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# A Fitting Memorial to the Service of the New Mexico Volunteers and Militia

A Review Essay on *A Civil War History of the New Mexico Volunteers & Militia*.

By Jerry Thompson.

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ROBERT J. TÓRREZ



For most students and researchers of the Civil War in New Mexico, the events of those critical times is typically limited to the period between February and May 1862, the several weeks that encompass the period between the pivotal battles at Valverde, Glorieta, and the invading Confederate Army's ignominious retreat. Jerry Thompson's massive tome is much more than an overview of the two battles often cited as the beginning and end of the Civil War in New Mexico. Battles described in detail are limited to Valverde, a chapter which consists of a mere twenty-five pages; and the pivotal battle of Glorieta (Apache) Pass is covered in less than half that number. Readers interested in the minutia of battlefield maneuvering and positioning of units will be sorely disappointed and are better served by referring to older standards such as Martin H. Hall's *Sibley's New Mexico Campaign* (University of New Mexico Press, 1960) and more recent publications such as John Taylor's *Bloody Valverde: A Civil War Battle on the Rio Grande, February 21, 1862* (University of New Mexico Press, 1995), and Thomas S. Edrington and John Taylor's *The Battle of Glorieta Pass: A Gettysburg of the West, March 26–28, 1862* (University of New Mexico Press, 1998).

The author's emphasis is on the organization and actions of the New Mexico Volunteers and militia, and since there was little participation by such units at

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*A Civil War History of the New Mexico Volunteers & Militia*. By Jerry Thompson. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2015. xi + 939 pp. 75 halftones, 11 maps, 6 tables, appendices, notes, bibliography, index. \$95.00 cloth, ISBN 978-0-8263-55676.)

Robert J. Tórréz served as the New Mexico State Historian from 1987–2000 and continues to write and lecture on a broad range of New Mexico topics.

the pivotal action at Glorieta Pass, the so-called “Gettysburg of the West” battle becomes a small part of Thompson’s much larger story on the Union military organization in New Mexico Territory. Thompson provides an excellent overview of the entire Civil War period for New Mexico. He begins with early resignations of Southern-born officers who went on to command Confederate units, even some that threatened New Mexico. Among the officers was the “heavy drinking Louisiana native,” Henry Hopkins Sibley, who had served at Cantonment Burgwin near Taos as well as at Fort Union. Sibley developed a “grandiose scheme” to establish a Confederate empire in the Southwest (p. 2).

Thompson sets the scene with the occupation of the Mesilla Valley and southern New Mexico by Confederate secessionists. Next, he begins the story of the New Mexico Volunteers with Gov. Henry Connelly’s call for recruitment of volunteer units in December 1861. Thousands of young men responded, including the sons of many of New Mexico’s leading Hispano families. But more importantly, Thompson also relates accounts from the hundreds of young men recruited not only from the major towns, but dozens of villages. Many volunteers, according to Thompson, signed up with a young man’s dream of being part of a grand adventure while others sought release from an oppressive peonage system. Thompson’s careful research documents the clash between military officials and civil authorities when the “masters” unsuccessfully demanded the release of a servant whose labor they had contracted under New Mexico’s peonage laws.

Through biographical sketches and skillful use of extensive military records, Thompson weaves together the lives of many “gallant, yet largely forgotten” New Mexicans who served in the units of New Mexico Volunteers and militia from 1861–1865, well beyond the critical Valverde and Glorieta battles in 1862 (p. 12). (The author does not fully explain the distinction of volunteer and militia service that for the period.) He points out that the volunteers developed into formidable fighting units whose service was critical in the subsequent actions against Navajos, Mescalero Apaches, and Plains tribes. As the author notes, “This is their story” (p. 12).

Additionally, the devastation left behind by retreating Texans is a little-known story. Thompson describes the loss of civilian property during the Texans’ advance north along the Rio Grande Valley, and their subsequent retreat. He reviews depredation claims of merchants whose entire stores were taken and losses by civilians along the path of retreat. For instance, Rafael Luna of Los Lunas lost everything—bedding, clothing, and even kitchen utensils—to Sibley’s men. The situation was made worse by increased depredations by Navajos and Mescalero Apaches; the chaos of post-invasion reorganization of militia and volunteers; deals with deserters; and collaborators, which Thompson details in a number of high-profile cases.

A major portion of the volume deals with post-invasion issues such as Gen. James H. Carleton's Indian policy in which military attention turned to war with Navajos and Mescalero Apaches. Chapters detail the Mangas Coloradas case; the submission of the Mescalero; the roundup of the Navajo Long Walk; the disastrous Bosque Redondo experiment; and the role of volunteers, militia, and Utes in rounding up the Navajos, campaigning at Canyon de Chelly, and destroying the Navajo food supply including the eradication of their peach orchards. Thompson's final narrative chapter consists of often-affectionate vignettes of several prominent and well-known volunteers and militia: Kit Carson, Manuel Antonio Chaves, Rafael Chacon, Edward H. Bergmann, John H. Mink, and others. The author describes through pension records their struggles to have their service recognized.

The narrative portion of Thompson's Civil War history consists of less than half of its 939 pages. The remainder is comprised of appendices, which list New Mexico's population in 1860 by county, with details on Socorro County by community. However, it is not clear why Socorro County alone was chosen for this distinction. The remaining appendices make the volume fascinating for the general reader, especially for thousands of descendants of New Mexicans who served in the Civil War. The appendices include lists of territorial militia company commanders; New Mexico Volunteers killed at Valverde and in associated fighting near Fort Craig, and gravesites of New Mexico Volunteers and widows of veterans with government tombstones, including those in several other states and one in Mexico City.

The largest appendix, and the one which will undoubtedly draw the most attention, constitutes nearly one third of the volume. It is a comprehensive alphabetical list of New Mexico Volunteers and Militia extracted from the company-level muster rolls found at the National Archives and the New Mexico State Records Center and Archives in Santa Fe. The entries are crowded and require careful reading but will prove invaluable to descendants who have not had the privilege of accessing the originals or microfilm versions.

By any definition, this monumental work is undoubtedly the result of meticulous research evidenced by the nearly one hundred pages of notes and bibliography. The bulk and price of the volume may limit its purchase and use by the general reader. Civil War aficionados will gleefully mine its extensive resource material. The general reader will find it provides an excellent overview of the tumultuous Civil War period in New Mexico and access to a piece of genealogical information that might have evaded them. After all, as the author noted, "this is their story."

