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The Battle of Valverde: Lessons on How to Take a Defensive Position

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FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

THE BATTLE OF VALVERDE:
LESSONS ON HOW TO TAKE A DEFENSIVE POSITION

By

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One Sunday morning when I was a young teenager I sat with my father watching *The Good, The Bad and the Ugly* for the first time. I had a working knowledge of the Civil War thanks to Ken Burn's *The Civil War* on PBS. As I saw Union and Confederate soldiers in the far removed west during the movie I looked at my father and stated that this wasn't true. He assured me that it was in fact true and that there had been a campaign fought in the New Mexican Territory during the Civil War. As he went on to describe the events I was instantly captivated. What follows in this thesis is a young man's fascination with those events.

I will echo here what I stated the day I was commissioned as a new 2nd Lieutenant in the U.S. Army, we can't chose who our parents will be, but if we could, I would pick mine. Their love and support have been a beacon of light in the tumultuous seas of life. I am in awe more each and every day of their love for not only one another, but of me. I am truly a very lucky man.

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ABSTRACT

On February 21, 1862 Colonel Thomas Green launched an assault on a fixed Union defensive position in the New Mexican Territory during the American Civil War. The charge met with success where several others failed during the war. Across a field over six hundred yards long and with artillery support the Confederates were able to seize the defenses. These defenses had an attachment of six cannons under the command of Union Captain Alexander McRae and anchored the Federals' left flank. The capture of these guns and subsequent breakthrough on the northern portion of the field led to the Confederate victory at the Battle of Valverde. What has been overlooked are the reasons that led to the success of this frontal assault where so many others failed during the Civil War. Due to the remoteness of the battle in the desolate American west, the charge and the elements that were implemented both purposely and accidentally on the field that day have been glossed over by history. By examining events that led up to the battle, the movement of forces on the day of the battle, and a thorough examination of all angles of the assault, I will conclude a set of principles that, when implemented, will increase a commander's success when assaulting fixed defensive positions. The examination will conclude by briefly looking at these elements in future wars to see how they were implemented on other battlefields.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

It was a cold day in February 1862, just shy of two thousand miles west of Washington D.C. On a windswept desert in the remote New Mexico Territory, an artillery Captain from North Carolina was in the final moments of his life defending his precious guns. The color of the Captain's uniform is not what one would imagine a Southerner would be wearing in a Civil War battle. Captain Alexander McRae is being closed in on three sides by the Confederate grey, and he is wearing the Union blue. Over 750 Confederates from Texas have crossed a field over six hundred yards long to get to McRae's guns anchoring the Union left. Major S.A. Lockridge, commanding the left flank of the charge, is one of the first Confederates to get to the guns. The Texans have finally been able to bring their guns to bear on the position and now the fighting has gone hand to hand. Like a hangman's noose around his neck, McRae feels the pressure of the Confederate assault, a lonely place to be for the Union Captain. There he stands, a man whose loyalty to his beloved stars and stripes has been questioned by soldiers and officers alike because of the state in which he was born. There he stands, a man whose friends and family back home feel slighted and betrayed because he had not sided with the stars and bars. This has been a very lonely year for the Captain, who chose the only flag he had ever known; honor has been his only companion. Surely that familiar feeling of loneliness now presents itself once again, probably more intensely than ever. As Confederates close in on McRae, they call out for him to surrender. With his arm shattered and leaning against his cannon, he refuses. As a witness later reported after the battle, "Lockridge then placed his hand on the muzzle of the same gun McRae now

leaned upon. Both men raise their revolvers, fired at each other, and fell dead across the gun, their blood flowing along the surface.”¹

Since the dawn of warfare, the frontal assault was one of the first tactics implemented on the field of battle. Used by Alexander, Caesar, and Napoleon, one would be hard-pressed to find a great captain of history who did not implement this tactic in some capacity on his battlefield. The war with Mexico served as a proving ground for American leadership and yielded tactics they then would implement in the American Civil War. The primary reason for the frontal assault's success in the Mexican-American War was due to the weaponry used at the time. The smoothbore muskets only had a maximum effective range of 250 yards, this distance would triple during the Civil War.² This short maximum effective range allowed for the frontal charges implemented based on Napoleonic tactics of massing at the critical point to meet with grand success. By the advent of the Civil War, however, weapon technology had advanced in distance and accuracy to such a point that it could easily blunt these frontal assaults. It is estimated that over 90 percent of such charges failed during the Civil War: technology had changed, but the tactics had not. On February 22, 1862, however, in the desolate New Mexican Territory, one of these frontal assaults did in fact find success. Much of the literature on this battle is a narrative that paints for us the battle's circumstances and effect on the campaign as a whole. The uniqueness of this successful frontal assault has never been truly examined. The question that has been widely overlooked is how this assault achieved success where so many others failed. This thesis will provide an analytical scope of the battle rather than the traditional narrative. A thorough examination of the events leading to the assault, will show precisely what set the Confederate assault in motion. By conducting an in-depth battle analysis, we will discover

¹ Ray Charles Colton, *The Civil War in the western territories Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico, and Utah*. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press 1959),33.

² Tim McNeese, *America's Civil War*. (St. Louis, MO: Milliken Pub., 2003), 73.

lessons on how to conduct an assault on a fixed defensive position defended with artillery support in the Civil War. The use of diaries, letters, and official reports of the battle will be key to understanding the success of the charge on the field of Valverde. This thesis will suggest that it was in fact possible to carry a defensive position in the Civil War when certain tactics, ratios, use of terrain, and aspects of leadership were applied. The application of lessons learned from this particular battle on Civil War battlefields could have drastically changed the tactics of the time and could have affected the course of the war. Thousands of lives saved and a tactical advancement are the key elements of that change. These lessons, though overlooked by high ranking army leadership in Washington D.C. and Richmond during the war and to a large extent by history itself, resonate through future battles and even the U.S. Army manuals to this day.

The Literature

By examining the literature we will begin to develop a picture of the frontal assault throughout history and the Civil War. By examining the assault through history, the similarities but more importantly the differences of the frontal assault on the fields of Valverde will come to fruition. With the history firmly established, tactics of the Civil War examined and a thorough view of the narrative of the battle viewed, what will be seen are the broad elements of this particular frontal assault on McRae's guns and its place in military history.

Partha Bose's book *Alexander the Great's art of strategy* (2003) defines the frontal assault up to Alexander's time as two armies hurling themselves at one another until the bigger army won. There was little use of tactics before Alexander's time; this particular warfare's victor went customarily to the bigger and stronger armies. Alexander was able to change the face of warfare by using flank attacks, striking decisive points of the armies, utilization of cavalry and using deception in his assaults. The frontal assault became an element, or tool in which Alexander

orchestrated these elements around to reach his desired effect. Alexander's phalanx became more of an occupying force with their frontal assaults while he maneuvered his forces around the field.

The tactics of Caesar are viewed in Harry Judson's book, *Caesar's Army* (1961). The Roman Legion was the heart of the army and on it rested victory or defeat. The professionalism of the centurions and legionaries made the legion one of the only professional armies in the world at the time. Caesar would make three lines of battle with his most experienced soldiers in the front line and best legion in that line on the right flank. It was the primary responsibility of the first line (leading off with the extreme right legion)* to break the enemy lines. In a staggered frontal assault the first line would approach the enemy and break their lines. If necessary the second and third line could be thrown into battle to support the first line. Cavalry, auxiliary troops, archers, slingers were typically held in reserve, used to protect the flanks or rear of the legions, and used as skirmishers ahead of the legions. The frontal assault of Caesar's vaunted Roman Legions gave him victories across the empire and was his primary tool for success.

The Art of Warfare in the Age of Napoleon (1978) by Gunther Erich Rothenberg shows us the three tactics Napoleon used on the battlefields of Europe in that of the maneuver on the rear, the central position and the direct assault. Each of these implements the frontal assault as a tool to weaken the enemy, Napoleon then would launch his coup de grace at the critical point of the enemy lines. This was made possible with the short range effectiveness of rifles and cannons at the time affording the units the ability to close with the enemy. For maneuver on the rear Napoleon would use a frontal attack to distract his enemy as he flanked his adversary and assaulted from the side or rear. In the central position he would use a small force to fix part of the enemy while the rest of his army would destroy the other portion of the enemy in detail and

* This would have been Caesars's famed Tenth Legion recruited personally by him in Spain and would serve the general in all of his campaigns.

quickly move to support the fixing force. The direct assault would be used to assault a flank of enemy line where about the enemy commander would commit his reserve or weaken another portion of his lines. Napoleon would then wait for this movement by the opposing commander, identify it and assault the newly weakened position with an all out assault. These three tactics exhibit how Napoleon perfected the tool of the direct assault.

The primary text used to train soldiers during the Civil War was W. J. Hardee's book, *Hardee's Rifle and Light Infantry Tactics* (1861). This book was written before the war and became widely used by both sides during the war. At the time it was considered the bible of drill and is widely accepted that most of the tactics and formations are directly taken from early nineteenth century theorist General Antoine-Henri Jomini's writings on the Napoleonic wars. The essence of Hardee's text is keeping the companies as effective fighting formations in regimental formations. This is done by keeping the smaller units in symmetrical lines, unison movement and controlled rifle fire. These tightly massed formations typically two to four men deep was closely similar to the formations used on Napoleonic battlefields. The primary issue with these massed formations during the Civil War was that the effective firing range of the weaponry had a longer range. This made formations easy targets for the defenders who typically were behind defenses higher and further away. As units tried in mass to concentrate at certain points to overwhelm the enemy, they were soon torn to pieces before they arrived at the critical juncture.

Paddy Griffith argues in his book *Battle Tactics of the Civil War* (1989) that the flank attacks were in fact preferred to the frontal assault. But, because it exposed the sides of maneuvering units to fire, almost by default the frontal assault had to be utilized. Superior weaponry, defensive commanders setting good fields of fire and anchoring lines on suitable

defensive terrain also contributed to the flanks being less vulnerable to attack. With the flank tactic unusable, a commander would then focus at one point on the enemy lines and piecemeal his forces to create a break in the opposing forces line. This concentration at a point is taken from the Napoleonic line of thinking with the theory that the line will eventually give way. The problem with this line of thinking is that during the Civil War rifles, muskets and guns across the whole of the defensive line could be brought to bear. This would in turn bring the attacking piecemealed mass formations to a halt with superior firepower.

Grady McWhiney and Perry D. Jamieson also contend in their book *Attack and Die: Civil War Military Tactics and the Southern Heritage* (1984) that the weaponry combined with the mass formations lends itself to the high causality rate of the war. Their examination looks at the statistics of the bloody assaults of the war and shows how high the direct assault casualty rate was during the war. They also examine the offensive moves made by the Confederacy and concluded that with manpower shortage in the southern ranks, it would have been wiser strategically, to stay on the defensive. Offensive moves on a battlefield, the majority of the time, resulted in higher causality rates and usually lost battles.

With the historical and Civil War perspective of the direct assault firmly in place, an examination of the decisiveness of the direct assault on the field of Valverde will be examined. The fixed defensive position seized by the Confederates on February 22, 1862 was defended by Union Captain Alexander McRae and his six guns while an attachment of troops anchored the left flank or northern end of the Union line. There were several events surrounding this assault, but shortly after 4:00 P.M., this assault was the “decisive point” of the engagement. The literature below shows the elements involved in this frontal assault but fails to identify the distinct differences this charge had from past assaults. Furthermore, the literature fails to

recognize how different this frontal attack was from typical Civil War assaults. There is no thorough examination of the assault's success and most of the literature glosses over the details of this event.

In Robert Lee Kerby's book, *The Confederate Invasion of New Mexico and Arizona 1861-1862* (1958) he attributes the success of the assault on "McRae's Guns," to a Union unit deserting at a critical juncture and to the maneuvering of the Confederate commander. The deserting unit left a hole in the Union lines immediately adjacent to the right flank of the battery. "The mile gap in the center was supposed to be filled by Colonel Miguel Pino, but his regiment chose this most inappropriate moment to mutiny, and scattered in all directions. This was the turning point in the Battle of Valverde."³ On the Union right (Southern portion of the battlefield), an offensive had been launched at midday; (Confederate left) this had weakened the Union left considerably. "This is exactly what Green (Confederate Commander) wanted, for now in two successive charges by Lockridge, Pyron, Scurry and his own Fifth, he fell on the weakened left, killed McRae and took his battery."⁴ Kerby attributes these two factors to the Confederates' capture of the fixed defensive position, which consequently led to their winning of the Battle of Valverde.

In Shelby Foote's *The Civil War: A Narrative* (1958), he appears to agree with Kerby's assessment to an extent and takes it a step further. His view was that the Confederate commander was an experienced fighter and did not hesitate to strike at what he recognized as the key position of the Union lines. It was an all or nothing throw of the dice for Colonel Green; he saw victory and went after it. Green grabbed as many men as he could to launch at the Union battery,

³ Robert Lee Kerby, *The Confederate Invasion of New Mexico and Arizona, 1861-1862* (Los Angeles: Westernlore Press 1958), 73.

⁴ Kerby, *Confederate Invasion*, 73.

and by carrying the guns was able to grab victory out of the jaws of defeat at Valverde. Shelby argues that Green's decision to grab every available man he had left did in fact leave him with no reserves; a failed assault on the guns would have, without a doubt, led to a Confederate defeat.

Ray C. Colton's account in *The Civil War in the Western Territories* (1959) is the first to give us information on distances, weaponry, and numbers. Colton speaks to the number of troops involved in the assault (750), the weaponry the Confederates were armed with in the way of shotguns and pistols, and a distance of seven hundred yards traveled in the assault. He paints for us a little clearer picture of the assault than the previous two authors. The author also shows the Union's numbers in guns and in artillery used to stop the assault. He also states that McRae's guns were supported initially by Captain P.W.L. Plympton's Seventh U.S. Infantry, and that eventually Captain Benjamin Wingate's Fifth U.S. Infantry was thrown into the line after the battery was seized. He also clarifies for us that the attack was under the overall direction of Lieutenant Colonel William R. Scurry who was positioned in the rear. The officer leading the charge from the front is Major S.A. Lockridge. He is also the first author to speak to the savagery of the fighting for the battery as well as to the last moments of McRae's life defending his guns. Colton gives us a brief account of the charge rather than any analysis on why it succeeded.

Unlike the previous works, in Martin Hardwick Hall's book, *Sibley's New Mexican Campaign* (1960), we receive a more detailed view of the assault and reasons for its success. Hall also gives us a distance from the Confederate lines to the Union guns, but unlike Colton's 750, he places it at 450 yards. This figure is a solid 250 yards less than what Colton states that the Confederates had to cross. Hall is the first to point out that the Confederate assault was being supported by artillery, which aided the Confederates in their assault. It is also interesting that the Confederate charge was not an all-out, nonstop assault, like that of Pickett's Charge at

Gettysburg, but was rather one with several halts. “As the Texans saw the flashes from McRae’s guns, they would hit the ground and fire their small arms, and when the artillery charges had passed over, they would spring up and advance again in the same fashion.”⁵ This tactic had a threefold effect. First, the Confederates suffered fewer deaths in the assault by taking cover. Second, troops would get a slight break when they took to the ground. Finally, Union gunners thought they were inflicting casualties, only to be unnerved by the charge that continued to surge towards them. We also learn in this volume that Colonel Canby was directly behind McRae’s guns and attempted to bring the artillery’s support troops, the New Mexico Volunteers, in to help, but due to the intense fire from the Confederates’ artillery and the rebel yells from the assault, the Volunteers refused to move up to support the battery and eventually fled from the field. Hall points out two tactics used by the Texans to help take the position as they moved closer to the battery. “The main Confederate storming party, in an effort to completely envelop the battery, had deployed in an advancing crescent formation nearly a half a mile in length.”⁶ This allowed the Confederates a concentration of their arms on the objective. He also talked of cottonwood trees on the field, especially to the Union right that allowed for excellent cover and concealment for advancing Confederates. His brief analysis of the battle revolves around two points—the superior number of Confederates and their ferocious will to take the position. As clearly demonstrated above, however, there were reasons beyond these two for the seizing of the guns.

In William Clarke Whitford’s book *Colorado Volunteers in the Civil War* (1963), he echoes a couple of the above texts, but also brings some new items to light. As stated above, Whitford talks of the early Union attack on the Confederate left and how this took forces away

⁵ Martin Hardwick Hall, *Sibley's New Mexico campaign* (Austin: University of Texas Press 1960), 95.

⁶ Hall, *Sibley's*, 96.

from the McRae's Battery. He also mentions that Colonel Pino's men were supposed to cover the center of the field, adjacent to McRae's battery, but refused. Whitford does bring to light that Colonel Pino's forces were five companies of the Second Regiment of the New Mexican Volunteers and that this force did not even cross the river to move up to the battlefield. He is also the first author to talk about the Texans staging behind "sand hills" on the northern end of their lines. This is again important for cover and concealment of the assault as well as the shock of the attack. He, like Colton, also gives as a description of weaponry and the time of the attack in the way of machetes, shotguns, rifles, pistols, and their ranges. Whitford puts the distance of the charge at approximately seven hundred yards going down slope, with the battery falling in eight minutes. This gives us real insight into the assault, but also leaves us with three significant questions and one fact. Does going "down the slope" imply that the Texans were going downhill in the assault? Is the eight minutes the whole time of the assault, or just when the Texans reached the objective of the guns? Is the assault distance seven hundred yards or four hundred fifty? The one indisputable fact he presents was that most of the Texans' weapons were out of range of the guns until they closed the distance. Whitford is the first author to point out that McRae and Lockridge kill each other at the guns.

Of all the texts on the topic, John Taylor's *Bloody Valverde* (1995) has the most extensive research on the battle and breaks the engagement down into fifteen to thirty-minute intervals. In relation to the assault, he covers all the above in detail and also shows several new angles on the assault. He starts with the background of McRae's battery having its roots in the Second and Third U.S. Cavalry, and that although there were a few veterans from the Mexican and Indian campaigns, most of the personnel were new recruits. He does confirm Union commander Colonel Canby behind and to the right of McRae's guns. Taylor is the first author to

contend that Canby is one of the first to recognize the assault by the Confederates. “Wheeling his horse and galloping to the riverbank he roused Plymouth’s Battalion and the New Mexican volunteers and ordered them forward.”⁷ He confirms from earlier texts the Volunteers being at this location and the presence of Plymouth’s Seventh Battalion. The author points out that at this time additional units were being brought up from the rear to plug the right of the battery. Taylor contends that Plymouth and the New Mexico volunteers did assume position on the flanks of the battery. Therefore, from this we can surmise that there were Union units in defensive posture during the assault. He also states that the Confederate artillery commander Captain Teel said it took eight minutes for the Texans to reach the battery. We need to assume here that this indicated the time it took the Texans to get into firing range or even assault the battery, but did not include the time it actually took to seize the battery. It was somewhere during this eight minutes that the onrushing Texans, combined with Teel’s guns, scared Captain William Mortimore’s Third New Mexico Volunteers on the left of the battery. At this juncture, a portion of Plymouth’s Regulars also fled the field. Taylor does contend that not every man retreated and that approximately two hundred fifty of the six hundred men stayed to defend the guns. This gives us the clearest picture thus far of the defense and assault of the guns. Though they were outnumbered, there was a sizable force left to defend the guns. These two hundred-plus men were able to push back the first wave of the assault. However, the second and third were able to close the distance, turning the fight into a hand-to-hand slugfest. These two points will be important from a tactical and ratio perspective when we analyze the assault’s success. The author contends that this fight lasted several minutes, which helps us understand the timetable of the assault. He does mention McRae’s last moments and how Canby, seeing the position taken, realized the battle was lost.

⁷ John McLellan Taylor, *Bloody Valverde: a Civil War battle on the Rio Grande, February 21, 1862*, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press 1995), 85.

In the final account, *Distant Bugles, Distant Drums* (2006), Flint Whitlock uses many more firsthand accounts in his text to try to paint a picture of the assault. It is in Whitlock's book that we get another figure of the number of Confederates in the assault—one thousand men—and in which Whitlock credits Colonel Tom Green's audacity for the success of the assault. This figure puts the attackers at a four-to-one advantage. Between this account and previous accounts, we can calculate that the assault contained between seven hundred fifty and one thousand rebels. The author also points out that at 4:00 P.M. there would have been only an hour of daylight left during which to launch the assault. It is also clearly shown by his detailed maps that the starting position of the Texans' assault was a dried-up riverbed, probably at one time part of the Rio Grande. Whitlock does not go into detail about the length of time in the actual assault or in crossing the field, but does give detailed firsthand accounts of the hand-to-hand fighting on the objective. One of the points he brings up that is not examined in the other texts is that Captain Lord's Company D, First U.S. Cavalry, was ordered into the defense of the guns, but never arrived. He is also quick to point out that not only did the New Mexican volunteers throw down their weapons as the Texans came on three sides, but, "the panic quickly spread to some members of the Tenth U.S. Infantry, who threw down their arms and splashed back across the river to safety."⁸ Like all the authors, Whitlock contends that the seizing of the guns was the decisive part of the battle.

