

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

November 24, 1958

### **Tribute to Both Sides**

The program at the unveiling of the bronze plaque at the site of the Battle of Natividad last Sunday was enhanced, by the presence and music of the 52nd Army band from Fort Ord, led by CWO Michael Rega, and a firing squad which offered final tribute to the heroes of the Nov. 18, 1846 battle.

Mrs. Donald Davies, the president of the Monterey County Historical Society who presided at the ceremony, explained that the commemorative program was intended as a tribute to both sides, the Californians, and the Americans. The American and the Mexican flag shared, equal honors at each side of the huge block of dolomite on which the plaque had been placed.

Santiago A. Campbell, Mexican consul from the Fresno consulate, and Col. Charles G. Rau, representing Fort Ord headquarters, took part in the unveiling. There were representatives present from Monterey County supervisors, various parlors of the Native Daughters and Sons of the Golden West, Division of Beaches and Parks, State Sen. Fred Farr (D-Carmel), Assemblyman Alan Pattee (R-Corral De Tierra) and the Monterey History and Art Assn.

With this introduction to Sunday's ceremony, we will continue with the story of the Battle of Natividad as recounted through history and by Col. Rogers (USA-ret), the speaker at the unveiling.

Burrass took a position at the lead of the forces on Fremont's gray charger "Sacramento," which was a present to Fremont from Capt. John Sutter, and which made the long journey from Sutter's Fort to Kentucky and return. Out from the "Garden of Flowers" came the American force of 55 against Californians at least double their strength. The Californians' fire had been quite general when the Americans closed to about 500 yards, dismounted, and returned the fire.

Had but half the Americans fired at that time and reloaded at once, the result might have been different. But it seemed that practically the whole line forgot instructions and were determined to fire before the Californians should withdraw. Someone cried "Charge!" In a moment, the volunteers were on their horses "and with empty upturned rifles, rushed pell-mell upon the foe."

The Californians' center gave way, but their left charged through the help-less Americans - helpless because empty rifles were a poor defense against lances in the hands of those fine horsemen. Burrass, in the lead, was shot in the breast and killed. Hiram Ames and William Thorne were also killed, and James Cash, William McGlone, and Henry Marshall were wounded.

The running fight continued as far as the present Salinas golf course, according to a statement made by Cantua to Paul P. Parker half a century ago. The casualties were about equal, but the 500 horses had been saved for Fremont's battalion.

Col. Rogers has written: "Since an attack by the Californians was feared, Thompson sent Tom Hill and Charlie McIntosh, a half-breed, to Fremont in Monterey with information concerning the situation.

The hill at the Gomez place was prepared for defense and scouts were posted: The cannon was placed on the hill, and loads were prepared. The bodies of the dead were placed on the porch, wrapped in blankets. Even a scalp dance by the Walla Wallas failed to dispel the general gloom. On the morning of the 17th, the bodies of Burrass, Ames, and Thorne were buried on the hill, and three volleys were fired over their graves.

The watchers saw a mounted column emerge from the woods in "perfect order," supported by skirmishers on each flank. At the head was a strange device, an eagle on a field of blue. A bugle played a reasonable imitation, Col. Rogers said of "Yankee Doodle."

The body of Foster was buried where he fell at the foot of an oak, which was carved with the inscription "Foster - 1846." That oak was seen as late as 1876 by Vicente, son of Jose Joaquin Gomez. A large wooden cross was erected on a hill near the road, probably the hill on which the other American dead were buried at the Gomez rancho.

Fremont's battalion moved to San Juan Bautista, where it completed its organization. It marched south in November and arrived in Cahuenga in January, in time for Fremont to receive there the capitulation ending the war in California. Today there are several historical tablets at points on Fremont's trip south, and now the Battle of Natividad has been marked and recognized.