The 101st Cavalry - To The Utmost
Major General John K. Herr
The Battles of Palo Alto and Resaca de La Palma
Christmas at Fort Robinson, 1882
From our BioCav Files:
Morton McDonald Jones, Jr.
Real Turkey on the Menu for Soldiers in War Zones

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Sutler's Store Monthly Specials
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The 101st Cavalry
To the Utmost
From the Units History

The 1st Battalion, 101st Cavalry was originally organized on 29 December 1860 in the New York State Militia from new and existing companies at Albany as the 10th Regiment (the New York State Militia was redesignated on 23 April 1862 as the New York National Guard). It was mustered into federal service on 21 November 1862 at Albany as the 177th New York Volunteer Infantry Regiment and mustered out of Federal service on 10 September 1863 at Albany and resumed state status as the 10th Regiment.

The unit was reorganized and redesignated on 17 February 1881 as the 10th Battalion. Squadron A and Squadron C were called into federal service for duty in Puerto Rico during the Spanish-American War. The first baptism of fire came at Coamo, Puerto Rico, where Brooklyn's Squadron C (Brooklyn) served with distinction. The troopers were under the command of Captain Bertram T. Clayton, a graduate of West Point, who was later killed in France during World War I. Captain Clayton was also in command of Squadron C (Brooklyn) during the Croton Dam Strike, when laborers were demanding higher wages and decided on April Fool's Day, 1900, to put down their hammers and strike. Soon teamsters, drillers, machinists and other artisans followed and the National Guard was called to the dam.

In 1916, Squadron A (Manhattan), the oldest of the parent units, remained a separate squadron while Troop B (Genesee), the youngest, and other upstate Troops joined with the now Squadron C (Brooklyn), to form the 1st New York Cavalry and ordered to the Mexican border. On July 6, 1916, the troopers marched from Van Cortland Park in the Bronx to Yonkers, where the troops boarded the trains to McAllen, Texas. The New York Cavalry was commanded by Major William R. Wright, and future secretary of the Army Henry Stimson was assigned as the quartermaster sergeant.

The troopers found themselves dejectedly situated on flat clay terrain (the water had no place to run off), covered with mesquite and cactus. The troopers pooled their private resources to acquire a driven well, since the only water supply for horses, drinking, and washing was the end of the only pipe line run out from McAllen. It first had to supply the 1st, 7th, and 12th Cavalry so that only a trickle could be obtained by waiting until after midnight when the other outfits had had their fill. Until the advent of the well, bathing had been restricted by headquarters to "between the hours of 2:00 and 2:05 A.M." Major Wright reported that "it was no longer necessary to buy White Rock (a local beer) to shave." Outpost duty was conducted between Hidalgo and Mission along the Rio Grande river. Field firing practice was held at La Gloria, where the squadron set the National Guard record. The troopers did find a way to relax from their military duty. The onerous and odious General Orders 7, which prohibited alcohol in camp, was conveniently circumvented by the establishment of the Squadron A Club (Texas) at an adjacent ranch.

After six months of sometimes strenuous field service, orders to return to home station, effective December 15, 1916, were received. On December 23, the troopers landed at Jersey City, New Jersey, and crossed the Hudson River by ferry and then paraded mounted in column of platoons with drawn sabers up Fifth Avenue past the reviewing stand at the University Club. Arriving at the armory at 94th Street and Madison Avenue, arms were stacked, sabers scabbarded, horses fed and stalled, and the troopers were dismissed from active service with one day to do their Christmas shopping.
The unit was mustered into federal service on 16-22 July 1917 at home stations and drafted into federal service again on 5 August 1917. The entire regiment was assembled at Spartanburg, where it was converted into machine gun units and a wagon train, and as such saw service in France for about 18 months. The unit was reorganized and redesignated as the 105th Machine Gun Battalion and assigned to the 27th Division. The unit participated in the Somme offensive, and the battles of Ypres-Lys, Meuse-Argonne, Flanders, and Lorraine. The unit was released from federal service on January 27, 1919, at Camp Upton, New York.