As clearly demonstrated by all seven of the above authors, there are not just a few reasons for this successful assault, but several. This existing information will be used in the examination of this anomaly on a Civil War battlefield, but there are several other avenues to explore, and still more pieces to discover on why this frontal assault met with success where so

⁸ Flint Whitlock, *Distant bugles, distant drums: the Union response to the Confederate invasion of New Mexico*, (Boulder: University Press of Colorado 2006), 135.

many others found failure. With an exhaustive research of all the elements of the charge, we will find conclusive reasons for its success. By establishing the background to the war we will understand how the campaign in the New Mexico Territory came to fruition. Examining the geography of the region will demonstrate how the elements played on the soldiers involved on the campaign and in their movement to the field of battle. Looking at the leaders involved and at the opening moves by its commanders will show us how the soldiers arrived at the field of battle and what part those leaders played on the day of the assault. Then by thoroughly investigating the Battle of Valverde before 4:00 P.M., we will see the elements that led to the ordering of the charge against the guns. By investigating the commander of the Confederate army at the time of the assault, Colonel Thomas Green, it will be uncovered what type of tactician and leader he was on that day. With a thorough look of the tactics, it will be seen how they were different than typical Civil War methods. By viewing the field and the weaponry it will be clearly demonstrated how the lay of the land and the weapons used on that terrain worked in the Confederates' favor. Finally, we will look at the Union battery and the disposition of troops around it that lead to it being captured. By using the words of the commanders on the field and the officers present that day, in the *Official Records of The War of Rebellion* we will be able to find the truth in this examination. In looking at letters and diaries of both Confederates involved in the actual charge and Federals defending the battery, we will get a clear picture of what transpired at approximately 4:00 P.M. on that fateful day in February 1862. After this thorough view of every angle, we will be able to unravel the mystery behind the success of the assault on McRae's battery at Valverde, and how it was and can be applied by future armies.

Background to War

A year and a half of war with Mexico proved to be a crucible of leadership in the ranks

of the United States Army, where major players in the upcoming Civil War cut their teeth. The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo that was signed in 1848 ended the war with Mexico. The victory ceded Texas and most of today's Southwestern region to the United States increasing the land of the country by nearly a quarter. Two years later, on September 9, 1850, the United States Congress passed the Organic Act, which created the Territory of New Mexico and authorized the establishment of a new civil government. Three years later, a deal was struck with the Mexican government for the purchase of the southern portions of modern-day New Mexico and Arizona. The Gadsden Purchase, with its 45,535 mile track, was made to obtain a suitable route for a Southern Pacific Railroad. Many Southern representatives, including then-Secretary of War Jefferson Davis from Mississippi, were advocates of this purchase to increase "Southern" states that would be agriculturally suitable for slavery. The acquisition of this land, which would presumably become Southern, was intended to keep up with northern states increasing their "Free States" westward.

The major question in the years prior to the war was on which side the New Mexico Territory would fall should war occur. Some speculated that the important factor in this outcome would be the number of miners from free states like Colorado in the territory. Others speculated that the side who provided the most protection from Indians would be a decisive factor. Where Missouri fell was also viewed as a critical factor because of the trade route in that of the Santa Fe Trail linked the two regions economies. Also during this time, the New Mexican government established more stringent slave codes showing a distinct lean toward the Southern states. Finally, the territorial governor and departmental military commander were North Carolinians,

while the territorial secretary was a Mississippian.⁹ It was thought these personnel in key positions might push the territory onto the side of the Confederacy.

In the years leading up to the war, a territory-wide inspection of all forts was conducted. Joseph Johnston and Joseph Mansfield were the two officers placed in charge of these inspections. Between 1859 and 1861 they both inspected most of the forts in the Department of Texas and New Mexico.¹⁰ Their job was to inspect, investigate, and report on all matters affecting the efficiency, discipline, and welfare of the army. Their inspections found morale low and the living substandard, but many of the men they encountered were about to play a vital part in the affairs of the New Mexico Campaign. This was the picture of the New Mexico Territory on the eve of war.

Geography of the Region

The New Mexico Territory had a unique geographic landscape, completely different from the eastern portion of the country. Due to its immense size (nearly five hundred thousand square miles), it had varying types of landscapes. The Mesilla Valley of the Rio Grande, which formed the eastern extreme of that part of southern New Mexico Territory, was about forty miles long, average two miles in width, and contained approximately two thirds of the population. The Rio Grande River dominated the eastern portion of the New Mexico Territory. It ran from Mesilla, just across the border from El Paso, through the entire width of the territory. Several forts and cities were built along the river that would play crucial roles in the upcoming campaign including the territorial capital of Santa Fe located in the northern portion of the territory.

⁹ Hall, *Sibley's*, 13.

¹⁰ Joseph K. F. Mansfield and Joseph E. Johnston, and Jerry D. Thompson, *Texas & New Mexico on the eve of the Civil War: the Mansfield & Johnston inspections, 1859-1861*, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press 1991), 1.

To most travelers, the country seemed hardly more than a great wasteland of mountains, arid plains, and desert. Small mountains and plateaus seemed to jut out of the desert with snowcapped tops. The northern portion of the territory is dominated by the Rocky Mountains, with the northeast portions mountain ranges of the San Juan and Sangre de Cristo intersected by the Rio Grande. To the west, in modern day Arizona, the most prominent feature in the



Figure 1. The New Mexican Territory (Courtesy Hall, *Sibley New Mexican Campaign*)

northwest portion of the territory is the Colorado River with its Grand Canyon. This river also served as the border between California and the territory. The southwestern section of the territory is geographically made up of small valleys and desert landscape. The desert is part of the Sonora Desert, which extends into Mexico. The Gila River runs east to west in this area just south of Tucson. One hundred degree temperatures are common in the southern portion of the territory, with snowstorms prevalent in the mountainous north. Sandstorms were a regular

occurrence in any portion of the territory. In a word, the New Mexico Territory conditions were extreme.

Agriculture worked by slaves and owners was also a major staple on the Rio Grande, which was also in line with the Southern way of life. Farming villages were located on the Rio Grande and her northern tributaries. It was estimated that 90 percent of the people in the region were farmers.¹¹ This was important to the Confederate army because it was believed that the ranks would swell once they entered this agricultural region. The western portion of the territory was considered desolate with a viable Indian threat to settlers but also had vast mineral wealth.¹² Modern day Arizona gained a reputation as a silver district. Overnight, towns like Tucson, Tubac, and Pinto Altos—all in the southern portion of the territory—became mining towns. This brought an influx of miners into the area, and they ultimately clashed with native Indian tribes.

Opening Moves and Confederate Forces

Texas seceded from the Union on March 2, 1861 setting in motion events that eventually led to the New Mexican Campaign. A Lieutenant Colonel at Fort Defiance in the New Mexico Territory, a Major at El Paso (Fort Bliss), and a Captain in Austin, Texas were about to take center stage. The Major in El Paso resigned his commission in the Union army and began the arduous task of traveling to Richmond, Virginia to meet the newly elected president. In June of 1862, Jefferson Davis welcomed to Richmond the forty-four year old Louisiana born, Major Henry H. Sibley.¹³ The man who stood before the Confederate president had one of the most impressive resumes in the US Army and one of the most elaborate schemes to boot. Henry Sibley graduated West Point in 1838 and shortly after was dispatched to Florida to fight in the Second Seminole War. He would also fight in the war with Mexico where he won a brevet for

¹¹ Hall, *Sibley's*, 6.

¹² *Ibid*, 11.

¹³ Shelby Foote, *The Civil War, a narrative* (New York: Random House 1958), 144.

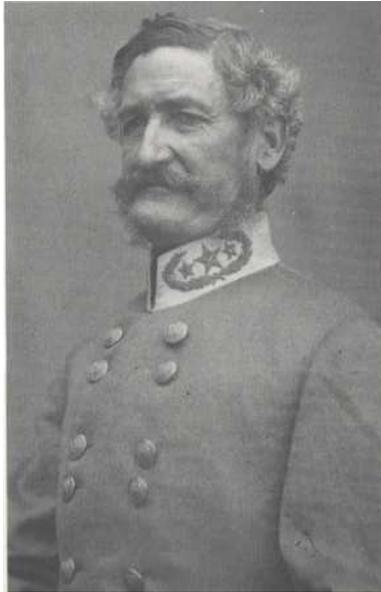


Figure 2. General Henry H. Sibley (Courtesy Taylor, *Bloody Valverde*)

heroism. He then served on the Texas frontier for five years (where he invented the Sibley stove and tent) and soon was dispatched to Bleeding Kansas in the mid 1850's. He would eventually go west to subdue the defiant Mormons and finally commanded a squadron of cavalry during the 1860 Navajo campaign.¹⁴

Sibley planned to consolidate troops in Texas and use El Paso (Ft. Bliss) as a supply base. From there, he would attack north along the Rio Grande. He predicted and Davis concurred that his ranks would swell as he marched on the territorial capital of Santa Fe. The New Mexican Campaign would apply Davis's strategy of the 'offensive-defensive.'* This strategy would be implemented by placing Confederate troops at strategic locations (border states) of the Confederacy. When a Northern army would appear at these strategically significant locations an all out offensive by southern forces would ensue.¹⁵ With Santa Fe firmly in Confederate hands

¹⁴ Jerry D. Thompson, *Civil War in the Southwest recollections of the Sibley Brigade* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press 2001), XIV.

* In 1862 this strategy would further unfold with the invasions of the border states Kentucky and Maryland.

¹⁵ Thompson, *Civil War in the Southwest*, XIV.

and the Union Army destroyed, Sibley would have the option of either moving north to the gold mines of Colorado or making a dash west to the silver mines in the western portion of the territory. In any event, the west coast would eventually be his aim with his battle cry being, On to San Francisco! It was made very clear to Sibley by Davis before he gave him command that his army would have to live off the land and be self sustaining.¹⁶ Agreeing to these terms the newly commissioned Brigadier General of the Confederate States of America with the title “Commander of the Department of New Mexico” began his journey back west to El Paso, where he would commence his campaign of conquest.

Back in Texas, the Captain was soon elevated to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel, and he went about recruiting a unit to secure the interior lines of Texas. Lieutenant Colonel John Robert Baylor can be best described as an Indian hating, fire eating Southern zealot. Originally from Kentucky, he had moved to Texas as a teenager where he soon became an Indian agent and developed a hatred for their race. Baylor soon recruited 350 volunteers in central Texas where he organized his regiment into what he dubbed the Texas Mounted Rifles, and marched them to El Paso in time to receive the surrender of Fort Bliss.¹⁷ En route, Baylor occupied the chain of military posts that stretched 666 miles along the Lower Military Road from San Antonio to Franklin (El Paso). By June 1862, Baylor had secured all of the forts and roads in western Texas, raised the Confederate battle flag on Bliss, and prepared a movement north into the New Mexican Territory.

On his own initiative, Baylor crossed the Rio Grande and marched his small band of Texans into Mesilla, the largest city in the southern portion of the Mexican territory. He soon established his headquarters in the town as he was cheered on by secessionists. In a ploy to get

¹⁶ Foote, *The Civil War*, 146.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 147.

the Hispanic population to join his cause, he proclaimed the new Confederate Territory of Arizona south of the thirty fourth parallel and announced himself the military governor of this new Confederate puppet state.¹⁸ Baylor then turned his attention to Ft. Fillmore, where a garrison of seven hundred men seemed poised to retake Mesilla. With Mesilla firmly in grasp the commander of the nearby Fort Fillmore, the inept and old Major Isaac Lynde began movements to retake the town. On July 25, 1861 Lynde crossed the river with six companies of 380 men to retake Mesilla.¹⁹ Lynde ordered Baylor to surrender the town or he would be attacked. Baylor refused and Lynde commenced his attack with artillery and an infantry assault across a cornfield on the outskirts of town. Baylor had hidden pickets on the flanks, and Lynde's assault came to a grinding halt.

As darkness fell, Lynde made his way back to Ft. Fillmore. Lynde heard rumors that the Confederates were bringing artillery forward, and ordered the evacuation of the post. Lynde decided to move his forces to the northwest and make for the safety of Ft. Stanton along a rough road through the Organ Mountains. Baylor saw his opportunity. He soon dispatched his cavalry in pursuit. Confederate forces moved swiftly along the road and began encountering large numbers of Federals who were too weak from heat exhaustion to put up any resistance.²⁰ At St. Augustine Pass, Baylor's men caught up with Major Lynde and demanded his surrender. Barely able to move, he surrendered over five hundred men, ammunition, and equipment. Lieutenant Colonel Baylor, in a period of only a few months, had secured all interior lines in Texas, taken the biggest city between San Antonio and San Diego, defeated an army twice the size of his own, and established the new Confederate state of Arizona.

¹⁸ Henry Davies Wallen, Andrew Wallace Evans, and Jerry D. Thompson, *New Mexico Territory during the Civil War: Wallen and Evans inspection reports, 1862-1863* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press 2008), 2.

¹⁹ Wallen, Evans, and Thompson, *New Mexico Territory during the Civil War*, 2.

²⁰ Hall, *Sibley's*, 19.

Of the three men highlighted, only one, the Lieutenant Colonel in Santa Fe, would stay with the Union. Edward Richard Spriggs Canby, like Baylor, was born in Kentucky. After graduation from West Point in 1839, he served first in the Second Seminole War. He then

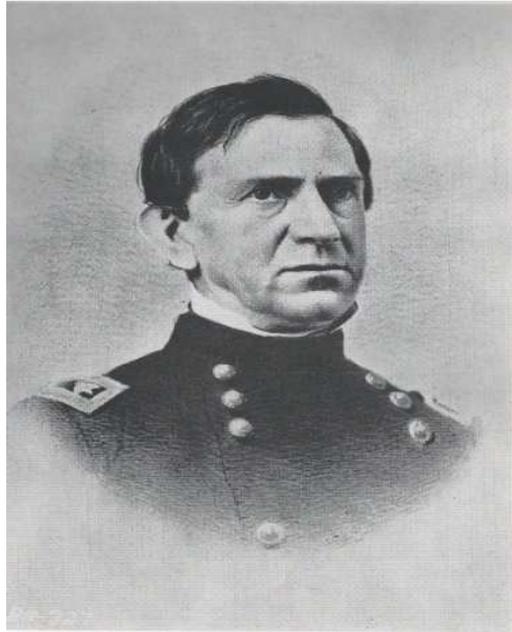


Figure 3. Colonel Edward R.S. Canby (Courtesy of Hall, *Sibley's New Mexican Campaign*)

participated in escorting the Cherokee, Creeks, and Choctaws to Indian Territory in modern day Oklahoma.²¹ He served with distinction in Mexico, frontier duty in Minnesota and Wisconsin and recently had led an expedition against the Navajo in New Mexican Territory.* This expedition would pay dividends in the impending campaign, for it was here he learned the terrain on which he was about to fight. Canby was a tall man and spoke very little and when he did it was to the point. He was thoroughly a soldier and his manner was very modest.²²

Commanding the Military Department of New Mexico since June 11, 1861 Brevet Lieutenant-Colonel R.S. Canby's major issue was manpower. He had less than twenty-five

²¹ Hall, *Sibley's*, 21 and 22.

* Canby and Sibley worked together in this campaign against the Navajo.

²² John D. Winters, *The Civil War in Louisiana*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1963), 388.

hundred Union Infantry, dragoons, and cavalymen in the territory and to make matters worse, they were dispersed in small posts across hundreds of miles.²³ After the crippling loss of Ft. Fillmore and the capture of Major Lynde's forces, he began concentrating forces at Ft. Craig on the Rio Grande (just south of the thirty fourth parallel). Canby was virtually abandoning all forts in the new Confederate territory of Arizona and consolidating his forces just south of the New Mexican Territory. The Colonel began raising local forces in the area and appealed to the governor of Colorado to send units to Santa Fe. Baylor sent a few Confederate reconnaissance parties north to Fort Craig in the closing months of 1861 where a few skirmishes took place between him and Federal forces. He was waiting for the arrival of General Sibley's forces before he made any movement north. This bought Canby valuable time to consolidate his forces at Ft. Craig, where he planned to have a force of approximately four thousand men by year's end. By January 1, 1862 Canby had a sizable volunteer force made up of five regiments recruited by prominent New Mexicans at Fort Craig.²⁴ Colonel Canby was still pushing forces south in the hope he would be able to take command of the fort and prepare for his offensive, but his counterpart General Sibley had other plans.

While Baylor was advancing into the southern portion of the New Mexico territory and Colonel Canby was marshaling his forces in the north, General Sibley had arrived in San Antonio in August 1861, and commenced putting his army together. The Second, Fourth, Fifth and Seventh Texas Mounted Volunteers made up Sibley's Brigade. After two months of extensive training, the 2,500 man brigade moved out of San Antonio in October. Because of the lack of trail grass along the San Antonia-El Paso road, the three regiments in the brigade

²³ John P. Wilson, *When the Texans came: missing records from the Civil War in the Southwest, 1861-1862* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press 2001), 1.

²⁴ Foote, *The Civil War*, 149.

departed in intervals. The 666-mile trek was daunting due to lack of water and movement was slow. By December, the brigade of young eager Texans arrived at their forward operating base in El Paso.

Sibley found the food stocks unsatisfactory at Fort Bliss, but made do with what he could as he prepared his brigade for its northern thrust. Sibley's Brigade of 2,500 soldiers were organized into four regiments and an artillery detachment. The Second Texas Mounted Volunteers would soon fall under the command of Major Charles Lynn Pyron. Pyron was a native of Alabama and after his service in the Mexican-American War as an enlisted man settled on his ranch on the San Antonio River in Texas. At the start of the war, he received a commission as a Captain from the Governor of Texas and raised his own unit, by year's end he was promoted to Major and attached to Baylor. Lieutenant Colonel William Read Scurry would lead the Fourth Texas Volunteers. He was a native of Tennessee who had moved to Texas to get involved with politics and eventually became a bitter political enemy of Sam Houston. The most experienced fighter of the Regimental Commanders was the hard-fighting and hard-drinking Colonel Thomas Green. Green would assume command of Confederate forces at the Battle of Valverde when Sibley was taken ill around midday. His role would be crucial in the success of the Confederates on the field at Valverde and would be the architect of this unique frontal assault. Having served in the Texas Revolution as an artilleryman and a Company Commander in the Mexican-American War, Green had a keen understanding for warfare and so was placed in charge of the Fifth Texas Mounted Volunteers. The Seventh Texas Mounted Volunteers would be commanded by a former Texas Ranger and Texas Revolutionary in Lieutenant Colonel John Sutton. Finally, the First Texas Artillery would be commanded by Captain Trevanian T. Teel from Pennsylvania, who had moved to San Antonio as a young man and was a veteran of the

Mexican-American War. By January 11th, 1862 Sibley had moved his brigade from El Paso to Mesilla. This initial thrust into the New Mexican territory was only fifty miles along the Rio Grande and it was here Sibley linked up with Lieutenant Colonel Baylor. Baylor greeted Sibley and later incorporated Baylor's unit into his brigade under the command of Major Charles Lynn Pyron. Baylor was then given orders to take a small attachment and to head west to safeguard that portion of the territory.



Figure 4. Colonel Thomas Green (Courtesy *The Confederate Veteran*, Volume XV)

Canby now had to forecast what invasion route Sibley would take into the New Mexican Territory. Three routes afforded Sibley the opportunity to enter the northern recesses of the territory. There was a wide flanking route up through Texas to the Canadian River in the extreme northeastern portion of the territory, a second avenue was up the Pecos River east of the Rio Grande, or up the Rio Grande to Fort Union by way of Albuquerque, Santa Fe, and Glorieta Pass.²⁵ All these invasion routes led to Fort Union in the northern portion of the territory which

²⁵ Taylor, *Bloody Valverde*, 15.

represented the last bastion of resistance in the northeastern portion of the New Mexican Territory. The capitulation of that fort would signal Confederate control of the entire eastern portion of the territory. This key fort could also be utilized as the jump off point for the invasion of the Colorado Territory with Denver City squarely in Sibley's crosshairs. In the end, Sibley decided on the Rio Grande avenue of approach for several reasons. The land irrigated by the Rio Grande would allow the army to forage and there were rich supply stores at Fort Craig, Albuquerque, and Santa Fe along the river. Using the more populated route also provided a better chance of swelling the Confederate ranks. Logistically, the Rio Grande route made more sense to Sibley. With these factors in mind, Canby went about defending that avenue of approach.

Sibley now began to focus on his next objective Fort Thorn: here would be the final jump off point for his assault on Fort Craig. Thorn was on the Rio Grande and approximately forty miles north of Mesilla. It was ninety miles south of Fort Craig and had been abandoned in 1859 because of sickness in the region.²⁶ The Fourth Texas Mounted Volunteers under Lieutenant Colonel Scurry was the first to arrive and make camp outside the fort and by February 7, the entire Brigade lay camped there. Several reconnaissance patrols were sent from Ft Thorn to Fort Craig to ascertain information on the troop disposition of Union forces. As a rebel soldier explained about the scouting mission, "two scout companies of the 5th [sic] went up to Craig but the Yanks sent them back faster than they went."²⁷ Union forces also operated in the area collecting intelligence on Sibley's Brigade at this juncture. On February 8, Colonel Green's Fifth Texas Mounted Volunteers made their push north with Captain Teel's artillery. "With twenty

²⁶ Hall, *Sibley's*, 51-52.

