

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

October 9, 1961

The Civil War In California

The letter below and its request has placed us in a quandary. Maybe someone will come forth with an answer better than we can give at the moment.

"Early this year, when items relating to the Civil War Centennial were published, The Herald editor wrote that throughout this year other articles would be published. Possibly my query is still in time to be answered; Throughout my school days I had always been taught and believed the Civil War was a North-South conflict, far removed from my native state.

"I now read in "The Army Almanac," an official publication of the department of the Army", that the following battles or engagements were fought here in California:

April 14, 15, 1861 - Mad River.

April 8, 1861 - Redwood Creek.

May 14, 1861 - Boulder Creek.

June 3, 1861 - Redwood Creek.

August 5, 1861 - Goose Lake.

"Who can tell me of these battles so close to home? Who participated? Who led the troops? Has California's participation been a guarded secret?

The letter bears the signature of Robert C. Gilmour, a native of California and a former resident of Carmel.

After looking through every possible reference book in my library I turned to Brig. General Frank Dorn of Carmel for information and advice. The general was most cooperative and told me that while attending the Information and Public Relation School he assisted in editing "The Army Almanac" in which the California battles of the Civil War are listed, but as the publication does not go into detail in the minor skirmishes throughout the United States at that time, there is little knowledge of these small battles recorded in history.

However General Dorn did some research on his own and found out that California furnished 15,725 men from 1861 to '65 for the Civil War. His own maternal grandfather, whose name was Jeremiah O'Reilly, spent two years in the army at Fort Winfield Scott in San Francisco. He arrived in California at the age of 17 years

after traveling from Ireland around Cape Horn and was almost immediately (1861) drafted into the Army.

Turning to "California Through Four Centuries" by Phil Townsend Hanna, we found these recordings:

April 19, 1861 - Gen. Albert Sidney Johnston resigned as commander of the United States Army's Department of the Pacific. Johnston, a Confederate sympathizer, is generally believed to have accepted the command to enable him to deliver the fortifications and military forces of the Pacific to the rebel cause on the declaration of war between the states. Learning that his plans were known, he resigned before he could be removed. Johnston was killed at the Battle of Shiloh.

President Lincoln on May 21, 1861, on the call for volunteers to the Union Army, the California Regiment was formed at a meeting at the Metropolitan Hotel in New York City. E. D. Baker was chosen colonel; Brainard, lieutenant-colonel; Lemon, major; and Ross A. Fish, captain.

On April 24, 1861 - on a call from the Secretary of War, Gov. Downey ordered one regiment of infantry (the First California Infantry Volunteers) and five companies of cavalry (the First California Cavalry Volunteers), enlisted and placed at the service of Gen. Sumner in the Union Army. Subsequently there were enlisted: on August 14, 1861, four regiments of infantry and one of cavalry and six companies, consisting of First Battalion of California Mountaineers; in 1863-1864, the First Battalion of Native California Cavalry; in 1863-1864, three other regiments, known as Sixth, Seventh and Eighth California Infantry Volunteers. California Volunteers never saw service east of the Rockies.

The California Legislature on May 17, 1861, pledged the state to the Union, following the receipt of news on April 24 that Fort Sumter had surrendered. The legislative resolution, almost unanimously adopted, declared the people of the state were devoted to the Constitution and the Union, and were ready, at all times to maintain the rights and the honor of the national government at home and abroad.

So ends our search for data on the Battles of California.