In 1920, the horse organizations were reestablished and in 1922 the 1st New York Cavalry was redesignated the 101st Cavalry. During the peace-time years between the two World Wars, the 101st maintained its status as a trained horse cavalry regiment, ready to respond to a domestic crisis or to move quickly into a combat role. The Regiment was active in many peace-time activities, and was in much demand at parades and ceremonial occasions. The Regiment was also an active participant in the National Horse Shows, and its polo matches became increasingly popular.

As World War II approached in 1939, the 101st participated in the army maneuvers in northern New York State, and increased its number and intensity of week-end drills and maneuvers. In January, 1941 the 101st Cavalry was federalized as a horse/mechanized regiment, and went to Fort Devens, Massachusetts for training. As a horse/mechanized unit, the Regiment participated in the huge Carolina maneuvers of 1941, returning to Fort Devens just before the attack on Pearl Harbor. In April, 1942 the Regiment was redesignated 101st Cavalry (Mechanized) and said good bye to its horses.

For the latter half of 1943 and most of 1944, the 101st served within mobile groups in Virginia and Maryland. On October 31, 1944 the 101st embarked at New York City bound for Liverpool in England where it arrived on the 12th of November.

On January 30, 1945 the 101st Cavalry crossed the English Channel and landed in Normandy. From there the

A Crew of the Fighting Bastards of the 101st unit moved to Camp Twenty Grand, forty-five miles from the debarkation point, arriving by February 2nd. The 101st Cavalry group was attached to the XV Corp of the American 7th Army and sent up to relieve the 106th Cavalry Group. The relief took place from the 9th to the 11th of February and the 101st found itself stationed in Wadgassen, Germany along line of Emmeresweiler. The assignment of the XV Corp was a short one however, for after holding a defensive line from February 11th to the 25th, the 101st Cavalry Group was assigned to the XXI Corp. The 101st was kept in line until the 14th of March when the Cavalry Group launched an attack that eliminated all enemy resistance south of the Saar River. Following this successful assault, the 101st was relieved and attached to the 63rd Division. On the 17th of March the group relieved the 253rd Infantry Regiment and took its place opposite the formidable German Siegfried Line. The 101st, noting signs of enemy withdraw on their front, launched an advance on the 20th and broke through German lines, capturing the town of St. Ingbert. During the month of April, the 101st Cavalry Group screened the advance of the XXI Corp deeper into Germany against rapidly stiffening resistance. During this time the German's advanced jet aircraft made their first appearance strafing and bombing units all over the 7th Army front, including the 101st.

Throughout April and the first few days of May, the 101st continued to screen the
advance of the XXI Corp and fought a number of gritty battles with troops from the 17th SS Panzer Division and the elite Totenkopf Division. On May 5th, the fighting ended for the 101st Cavalry Group. On May 8th, a platoon from the 101st Cavalry Group captured Field Marshal Kesslering and his entire staff at Zeller See. The 101st also captured a number of German governmental officials, including the Secretary of Agriculture, the Postmaster General, and the chief of the Reich Chancellery in addition to the Japanese Ambassador to Germany and his diplomatic entourage.

During its drive across Germany, the 101st Cavalry Group sustained a total of 217 casualties. Of these 44 were killed, 162 were wounded, and 11 were listed as missing in action. The 101st advanced quickly and almost recklessly during its 85 days of combat and in so doing captured a total of 27,346 enemy prisoners, a total that surpasses the unit’s own effective strength by 15 times.

Relieved on 17 May 1947 from assignment to the 27th Infantry Division, the 1st Battalion was withdrawn on 3 November 1947 from the 106th Infantry and converted, reorganized, and federally recognized as the 7th Antiaircraft Artillery Automatic Weapons Battalion, an element of the 27th Infantry Division (later reorganized and redesignated as the 27th Armored Division), with Headquarters at Albany (remainder of 106th Infantry hereafter separate lineage). It was redesignated on 12 May 1950 as the 106th Antiaircraft Artillery Automatic Weapons Battalion; on 15 October 1952 as the 127th Antiaircraft Artillery Automatic Weapons Battalion; and on 1 October 1953 as the 127th Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion.