²⁷ Thompson, *Civil War in the Southwest*, 19.

pounds to a man and one hundred and fifty rounds to the cannon,”²⁸ the lead units made for Fort Craig. Green soon established camp thirty miles south of Fort Craig and placed his men on high alert. He soon sent out scout parties under one of his most trusted staff officers in Major Samuel A. Lockridge to gather more intelligence on the disposition of the enemy. Lockridge was born in Alabama and eventually moved to Texas where he practiced law. He was part of the 1856 Nicaraguan expedition, where he participated in engagements with locals and with a unit of 250 men helped install William Walker as leader of that country. Needless to say, Lockridge was



Figure 5. Overview of Area of Operation (Courtesy Foote, *The Civil War, A Narrative*)

²⁸ Thompson, *Civil War in the Southwest*, 19.

was accustomed to being in hostile territory and being undermanned. His chosen route of reconnaissance would be located on the west side of the Rio Grande where Fort Craig also reside. By February 12, the bulk of Sibley's Brigade was now closing in on Fort Craig.

Union Forces and Disposition

Canby had known the rebels were in Mesilla since January and had redoubled his efforts in preparing the fort for the impending attack.²⁹ He had spent the previous ninety days making Fort Craig a logistical hub for the Union forces descending into the area. Ammunition, food, and arms were stockpiled at Craig. Canby understood the vital significance the fort had on blocking the Confederate forces north and his plan was to stop them cold before they reached the interior of the territory. Through December and January Union forces in the way of army regulars, Mexican Volunteers and even a company of Colorado Volunteers started arriving at the fort. As word spread through the region in February that the Confederates were closing in on the fort, Canby pushed his force out of Albuquerque with all haste to get to his logistical hub in the south. By forced march, he reached Fort Craig on February 10. Canby now had at his disposal a fortified position that was well supplied with high morale and approximately 3,810 men. Of these, 1,200 were regulars comprising the First U.S. Cavalry, Third U.S. Cavalry, Fifth U.S. Infantry, Seventh U.S. Infantry, Tenth U.S. Infantry, and I U.S. Provisional Battery and Section. These six units were comprised of seventeen companies. The other 2,600 "irregular" troops fell under First, Second, Third and Fourth New Mexico Volunteers, First and Second New Mexico Militia, Graydon's Independent Spy Company (Scout Unit), and the company of Colorado Volunteers.

²⁹ Kerby, *Confederate Invasion*, 64.

Canby's collection of leaders at Fort Craig included seasoned veterans, illustrious frontiersmen, Indian fighters and inexperienced leaders. Most of the U.S. Army units were under the command of Captains, and most of these men had held a service in the active duty army for at least five years and received their commissions from the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. Captain Robert Lord an 1856 West Point graduate from Ohio would command the First U.S. Cavalry. The Second Cavalry would fall under 43-year-old Major Thomas Duncan from Illinois who was one of the most experienced Union regulars, with deployments in the Black Hawk War, Mexican-American War and the Navajo Expedition. He had also fought the Comanche Indian tribe prior to the war. Major Duncan had been in command of Fort Union until Colonel Canby's arrival. Captain Henry Selden would command the Fifth U.S. Infantry; Captain Peter Plympton was in charge of both the Seventh and Tenth U.S. Infantry because of their smaller sizes. I U.S. Provisional Battery and Section or "McRae's Battery," would be led by the thirty-one year Captain Alexander McRae from Fayetteville, North Carolina. The West Pointer had six guns in his battery, 3 six-pounders, and 3 twelve pounders (two field howitzers and one mountain). "Hall's Battery," led by Lieutenant Robert Hall's 2 twenty-four pounders, would give Canby eight guns at his disposal. The seventeen companies of regulars were led mostly by junior Captains, but Lieutenants and Sergeants did lead some of these units due to lack of Captains out west. This leadership was the backbone of Canby's U.S. Regulars.

The year 1861 saw Canby scrambling to marshal Union forces in New Mexico. Not only had he appealed to Washington D.C. and the Territory of Colorado for additional men, he began a recruitment for volunteers in northern New Mexico. Numbers swelled in the territory during the latter half of the year as units began to take shape. The leadership of these units fell on the territory's rich landowners, available army officers, and those from prominent families. Canby

had by year's end over four thousand Volunteers. With the numbers crisis over, Canby saw the potential of another significant issue. Canby's biggest fear was the reliability of the New Mexico Volunteers and Militia in battle against Confederate troops who, by most accounts, were better trained. Canby knew they could defend fortified positions but in pitched battle, under fire and forced to maneuver, he feared they would break ranks.³⁰ Canby's remedy to this serious tactical issue would be in the leadership he placed in charge of the volunteers.

The First New Mexico Volunteers fell under the command of a celebrity of sorts in the daring frontiersmen of now Colonel Christopher "Kit" Carson. A native of Missouri, Carson came to the Santa Fe area first at age seventeen and used the area as a base of operation for his fur trappings. These adventures gained him familiarity with the west and by 1846 John C. Fremont, hired him as a guide for his expedition out west. Kit Carson soon became a national hero in Fremont's reports from out west and the rugged mountain man seemed capable of superhuman feats by an adoring public back east.³¹ By the time of the Mexican-American War Lieutenant Carson helped lead U.S. forces from the New Mexico Territory into California. At the victory at the battle of San Pasqual, he helped free San Diego from a Mexican siege adding to his notoriety. By war's end, he had settled in the New Mexico Territory as a rancher and Indian agent. The Second New Mexico volunteers would fall under the leadership of Colonel Miguel Pino. Pino could trace his family lineage in New Mexico back to the 1600's before the Territorial Period when New Mexico was a Spanish colony. His family had received land grants from the Spanish throne in Santa Fe area during this colonial period. His ancestors served as officials for the crown in this far off colony and would report to the king on the state of the Spanish possession. Miguel's brother Manuel would serve on his staff and Alpha Company Commander.

³⁰ Taylor, *Bloody Valverde*, 14.

³¹ *New Perspectives on the West: Kit Carson*, http://www.pbs.org/weta/thewest/people/a_c/carson.htm; © 2001 THE WEST FILM PROJECT and WETA Credits.

Colonel Jose Gallegos in charge of the 3rd New Mexico Volunteers family had been in New Mexico for over fifty years. They had acquired their land in the San Miguel del Bado Land Grant. This grant given out by the Spanish throne parceled land in the territory for the defense of the colony. Between 1852 and 1860 Gallegos served on the Territorial Legislature four times and two of these years as Council President. He also rose to the rank of Captain in the New Mexico Militia where he won a small engagement against Apache Indians. Other posts held prior to the war was sheriff of San Miguel county and President Historical Society of New Mexico.

The Fourth New Mexico volunteers would fall under a true career soldier, Colonel Gabriel Paul. A West Point graduate from Missouri, Paul had served in not only the Seminole Wars but also in the Mexican-American War where he led an assault to capture a Mexican flag atop the Mexican Military Institute of Chapultepec,* located in the center of Mexico City. The war found him a Major at Fort Union but in the need to raise troops and have good leadership he was advanced to Colonel. The Fifth and final New Mexico Volunteers unit fell under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Benjamin Roberts. Roberts, a New Englander from Vermont, was also a graduate of West Point. He had a break of service after a few years in the Army but returned after the war with Mexico started. He received a brevet to Lieutenant Colonel for bravery during the war, and by the outset of the Civil War, he was a Major. Like Paul, good leaders were in short supply and Canby advanced him and placed him in charge of the Fifth. These five Regiments represented the bulk of Canby's troops for the impending battle.

Three other smaller Union forces in the way of the Spy Company, Militia, and the Colorado Volunteers were attached to the Army. Captain James "Paddy" Graydon secured himself a unique independent command from Colonel Canby designated Graydon's Independent Spy Company. Leaving Ireland because of the devastating Potato Famine, he arrived in

* The Mexican version of the United States' Military Academy at West Point.

Baltimore in 1853. Within a few months he joined the First U.S. Dragoons and headed west.³² Graydon would spend the next six years in the dragoons chasing and fighting Indians all over the inhospitable southwest. Receiving his discharge at twenty-six, he opened a hotel and saloon south of Tuscan near Fort Buchanan. With the advent of the Civil War he led a band of Unionists for Santa Fe where he soon secured his commission as a Captain and began recruiting and training his special unit. Graydon's Independent Spy Company would serve Canby in the capacity of spies, scouts, police and foragers.³³ Graydon had approximately fifty men at his disposal at the time of the battle. The 1st and 2nd New Mexico Militia was composed of approximately five hundred soldiers. These men had no formal military training and were simply untrained men with their hunting rifles. A step below the volunteers Canby had no intention of placing the militia on the field of battle. Canby's initial plan for them would strictly be used to guard forts and supply routes to free up units that could be effective in battle.³⁴ However, with the speed and size of the approaching Confederate force, Canby would have to rethink the use of the militia. To him, it would be a numbers game. The 1st New Mexico Militia fell under the command of Colonel Manuel Armijo and the 2nd New Mexico Militia would fall under Miguel and Manuel's brother Lieutenant Colonel Nicholas Pino. Captain Theodore Dodd and his seventy men had reached Santa Fe on New Year's Day, their trek through the Colorado winter had been tough, but they represented the vanguard of aid that Colorado was to send. The tough miners and outdoorsmen of the Colorado Volunteers were ready for battle. Company A of the Second Colorado Infantry Regiment had departed Canon City in early December after drilling for almost six months. Dodd, a West Point graduate, took command of the Company after their former

³² Union Captain James 'Paddy' Graydon; History Net. COM; originally published by *Civil War Times* magazine. Published Online: June 12, 2006: <http://www.historynet.com/union-captain-james-paddy-graydon.htm>

³³ Hall, *Sibley's*, 81.

³⁴ *Ibid*, 67.

commanding officer was dismissed for drunkenness en route to Santa Fe. Pressing south through the Rocky Mountains for Santa Fe they got a ten day rest and were issued their uniforms and equipment at Fort Marcy. Soon they were back on the move with orders to reinforce Canby at Fort Craig another 150 miles to the south.³⁵ Captain Dodd pushed his Coloradoans with all haste to their objective of Fort Craig. When Dodd arrived, they were soon absorbed by the Tenth U.S. Infantry in preparation for the oncoming Confederate invasion.

³⁵ Flint, *Distant Bugles*, 92.

CHAPTER 2

LEAD UP TO THE CHARGE

Before the examination of the charge, it is important to highlight how the armies arrived at the field of battle and what transpired that day that led to the assault. It is vital to understand not only how the units arrived at their positions prior to the charge but the disposition of troops on both sides of the field prior to the assault. This will paint for us a clear picture of all the events surrounding the charge to better understand the uniqueness of the assault but, more importantly, how it succeeded. These elements will be vital to the understanding of how such an assault, that has never been examined for its uniqueness in carrying a fixed defensive position by frontal assault, found success. By February 13, both General Sibley and Colonel Canby's armies knew of the proximity of the enemy forces in the region. This led to a high anticipation in both camps that battle would soon be met. Reconnaissance patrols had been going out daily from each army to report intelligence to their commanders of the disposition of the opposing force. The intelligence provided during this juncture would have been mainly: the size of the enemy force (including unit designation); all movement of enemy forces; how well supplied the enemy forces were; artillery and cavalry forces supporting enemy forces; and finally, for the Confederate commander, the strength of the enemies defenses of Fort Craig. During this phase of the operation, both commanders were trying to get a clear picture of the composition and disposition of the enemy forces to ascertain the best course of action against their adversary. For General Sibley his course of action would depend on the defenses of the fort at his front. He would have to size up the type of defenses the bastion carried as well as the number of troops inside it in order to enact a course of action. In Colonel Canby's military decision-making process, he would have to examine what the Confederates would do first in order for him to entertain one of his

own courses. Canby's courses of action would stem off of two factors: what the Confederate army was going to do in the way of their movement or if they decided to attack his well fortified position. What was now being played out by both forces was the jockeying for the best intelligence and keeping a watchful eye on their adversary. This would ensure that their whereabouts and movements were constantly being fed back up to their own headquarters and proper decisions made off that given information. Intelligence from reconnaissance, as in any battle of history, would become a key element to victory or defeat.

Reconnaissance and Movement around Fort Craig

On February 13, 1862 Canby ordered the men of Dodd's company of Colorado Volunteers and Captain Benjamin Wingate Company D of the Fifth U.S. Infantry to commence reconnaissance patrols south of Fort Craig.³⁶ On the patrol Union forces ran into a strong Confederate scout force under Lockridge. Union forces immediately sent for aid from the fort as Lockridge began to marshal the three companies under his command in the area for the impending fight. Canby, upon receiving word of a strong reconnaissance south of him, marshaled his entire force of over three thousand men and moved out of the protective walls of the fort to meet the rebels in battle. Lockridge and his nearly four hundred Texans began pushing north towards the fort and were soon in battle formation. Most of the officers seemed cool and it was later reported that the men "were cursing the Yankee's, some were careless and unconcerned, while others were praying for an attack."³⁷ What can only be explained as either a show of force by Union forces or perhaps it was the false report from scouts of a Confederate flanking force, Canby withdrew his forces back into the fort. Lockridge would withdraw that

³⁶ Taylor, *Bloody Valverde*, 22.

³⁷ Hall, *Sibley's*, 75.

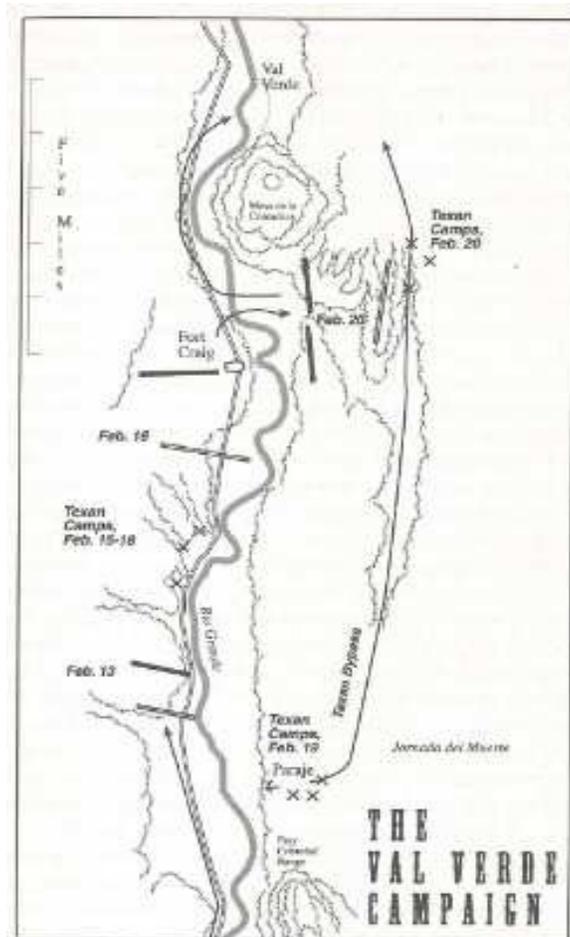


Figure 6. Movement Around Fort Craig (Courtesy Thompson, *Civil War in the Southwest*)

evening to the new regimental encampment located only ten miles south of Fort Craig. Colonel Green's Fifth Texas Mounted Volunteers had again been selected to be the spearhead and again he had his forces on high alert. When Lockridge returned to camp that night, he had a solid piece of intelligence in not only the size but composition of the Union forces for his commander.

The night of the 13th and the morning of the 14th saw a terrible blizzard hit that region of the territory. As Canby's men were placed on high alert in Fort Craig, a night march by the rest of Sibley's Brigade was underway in some of the worst conditions imaginable. Reports from a Confederate soldiers that travelled through the sleet stated it was "so hard as to almost pelt the

skin off our faces."³⁸ The rest of the 14th saw stragglers from the Brigade stagger into camp with ice and snow on them. The fires in the new camp must surely have been a welcome sight to the half-frozen Texans. A minor skirmish with the enemy near Fort Craig occurred that night, with the capture of twenty-one New Mexican Volunteers, intelligence was now beginning to come in daily for Sibley. Canby also received some much-needed intelligence. Utilizing Graydon's Special Spy Company and the reconnaissance patrols, Canby now estimated that Sibley's army numbered around three thousand men.³⁹ For both commanders the picture was beginning to take shape.

The night of the 14th and morning of the 15th saw additional snowstorms hit the area. By sunrise, the weather seemed to push through the area and once again Colonel Green's Fifth Regiment was back in action leading most of the Brigade ever closer to their objective of Fort Craig. Besides the movement of the majority of the army, the other major event of the day was the sickness of Sibley. Whether it was a real sickness or drunkenness is under debate, but what is known is that Colonel Green assumed command of the Brigade and was now on the move. By sunset, the Brigade had made camp by three small canyons, which afforded plenty of room for camp and good defense. The Confederate army was now four miles from the fort and now under the watchful eyes of Union scouts under of the Spy Company. That day Fort Craig received a huge supply of seventy wagons. The Confederate objective was close and now full of supplies that when captured, could be used on their march north.

Colonel Green was looking for a fight on the 16th and was hoping Canby would oblige. Reconnaissance had shown that a direct assault of the fort would be extremely difficult, the best course of action for the Confederates was to draw the Federals out for a fight. Early that morning

³⁸ Flint, *Distant Bugles*, 104.

³⁹ Taylor, *Bloody Valverde*, 22.

Confederate forces began their movement to the plains just south of Fort Craig. Alerted to this by Graydon, Canby began preparing his defenses. He first went about setting Captain McRae's Battery of six guns outside the fort due south and adjacent to the fort. Canby then placed the bulk of his infantry on both flanks of the guns and kicked out his skirmishers on the slope in front of his main force (Fort Craig was on elevated ground). On the extreme right flank (west) a short distance from the fort he placed his cavalry on a small hill to cover that avenue of approach.⁴⁰ By 1:00 P.M. Green had his men assembled in a half a mile line with his right anchored by the Rio Grande and his left on high ground. Artillery and sharpshooters were in reserve. Green gave the order and the Confederate line began its march. Between the Confederate line and the Union line were some naturally wide ditches called arroyos. Upon reaching the first of these, a halt was given for the Confederates to dispatch a light cavalry force to the west to observe the fort and to bring their artillery under Teel toward the center. Again the advance was sounded until they reached another arroyo named Milligan Gulch. Milligan Gulch was the last major arroyos south of the fort and was quickly reached by Green's men. The Confederates were now one-half to three-fourths of a mile south of the federal lines in front of Craig.⁴¹ Colonel Green recognizing the excellent defensive position he had just stumbled into halted his men to entice Canby to come down and fight. Canby dispatched the bulk of his cavalry to push the small unit of Confederate cavalry off a western hill on the Confederate left. He then ordered some of his cavalry to ride in between the lines to provoke the Confederates to assault the fort. Though some shots were exchanged, neither side was willing to budge. A description from a Confederate soldier witnessing these events stated, "it looked to me somewhat like two boys in my school days,

⁴⁰ Flint, *Distant Bugles*, 105.

⁴¹ Taylor, *Bloody Valverde*, 27.

daring each other to knock a chip off the other's shoulder and each afraid to do so."⁴² Canby understood the excellent defensive position the Confederates now held and he must have been highly concerned about how well his volunteers would perform attacking a solid defensive position. It also would be foolish for him to give up his strong defensive posture in front of the fort; an assault on the Confederate lines would nullify his superior artillery due to the ditch they now occupied. For Green, an assault on those guns on high ground and the well-defended fort would have looked suicidal; his plan was predicated on the hope that he could get the Federals on open ground where he could bring his forces to bear. What had now transpired is what neither commander could have expected—a stalemate, or, more appropriately, a Mexican standoff. After remaining in position for several hours Green ordered his troops to withdraw to camp. That evening the blizzard of previous nights was replaced by a massive dust storm, which had both a positive and negative impact on the Texans. It did cover the retrograde movement back to camp, but made it tougher to get to the camp itself. That night they returned to camp strung out along a road four miles south of Fort Craig. Confederate leadership would now have to find a different course of action to force Canby out of his defensive bastion. Both Canby and Green had felt each other out and the insight gained in the first engagement would play a pivotal role on their decisions at the fields of Valverde.

That night with Sibley back at full capacity, a council of war was called with his commanders to examine the next course of action. As seen by the day's events, a direct assault against the fort would be extremely tough and would cost considerable casualties. Placing the fort under siege was a possibility, but with the recent resupply, the Texans could be waiting around there for months, not to mention that it would halt the invasion of the territory and give

⁴² Thompson, *Civil War in the Southwest*, 24.

the Union time to marshal more forces in the region. The staff's solution to this problem was to move the army north of the fort placing the army between Canby and his base of supply located at Albuquerque and Santa Fe. If Canby came out of his fortification, then Sibley would have the battle he wanted; if he stayed in his fort a holding force could be designated to stay and keep eyes on the Union army as Sibley marched north. One of the staff officers soon discovered on the local maps a few miles to the south near the small hamlet known as Paraje de Fra Cristobal a ford across the Rio Grande. The ford lead to a trail leading north, paralleled to the river. The trail made its way east of Mesa del Contadero and just north of the mesa. The road then recrossed the river at a ford, this ford was east of the site of the abandoned Fort Conrad and west of the ruins of the village of Valverde.⁴³ The ford was only two miles south and orders were quickly disseminated for a crossing operation. Major Pyron would be in the lead and direct the brigade for two miles, ford the river, march another twelve miles north on the east side of the river, and secure the ford at Valverde. The entire Brigade minus Green's Fifth Texas, which would act as a rearguard, would cross the ford. Green's forces would protect the Brigade from a Union assault from the rear. Everything was prepared to kick off, but the sandstorm did not let up. Visibility was reduced and all movement virtually ground to a halt. Weather would delay operations for a full 48 hours. Not until February 19 would hostilities resume.

