

The Civil War in Arizona: The Story of the California Volunteers 1861-1866

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Review

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Battling in the Desert

Preparing for the Future

Unless one is a scholar of American military history, few people today realize significant events of the Civil War occurred far to the west of the Mississippi River, let alone many of these events transpired nearly two thousand miles further west beyond the vast expanse of the southern plains, in the rugged territory of the Southwest, in the region encompassing the present states of New Mexico and Arizona. Nor do most people realize the westernmost battle of the war, the skirmish or Battle at Picacho Pass, was not fought at some point in Louisiana or even Texas but on an arid, rocky, and cactus-covered landscape lying between present day Phoenix and Tucson, in the remote desert of the state of Arizona. In this new book-length study, **The Civil War in Arizona**, Andrew E. Masich chronicles the little-known story of the California Column, a force of volunteer soldiers serving in the United States Army from 1861 to 1866 who played a crucial role in establishing and developing the Arizona Territory. To accomplish this task, Masich divided the book into two parts, the first portion being a thorough and readable narrative history of the events and personalities associated with the California Column in wartime Arizona, followed by a compendium of firsthand sources—dispatches written by the Bear state volunteers themselves—originally published in the popular newspaper, the *San Francisco Daily Alta California*. Enhanced by the author's illuminating annotations, these published soldier-correspondent articles provide provocative eyewitness observations of the grueling desert war conditions the hardy and efficient Californians endured during the conflict. These wartime soldier-correspondent letters give voice to these men from California, bringing to life the remarkable story of the generation who provided the foundation upon which the Arizona

Territory was built.

The Civil War in Arizona provides smartly researched scholarship on the desert campaign in the Southwest as viewed from the perspective of the soldiers from California. Despite having to deal with an uncaring Union command structure preoccupied with what was considered the real war in the East, the conflict in Arizona developed into a campaign, which is similar to the social impact of the war in general—proved an agent of change on many fronts. Far beyond thwarting Confederate interests in the region, defending the Arizona gold fields for the Union, and protecting the border from encroachment by Louis Napoleon's French forces in Mexico, the officers and men of the California Column established essential community services, protected settlers, and explored vast uncharted sections of the territory, creating some of the first detailed maps of the region. They also provided key political leadership, invested in business enterprises, enacted laws, promoted territorial interests, and founded institutions based on California models, the legacy of which are still reflected in the character of the people inhabiting the region today. Masich further humanizes the official record of the California Column's military service in Arizona beyond simply detailing the westernmost confrontations of a campaign aimed at preventing a Confederate takeover of the territory by providing a straightforward assessment of how the relentless campaigning led to the tragic decimation of the Apache, Navajo, and other tribal peoples of the region deemed hostile by the Federal government and white society. Thus, the creation of the Arizona Territory in a time of national conflict carried with it the resulting destruction of indigenous tribal cultures, which unfortunately stood in the path of territorial settlement by the Californians themselves and the post-war migration into the southwestern territories by more numerous white settlers from the East.

Historians and general readers alike will find this all-but-forgotten history of **The Civil War in Arizona** riveting—a provocative study of human conflict and development that is both relevant and exceedingly well written.

A twenty-one-year veteran of the National Park Service, Stacy D. Allen currently serves as Chief Park Ranger at Shiloh National Military Park. His most recent book is entitled On the Skirmish Line Behind a Friendly Tree: The Civil War Memoirs of William Royal Oake, 26th Iowa Volunteers (Farcountry Press, ISBN 1560373768, \$26.95, hardcover).