The unit was reorganized and redesignated on 16 March 1959 as the 210th Artillery, a parent regiment under the Combat Arms Regimental System, to consist of the 1st Automatic Weapons Battalion. It was then converted and redesignated on 1 October 1960 as the 210th Armor to consist of the 1st Medium Tank Battalion, an element of the 27th Armored Division, before being reorganized on 15 April 1963 to consist of the 1st Battalion, an element of the 27th Armored Division; and on 1 February 1968 as the 1st Battalion.

It was withdrawn on 20 October 1986 from the Combat Arms Regimental System and reorganized under the United States Army Regimental System with Headquarters at Albany. It was next consolidated on 1 September 1993 with the 101st Cavalry and the consolidated unit reorganized as the 101st Cavalry, with Headquarters at Staten Island, to consist of the 1st Battalion, an element of the 42nd Infantry Division.

In response to the events of September 11, 2001, the unit used its Staten Island armory as home base with over 400 members of the battalion assisting the New York City Police and Fire Departments in the rescue efforts. The unit provided assistance to displaced civilians, in addition to securing the ground zero scene, shutting down unnecessary traffic in southern Manhattan transporting needed supplies, and providing a military presence to reassure city residents.

In early November of 2001, the 101st Cavalry, with elements of the 53rd Troop Command, was tasked with the mission of providing security within the city of New York. For the following 90 days, the unit’s soldiers guarded the bridges and tunnels, the train stations, and the area immediately around ground zero. The 101st has also served in Iraq and Afghanistan.

![101st Cavalry Stand Ready](image)

**Major General John K. Herr**

By Bob Seals

"There is no substitute for cavalry!" was the concluding sentence of Major General John K. Herr and Edward S. Wallace’s 1953 book *The Story of the U.S. Cavalry*. In many respects this phrase could be used to summarize the life of Major General Herr, the U.S. Army’s last Chief of Cavalry from 1938 to 1942. Throughout his entire professional life Herr was a passionate, vocal, and forceful defender of the Cavalry Branch in general and horse cavalry specifically. Conventional historical wisdom has been most critical of Herr. He has been disparaged as a symbol of reactionary military thinking who “lost it all” for the Cavalry Branch and mechanization. However, as with most
history, the reality is far more complex and interesting. In the late prewar period, Herr attempted to develop a force structure that blended the use of motor vehicles and horses but was ultimately defeated by foes of horse cavalry. Herr was much more than a “Colonel Blimp” caricature of typical military resistance to change.

Herr was not as opposed to mechanization as usually thought but rather attempted to control change within tradition by blending horse and machine in a force oriented for use in the Western Hemisphere, not Northern Europe. In the end, Herr’s efforts were for naught, perhaps due to his relationship, or lack of one, with the Army Chief of Staff, General George C. Marshall. Until his death in 1955, Herr continued to believe that “Cavalry properly modernized, trained and equipped has a place in modern war.”

Herr’s background, training, and Army career prepared him well to be the Chief of Cavalry. In many respects, one is hard pressed to find an interwar officer with more “muddy boots in the stirrups” experience. Over the course of a forty-year career on active duty, Herr served with six horse cavalry regiments for a total of fifteen years in tactical units. Such extensive small unit service undoubtedly served him well in understanding the nuts and bolts of his profession and was most likely a reason for his selection as Branch Chief in 1938.

John Knowles Herr was very much a product of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The Herr family was originally from Switzerland and traced their lineage to Mennonite Bishop Hans Herr, who emigrated from Switzerland in 1710 and settled in Pennsylvania. Born on 1 October 1878, “JK” was one of five sons and two daughters of Judge Henry Burdette Herr and Virginia Buford Large Herr. He inherited a strong personality and willingness to stand up for his rights from his father. The Herr boys also inherited a proclivity for military service; four of five of the Herr sons served in Europe during World War I.