Movement to the Field of Battle

Dawn of February 19 saw Sibley's entire brigade back on the move, but instead of marching north as they had done for nearly forty-five days, they were now marching south. Graydon's Independent Spy Company shadowed the Texan's movements and kept Canby informed of their movements, which instead of moving north now were proceeding south. What

⁴³ Flint, *Distant Bugles*, 106.

the rebels' course of action now was perplexed Canby.⁴⁴ When word reached Canby that the Confederates were fording near the village Paraje de Fra Cristobal he knew the direction of movement, but there were still questions left unanswered. Was this a feint? Were the Confederates in retreat? Did they propose to drive up the eastern side of the Rio Grande and assault the fort from another avenue? Or were they going to bypass Fort Craig altogether? Canby still needed more information. The Confederate Brigade crossed the ice-cold waters of the Rio Grande and was soon at the village. By 3:00 P.M. the entire brigade with its supply trains had safely crossed the river and had set up camp approximately two miles northeast of the ford.⁴⁵ When this new information reached Canby, he began to take precautionary steps to defend the fort. Directly to the east of Fort Craig across the Rio Grande were some hills that Canby recognized as key terrain. Although he could not occupy all of them, the bluffs approximately a half mile from the fort and just adjacent to the river had to be seized. By controlling this piece of real estate Canby ensured that the fort wouldn't be attacked from the east and he would gain control of the one major north south running road that followed the river on the east side. Canby dispatched Colonel Carson's 1st New Mexico Volunteers, Colonel Pino's Second New Mexico Volunteers and Captain Selden's Fifth U.S. Infantry to take the position which they carried out unopposed. Sibley's plan of quickly capturing the ford above the fort at Valverde was stopped cold by this move of Canby. That cold night the federals on the bluff were on high alert and eagerly awaited the morning to see what the Confederates' next move would entail.

By the morning of the 20th, Sibley's scouts had reported that Federal troops were on the hills just east of the fort blocking his avenue of approach northward and a new plan was now in order. A new route would need to be taken and Sibley turned to Captain George Milton Frazier

⁴⁴ Ibid, 107.

⁴⁵Hall, *Sibley's*, 79.

who was familiar with the area to now lead the brigade in a new direction. The column stayed on the road for four miles, but as Fort Craig came into view and the menacing east bluffs, the column shifted its course. Avoiding the terrain the Federals now controlled, Frazier directed the brigade to turn on a right oblique and move northeast up an arroyo toward higher ground.⁴⁶ At this juncture the route becomes increasingly difficult as the Brigade is not only trail blazing but were now steadily beginning to go uphill. Near the river (in the valley) the ground is generally one elevation known as the lower shelf. Two miles inland (east) from the river the elevation begins to gradually elevate to a high plain. Sandy ridges and ravines connect the low ground near the river with this plain.⁴⁷ Sibley's brigade now was not fighting the federals; they were fighting the terrain.

As Sibley's men fought sand and elevation, Canby received word that the Texans were now on a wide flanking maneuver to the east of his defenses and heading for higher ground. Canby decided that this would be the time for an attack, marshaling all his forces from the fort at approximately 2:00 P.M. he crossed the Rio Grande and linked up with his forces on the eastern side of the river. Placing his men in a line of battle near the road, they then moved as quickly as possible up the heights to the east to beat Sibley to the top. Canby's movement did not go unnoticed by Confederate scouts. At first, they reported the presence of cavalry to the north. Then a report garnered the Confederate commander's attention in the presence of infantry moving up the hills. Sibley's advance force was then ordered to move as quickly as possible to seize the top of the hills before the Federals. Colonel Green was able to get the Texans on the heights and put the advance guard on line. Captain Teel, proving his worth as an artilleryman, pushed his guns to the top and unlimbered his cannons in the center of the battle line. At

⁴⁶ Taylor, *Bloody Valverde*, 33.

⁴⁷ A. B. Peticolas, and Don E. Alberts, *Rebels on the Rio Grande: the Civil War journal of A.B. Peticolas*. Albuquerque (University of New Mexico Press 1984), 38.

approximately 4:00 P.M., a small brass band from the Fifth Regiment played “Dixie,” and Teel’s guns let loose on the Federals below. At the time of the artillery strike Canby had his skirmishers approximately eight hundred yards from the ridgeline. He also had a cavalry force way off to his left; the problem he now faced was that the steep sloping ground in which he now occupied was not suited for cavalry or his artillery. Confederate artillery rounds exploded on the hill side showering the men with rocks and debris. It was at this juncture some of Pino’s men broke ranks and fell in full retreat off the hill side.⁴⁸ Canby’s misgivings of the mettle of the New Mexican Volunteers came to fruition and he had no option but to fall back. Canby used one of his commanders in Lieutenant Colonel Benjamin Roberts to conduct a demonstration on the Confederate right to cover his withdrawal. Canby soon left forces on the bluffs previously occupied by Federal forces and posted small units in between those bluffs and the Confederates. This move would ensure that the fort would not be placed in artillery range by the Confederate guns.

Sibley’s men, though thirsty and tired, had won the day; that night Sibley began discussing with his commanders and staff the next move. The agreed plan was that there would need to be a sizable demonstration to the east of the fort to occupy the Federal’s attention while the majority of the brigade made a run for the ford at Valverde. Major Pyron would lead the advanced force out before sunrise with four companies of his Second Texas Mounted Regiment composed of 180 men to acquire the trail and the exact location of the ford. He would be followed by Lieutenant Colonel Scurry’s entire Fourth Regiment with the attachment of all four of Teel’s guns. Sibley’s course of action here was to provoke Canby out of his defenses by placing his Confederate forces between Canby and his major supply depots in the north. With orders relayed to junior commanders, the Confederate army was ready for the movement north

⁴⁸ Taylor, *Bloody Valverde*, 37.

the next day. Would Canby give battle was the question. The spirited and battle hardened Green grasped that the eve of battle was upon his Texans. Charles Scott of the Fifth Texas Mounted Volunteers reported that Colonel Green told his men, "Boys, you've come too far from home hunting a fight to lose-you must win tomorrow or die on the battlefield."⁴⁹

Canby at Fort Craig now had to anticipate Sibley's next move with his staff. By deductive reasoning, he could safely forecast that Sibley's men were definitely not heading south. This really left the Confederate commander with three options. Sibley would either move his forces north bypassing the fort completely by either the east or west side of the river; surround the fort by making an attempt at the bluffs to the east of the fort to use for bombardment while sending another force to cross over the river to the north; or keep a blocking force at the fort while the other half of the army moved northward. Whatever course of action he chose, Canby was determined not to give him the west side of the Rio Grande north of the fort. The Union commander was now taking steps to put a sizable force together with orders the next morning to seize the ford at Valverde.

Ford at Valverde

Valle Verde translated means "green valley," which refers to what the region looks like in the summer months when the waters of the Rio Grande feed the abundant vegetation. Over the years the "le" in the first word was dropped, and eventually the words were combined to make the word we know today as Valverde. The town of Valverde was located on the east bank of the Rio Grande on an old trade route. Fort Conrad was built on the west side near the ford to protect those traveling routes in 1851. Upon the construction of Fort Craig, the post was abandoned in 1854. There are actually four fords at Valverde, all occurring in a bow that protrudes to the

⁴⁹ Taylor, *Bloody Valverde*, 39.

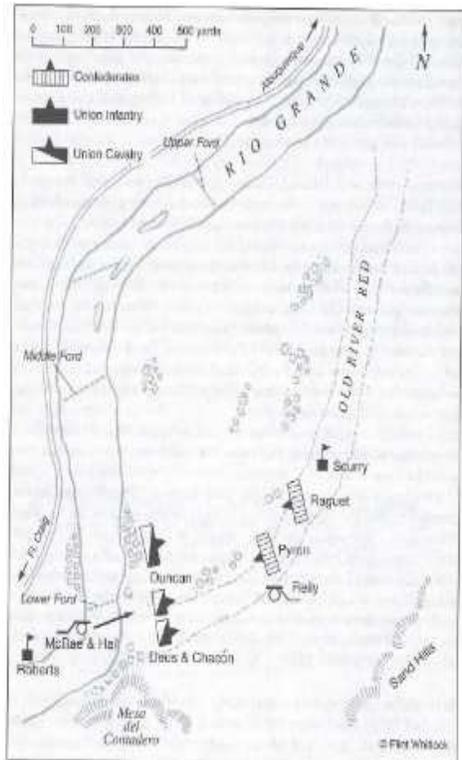


Figure 7. Late Morning at Battle of Valverde (Courtesy Whitlock, *Distant Bugles, Distant Drums*)

west—the lower ford representing the most southern, the middle fords representing the two in the middle and the upper ford representing the northern one. These fords spanned a distance of roughly one thousand yards. Bowing in the opposite direction is a dried up riverbed where presumably the Rio Grande flowed at one time. The southern end of both bows meet at the lower ford with the northern bows meeting roughly a few hundred yards north of the upper ford. The main north south road was located to the east of the river. For a certain distance the road cuts to the west bank of the river and picks back up on the east side through the fords (there is also a road that runs on the western bank from Fort Craig to Albuquerque). The major terrain feature of the area is just south of the fords, Mesa Del Contadero. Composed of sand rock, covered by lava, it rises over three hundred feet abruptly from the river and plain, and extends easterly for three miles. The fords lay approximately five miles to both Fort Craig and the Texan camp with the

notable exception that the Confederates would be going downhill nearly the whole way to the ford. Also between the bows there would be sparse vegetation in the way of a grove or bosque of large cottonwood trees, with openings in between them.⁵⁰ This is what the field of battle looked like on a cold cloudy day February 21, 1862.

Major Pyron's departure before sunup did not go unnoticed by Union scouts that morning. As Canby's report on the battle stated, "Graydon's Spy Company and five hundred mounted militia, under Colonels Pino and Stapleton, had already been sent to the eastern side of the river to watch the movements of the enemy, threaten his flanks and rear, and impede his movements as much as possible."⁵¹ Canby once again went to Lieutenant Colonel Benjamin Roberts and dispatched him with all haste to get to the ford, seize it and hold it from the rebels. Roberts was an 1836 graduate of West Point and during the Mexican-American War served in no less than seven engagements. Canby had most certainly picked his man well in reaching the objective. With a combined force of cavalry, infantry, and artillery, he had at his disposal just shy of nine hundred men. His cavalry force included a company of the First U.S. Cavalry, all four companies of the Third U.S. Cavalry and four companies from the Third New Mexico Volunteers totaling over five hundred men. The infantry units attached were the two from the Fifth U.S. Infantry, one from the Seventh and one company from the Third New Mexico Volunteers totaling approximately three hundred men. Finally, he would have most of the Union guns with him in that of four of McRae's Battery and Hall's two. As the artillery and infantry slowed his column he let loose the cavalry force (minus one company) under the command of Major Thomas Duncan to race ahead to the ford and hold it till the main body arrived.

⁵⁰ William Clarke Whitford, *Colorado volunteers in the Civil War: the New Mexico campaign in 1862* (Boulder, Col: Republished by Pruett Press 1963), 60.

⁵¹ *The War of the Rebellion, Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, 128 vols. (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1880-1901), 9:489.

At approximately 7:15 A.M., with the first signs of light peeking through the cloudy winter sky, Pyron's Confederate detachment made it to the upper ford to water the horses and themselves. Initially everything looked clear, and in truth, the upper ford was open. Pyron left some of his men to hold the ford and took the rest to link up with Scurry when Union scouts on horseback were sighted. These Union scouts were the forward elements of Duncan's force that had crossed over at the lower ford at approximately 6:45 A.M.. Pyron gave chase to the Union scouts and reported, "I followed until reaching the bank of a slough in the bottom, when I found myself in front of a large force of all arms."⁵² Pushing the skirmishes back to the lower ford Pyron's 180 men were now face to face with Duncan's entire force of nearly 500. Duncan's men had been closely observing the Texans since their arrival in the valley via scouts on both sides of the river. Duncan was busy pushing forces across the ford as fast as possible when Pyron's men showed up. Duncan reported, "I therefore dismounted my command, had the horses and horseholders concealed as well as possible behind a low sand ridge, about eighty yards from and parallel to the river, and deployed the remainder of the men behind some small sand hills, logs, and a few scattering trees, about 100 [sic] yards in advance of the horses, determined, if possible, to hold the position and keep the enemy back from the ford until our artillery and infantry could arrive and cross."⁵³ This is what the Texans ran into at approximately 8:00 A.M., and a hot contest ensued. Pyron, outgunned nearly three to one, dispatched a runner to inform Scurry that he needed reinforcements immediately as he began to give ground. Using the bosque, he was able to pull his forces back into the dried riverbed for cover and concealment. Duncan was still unaware of the size of the force at his front, and dispatched riders to inform Roberts of the

⁵² *Confederate States of America, Southern history of the war: Official reports of battles as published by order of the Confederate Congress at Richmond* (New York: C.B. Richardson, 1864), 202 and 203.

⁵³ Official Record 9:497.

engagement and to bring up the infantry and artillery quickly. All forces in the area were now converging on the lower ford.

Pyron, using the dried up riverbed as cover, kept sending platoons of men through the thickets to recon the enemy's disposition and keep up the fight. These maneuvers and engagements would ensue over the course of the next hour. It was during this hour Lieutenant Colonel Roberts arrived on the scene and implored Duncan to clear the bosque at all costs. He had been studying the area for months and understood the importance of clearing the area in order to advance forces inland. In addition, McRae's battery was coming up and they wanted to move those guns without any hindrance of small arms fire to the east bank. Duncan ordered two companies of the Third U.S. Cavalry to clear the area and reported, "after a spirited skirmish for several minutes the enemy was driven back, but soon rallied and renewed the assault with vigor, and although several times repulsed, he as often returned."⁵⁴ As 9:00 A.M. approached, reinforcements were streaming in on both sides. Lieutenant Colonel Scurry arrived in person with one of his battalion commanders, Major Henry Raguet, whom he ordered with all speed four of his companies to go to Pyron's aid. Raguet soon moved to Pyron's right and his three hundred man battalion now entered the melee determined to carry the ford. Roberts, now getting reports of rebel reinforcements to his front, ordered an up-tempo of fire into the woods to discourage the impending assault. Shortly after this, Captain McRae's guns arrived on the west bank. McRae quickly unlimbered his four guns followed by Hall's two and begun unleashing rounds into the bosque, any chance for a Confederate assault to carry the ford soon evaporated. Roberts kept demanding Duncan to clear the bosque but the Texans kept pushing him back. By 10:00 A.M., the rest of the Texas Fourth Regiment had arrived in the riverbed. Roberts, seeing

⁵⁴ Official Record 9:498.

the Confederates being reinforced, sent dispatches back to Canby explaining of the rebel build up and demanding reinforcements. It was also at this time that Teel was beginning to set up a section of 2 six-pound-field guns commanded by Lieutenant Bradford to what he hoped to be a counter battery to McRae's guns that were creating havoc on the Texan's line. The engagement for the south ford was beginning to heat up.

Lieutenant Bradford's section had been assigned movement near the front of the Texas Fourth Regiment and upon their arrival near the ford began to deploy. Captain Teel who was in the rear with his other section had scrambled forward to link up with this section after receiving intelligence that the enemy was at the front of the column. Arriving just in time to deploy the section, Teel reported he "found Lieutenant Bradford, with his section, at the head of the train and ordered the pieces to the place of firing at a gallop, and in a few minutes it was placed in battery, about the center of Lieutenant Scurry's Regiment, and commenced firing upon the battery of the enemy and his lines within a few minutes."⁵⁵ What then ensued was an artillery clash between McRae and Teel's guns. McRae had the superiors' guns and was able to injure some of Teel's artillerymen. Private Peticolas observed that, "at almost the same time another was shot dead, but in a hail of bullets Teel stood bravely to his post, and his battery returned fire with great spirit."⁵⁶ With artillery raining down on the Confederate line, most of the Texans were driven to the ground and behind cover. This and the onset of the damaged Confederate artillery gave Roberts the time necessary to move the bulk of his forces across the ford by noon. Though they were finally firmly across the Rio Grande, it had taken much longer than he determined for victory to be achieved. In addition, when they did cross over, they were not able to cross very far. The Texans were still laying down heavy fire and Teel's other section had moved up to help

⁵⁵ Confederate Official Record, 205.

⁵⁶ Peticolas, *Rebels*, 43.

lay down more fire, keeping the Union forces at bay. But Duncan was finally on the eastern bank with a sizable force and had no intention of surrendering his ground. Both forces looked now to be in a stalemate.

All morning Roberts had been requesting reinforcements from Canby, but like any good tactician, he was still awaiting more information on the sizable Confederate force in front of him (directly east of Fort Craig). Canby was wisely positioned in the middle of his lines at this juncture with a Union force across the river on the bluffs, troops in reserve at the fort, and Roberts's force to the north. As reports came in from Graydon and from units at the ford about the size of the Confederate force in front of Roberts, Canby started pulling forces off the eastern bank bluffs and sending them north. Selden's battalion, eight companies of regular infantry and the Colorado Volunteers Company were recalled from the opposite side of the river. After moving the bulk of the forces he then recounted ordering, "Carson's regiment (eight companies of New Mexican Volunteers) followed immediately afterwards."⁵⁷ Canby himself would depart the fort at noon with the Second New Mexico Volunteers Regiment, G Company, First U.S. Cavalry and the last section of McRae's battery. He would leave a small force of New Mexico militia and a few Regulars to hold the fort.

Right before noon Green was on the move with orders from Sibley to take his Fifth Regiment (minus C and H company) to reinforce the Confederate forces at the ford. He would leave the Seventh Texas Mounted Regiment as well as C and H Company of the Fifth to guard the rear. Eight companies of the Fifth, about 670 men, plus one section of regimental artillery (2 twelve pound mountain howitzers under Lieutenant William Wood) were now ready for movement. Green took these reinforcements and proceeded to the battlefield as he later stated in

⁵⁷ Official Record 9:489.



Figure 8. Private A.B. Peticolas's sketch of the Lower Forde engagement from the Confederate prospective

his report, "with as much speed as practicable."⁵⁸ Within approximately ninety minutes of Green's departure Sibley would relinquish his command of the field to Green due to "illness" and send him his staff.

The Middle Fords

The southern ford finally had been stabilized as Duncan slowly began to push the Confederate left flank back. This gave Roberts the opportunity to turn his attention to the north where the remaining fords lay. Captain Selden's Fifth Regiment was the first reinforcement to

⁵⁸ Taylor, *Bloody Valverde*, 39.

arrive (which had been strengthened) bringing the regiment to six full companies of regulars (elements of the Seventh and Tenth). In addition, Captain Dodd's Colorado volunteers were also in the organization, making this unit a robust force on the field. Roberts quickly ordered him to the middle fords and repositioned McRae's battery north to give support. Selden moved the six hundred men up the river and began forming them upon the west bank and collecting up the stragglers. With Captain Wingate on his right and Captain Plympton on his left, they crossed the cold Rio Grande in chest high water as light snow came down from the heavens. Re-forming on the other side, they were met by Scurry's pickets where a small skirmish ensued. Seldon's force was able to use their superior numbers and firepower to push the pickets back who now informed Scurry of the impending move. Seldon reformed his men in line formation and commenced his movement towards the enemy approximately six hundred yards away. Scurry later reported, "about this time Major Lockridge, of the Fifth regiment, arrived on the field and reported himself with a portion of that command."⁵⁹ Lockridge had been sent ahead by Green with two lancer companies to give aid to the Texans already engaged. Scurry immediately dismounted that unit and placed those men on his right. He maneuvered these troops up the riverbed (north) to cover the oncoming assault. Most of the Confederates' weaponry consisted of the short-range variety (shot guns, side arms, bowie knives, and machetes) brought from their homes back in Texas. The massed Union frontal assault closed within a couple of hundred yards of the Texans as they continued pouring fire into the Confederate lines, but the rebels had the protection of the riverbed and were able to keep cover from the musket fire. As a Confederate soldier witnessed "the enemy later came up in about forty yards from our center when Scurry cried out, 'Now give them hell, boys,' and immediately the men rose and turned loose their shotguns. The Yankees did not

⁵⁹ Confederate Official Records, 197.

wait for our six shooters but turned and fled.”⁶⁰ Within fifteen minutes, the sharpest part of the action was over and Selden in good order began maneuvering his men back to the riverbank.

As Selden had began his movement towards the Confederate lines, Roberts had pushed Colonel Carson’s First New Mexican Volunteers north to watch the upper and middle fords and protect from a wide flanking maneuver. Also at this time he sent McRae’s four guns and Hall’s two across the Rio Grande behind Seldon's failed assault, which immediately unlimbered and began firing again on the Confederate lines. Hall moved his twenty-four pounders to the right in order to give fire support to Major Duncan’s forces, which now occupied the old Confederate position. With the guns now on the east side of the river their aim became more accurate and continued to give fits to Teel’s artillery. Shortly after Seldon's failed assault, Colonel Green arrived with his regiment to assume command of the field. His first order of business was the consolidation of forces on the line as his regiment filed onto the field. With Confederate forces filing into the dry riverbed and pushing north it appeared that Union forces were making an assault on the weak Confederate right (north). In actuality Selden was now consolidating his forces around McRae’s guns placing Plympton on the right, himself a little to the left and behind (edge of the river) and was pushing Dodd’s Coloradoans to the left front (river bend). This consolidation by Selden gave the appearance of an attack. In response to the “attack,” Colonel Green launched a counterattack of a very unusual type. Only once did a lancer company charge the fields of battle in the Civil War, and that was on the fields of Valverde. Captain Willis Lang’s troopers were ordered to mount and armed with nine foot lances, each tipped with twelve-inch blades, prepared to charge. With their guidon swaying in the wind with the traditional red with a

⁶⁰ Thompson, *Civil War in the Southwest*, 67.

