

Union Civil War Casualties in Arizona

There were several Union soldier casualties caused by Confederates in Arizona during the Civil War.

In February 1862 a Confederate force occupied Tucson, and a Union army called the California Column, comprised primarily of Union volunteers from northern California, left Fort Yuma, at the crossing of the Colorado River, to travel up the Gila River to force them out.

The first Union casualty of the Civil War in Arizona occurred during a skirmish along the Gila River in March 1862. A cavalry vanguard of the California Column encountered a small force of Confederate cavalry burning hay at Stanwix Station. One Union soldier, Pvt. William F. Semmelrogge, from Company A of the 1st California Cavalry, was shot in the shoulder. He recovered from his wound at Fort Yuma, and then rejoined his unit in Tucson in June.

After soldiers from the California Column reached the large Pima Indian villages along the Gila River, they turned south to capture Tucson from the Confederates.

The subsequent Battle of Picacho Pass in April resulted in 6 more Union casualties in the 1st California Cavalry – 3 killed and 3 wounded. The fatalities included Lt. James Barrett, along with privates George Johnson and William S. Leonard. Barrett was the Company A commander, Johnson was in his company, while Leonard belonged to Company D. All three bodies were buried in their blankets the next day at the site of the battle, their simple graves marked with used hardtack cracker box boards.

The three Union soldiers wounded at Picacho Pass were Cpl. James Botsford of Company A, Pvt. Peter Glann of Company D, and Pvt. William C. Tobin of Company B. Botsford soon recovered and returned to duty, but Glann and Tobin were discharged in 1863 for disabilities caused by their wounds.

The bodies of Johnson and Leonard were later moved from Picacho Pass to the National Cemetery at the Presidio near the Golden Gate bridge in San Francisco. But the body of Lt. Barrett has never been found.

(The National Cemetery at the Presidio, sometimes called the Arlington of the West, has the graves of about 30,000 soldiers and their family members.)

These weren't the last Union casualties of the Civil War in Arizona.

In November 1861 Company E of the 1st California Cavalry had captured a group of secessionists in southern California, called the Showalter Party, that were headed east to join the Confederate Army. They were imprisoned at Fort Yuma. And in early 1862, the overall commander of Union troops in Arizona, Brigadier General George Carleton, closed the Yuma crossing to secessionists from southern California traveling east. He also ordered all suspected secessionists in the area imprisoned at Fort Yuma and to remain jailed until they signed loyalty oaths to the U.S. government.

One of the members of the Showalter Party was a diehard Southern sympathizer named William "Frog" Edwards. In May 1863, soon after he was released from detention at Fort Yuma, presumably after signing a loyalty oath, Edwards bushwacked Union soldiers of the 4th California Infantry in the short-lived gold mining boom town of La Paz,

located upstream from Yuma on the Colorado River. Pvt. Ferdinand Behn was killed instantly, Pvt. Truston Wentworth was mortally wounded and died the following day, and Pvt. Thomas Gainor was severely wounded, but recovered.

Wentworth and Behn were also buried at the National Cemetery at the Presidio, although Behn's grave is unmarked, and is located with other unknown Civil War soldiers buried there.

Lt. James Hale, the commander of the Union soldiers that were in La Paz that day, immediately searched the town with his remaining men but did not find Edwards. Lieutenant Hale returned to Fort Yuma aboard the steamboat *Cocopah* with his dead and wounded the following day.

In response to Edwards' attack, a detachment of forty men from Fort Mojave commanded by Captain Charles Atchison of Company I of the 4th California Infantry, was deployed to hunt him down but failed to find him after a month-long search.

Edwards was found several days later out in the desert, where he had apparently died of exposure and dehydration. What remained of his body was presumably left there.

This information was collected and summarized by Jeff Burgess, 02/16/25.