Graduating from Reading Academy in Flemington, New Jersey, in 1895 at the tender age of sixteen, Herr attended Lafayette College in Easton, Pennsylvania, for three years. A member of the class of 1899, he left Lafayette in 1898 after the outbreak of the Spanish-American War to attend the United States Military Academy. Perhaps his influential father helped with the process, as Herr was one of a class of only thirty-three cadets admitted that summer of 1898. It is remarkable that Herr was willing to undergo the rather austere life at the academy after completing three years of undergraduate studies at Lafayette.

Herr’s cadet years were a blur of activity, much of it involving sports. A natural athlete, he achieved considerable success in track, football, boxing, baseball, and horseback riding. Herr won his varsity letter for baseball in 1900 and played shortstop in the first ever Army-Navy baseball game in 1901, with Cadet Douglas MacArthur playing in the same game. Herr’s years at West Point, however, were not without controversy. He was called before the Superintendent’s Investigative Board in May 1901. During questioning, he refused to inform on his classmates, and as a result, Herr was dismissed. He fought the action by taking a train to Washington, D.C., to meet with Secretary of War Elihu Root. In his meeting with the Secretary, Herr successfully argued his case and Root quickly reinstated him. The significance of this episode, apart from salvaging his military career, was that it clearly demonstrated Herr’s willingness to stand up for his beliefs under pressure and defy authority. These traits were again clearly evident four decades later.

In May 1902, Herr was presented his diploma by President Theodore Roosevelt. He graduated in the bottom third of his class, ranking forty-fifth out of fifty-four graduates. Commissioned in the Cavalry, he was assigned to the famous 7th Cavalry Regiment (Garry Owen), which fought in several campaigns of the Indian Wars and was once led in the field by Lieutenant Colonel George A. Custer.

Second Lieutenant Herr was content with Army life and wrote home to his father that “There is no happier life than that of the Army and Navy...I am very fond of Army life and don’t
suppose I will ever leave it.” His career before World War I included tours of duty in Georgia, the Philippines and Hawaii. In addition, he served as an instructor at West Point. He also found time to marry the daughter of a field artillery officer, Helen Maxwell Hoyle, and father two daughters.

For Herr, Army duties were not onerous, and he had plenty of time for leave and recreation, including baseball, riding, polo, hunting, and various social activities. This rather pleasant lifestyle changed in 1917. Herr briefly commanded a depot battalion at Fort Dix, New Jersey, before rotating overseas for duty as the Chief of Staff of the 30th Division (Old Hickory). Herr’s wartime service was a career highlight, as he rose to the rank of temporary colonel, but it came at a price, with the loss of both his younger brother and best friend.

After the war, Herr’s career included service with the Army occupation forces in Germany, War Department Staff duty, service schooling, instructor duty, and more tactical assignments. In 1923, Herr was a key member of the four-man U.S. Army Polo Team that defeated the British Army for the world military championship. One of the top riders in the Army, Herr carried a higher polo handicap than all but two other officers.

Herr returned to Texas in 1935 to command the 7th Cavalry Regiment, the pinnacle of a cavalry officer’s career. However, he continued his service in the Army and, in 1938, Herr was chosen as the Army’s Chief of Cavalry. This year also marked the assignment of George C. Marshall to the War Department.

As the new Chief of Cavalry, Herr was described in a Time magazine article as “...a grey horseman, one-time top-flight polo player, who hates to smell gasoline, does what he can to break the trend toward mechanization at the cost of horsed units.” As Herr assumed office, the Cavalry Branch consisted of 9,919 men and 895 officers organized into two mechanized and twelve horse regiments, all of them under strength.

Herr was under no illusion as to the challenges and frustrations he would face as Chief. During a trip to Washington, DC, he briefly stopped at Fort Knox, Kentucky for an orientation on the mechanized cavalry regiments and spoke to the assembled cavalry officers. Herr later said, “I stressed unity...although I was known as an ardent horseman I appreciated the [usefulness] of mechanization...it would be my policy to build and develop mechanization to the greatest degree feasible, but that under no circumstances would I consent to a further [dilution] of our small force of horse cavalry by conversion to armor...we needed both arms...they were not exclusive but supplementary.”