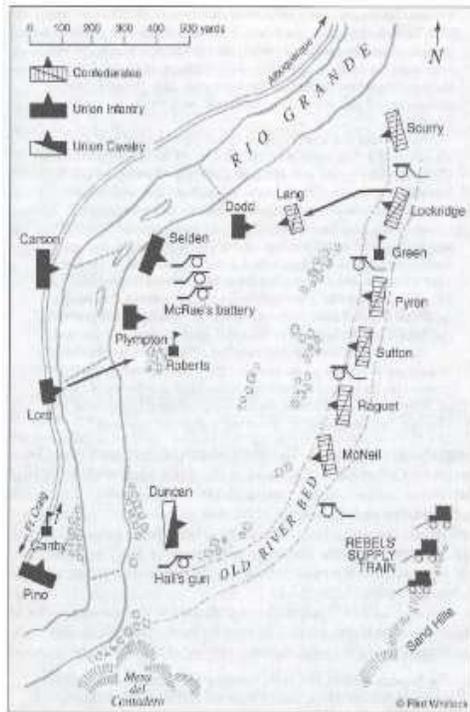


Figure 9. Battle of Valverde approximately 2:45 P.M. (Courtesy Whitlock, *Distant Bugles, Distant Drums*)

white star they readied for the assault. Just shy of 2:30 P.M. the bugle sounded and seventy men closed quickly on the Coloradoans, Dodd’s company was ready for them, having assumed the classic hollow square they were prepared for the oncoming assault. As observed by a Confederate soldier, “the struggle was terrible and firing on both sides ceased as soldiers paused to watch the struggle.”⁶¹ It was at this point the entire field of battle stopped fighting as nearly every man was captivated with what was transpiring on that northern flank. As glorious as it looked to the onlookers, it was quickly over as Lang’s ranks were decimated. Both Lang and his second command were so badly injured in the assault they would both die later of their wounds. The musket and Minie ball had effectively ended the era of the lancer in United States history. From Green's position the charge, though a failure, brought the realization that it was not a real Union assault and furthermore gave him time to consolidate his forces. As it approached 3:00

⁶¹Thompson, *Civil War in the Southwest*, 32.

P.M., the Confederates had reorganized their lines within the riverbed with Scurry's Fourth Texas Regiment anchoring the extreme right flank (north) of the line. To his left Green had been able to position Teel's two guns during the lancer assault and a battalion of the Fifth Regiment under Lockridge was able to position itself adjacent (to the left) of the guns. Pyron was situated in the center and other elements of the Fifth under Sutton (recently brought forward from protecting the baggage train) were to his left. Raguet was in charge of the left with Lockridge's aid and had given up some real estate as they moved back into the riverbed with one cannon in support to consolidate his position.

At 2:45 P.M., a great cheer was let loose across the Union lines as Colonel Canby arrived to take charge of the field bringing with him Federal reinforcements. Canby found Roberts's Field Headquarters across the middle lower ford to the right of McRae's guns. He received the battle update from Roberts, began studying the enemy disposition, and discussed a plan of attack to win the day at Valverde. After scanning the lines Canby assessed, "the position now occupied by the enemy was one of great natural strength, behind a sand ridge nearly parallel to the course of the river, which covered his guns and men from our fire, and in a great measure concealed his movements."⁶² A direct assault against such a great defensive position would be useless, this was a sound tactical assessment that allowed him one viable option—look toward the flanks. Canby's right flank easily appeared the more viable option for an attack. Not only had Duncan been slowly pushing the Confederates back all afternoon on the Union right, but once the troops pushed into the dry riverbed they would easily be able to roll up the entire rebel line using the cover and concealment of the dried up bed. Also with the failed attempt on his left by the lancers, Canby felt safe that the Confederates would not make the same mistake twice.

⁶² Official Record 9:490.

To further protect McRae's Battery, which was at this moment receiving the additional section of two guns, Canby ordered McRae's battery to move about two hundred yards northeast (forward) to a better defensive position. The riverbank would now be on the left protecting the gun's flank with additional troops supporting the battery. Canby ordered McRae, once his battery was in position, to concentrate on the Confederate right, including the pesky battery which had materialized in the wake of the failed lancer assault.⁶³ With the commencement of six guns firing directly on the Confederate right, it would serve as a feint that an assault was now being prepared on that flank of the Confederate lines. Canby immediately put McRae's battery in motion as he commenced moving pieces around the chessboard. He then immediately sent Roberts south to Duncan with the six hundred plus soldiers and two guns (reinforcements Canby brought from the fort) to push the attack on his right. In the center, he placed Wingate with most of the Fifth U.S. Infantry (four companies) and initiated bringing over the river Carson with his 1st New Mexico's Volunteers to help support either of his flanks as needed. With McRae's Battery moving into position he kept Dodd's Coloradoans on the batteries left (on riverbank left of McRae's battery), Selden's Battalion behind the battery and Plympton's Company to his right rear; all of these units were stationed on or near the riverbank. Canby's right also had over six hundred men in support. Captain Lord, who had two First Cavalry companies at his disposal further to the right of battery was also in the riverbed and Colonel Pino's Second New Mexico Volunteers, still arriving on the west bank, composed his reserve of over seven hundred men. Colonel Canby had initiated a extremely sound tactical plan and maneuvered his forces in such a way as to place the Federals in a highly advantageous position. But as with all great battle plans and maneuvers, the enemy also has a say.

⁶³ Taylor, *Bloody Valverde*, 73.

Union Assault on the Confederate Lines

At approximately 3:30 P.M. McRae's six-gun battery opened up on the Confederate right. He had aligned his 4 twelve-pounders together on the right with his 2 six-pounders to the left (closer to the river). Soldiers on the Confederate right got the brunt of it as one soldier recalls, "about this time, six pieces of artillery ran out and planted in point-blank range of us and begin to play grape and shell upon us. In a moment or two up came Teel with two guns and planted them within two yards of where I was lying and opened fire upon the enemy."⁶⁴ Teel at this juncture had maneuvered his guns to the extreme right of the line in an attempt to shadow McRae's slight northern movement; with only two guns, Teel responded on the Union position. Lieutenant Newbold, one of McRae's artillerists contends, "in a short time, their battery opened with canister and grape upon us, doing large damage to both men and horses; a more complete destruction being prevented by the order of Capt. McRae for all to be on the ground at the explosion of their gun, and allow the shot to pass over."⁶⁵ An artillery duel on the northern portion of the field ensued with Teel eventually getting two more guns for support.

Lockridge had been demanding reinforcements all afternoon for himself and Raguet on the southern flank. With four companies, they had continued slowly moving their lines back and consolidating their forces a few yards at a time since the morning. Lockridge soon sought out Green to assess the next move as the Union artillery began to pound his right flank. Sensing a Union assault on his right flank Green ordered Lockridge to tell Raguet to pull his forces to the center, where Green felt they would be more readily available to him for his next tactical move. Raguet quickly had his men mount their horses, and behind the cover and concealment of the riverbed moved them six hundred yards to the center where Green told him to prepare for a,

⁶⁴ Peticolas, *Rebels*, 46.

⁶⁵ Wilson, *Texans*, 244.

“charge as cavalry.” At this juncture, the warfighter in Green came to the forefront. All day the Confederates had been pushed back, forced to give ground, and bombarded by Union guns. Now it was as if they were hemmed in with the Union closing in on all sides. Green needed that Union assault on his left stopped: he needed Raguet to buy him time. Raguet recounts the countermand order, “no sooner were we mounted than an order came by Major Pyron to move down on the left and menace the enemy, now flanking us in large force. Marching down to within 600 [sic] yards I dismounted my command under cover, when I was joined by Captain Scarborough, of the 4th, and received an order through Captain Dwyer to charge the enemy.”⁶⁶ Now with five companies, Raguet was going to try to blunt the Federal assault on the left.

Duncan’s slow advance against the Confederate left was about to culminate. Carson and his First New Mexican volunteers had crossed over the river and taken a position on Duncan’s left. Graydon’s Spy Company also joined Duncan’s contingent as he positioned the two howitzers on his right. His force now had over one thousand soldiers, yet Duncan still moved cautiously as he did all day, never really seeming to press the attack home. In addition, he always seemed to think that there was always a much larger force in front of him. We see this extensively during the first portion of morning engagement and even during the midday portion of the fighting. While Lockridge kept sending appeals to Green for more troops because he was outmanned, Duncan never pressed the attack forward; he never seemed to get a good measure of the amount of troops in front of him. This was about to cost the Union army dearly; the time was approximately 3:45 P.M.

As Duncan advanced with his newly reinforced wing of the army onto the Confederate left, Raguet launched his attack with a force not even half the size of the Union wing formed into one rank. Carson observed, "after advancing some 400 [sic] yards we discovered a large body

⁶⁶ Confederate Official Records, 201.

(some 400 or 500 [sic]) of the enemy charging diagonally across our front, evidently with the intention of capturing the 24 [sic] pounder gun, which, stationed on our right, was advancing and doing much harm to the enemy."⁶⁷ Believing this to be an all-out Confederate offensive against him, Duncan stopped his movement and elected to go on the defensive, he then sent a dispatch to Canby relaying this and requested additional troops immediately even though Carson could clearly see that it was merely a regiment-sized assault. Canby at this juncture was trying to move elements of Pino's Second New Mexico Volunteers across the river to help bolster the defense of McRae's battery. Canby then recollected that, "receiving from Major Duncan urgent and repeated messages, I detached first Ingraham's company of the Seventh Infantry to support the battery, and then Wingate's battalion of the Fifth to aid in repelling the attack."⁶⁸ In one faulty swoop, Canby had weakened his left and created an opening in his center. But in Canby's mind the gap in his center and a weakened left would not be of consequence because of the report he had received from Duncan. With one thousand men at Duncan's disposal, surely he would not be urgently requesting additional troops unless he was fighting a force at least that size. That information would lead Canby to conclude that an all out major Confederate assault was now occurring on his right. Raguet got within two hundred yards when the Union forces opened up into his assault. Hit from their front by Duncan's nearly six hundred men, Hall's two guns and Carson's flanking shots, the assault was short-lived. Raguet fell back to his starting point and started scratching together stragglers to put up a last-ditch defense to hold the flank. He even grabbed a nearby mountain howitzer and prepared his troops for a desperate last stand. Duncan was now halted and consolidating his forces to begin rolling the Confederate flank. Canby sitting on his horse to the right and rear of McRae's battery was in the midst of filling the gap in the

⁶⁷ Official Record 9:502.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 9:490.

center of his lines. At the juncture Green had begun issuing orders down the line, in this desperate hour his orders simply put were, "Prepare to Charge the Right!"

With the pieces and players now in place we have a clear understanding of how the charge came to fruition and the disposition of troops at the time of the assault. This will allow for us a clear picture of the events during the assault. The examination will now go a step further in how this unprecedented assault succeeded. By taking an in depth view of the events that transpired between approximately 4:00 P.M. and 4:30 P.M., we will discover the uniqueness to this frontal assault's success.

CHAPTER 3

THE CHARGE

The Battle of Valverde is described on the National Park Service website: “after crossing all his men, Canby decided that a frontal assault would fail and deployed his force to assault and turn the Confederate left flank. Before he could do so, though, the Rebels attacked. Federals rebuffed a cavalry charge, but the main Confederate force made a frontal attack, capturing 6 [sic] artillery pieces and forcing the Union battle line to break and many of the men to flee. Canby ordered a retreat.”⁶⁹ Though elementary, this brief overview highlights what we will now examine; the decisive point of the engagement. It also serves as a good example of how history has glossed over a rarity during the war, a victorious frontal assault. There are several factors that go into a charge, and in this portion of the thesis we will examine what made this assault succeed in taking the objective. The unique aspects of this frontal charge's success will now be explored and the factors that ensured this victory will come to fruition. In this chapter, the breaking down of every aspect of the charge will give us a clear understanding of its components. Not only will a clear perspective on why it succeeded be viewed, but the factors that lead to its success. In this chapter there are five different elements we will examine that will encompass all angles of the assault. The first element examined is the commander. This will allow us to look at the history of the man who initiated the assault and what led him to order the charge. Next, we will look at the tactics of the assault; here we will view what made this assault so different from that vast majority that found defeat during the war. We will then view the field in which the charge was conducted; by examining the precise distances and the geography of the area, we will understand

⁶⁹ <http://www.nps.gov/history/hps/abpp/battles/nm001.htm>; Heritage Preservation Services, CWSAC Battle Summaries; American Battlefield Protection Program: Valverde

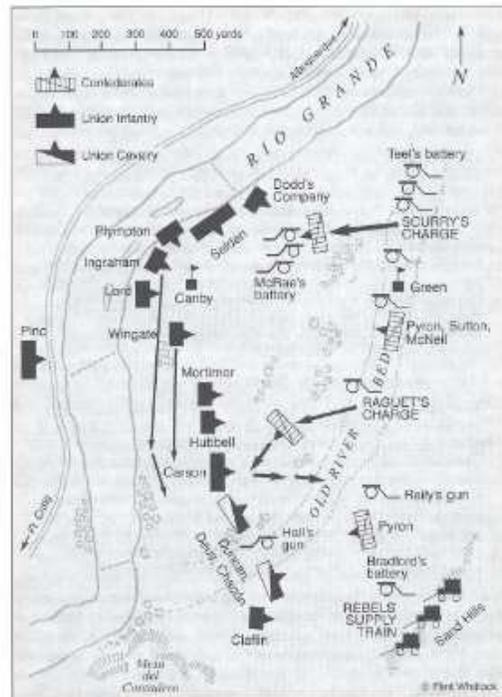


Figure 10. Battle of Valverde approximately 4:00 P.M. (Courtesy Whitlock, *Distant Bugles, Distant Drums*)

the lay of the land. Our examination will then revolve around the weapons that the soldiers used at Valverde, from their side arms to the cannons it will be shown how this affected the assault. Finally by examining the battery, we will see what factors surrounding the guns led to their capture. After examining all of these factors, we will be able to make sound conclusions on the contributing factors that led to the Confederate success in storming McRae's battery.

The Commander

It was in Colonel Thomas Green's blood to fight. His father Nathan Green had served in the War of 1812 and his namesake, grandfather Thomas Green, had achieved the rank of General and had served in the Revolutionary War. Shortly after graduating from the University of Tennessee twenty-one year old Tom traveled to Texas to enlist in Sam Houston's army in the fight against Mexico. He was made an artillerist and was assigned to the only two guns in the army, the famed, "Twin Sisters." The young Green charged with those guns on the field of San

Jacinto with the entire Texan Army. The young Green charged with those guns on the field of San Jacinto with the entire Texan Army against a larger, albeit unsuspecting, foe. This route of the Mexican Army left quite an impression on the young man during his first taste of combat. A lesson was learned that day for young Green about what a smaller army with the element of surprise could inflict on an unsuspecting foe. Green would eventually settle in Texas where he became a politician, but the battlefield always seemed to be close at hand. He participated in operations against the Apaches and Mexicans during border disputes. These engagements taught him the savagery of war and how to fight adversaries in inhospitable terrain.

When war with Mexico came again, he raised his own company of Texas Rangers and became a Captain in the First Texas Regiment of Mounted Riflemen. Texas Rangers were known for their savagery against "criminals" of the region. "Do unto others (Mexican bandits, Indians raiders, and outlaws) before they do unto you" was their credo and they carried this form of justice along the frontier. When the war with Mexico commenced this credo was brought with them south of the border. Needless to say keeping control of this irregular force that viewed virtually all Mexicans as the enemy was quite the leadership challenge for Captain Green. But the Texas Rangers also brought with them combat multipliers on campaign. Experienced light fighters, irregular cavalry forces with expert knowledge of the terrain of the southwest and unmatched firepower gave the American Army a decisive advantage in hostile territory.⁷⁰ This was the irregular unit with which Green cut his teeth and received his primary education in warfare. The bowie knife wielding, colt pistol carrying, rifle-shooting men of the Texas Rangers were as tough as they came in the American west. Under Zachary Taylor's command in hostile northern Mexico, they would provide intelligence, while conducting an anti-guerrilla campaign

⁷⁰ Ian B. Lyles, *Mixed Blessing the Role of the Texas Rangers in The Mexican War, 1846-1848*. M.A. Thesis, University of Texas at Austin, Austin, Texas, 2001, p14.

against Mexican scouts and militia. The campaign finally culminated at the Battle of Monterrey, September 21-24, 1854 against a well-defended city in northern Mexico. Again, Green was with an army that was outnumbered and utilized surprise to win the day. Taylor, in the plains in front (East) of the city, kept the Mexicans' attention as he sent a division of regulars with the Texas Rangers on a wide disguised flanking maneuver to the west side of the city. The flanking force was able to take the outer defenses on the west side of the city by surprise and two days later, an all-out assault by both American forces on opposite sides seized the city. These early lessons influenced Green in the type of commander he would be, one with a keen eye for terrain, the importance of the element of surprise against a larger force, the proper way to conduct a charge, but most importantly, how to lead men in combat. This is the commander who would order the charge on the fields of Valverde.

A great battlefield commander is a master of time and space. Green's experience in the Army taught him how to balance these two precious commodities on the battlefield. Up to the order to launch Raguet on the left, Green had been on the field for under three hours. During that time he was constantly adjusting his line, maneuvering his artillery to counter McRae's superior guns, and halting assaults (real and fake). It took this amount of time to get his chess pieces to the proper place on the board. We can see through his first orders to recall Raguet that his initial thought was to use him in the assault. As stated above, Raguet's report clearly stated, "Col. Green rode up and ordered me to reserve my command as a charge of cavalry."⁷¹ This conversation occurred at approximately 3:15 P.M. and it was shortly countermanded. Raguet then had to travel six hundred yards, dismount his command, align his forces, and make the assault at approximately 3:45 P.M. This also gives us insight into Green's thought processes. We now know that McRae's Battery was the objective. The guns had to stop firing at approximately

⁷¹ Confederate Official Record, 201.

2:55 P.M. when Canby ordered McRae's pieces moved forward. The superior guns of the Union had been the primary nuisance all day, as they were the highest casualty-producing weapon on the field. This factor had to be addressed. The bad news is they were moving closer to the lines and would inflict more casualties, but a great battlefield commander will find opportunities in all situations—after all, this also closed the distance from the Confederate lines to the guns.

Another important piece to this equation is what Green saw or did not see. In support of McRae's ninety man Battery were: Dodd's Coloradoans (seventy soldiers), Captain Plympton's Battalion* composed of 3rd New Mexico Company A (fifty soldiers), 5th New Mexico Company B (seventy soldiers), and H Company (fifty soldiers). In addition, there is the Tenth U.S. Infantry (one hundred soldiers) and C, F and H of the Seventh U.S. Infantry (two hundred and thirty soldiers). The interesting aspect to these forces is that they are out of sight to Green because they were either lying down (as McRae had ordered some of his men to do to avoid getting hit) or under the cover of the slope of the riverbank. There, as an observer, an Indian Superintendent who was near the guns states, "when the battery was thus moved up two companies of Mexican Volunteers were brought forward for its support, who took position and laid down to the left and behind the guns in a line parallel to the river and about thirty steps from it."⁷² In addition, Lewis Roe, a soldier in F Company Seventh U.S. Infantry wrote, "we lay down behind the pieces while the artillery of both sides kept up fire for some time."⁷³ Green obviously could see there was support around the battery but not in the sum of over six hundred men. As the cannons were moving forward Green was preparing his strike, maybe he was a little too excited and too eager for what he now saw as victory staring him in the face, trying to marshal all the forces he could

* Seldon moved with Wingate, with Plympton next in command.

⁷² James L. Collin and Jerry Thompson. "An Indian Superintendent at the Battle of Valverde: The Civil War Letters of James L. Collin." *JSTOR*. Texas State Historical Association, 1 Oct. 1999. Web. 02 Dec. 2013.

⁷³ Roe, *From Western Deserts*, 64.

he ordered Raguet to the center. However, after telling him to prepare for an attack he examined the field one last time, and saw the left flank slowly closing in on him. He gazed at the Union center that could still support either wing, and must have thought that an assault by Raguet could be a distraction for the main assault, just as he had learned so many years ago at Monterrey. He quickly ordered Raguet back to his starting position and immediately upon his arrival received orders to attack the Union right with a reinforced company that had just arrived. This brought Raguet's assault force to 250 men, who are now charging out of their starting position; the time is approximately 3:45 P.M.

Within a couple of minutes, Duncan had halted his force and scribbled to Canby to send reinforcements immediately. Located a few hundred yards away, Canby would get this letter at approximately 3:50 P.M. Canby trusted his subordinate's report that this was the main Confederate assault. He also knew that Duncan had over six hundred soldiers and Carson over five hundred, and he could have reasonably expected this Confederate assault to contain at least this many (1100) for Duncan to need immediate reinforcements. Canby then immediately dispatched Wingate's Battalion and Company H's eighty men of the Seventh supporting McRae's Battery. Green could see it: slowly it was opening, and he was now starting to send the word to his subordinate field commanders to prepare for an assault that would utilize a charge in three echelons. Canby opened a hole in the center of his lines, but was not able to close it fast enough. Green would write after the battle of Raguet, "this charge was made against ten times his number of Raguet's force, and although we suffered severely and were compelled to fall back, he effected the object of his mission and occupied the attention of our powerful enemy on the left, while our dismounted men were advancing upon those in front and running them into the

river.”⁷⁴ Not only did Raguet occupy the attention of the left, but of the center and of the enemy commander. The old war fighting Texas Ranger was about to make his presence felt on the field of Valverde.

