald* newspaper; the November 3, 1861, issue of the *New York Herald* newspaper; the November 29, 1861, issue of *The Daily True Delta* newspaper (New Orleans, Louisiana); and, the *Official Records: War of the Rebellion*.