The Tactics

The major lesson learned from the War with Mexico was that large frontal assaults could in fact carry defensive positions. This tactic was so engrained in the minds of the leaders of the Civil War that time and time again they used it with the same staggering loss of life. The rifled firearms and the Minie ball utilized on a mass scale in the Civil War subsequently brought a halt to frontal assault's success.⁷⁵ Take this and compound it with a fixed artillery position in support and you will hardly ever find a successful result during the Civil War. A frontal assault is characterized as a mass assault by men at the quick pace directed at a point in the enemy's defenses. An echelon assault is characterized by waves of troops either staggered or behind one another. This differs from piecemealing forces in that the successive lines are in close proximity to each other. This tactic was rarely used on the fields of the Civil War and would be part of the success at Valverde.

Green's echelon assault would be unleashed from his right flank. Green's official report stated, "our dismounted troops in front were composed of parts of the Fourth and Fifth Regiment Texas Mounted Volunteers and parts of Lieutenant Colonel Sutton's and most of Pyron's battalions, and Teel's, Riley's, and Wood's batteries of artillery, numbering about 750 on the ground."⁷⁶ The assault would be overseen by Scurry from the rear, with Pyron in the actual assault in the center, Lockridge leading the left flank. The standard echelon assault occurred in threes, so we can conclude that each wave had approximately 250 per echelon coming to the

⁷⁴ Confederate Official Record, 192 and 193.

⁷⁵ William L. Barney, *The Oxford encyclopedia of the Civil War*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011) , 207.

⁷⁶ Confederate Official Records, 192.

figure of 750 total men in the assault. With that many men in the assault and each man occupying roughly a yard of space, we can then put the total front of the assault at over 250 yards of space. For the distance between waves we see that it must have been very close, since Peticolas wrote, “Lockridge, with a heart of iron, led us on. Cpts. Lesueur, Hardeman, and Crosson followed close behind, shouting as they waved their swords: Come on my boys, don’t stop here.”⁷⁷ This clearly demonstrates for us that with the eagerness of the leadership that the waves were virtually on top of each other, roughly within thirty yards of one another. The distinct advantage of this formation is that if the front line falters the weight of the second and third wave, which will be covered from enemy fire by the first wave, will push the assault through to the objective. This tactic directly helped in the success of the assault.

Another direct factor lay in Teel’s artillery, the objective before and during the assault, and its second-order effect was to surprise the Union soldiers. As stated above, McRae’s artillerymen had taken to the ground due to the fire from Teel’s guns and the surrounding troops were seeking cover on the riverbank. Just as the assault commenced Teel’s artillery began to focus on McRae’s Battery, Colonel Green’s aide Lieutenant Ochiltree came up to the battery and told a young soldier to open fire. As one of Teel’s gunners recalls, “Ochiltree soon came back and said they were ready. I immediately fired on McRae’s battery at the moment the order to charge was given.”⁷⁸ This concentration and the rapid firing that proceeded continued to keep the Union soldiers unaware of the assault as it initially got underway. A Union artillery lieutenant on the receiving end stated, “their firing continued vigorously until the charge of the assaulting party upon the battery, when it ceased when our whole fire of “Canister” and “Double Canister”

⁷⁷ Peticolas, *Rebel*, 48.

⁷⁸ Thompson, *Civil War in the Southwest*, 56.

was directed upon the rapidly advancing body of assailants.”⁷⁹ This tells us two things about the Confederate artillery—that it was steady upon the Union position during the assault and it ceased when the charge arrived approximately two hundred yards from the guns because this is the maximum effective range of double canister shot. In addition, what cannot be overstated is the artillery directly lending itself to the shock factor upon the enemy when they finally do see the Confederates charging. Being under direct artillery fire for so long, several soldiers when summoned to defend the guns refused, the line of Texans now bearing in on their position was a terrifying sight. As Captain Plympton recollects, “at this time a body of Volunteers (Mexican) were seized with panic, and broke from their position immediately in front of my command, and rushed precipitately into the river, and I regret to say, took with them a portion of the left of my battalion, in spite of my efforts to stay their flight.”⁸⁰ The shock and awe of the assault created fear in the Union ranks. Fear is contagious and, once started, is extremely difficult to contain. The sight of hundreds of Texans running with shotguns and screaming the rebel yell at the top of their lungs had an unnerving effect on the defenders. This psychological factor had its effect on the defenders leading to half of their numbers retreating from the guns. The element of consistent fire upon the defensive position coupled with the surprise of the assault are two major reasons for the success of the frontal assault.

Perhaps the most unusual tactic that contributed to the success of the assault was the soldiers taking cover on the ground when they saw the flashes of McRae’s battery. This was a tactic not common in the Civil War and was explicitly directed to the troops by Green himself. One Texan soldier recollected Green’s order, “when he gave the order in the center he instructed the men to fall at the flash of the enemy’s cannon and after the shot passed over, to rise and go

⁷⁹ Wilson, *Texans*, 245.

⁸⁰ *Ibid* 243.

on.”⁸¹ This unique approach to a charge has a threefold effect. First, rather causing a blind march to death like most Civil War charges against prepared position, it conserved manpower for the actual assault on the objective. Secondly, upon crossing over hundreds of yards of field and making brief halts, it conserves energy for the actually fighting on the objective. The final point is the psychological value. This tactic gave a boost to the morale of the Confederate soldier, each of whom were able to take cover from enemy fire and help prevent his own demise. The other side of the coin to this was the psychological blow it dealt to the enemy as seen here from a Union artillerymen's perspective, “our fire was swift and well directed, and the enemy went down before our guns. Still they came upon us, and notwithstanding the determined resistance of the gunners and drivers with their pistols, the Battery was taken and we fell back.”⁸² This unorthodox tactic gave the Texans a considerable edge during their charge to the guns.

The final tactic we will look at is the crescent formed by the Confederates in their assault on the battery as they came within weapons range. In Canby’s official report he states, “the storming party proper was deployed as skirmishers, enveloping the left, front, and a part of the right of the battery by a circular segment nearly half a mile in length. Armed with double-barreled fowling-pieces and revolvers, and converging as they approached, a rapid and destructive fire was poured into the battery.”⁸³ This was not a notable tactic of the time but formed due to circumstance. With McRae’s guns firing squarely into the center of the Confederate lines it would make sense that the center would be slower than the flanks creating a bow in the Texans lines. The flanks would come into small arms range first, the center portion of the line would eventually move into firing range by the weight of the second and third lines.

⁸¹ Thompson, *Civil War in the Southwest*, 34.

⁸² Wilson, *Texans*, 245 and 246.

⁸³ Official Record 9:490.

What then transpired, with devastating effect, is the Federal position being fired upon from virtually three different sides. This accidental effect of crossfire would greatly enhance the success of the assault on the Union position.

The Field

We have concluded above that the width of the assault had to be at least two hundred fifty yards; this distance would have only grown as the lines begin to intermingle as they moved closer to the objective. This would account for Canby's observation of the semicircle of Confederates being nearly half a mile in length. The distance from the dry creek bed to McRae's battery appears to be between six and seven hundred yards by several credible sources. According to William Davidson of the Fifth Texas, "we had to run 600 [sic] yards through an open plain to reach him, with six pieces of artillery playing upon us."⁸⁴ An artilleryman with Captain Teel's guns Phil Fulcord, accustomed to dealing with distances, when judging where McRae's final position was with its infantry support, "they now formed a line about 700 [sic] yards from our line and opened fire with their minnie rifles. They now assumed this as their line of battle."⁸⁵ In the official records Lieutenant Colonel Scurry puts the distance at seven hundred yards while Colonel Green at approximately six hundred yards. Confederate sources would be the most accurate as they would have retained the field after winning the day and would have been able to judge the distance from both ends of the field. These accounts led us to the conclusion that the charge occurred over a distance of approximately 650 yards.

The area around the village of Valverde just east of the Rio Grande contains scattered large cottonwoods that extend about a half a mile inland without any undergrowth of bushes.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ Thompson, *Civil War in the Southwest*, 34.

⁸⁵ *Ibid*, 55.

⁸⁶ Rocky Mountain Research Station (Fort Collins, Colo.). The Station, 1998. *General Technical Report RMRS, Issues 5-7*, University of Michigan, p. 234.

The trees would be bare this time of year and is confirmed in the drawings taken by soldiers at the engagement. Cottonwoods, or Rio Grande cottonwoods, as they are known in the region, typically grow between forty and eighty feet and on average have a diameter of two to five feet. The habitat of this tree is in wet soils along streams or near lakes in deserts, grasslands and woodlands.⁸⁷ This is the state of the field at the time of the assault directly adjacent to the Rio Grande. The soil of the field is alluvium, a material deposited by rivers. Alluvium consists of silt, sand, clay, and gravel and often contains a good deal of organic matter ushered into the land by the overflowing river.⁸⁸ This would lend itself to a good surface to run across. Although not as hard as rock, it was much more stable than sand, on which one quickly tires. Though there was light snow on the field around noon, the ground was not wet, which made for a more stable surface to cross. We know for certain that the ground was not saturated by water by an account of a Confederate private who in describing the field wrote: “this plain was covered with tall dry grass. The grass had been sent on fire by a flash of cannon and through the grass on fire we had to go.”⁸⁹ This not only confirms for us the sure footing the Confederates would have in the charge but also another advantage gained by accident: the smoke created by that fire which concealed the initial movement and helped enhance the shock factor. In today’s military, it is customary for an assault by infantry or tanks to be masked with the use of smoke, but on a Civil War battlefield, by sheer accident, a distinct advantage was given to the charge.

⁸⁷ Trees of New Mexico. *Rio Grande Cottonwood*. © 2013. Tree New Mexico. All Rights Reserved. Website by Peregrine Digital, accessed March 22, 2014, <http://www.treenm.com/nm-tree-species/rio-grande-cottonwood/>

⁸⁸ *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, s. v. “alluvium,” accessed March 22, 2014, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/16665/alluvium>.

⁸⁹ Thompson, *Civil War in the Southwest*, 68.

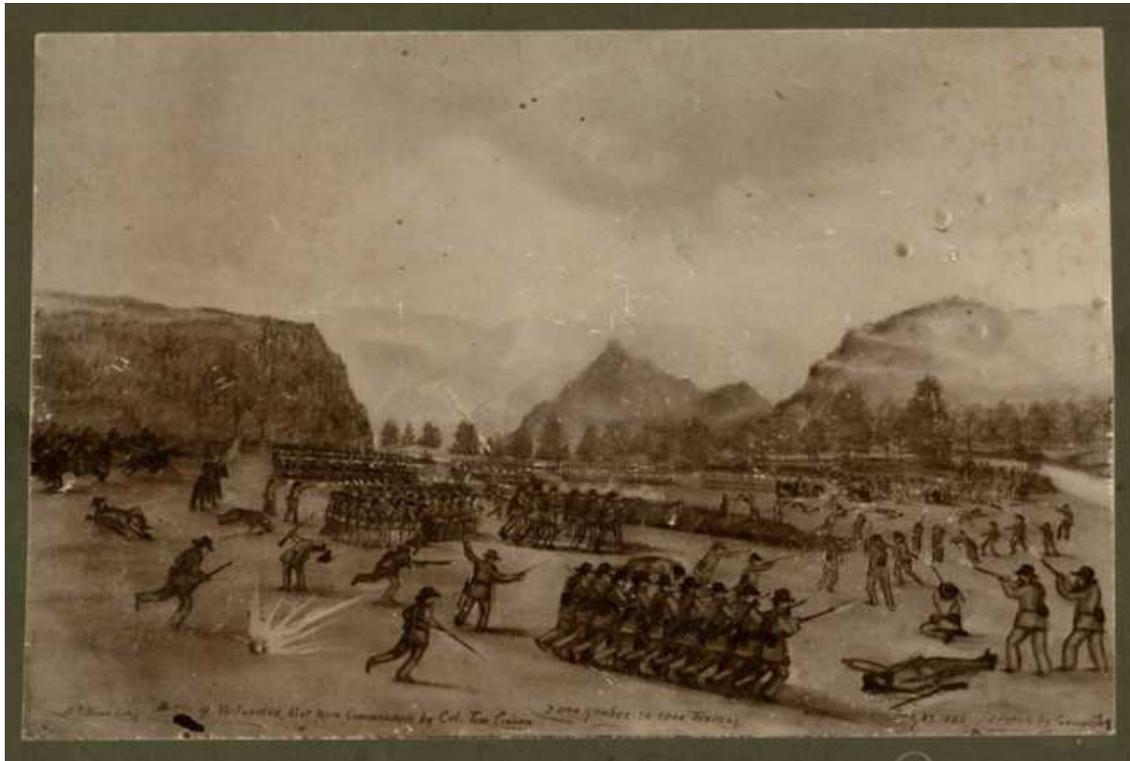


Figure 11. The Charge on McRae's Battery (Courtesy Texas State Library)

The cottonwoods, though sporadic on most of the field that the Texans crossed, would still serve to some degree as a form of cover for soldiers from enemy fire. The tall grass would also serve the soldiers as concealment during the assault. Those Texans lucky enough to be on the left side of the charge had another advantage; when they were approximately one hundred yards from the objective, a small copse of trees served as excellent cover and concealment. Though most of the Texans were armed with short ranged weapons there were some issued with long range weapons. Some of these "sharp shooters" would have found an excellent firing position in the trees and would use the Model 1842 Percussion Musket (smoothbore) with an effective firing range of seventy-five to one hundred yards and a maximum range of three hundred yards. This would put the copse of trees at just over one hundred yards. This copse also can explain what happened to Captain Lord who was sent to reinforce McRae's battery. In

Canby's report he states, "Lord's squadron coming up from the right [where he had been ordered for the purpose of uniting his company with Claflin's—*author*], was ordered to charge, but on approaching the battery became exposed to the fire of our own men as well as that of the enemy, turned to the left, and for reasons that are not entirely satisfactory fell back without making the charge."⁹⁰ The Confederate fire was from the trees protecting the left flank of the assault (also some from the assault force), the friendly fire he alludes to is Wingate's battalion, which had been recalled from the south portion of the field and was moving with all haste to aid McRae's guns from behind Lord. The cottonwoods on the field certainly served the Texans in their successful assault of the Federal position.

The last characteristic of the field we will examine is the slope. The Middle Rio Grande Basin lies in an asymmetrical, elongated valley. The inner valley or flood plain and the surrounding terrain that slopes from surface drainage divides towards the river.⁹¹ Simply put, everything slopes towards the river. Though it may have been a very slight slope, as the soldiers of the charge moved closer to the guns they would have in fact been moving closer to the river. As one nears water, there is always a level of drop-off to the terrain. This in effect would have given the Confederates a little more speed in their assault and again, would have conserved energy for the fight on the objective. The terrain on which McRae's battery was located, though it was protected on the left flank with the river, was not on the optimal defensive ground. It would have been more advantageous for the battery to be placed on the opposite side of the river with the Rio Grande as a natural defense, as earlier in the day. But there was always a sense or need by Union leadership to close the distance of the cannons to the enemy. In the last bit of

⁹⁰ Official Record 9:491.

⁹¹ James R. Bartolino, and James C. Cole. *Ground-water Resources of the Middle Rio Grande Basin, New Mexico*. (Reston, VA: U.S. Dept. of the Interior, U.S. Geological Survey, 2002), 9.

corroboration, one of the only renderings of the actual assault (Figure 11) drawn shortly after by an unknown artist, it is clearly shown that the field is gradually sloping towards the river.* These factors taken as a whole lead us to conclude that there was indeed a slight slope on the field charged by the Texans that helped accelerate their movement.

The Weaponry

The Texans brought with them quite an array of weapons to Valverde, mostly from their own homes back on the Texas frontier. Even Canby took notice of the Texan weaponry in his report, “armed with double-barreled fowling-pieces and revolvers, and converging as they approached, a rapid and destructive fire was poured into the battery.”⁹² The fowling pieces or shotguns only have an effective range of approximately thirty-five yards. The range for revolver's was much shorter than shotguns, on horseback the effective range was seven yards.⁹³ On steady ground in a fight, you could increase this range to about twenty-five yards; in optimal conditions, the maximum range was about fifty yards. The common sidearm of the day was the Colt 36 (1851) and the Colt Patterson. Most Texans were armed also with the legendary bowie knife made famous by Alamo hero James Bowie. The classic bowie knife of the time had hickory or hardwood handles and iron mounts. Typically they were worn in heavy leather sheaths with throats and tips of tin, iron, or brass.⁹⁴ The knife's standard length ranged from eight to twelve inches; it was typically used for hunting and self-defense. Another weapon brandished by the Texans was the machete, a short sword used in their home state mainly for

* The actual rendering is located at the Texas State Library in Austin, Texas.

⁹² Official Record 9:490.

⁹³ Dusenberry, Kenneth. Email to Shawn Bergstrom, March 22, 2014.

⁹⁴ William R. Williamson, “BOWIE KNIFE,” *Handbook of Texas Online*. Uploaded on June 12, 2010. Published by the Texas State Historical Association, accessed March 23, 2014, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/lnb01>.

agricultural purposes, it also could be used as a weapon in a fight.

Because of the shortage of weapons in the Confederate armies, the vast majority of soldiers were armed with these short-range weapons. A few of the lucky Texans, usually the ones who proved to be excellent marksmen, would be issued the Model 1842 Percussion Musket (smoothbore) and the older 1822 model. As stated above, the effective range of these weapons was between seventy-five and hundred yards. There were only a few very long-range weapons in the Confederate army. The rifles of the day (1855 and possibly the 1841) had sights good to four hundred yards when firing at a mass of troops.⁹⁵ The overriding conclusion we can make of the Confederate arms in the assault was that the vast majority of the soldiers had weapons that were effective only up to approximately forty yards. This short effective range possessed by the majority of the Confederates had resulted in two major effects on the charge. The first is that the soldiers only stopped to hit the ground during the cannon blasts from McRae's guns; they never stopped to fire and reload their weapons because of their guns having limited range, this lent itself to closing the gap to the Federal lines. Secondly, with being fired at constantly by enemy soldiers, the Texans were eager to close this range as quickly as possible to bring their weapons to bear on the enemy. Once that distance was breached and the semicircle formed around the cannons, the Texans took aim with their shotguns, fired, and then, rather than reload, closed the short distance to use their sidearms and knives. A rebel witness of the charge explained, "when in about forty yards of the enemy lines, the shotguns opened, and the fire of the enemy's lines seemed to melt away. The boys did not stop to reload but they drew their pistols and pressed right on over the cannon, where a terrific hand-to-hand struggle took place, during which the enemy blew up one of the caissons with several of our boys on it."⁹⁶ The second account by P.J.

⁹⁵ Dusenberry, Email.

⁹⁶ Thompson, *Civil War in the Southwest*, 35.

Phil Clough, describing after the shotguns had been fired, “the Federal lines seemed to melt away under this withering fire and reeled back, the Confederates, not willing to reload their guns, with revolvers in hand charged forward, and for a time the struggle was hand-to-hand.”⁹⁷ This clearly demonstrates for us the eagerness of the assault to close on the enemy and take the fight to him. It also shows us that once the shotguns had let loose there was a break in the Union lines and the Confederates seized on this opportunity.

In support of the assault, it is estimated that Captain Teel had four guns on the right flank. This would have been 2 six-pounders of his original 6 and 2 twelve-pound mountain howitzers. Teel’s other 4 six-pounders would have been on the south and central portion of the battlefield. As a Civil War expert in weaponry explains, “the six-pounder gun fired solid shot along with shell and canister and had a maximum range of about fifteen hundred yards. The twelve-pound Mountain Howitzer was a shell gun adopted in 1836, but changed to brass tubes in 1840. The maximum effective range was about one thousand yards.”⁹⁸ Opposing the assault, McRae’s Battery had 3 six-pounder guns, 2 twelve-pounder field howitzers, and 1 mountain howitzer. “The twelve-pounder field howitzer was on a larger carriage, drawn by four or six horses and had a maximum range of about thirteen hundred yards,” the expert described.⁹⁹ These two guns in McRae’s battery made the Union artillery superior to the Confederates in its range and firepower. All cannon, both Confederate and Union, could be fired twice in one minute.

In Teel’s report of the battle he states, “the charge was made by our line, and in eight minutes his battery was captured and his troops completely routed. Lieutenant Ochiltree, aide-de-camp, rode back and ordered the guns forward, which order was executed, and soon the enemy’s

⁹⁷ Thompson, *Civil War in the Southwest*, 48.

⁹⁸ Dusenberry, Email.

⁹⁹ Dusenberry, Email.

guns, as well as ours, were opened on his retreating forces.”¹⁰⁰ From his angle on the extreme right of the battlefield he would have had an excellent vantage point of the charge, as an artilleryman he would have had not only a better grasp of distances but also of time. In 1870, F.C. Saportas held the world record for the one hundred-yard dash at ten and a half seconds. From that we can estimate that the average soldier with ammunition, cumbersome shotgun, and a large sidearm could run the yardage in about thirty seconds. In addition, several soldiers on that right flank had been sitting around for several hours and had not seen action since the morning, which speaks to them being well-rested for the dash. By using the time of thirty seconds per one hundred yards at a distance of six hundred and fifty yards, we will try to recreate what transpired.

As stated above by one of Teel’s artilleryman, they fired the guns at the start of the charge, which in effect kept the Union soldiers down. This element of the battle, along with the Union guns focusing on Teel and other portions of the Confederate lines, the smoke obscuring Federal soldiers’ view, the initial shock of the soldiers coming towards the guns and repositioning guns towards the charge with the proper distance, as a whole would have given the soldiers a solid one hundred yards before the first flashes were directed at the assault. Soldiers going to ground and getting up should take no more than fifteen seconds. With two stops approximately every minute and the up-and-down movement, the next three hundred yards of the assault would have taken a little over three minutes. It is during this phase that the Union regulars guarding the battery (at this point approximately 150) began firing their standard-issued U.S. Springfield Model 1855 .58 caliber percussion musket and the New Mexican regiment’s Model 1841 Mississippi Rifle, both with an effective firing range of three hundred yards, with a maximum firing range of one thousand yards. These shots from the rifles would have done very

¹⁰⁰ Confederate Official Record, 206.

little due to the number of Federals firing and the distance at this phase of the charge (250 to 550 yards from the cannons).



Figure 12. One of the Guns of McRae's Battery (Courtesy Alberts, *Rebels on the Rio Grande*)

Near the four-minute mark of the assault, the Confederates would have travelled four hundred yards (approximately two hundred and fifty yards from the guns). It was at this point that the troops under the Union Lieutenant mentioned earlier opened up with “Canister” and “Double Canister” onto the Texans’ lines and some of the musket fire began hitting its targets. Canister fire is essentially a cannon acting like a big shotgun firing several pieces of metal and balls. It is most effective against infantry at short ranges. This canister fire forced a bow to form in the Confederate lines as the center slowed and the tips kept moving. It was here that the second and third ranks begin filling gaps in the lines and pushing the center towards the guns. With the canister fire and muskets on target, within the next two minutes the Texans closed the distance to the cannon by only about 150 yards. It is at this time that sharpshooters had infiltrated the group of cottonwoods and began firing their Model 1842 Percussion Musket and rifles on the battery focusing on the gunners. Companies that never stopped to take ground from McRae’s fire and one with Lockridge leading get to the foot of the guns as a private recounts, “when the charge started, Lockridge was directly in front of Company A of the Fifth and his company did

reach the battery first because when the charge started, we were ordered to fall at the flash of the enemy's cannon, and that company did not get the order and kept going all the time and were a little ahead of the other companies."¹⁰¹ It is at this time that Lockridge was at the foot of the gun staring at McRae where he states, "This is mine," seconds before his demise. These initial Confederate companies were pushed back as the battery survived the first assault, as Canby explains, "the advance of the storming party was driven back, and under cover of this repulse the first fugitives from the battery crossed the river with but little loss."¹⁰² At this seven minute mark, the line of Texans closed the distance to use its shotguns from nearly all three sides. Large portions of Federals fell as others retreated across the river. Quickly grabbing their pistols and bowie knives, the Texan line launched itself at McRae's battery and were on top of the guns, where hand-to-hand fighting ensued with the few brave men in blue that stayed to defend the cannons. All reports indicate that the hand-to-hand fighting ensued for a few minutes: from Teel's perspective 650 yards away it is at the eight minute mark the Texans firmly established themselves on the objective and the guns have been seized.

The Battery

Atop his horse to the back and right of McRae's battery Canby and his staff were the first to suddenly notice the approach of the Texans. After the departure of Ingraham's company of the Seventh and Wingate's battalion of the Fifth to the right the number of men in direct support of the battery was approximately 550 men. The disposition was Dodd's Colorado volunteers on the left of the battery with Captain Plympton's Battalion composed of elements of the Tenth U.S. Infantry (two Companies), the Seventh U.S. Infantry (two Companies) and two additional companies of New Mexico Volunteers in the center. With the exception of the two New Mexican

¹⁰¹ Thompson, *Civil War in the Southwest*, 68.

¹⁰² Official Record 9:491.

units who were directly behind the guns, all of the regulars were taking cover on the slope next to the river. Dodd's men, who were on the left of the guns, were also concealed by the slope. In



Figure 13. Captain Alexander McRae (Courtesy Taylor, *Bloody Valverde*)

support of McRae's six guns were approximately one hundred artillerymen. Canby immediately dispatched riders to recall Wingate's regiment and to bring Captain Lord's two cavalry companies towards the batteries with all haste. Canby saw how precarious his situation was with no support on the right flank (center of Union lines) of McRae's guns. The Confederates were now closing in fast on his guns, but the Union battery had now begun to fire upon that charge. Canby moved back approximately thirty yards to find Captain Plympton bringing elements of his battalion forward. Canby notes, "perceiving that Plympton's command was entirely unsuspecting of the danger that threatened the battery, I hastened in person to point it out and make

arrangements for its defense, but before this could be fully accomplished the volunteers that formed a part of its support gave way, and in passing through Plympton's battalion communicated their panic, and carried with them a part of his men."¹⁰³ The flight of the Volunteers was confirmed by Captain Selden's report on his two companies of the Seventh. As seen above, however, a portion of his command also fled. These reports show us that the two New Mexican Volunteer Companies (Third New Mexican CO A and Fifth New Mexican CO A), located directly behind and the left of the guns, were the first to start fleeing upon the sight of the line of Texans bearing down on their position. The reports also say that several regulars from the two companies of the Seventh fled with them. The fear that was spreading was critical to the success of the assault, because the defending units were now losing valuable manpower for the defense of the cannons. It is important to note that of the Regulars and Volunteers who did stay and fight, the records indicate most of these men became casualties. Fifty percent of the two New Mexican companies that did stay were casualties at the guns, while seventy percent of Company F of the Seventh and seventeen percent of Company C (undoubtedly most of this Company presumably fled). The Tenth infantry as a whole suffered just over thirty percent. Dodd's Company which was the only unit at the battery not to have any soldiers flee, would suffer over fifty percent casualties. The disposition of troops that did stay was as follows: the Mexican Volunteers now adjust to the right of the guns, McRae's support troops in the center position, the remaining Regulars of the Seventh and Fifth just adjacent to the left of the guns and holding the extreme left flank on the river Dodd's Company. This left the Federals with less than 250 men to defend the guns. The shock of Green's Texan assault and the fear that ensued in the Union ranks has given him a three to one attack ratio.

¹⁰³ Official Record 9:490 and 491.

McRae was positioned on the right of his battery. He spent several minutes going back to rally the fleeing soldiers to help protect his guns from the tidal wave of Texans coming towards his battery. As a Union civilian near the battery witnessed, “Capt McRae, too, when he saw the critical condition of his battery, ran back to the men and implored them for God’s sake to assist him in maintaining his position and save the guns.”¹⁰⁴ He was pushing his men in those critical minutes to keep up the fire on the enemy’s advance and soon gave the word to switch to canister as the charge was nearing the two hundred yard mark. Now the Regulars and Volunteers alike were unloading their rifles into the tidal surge of men now bearing down on them. As one of McRae’s artillerymen wrote, “our fire was swift and well directed, and the enemy went down before the guns.”¹⁰⁵ This was the moment where the Confederate advance appears to have slowed down under the Federal canister fire. But the flanks kept advancing and lead companies moved to the crest of the guns. Around this time, McRae took a bullet in his arm, most likely from one of the marksmen in the copse of trees to his right. Lockridge and his Texans were upon the battery and closing in on McRae. “It was told that a Texan officer in the attack shouted at him: ‘Surrender McRae! We don’t want to kill you!’ and that from him, with his right arm shattered by a bullet, and leaning upon one of his pieces, came the instantaneous response: ‘I shall never forsake my guns! At that moment both he and Major Lockridge were instantly killed, and their bodies fell limp across the gun as their blood flowed across the surface.’”¹⁰⁶

This initial assault by a couple of forward Texan elements was beaten back by the Regulars, Volunteers and Coloradoans. As a soldier from the Seventh who didn’t flee remarked,

¹⁰⁴Collin and Thompson, *An Indian Superintendent at the Battle of Valverde*.

¹⁰⁵ John P. Wilson, *When the Texans came: missing records from the Civil War in the Southwest, 1861-1862*. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press 2001), 245.

¹⁰⁶ Whitford, *Colorado Volunteers*, 65.

“at last the rebels charged us, but were repulsed.”¹⁰⁷ As soon as this repulse occurred, the main front line of Texans were now within shotgun range and were firing on the Union position from what appears to have been three sides. Another exodus occurred as the combination from the volley of shotguns blasts, six- shooters going off, and the yelling Texans proved too much for most of the Union troops. Only a few brave soldiers stayed behind for the hand-to-hand combat that transpired. As Peticolas recounts, “when the battery was gone, one of the battery boys sprang on the magazine, which was near cried 'Victory or death' and then coolly fired his pistol into the ammunition.”¹⁰⁸ This explosion rocked the area killing several nearby Texans and casting smoke over the objective. What ensued was carnage, as men fought hand to hand with muskets swinging, sidearms firing, and bowie knives slicing at human flesh. A Union soldier recalls, “I heard no orders, no shouting, no yelling. Everybody was busy fighting.”¹⁰⁹ At this point Captain Lord’s forces arrived and dismounted from their horses and began closing in on the objective from the south side and commenced firing. It was also at this time that Wingate’s forces (a couple of hundred yards behind him) started firing into the battery. Lord was now caught between fires from his rear, front, and flank where the copse of trees was located, and fell back.* Canby, who was now linking up with Wingate’s forces, evaluated the situation and realized that this 250-man battalion would be no match for the approximately 700 Texans now flooding the area. Canby now had a bigger issue to contend with, the Texans were now moving towards the river and could potentially cross the Rio Grande and drive south on Fort Craig. He immediately sent orders to Pino to hold his position on the other side of the river with his Second New Mexico Volunteer Regiment and to delay any movement of the enemy. He then sent word

¹⁰⁷ Roe, *From Western Deserts*, 64.

¹⁰⁸ Peticolas, *Rebels*, 48.

¹⁰⁹ Roe, *From Western Deserts*, 65.

* Captain Lord was investigated for his actions here and later was exonerated of any wrongdoing or cowardice.

to Duncan immediately to have his forces cross the Rio Grande at the lower ford and move back to Craig. He then ordered Wingate's unit over the lower middle ford. Canby's decision was a prudent call at this critical juncture. He had lost the field at Valverde; he did not intend to lose the entire campaign.

The Lessons

Before any combat leader can become a master of the art of war, he must first understand its science. The science of war revolves around certain rules a commander applies in battlefield conditions; the numbers, organization, supply and maneuvering of soldiers are part of this science. By taking this extraordinary victory that has been overlooked by historians, we can find certain rules that need to be abided by for an frontal assault to work. What this examination provides is an addition to the rules that can be added to the science of warfare. If applied correctly, these rules can aid a commander in seizing a fixed defensive position. These rules add to the science of war and transcend battlefields across time. Though no set of rules in warfare are ever foolproof, the best a commander can do is put his soldiers in the most advantageous of scenarios to help them not only survive but win the field.

When Carl Von Clausewitz wrote in his *On War*, “if the leader is filled with high ambition and if he pursues his aims with audacity and strength of will, he will reach them in spite of all obstacles,”¹¹⁰ he could not have better described Colonel Green's actions on the fields of Valverde. After taking over the Confederate army halfway through the battle, being battered all day by superior Union artillery, and having fewer men on the field, it was fully in the realm of reason for Green to withdraw the army. Though the Confederates had been pushed back all day and were slowly moving backwards Green still had the measure of a strong leader to launch an

¹¹⁰ Carl von Clausewitz, Howard, Michael & Paret, Peter, Eds. *On War [Vom Kriege]* (Indexed ed. New Jersey: Princeton University Press(1984) [1832]),65.

all out assault, in the assault the hope for victory or defeat stood in the balance. In hostile terrain, miles away from supply depots against a bigger army to make such a decision brings us to our first rule in a successful assault: an audacious commander.

“All warfare is based on deception.”¹¹¹ Sun Tzu brings us to the second element needed for success. Green's decision to send Raguet back to the left, reinforce him, and order him to charge was pivotal in the success of Valverde. This distraction shifted the enemy's attention away from the real assault. It forced a momentary halt to Union forces on his left, created the opening in his center and made the right completely vulnerable to attack. Like a judo wrestler, Green was using Canby's weight against him with his feint. The second rule is this: prior to any assault a commander is about to initiate, he needs a distraction.

“Up, men, and to your posts! Don't forget today that you are from old Virginia!”¹¹² General Pickett's motivating words to his Corps on the third day of the Battle of Gettysburg bring us to our third rule. In what can only be characterized as the biggest mass Confederate assault of the war, typical of so many failures from that war, to assault a fortified point in mass was failure characterized by butchery. Dividing your forces into three equal parts, each supporting one another with cover and momentum gives the best chance for success. The conservation of troops and keeping the assault on a steady tempo are invaluable to taking a fixed position. Our third rule: assault in echelon.

In today's army, masking your forces from the enemy is vital part of any operation. The U.S. Army Field Manual on this states, “if the enemy can see you, he can hit you with his fire. So you must be concealed from enemy observation and have cover from enemy fire.”¹¹³ First and

¹¹¹ Sunzi & John Minford, *The Art of War* (New York: Penguin,2003), 3.

¹¹² Foote, *The Civil War*, 551.

¹¹³ U.S. Army. *Cover, Concealment and Camouflage*. Department of the Army.FM 21-75.Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1984, 1.

foremost, commanders should avoid assaults over ground that doesn't afford their attack good protection and camouflage or that is going uphill. Green was able to use the dried riverbed to protect his men. For the assault, the combination of trees, tall grass, smoke and the unorthodox tactic of taking to the ground for cover at the flash of the guns all contributed to the success of the assault. All these taken together conserved vital manpower for the actual seizing of the objective. The use of cover, concealment, and camouflage is the fourth rule.

“Always mystify, mislead, and surprise the enemy, if possible.”¹¹⁴ These words spoken by Stonewall Jackson were used to perfection in his 1862 Valley Campaign. His use of forced marches enabled him to strike Union armies from unexpected quarters and rout them from the field. The proper timing for any assault is vital to its success. Canby's forces having moved to the south of the field to cover Raguet's feint, coupled with the Federals' false sense of security in the north after the failed lancer attack set in motion an excellent opportunity for Green's assault. The sheer size of the force involved, the fluidity of movement, and even the yells all added to the psychological edge the Confederates gained by charging the enemy. The smoke, as stated earlier, also played a role in this, as did the artillery which kept the Yankees down. Rule number five cannot be overstated—on an assault, surprise is key.

“Artillery conquers, infantry occupies.”¹¹⁵ In this very short statement the theorist, inventor, and British Major General J.F.C. Fuller shows us the cooperation between the two arms of service. In truth, Captain Teel's Confederate artillery was vital in keeping the Federal soldiers down and unaware in the initial moments of the charge. Teel's constant barrage on the guns as the charge closed served not only to weaken the defenses on the objective, but also as a

¹¹⁴ Miner, Margaret and Rawson, Hugh, *The Oxford dictionary of American quotations* (Oxford; New York 2006), 423.

¹¹⁵ Fuller, J. F. C. *The conduct of war, 1789-1961; a study of the impact of the French, industrial, and Russian revolutions on war and its conduct* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode 1961), 166.

psychological boost to the soldiers moving towards the enemy battery. With McRae's guns trying desperately to stop the assault, Teel's guns had free range for a few minutes to fire on the Federal battery with no fear of counter battery. This would have allowed them to steady their aim and ensure that the rounds hit the objective. The sixth rule is that you must have covering fire from artillery.

“Infantry must move in order to close with the enemy.”¹¹⁶ Though written over eighty years after the battle of Valverde, General George S. Patton's summation of movement held true in the Second World War. This movement of the enemy shouldn't be a walk, trot, or jog but a run towards the enemy. Very simply put, the least amount of time spent on the field, the least chance they have of getting shot. The Texans, without the luxury of long-range weapons, needed to close that range as quickly as possible to bring their shotguns to bear. There was nearly no additional time spent on that field for the rebels except to avoid cannon fire. They brought the fight to the Federals' doorstep, this is where the battle needed to be determined for the attacker, not in the field. Rule seven, simply put: close the distance as quickly as possible.

Ground Warfare: An International Encyclopedia, Volume 1 lists Russia's casualties in World War II at approximately twenty five million people compared to Germany's three and a half million. Needless to say, there is something to be said for strength in numbers. After the shock and retreat of several Union forces, the battery was only defended by approximately 225 soldiers. Meanwhile 750 Texans were quickly closing in on the guns. This three to one ratio is commonly used as the standard for an attack in today's U.S. Army. During the Civil War, however, the rule did not exist. What this ratio did for the Texans is worth noting. As they moved closer and the echelons combined, the line of Texans got wider, providing the Federals

¹¹⁶ George S Patton, Paul D. Harkins, and Beatrice B. A. Patton. *War As I Knew It*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co, 1947), 410.

with the view of a massive army. As we saw in Canby's report, he states the Texans are half a mile wide. The Texans are battle focused on the guns and not focused on the Federal numbers, the Federals on the other hand can only sit, wait, and watch this surge of men, which are more than their numbers, close in on them. This sight must have been quite unnerving. Then with the odds so much in the Texans' favor, when the lines did bow, they were wrapping around the objective on three sides. The superior numbers helped this three-sided assault, so to speak, come to fruition. The final rule does not have to be a hard number of three to one, but you do need to have more soldiers in the assault than on the defense.

These eight rules were often overlooked on Civil War battlefields and a better examination of assaults during the war was desperately needed. At the battle of Fredericksburg you could make the case that General Burnside's assault, though audacious and with artillery support, the charge itself on Marye's Heights however, was not a massed echelon assault with good cover and concealment. The failed Confederate assault by the Fifteenth Alabama to take the uphill position on Little Round Top at the battle of Gettysburg had good cover and concealment, but no artillery support was provided to aid in taking this key position. These two examples, though different in their size and scope, highlight what transpires when these principles are not applied. By scanning the landscape of Civil War battles, one can easily see in these frontal assaults where one and usually several of these rules are *not* applied and the failure that typically ensues. It is interesting to speculate the results of Civil War battles had these rules been applied.

One can take it a step further and look at subsequent battles to the modern day. The trench warfare, for example, and its massive frontal assaults went to a whole new level of carnage. Artillery was at its height in the Great War where guns could shoot farther, longer, and

with more destruction. The element of surprise was sacrificed, however, since attacks were always preceded by heavy preparatory bombardment, often several days in duration. The defending forces were thusly informed in advance where the forthcoming attack would take place and were well prepared when it did.¹¹⁷ Not until the advent of the creeping and jumping barrages in the later portion of the war did the element of surprise get reinserted into the equation. The German “Stormtroopers,” with their multi-echelon infiltration assaults on trenches, brought an end to the mass assaults and ushered in a new doctrine of infantry tactics. It was not until the advent of the German Blitzkrieg, approximately eighty years after Valverde, that all eight of these rules saw a large scale application on the landscape of Europe. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines “blitzkrieg” as, “war conducted with great speed and force; *specifically* : a violent surprise offensive by massed air forces and mechanized ground forces in close coordination.”¹¹⁸ If you look at Heinz Guderian's book on this so-called “new” type of warfare, *Achtung—Panzer!*, you will see terms and words like, feint, attacks in depth, surprise, and speed, to name just a few. The *Wehrmacht* was the first army to apply all of these rules using modern weaponry, with lethal precision on the battlefield. Today's U.S. Army doctrine is an enhanced version of what the Germans put into practice seventy-five years ago. Though missed by Civil War generals and history as a whole, the modern U.S. doctrine and the Blitzkrieg of World War II bear very strong parallels to what occurred one cold February day on the fields of Valverde.

¹¹⁷ Janice E. McKenney, *The organizational history of field artillery 1775-2003*, (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, United States Army 2007), 119.

¹¹⁸ *Webster's new collegiate dictionary: a Merriam-Webster*. 1956. Springfield, Mass: G. & C. Merriam Co, p. 133.

CHAPTER 4

EPILOGUE

In the waning hours of February 21, 1862, the situation was at its darkest for the Union cause in New Mexico. Colonel Canby quickly had moved his army back to the west portion of the Rio Grande river and began the retrograde movement back to Fort Craig. Once he and his forces were secured back at the fort a truce was called to pick up the wounded off the fields of Valverde. That night as Canby lay in his defensive bastion with his defeated army he began to set in motion a plan that would strangle the Confederate army in New Mexico. He would take a page out of military history and gather his knowledge of the ground and climate in which he now found himself. Much like the Russians fighting Napoleon in 1812, he adopted a scorched-earth policy. That night Canby began sending couriers and his logistics officer north with instructions to destroy anything that could be of use to the invaders. This twofold strategy would not only diminish the Confederate food supplies but also serve as a psychological blow as they moved deeper into Union territory. Removing and destroying the massive food and supply stores along the route would be the key to Canby's strategy. Canby would then hold Fort Craig and act as a thorn in Sibley's side as he moved north, hampering delivery of supplies and reinforcements out of Texas. Canby also knew that Union forces were gathering at Fort Union, approximately sixty miles northeast of Santa Fe, and that when they moved south he could act as a blocking force when the Confederates retreated.

General Sibley, on the other hand, despite winning a huge victory at Valverde, still had a host of troublesome issues with which to contend. First, the command climate was extremely poor in the Confederate ranks, the absence of Sibley from the field at Valverde seemed to upset the Confederate leadership. Another major issue was food. Though they controlled the

battlefield, Fort Craig remained in Union hands, along with nearly three months of supplies. The land around the Confederate army was barren, bereft of food, and had nearly no grass to feed the horses.¹¹⁹ Having been offered generous terms to surrender Fort Craig the day after the battle, the Union commander declined. Another obvious issue encountered since arriving in New Mexico was the lack of recruits to the Confederate cause. Though the population was sympathetic to the Confederacy because of their shared agrarian society, Sibley's ranks did not swell to the numbers he had hoped. This was the strategic situation Sibley found himself in after his "great victory." Sibley soon called his war council together to discuss his options. They had three: retreat to El Paso and consolidate, assault Fort Craig, or make a move north to Albuquerque. Some officers believed the force at hand was too small for the conquest of the territory while others assured Sibley that an assault on Craig would be futile. In the end, the Confederate commander chose the last option. He had to move his army north and leave the fort unmolested with the hope that Albuquerque's and Santa Fe's supply depots would be enough to sustain his army and appease the dissention in the ranks.¹²⁰

Moving quickly on February 23, Sibley's Brigade, with five days' rations, were back on the move north with Albuquerque set as the next objective. On March 2, Sibley's advance column came within sight of the city. The brigade was greeted with great columns of smoke standing tall and black above the town.¹²¹ The hope of a massive resupply was literally going up in flames. On March 8th Sibley marched the main army into Albuquerque. After thirteen cannons blasted in the town square a salute was rendered to the stars and bars as it was raised to flutter in the crisp New Mexican breeze.¹²²

¹¹⁹ Hall, *Sibley's*, 105.

¹²⁰ *Ibid*,106.

¹²¹ Foote, *The Civil War*, 152.

¹²² Hall, *Sibley's*,116.

Having established a base of operations in northern New Mexico, Sibley estimated he had three months of supply. In Santa Fe, word reached of the capitulation of Albuquerque, and soon all supplies there were transported to Fort Union. One hundred and twenty wagons were escorted by two hundred soldiers to Fort Union, while anything left was set ablaze. On March 10, a scouting party of eleven Confederate volunteers dispatched from Albuquerque entered Santa Fe, which was devoid of Union soldiers. With Santa Fe squarely in Confederate hands, and one major obstacle in that of Fort Union, Sibley's dream of conquest in the West seemed about to be realized. The first Union territorial capital captured during the war was now squarely in Confederate hands.*

Fort Union was located sixty miles east-northeast of Santa Fe, the trail bowed southward below the Santo de Cristo Mountains, skirting through canyons and eventually moving north on the mountain chains' eastern edge to the fort. For about two months, Canby had been in communications with his second in command, Colonel Gabriel R. Paul, to gather all available forces and to hold Fort Union at all costs. Paul had consolidated as many provisions as possible in the area and was sending dispatches all across the area for reinforcements. On the evening of March 11, the First Regiment of Colorado Volunteers came into sight of Fort Union traveling from Denver City.¹²³ The nearly one thousand strong Colorado regulars known as the "Pike's Peakers," under the direction of Colonel John P. Slough, had come to the New Mexico Territory to aid their comrades in arms and they were eager to kill Confederates. Paul wanted to hold at

* This would be the only Union Territorial capital captured by the Confederates during the Civil War. One Hundred and twenty Confederate cavalymen would capture Tucson, Arizona on February 28, 1862 proclaiming the city the western capital of the Arizona Territory (Mesilla the eastern) but this wasn't recognized by the U.S. Government. On April 15, 1862 a small skirmish (approximately ten cavalymen from each side) occurred northwest of Tuscan called the Battle of Picacho Pass, this engagement is recognized as the westernmost "battle" of the American Civil War. A skirmish did transpire west of this site at Stanwix Station approximately one hundred miles west of Picacho Pass (one hundred miles east of California state line) but due to the lack of casualties, Picacho Pass holds the distinction.¹²³ Hall, *Sibley's*, pp 126 and 127.

Fort Union and consolidate more forces in the area (as he felt his orders from Canby dictated), but Slough, who technically outranked Paul, was eager to go on the offensive. Leaving a skeleton force at Ft. Union, Slough marched south with over thirteen hundred men and on March 24, reached Bernal Springs, where the Santa Fe Trail began to turn toward the west. The next day, Slough sent a detachment of four hundred men under the command of Major John M. Chivington toward Santa Fe to scout the area. That night they reached Kozlowski's Ranch, twenty-seven miles from Santa Fe, and were surprised to discover from the owner that Confederates were operating in the area. Quickly, Chivington dispatched soldiers to nab the Confederate pickets. Upon capturing the pickets, it was discovered that these men were the forward elements of a three hundred-man force under the command of Major Pyron, the main body of which was now at Johnson's Ranch, located at the mouth of Apache Canyon. The Santa Fe Trail at this point wound its way through the southern extremity of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains. This narrow corridor was known as Glorieta Pass. The western portion of the pass was named Apache Canyon and was around seven miles in length and about a quarter of a mile wide.¹²⁴

The next morning, a skirmish ensued in the canyon with Chivington's four hundred man detachment against Pyron's three hundred at a slight bend in Apache Canyon. Chivington, using a cavalry charge, was able to push Pyron out of the canyon, dealing the Confederates their first defeat of the campaign. The "Pikes Peakers" of Colorado had won their first engagement and proved their mettle against the "undefeated" Texans. Despite General Lee's boast two years later that, "Texans always move them," on that day, Coloradoans moved Texans.

During the skirmishes in Apache Canyon, dispatches were sent by both armies to converge on the area. Pyron and Scurry set up defensive positions at the mouth of the canyon for

¹²⁴ Hall, *Sibley's*, pp 131 and 132.

the Union assault that was sure to come in the morning. By 2:00 P.M. in the morning Slough had arrived at Chivington's camp. Slough's plan was to go on the offensive. With nearly nine hundred of his men, he would go through the canyon while he sent Chivington's four hundred soldiers on a southern flanking maneuver to converge on the Confederates in a pincer maneuver at Johnson's Ranch.

At 8:00 A.M. on March 28, Slough moved his Federal forces out of Kozlowski's Ranch. At almost the same time, Scurry, who had grown impatient, entered the canyon with his 1,100 man Confederate army, leaving his baggage trains behind so he could quickly navigate the canyon. At 10:00 A.M. Federal forces had reached Pigeon Ranch and had halted to consolidate



Figure 14. Battle of Glorieta Pass (Courtesy Whitlock, *Distant Bugles, Distant Drums*)

their force and replenish their water supply. Slough sent a reconnaissance force forward under Captain Gurden Chapin, Seventh U.S. Infantry, to find the enemy and report back to him on the whereabouts of the rebels. The cavalry attachment proceeded about three hundred yards when they fell back to Slough. The Texans were in fact just eight hundred yards in front, concealed in

the trees and preparing to attack.¹²⁵ Union soldiers soon rushed into battle formations as shells began landing around them. The time was 11:00 AM, what ensued was the Battle of Glorieta Pass.

With maneuver nearly impossible in the tight canyon, the fight became a test of wills. In the first hour of the engagement, Slough tried to bottleneck the Confederates in the pass, but the surprise and the Texans' fanatical charge on his left forced him slowly back. What Slough had sacrificed in the bottleneck, he hoped to gain on a small hill, and for two hours on a wider front, he calmly directed the defense of his troops. Cannon fire racked Union lines as Slough tried to not only to make the Confederates pay for every inch of ground, but more importantly, to give Chivington time to get behind enemy lines. As Scurry pushed out of the pass onto more open ground, he was able to bring his higher numbers to bear on a wider front. He soon sent Pyron around the Union left to flank the hill. Union artillery temporarily halted the advance, giving Slough enough time to extract his men from the precarious situation. At 2:00 P.M. Slough set up a defensive line anchored by Tappan Hill on the left, Pigeon Ranch in the center, and some high ground sloping up toward the canyon wall on his right. Now Scurry ordered a push all along the lines with Shropshire on his right in the pines and Major Raguet on his left. Scurry, commanding from the center, launched the assault on the Federals. Charge after charge was thrown at the Coloradoans, as the most intense fighting of the day was now in effect. Shropshire was dead, Pyron had a horse shot from under him and Scurry's face was bloody from Minie ball, but the Texans kept coming. Under the weight of superior troop strength, fanatical charges, and well placed flanking movements, Union forces began slowly falling back. By 5:00 P.M., Slough ordered a tactical withdrawal back to his base camp at Kozlowski Ranch. The Confederates, too

¹²⁵ Colton, *Western Territories*, 59.

tired to pursue, halted and consolidated their forces as Slough moved eastward. Both armies were “fought out.” Scurry had control of the field and had won another Confederate victory, but little did he know that at that moment the fate of the Confederates conquest in New Mexico was already sealed.

Chivington's flanking force was about to, as best explained in the words of a contemporary, "pierce the Confederates vitals and drew from thence the life blood."¹²⁶ Chivington had spent nearly half the day pushing through eight miles of mountainous terrain to get to his objective at Johnson's Ranch. At 1:30 P.M. he emerged from the mountain trail, and below him was the entire supply train of Colonel Scurry's Army. Descending upon the Union wagons like a pack of hungry lobos, Chivington's four hundred men made quick work of the baggage train, killing nearly all the animals and setting fire to all the wagons of food and ammunition. In a matter of minutes, Chivington had crippled the Confederate army in the northern New Mexico Territory. These critical supplies represented the vast majority of Confederate supplies in the region. As quickly as they had come down from the mountains they were back up heading back to Union lines. By 10:00 P.M. Chivington's exhausted men were back at Kozlowski's Ranch and reported the news of their wild excursion through the mountains. The next day Slough decided to fall back and soon received a dispatch from Canby ordering him back to Fort Union. By April 2, Slough was back at Fort Union, and seven days later, fearing he would receive a court martial for his actions, relinquished command to Colonel Paul.

The following day brought a familiar sight for the victorious army under Scurry—the destruction of supplies and food. This left Scurry with no other option but to make the twenty-two-mile trek back to Santa Fe to try to scrape together supplies for his army. On March 29,

¹²⁶ Hall, *Sibley's*, 153.

Scurry and his hungry men were back in Santa Fe. Scurry had sent dispatches to Sibley for reinforcements, ammo, and most importantly, food. Reinforcements came on April 4 with the arrival of Sibley and the rest of the Confederate Army of New Mexico. Sibley's army was slowly withering from starvation and he had to move to another area to live off the land. As Sibley contemplated his decision on where to move next, the decision was quickly made for him. Dispatches arrived from Albuquerque that Canby was in fact closing in on the town from the south.

The situation for Sibley was dire at best. The Texans were now caught between two better equipped and better supplied Federal forces. Soon these two forces would unite, giving the enemy numerical superiority to crush the Confederates.¹²⁷ On April 7, Sibley moved his army south as fast as he could pushing towards Albuquerque. Canby had in fact left on April 1 with over one thousand men leaving "Kit" Carson in command of Fort Craig. By April 8, he was in the vicinity of Albuquerque. But Canby was not the only one on the move. On April 5, a courier arrived at Fort Union with orders for Colonel Paul to move as quickly as possible south to rendezvous with Canby at Tijeras, fifteen miles east of Albuquerque. Through horrible winter conditions, Paul moved his forces to the rendezvous point. Canby spent two days skirmishing with the Confederate garrison at Albuquerque before heading east to Tijeras where on the 13th he linked up with Paul. In the subsequent days, the whole of Sibley's forces would concentrate on the depleted supply post. Sibley was once again forced to make a critical decision—stay and fight, or retire southward.

Sibley's men had traveled thousands of miles,* fought two victorious battles, and had taken the territorial capital, but ammunition was scarce and food even scarcer. Whether due to a

¹²⁷ Hall, *Sibley's*, 168.

* More miles were travelled in this campaign than any other during the Civil War.

lack of nerve on Sibley's part or lack of resources, Sibley's rationale was that not even victory would bring him supplies. On April 12, Sibley's forward elements crossed the Rio Grande and began their march south. Canby soon forced a thirty-six mile march southward, and arrived just north of the town of Peralta into a blocking position. After a brief skirmish on the night of the 15th on the east side of the river, Confederate forces fell back to the western side of the Rio Grande and continued south. Canby elected to stay on the east side of the river to monitor the rebel's movements south. As both armies moved south, they were in plain sight of one another several times from across the river.

Sibley had another problem looming on the horizon aside from the Union army following close behind (and beside) him: Fort Craig. Canby's February strategy was coming to fruition in that the fort now served as a perfect blocking position for Confederate escape. Colonel Green, Scurry and other officers began to devise a plan to get the army out of this precarious situation. In its depleted state, the army was now not a capable fighting force. It was then proposed that a detour be made into the vast mountains and desert to the west. Though extremely precarious it allowed the army to avoid Fort Craig and make a run for a stream below that post.¹²⁸ Accepting this as the only course of action, under the cover of darkness on the night of April 16, Sibley took his army west into the vast wasteland of the New Mexico Territory. Canby, knowing the horrors of what lay ahead for the Confederates, knew better than to follow. On the 22nd he arrived at Fort Craig to await the invaders coming out of the wilderness.

Abandoning most of their supplies and taking only five days of rations, the Confederates entered what can only be described as hell on earth. As one of the foremost professors in the Civil War described, "it was one of the great marches of all time, and one of the great nightmares

¹²⁸ Colton, *Western Territories*, 91.

ever for the men who survived it."¹²⁹ Hacking through underbrush, over mountains, through desert the men of Sibley's Brigade were pushed beyond their physical limits. Men who fell on the march became food for the coyotes and weapons were thrown to the side to help lighten loads. In their one hundred mile trek through the wasteland, they lost approximately one thousand men. A northern lieutenant following their trail a year later reported, "not infrequently found a piece of gun-carriage, or part of a harness, or some piece of camp or garrison equipage, with occasionally a white, dry skeleton of a man. At some points it seemed impossible for men to have made their way."¹³⁰ On April 25, Sibley's army emerged ten miles below Alamosa, well south of Fort Craig. The good news for them was that Canby had outrun his supply lines and was forced to sit and wait for rations to arrive. Two days later, the Confederates were at the supply-rich Fort Thorn, and by May 1, with his army spread over fifty miles, General Sibley arrived in Fort Bliss, Texas, effectively ending the New Mexican Campaign.

On May 14, 1862 General Sibley addressed his army of under two thousand men and thanked them for their devotion to duty to what he called, "this more than difficult campaign." He eventually led his troops to San Antonio, where he then parted ways from his famed Texans. He would later fight in some engagements in his native Louisiana under General Richard Taylor, but his alcoholism eventually caught up with him and he was court-martialed in 1863. After the war, he went to Egypt to work as a military aide, but his addiction eventually got him removed. He died penniless in 1886 at his daughter's house in Fredericksburg, Virginia.

His counterpart, General Canby, would receive that rank as Sibley retreated out of Mexico. He eventually went back east, where he was commander of New York City, participated in campaigns in Louisiana and Alabama, and accepted the surrender of Richard Taylor and Kirby

¹²⁹ Foote, *The Civil War*, 157.

¹³⁰ *Ibid*, 158.

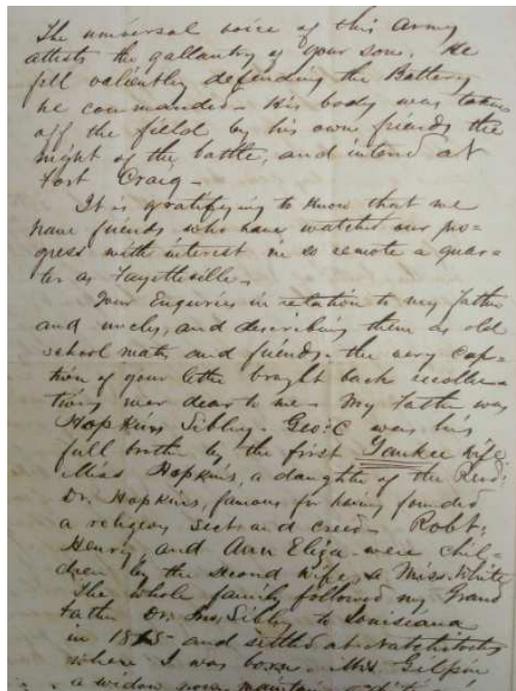
Smith at war's end. Canby eventually rose to the rank of Major General. After the war, he was assigned to help with Reconstruction in Louisiana, South Carolina, Texas, and Virginia. Canby's last assignment was as Commander of the Pacific Northwest, where he was killed during a truce by famed Indian renegade Captain Jack. His body was sent with full military honors back to his native Indiana, and he was buried in Indianapolis on May 23, 1873. William Tecumseh Sherman, Philip Sheridan, Lew Wallace, and Irvin McDowell were all in attendance.

Colonel Green would miss out on the action of Glorieta Pass, though he was involved in the skirmish at Peralta that forced the Confederates to the west side of the Rio Grande. After the campaign he returned with the brigade to east Texas where he received a well entitled break from the war. It wouldn't be till the next year that the warfighter went back in action at Galveston, Texas where on New Year's Day, 1863 he helped in the recapture of that city from Union forces. By spring of 1863, Green was assigned to General Richard Taylor's* army during the Bayou Teche campaign. Placed in charge of the First Cavalry Brigade, though pushed out of southern Louisiana, Green's Brigade fought with distinction, earning him a rank of Brigadier General and helping Taylor keep Federal forces out of Texas that same year. By year's end, he was placed in charge of a division of cavalry as Taylor prepared to defend North Louisiana from Union invasion up the Red River from Alexandria. The Red River Campaign of 1864 was a doomed Federal invasion. Union armies were defeated at the Battle of Mansfield and the Battle of Pleasant Hill, Green's cavalry served with distinction during these Confederate victories. On April 12, 1864, with a few hundred men on horseback, Green attempted to show his men how to fight by charging a gunboat on the Red River. Either in a drunken stupor or in a great show of élan Green charged the ship, the gunboat soon answered with their cannons towards the charging

*Thomas Green has the rare distinction of serving in two wars under a father and son (Zachary Taylor during Mexican-American War and Richard Taylor during the Civil War).

rebels. A ball from one of the guns found its mark on Green shearing off the top of his head, thus ending the life of the architect of victory on the fields of Valverde.

McRae's Battery, renamed the Valverde Battery, would be placed under the command of Captain Joseph D. Sayers of the Fifth Texas Mounted Regiment, who would one day become the 22nd governor of Texas. The battery would make it out of the New Mexican Territory and back to Texas with the Brigade. The cannons accompanied the unit into Louisiana where they were attached to General Taylor's army. After serving in the Bayou Teche and Red River campaign, including the battles of Mansfield and Pleasant Hill, two of the guns were traded out for better ones captured from the Union. At war's end, the battery was brought back to Texas where Confederate soldiers buried them in Fairfield, Texas, rather than surrender them to the Federals. In 1885, the guns were exhumed and today are on display at the Confederate Reunion Grounds State Historic Site near Mexia and Camp W.L. Moody, located in Fairfield, Texas.



The universal voice of this Army attests the gallantry of your sons. He fell valiantly defending the Battery he commanded. His body was taken off the field by his own friends the night of the battle, and interred at Fort Craig.

It is gratifying to know that we have friends who have watched our progress with interest in so remote a quarter as Fayetteville.

Your enquiries in relation to my father and uncle, and describing them as old school mates and friends, the very expression of your letter brought back recollections now dear to me. My father was Nathaniel Sibley. Geo: C was his full brother by the first Sauksee wife. Miss Hopkins, a daughter of the Rev: Dr. Hopkins, famous for having founded a religious sect and creed. Robert, Henry, and Wm Eliza were children by the second wife, so Miss White. The whole family followed my Grandfather Dr. Sibley to Louisiana in 1845 and settled at Natchitoches where I was born. Mrs. Gilpin a widow now resides at Natchitoches.

Figure 15. The Letter (courtesy University of North Carolina Special Collections)

On March 28, 1862, General Sibley received a letter from Captain Alexander McRae's father, John McRae, who requested his son's personal effects and inquired about Sibley's family. Sibley penned a letter once he arrived back at Fort Bliss on May 12 to McRae's father in which he assured him that he was already taking steps to recover all the items seized from his son on the battlefield. He went on to write that he would be contacting Canby's headquarters to see what other effects they might have. Through a weird twist of fate, General Sibley's father and John McRae's father had known each other as children, so Sibley obliged McRae with news on his family. Sibley went on to explain the reason for his withdrawal was largely due to the environment from the territory after the victories he had achieved. In regard to McRae's son's last moments, Sibley wrote, "the universal voice of this army attests the gallantry of your son. He fell valiantly defending the battery he commanded. His body was taken off the field by his own friends the night of the battle and interred at Fort Craig."¹³¹

¹³¹ Henry Hopkins Sibley to John McRae, May 12, 1862, in University of North Carolina Special Collections, 477. McRae, John, Series 1.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Shawn Erik Bergstrom or “The Captain,” as he is known by family and friends alike was born in Metairie, Louisiana, December 10, 1977. He attended Brother Martin High School in New Orleans, Louisiana where he graduated in 1996. He received his undergraduate degree from Florida State University in 2000. He was also commissioned through the Army ROTC program as a 2nd Lieutenant in the U.S. Army as an Armor Officer. After over a decade of service he returned to FSU in 2012 to teach at the Seminole Battalion and pursue his graduate degree in history. Upon completion he will move to Pensacola Beach, FL.