Such were Herr’s guiding principles as Chief. Above all else, he would not agree to convert any more mounted units to mechanized ones, but constantly argued for an increase in the meager Regular Army cavalry forces. If nothing else, he was consistent in his beliefs and consistent in speaking about the branch. His standard speech stressed the following: first, the U.S. Army possessed the best cavalry, horse and mechanized, in the world; two, in war, there were roles for the horse, motor vehicle, and aviation; three, the traditional cavalry missions of reconnaissance, pursuit, covering force, and limited combat remained valid; four, the next war would be a war of movement, perhaps in
areas with few roads and difficult terrain; and finally, cavalry troopers would travel mounted but fight dismounted—there would be no “Charge of the Light Brigade.”

After the completion of a review of forces and the Army’s mobilization plans, skirmishing began in earnest between Herr and the War Department. In memorandums to the Army Chief of Staff, Herr called for the doubling of the active duty Cavalry Branch strength to include a cavalry corps consisting of three horse and one mechanized division and four horse-mechanized reconnaissance regiments. Additionally, he called for more realistic training and a large maneuver area in Texas to be procured for true combined arms training, a forerunner of the Army’s current Combat Training Centers. Support was not forthcoming for an expansion, and Herr received no response to his proposals. He continued to press for a corps force structure the following year and agreed to partial conversion of the 2d Cavalry at Fort Riley, Kansas, into a mechanized unit. However, as war began in Europe in late summer 1939, the Cavalry’s structure had not changed radically since Herr assumed duties. Furthermore, General George C. Marshall was also sworn in as Army Chief of Staff on 1 September 1939, setting the stage for a future clash of personalities.

The Cavalry Branch and Herr attempted to keep pace with world events. Limited mobilization of the National Guard created additional stress for the branch as the new horse-mechanized corps reconnaissance regiments were organized. Seen by the general as a futuristic blend of mount and motor, the “portee” regiment consisted of one mechanized and one horse squadron, with the horses transported to the battlefield by prime movers or trucks. A squad of eight men and horses, with equipment, could be loaded and moving in five to seven minutes. Two days after the Germans invaded Poland on 1 September 1939, Herr again called for a substantial increase in the Cavalry Branch, to include a force of four mechanized cavalry divisions. However, without additional funds or personnel, forthcoming, his proposal was all but ignored.

The time remaining before the Japanese attack upon Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941 was a period of frustration for Herr and the Cavalry Branch. Maneuvers in Louisiana and the Carolinas, creation of the Armored Force, and training of activated National Guard regiments all were points of contention between Herr and the Army Staff. An unseen “Sword of Damocles,” elimination of the branch, hung over the Cavalry as the future of the horse cavalry was in doubt. Herr became convinced there was a conspiracy by the Army Staff against the horse cavalry, which appears fantastic at first glance. However, upon closer examination, his charges do not seem all that absurd given the credible performance of the branch in maneuvers in Louisiana and actual combat in the Philippines. Later in the war, some commanders in the field called for horse cavalry, but such requests were routinely ignored back in Washington.

In addition, the relationship between Herr and Marshall continued to deteriorate. By 1941, it seemed that the Chief of Staff and the War Department openly ignored their most senior Cavalry officer. For example, before the Carolina Maneuvers, the General Staff chose to reorganize, without consulting Herr, the two horse-mechanized reconnaissance regiments into the horse-only 107th Cavalry Regiment and the motorized 6th Cavalry Regiment, a move Herr vehemently opposed. This violated cavalry doctrine of the time, but Herr’s protests were ignored. There was to be a final acrimonious meeting in early 1942 between Herr and Marshall shortly before Herr was forced into retirement in March when the Office of the Chief
of Cavalry was abolished. The sword had fallen and the day of the horse cavalry was soon over.

Herr remained, in effect, the Chief of Cavalry in exile after his retirement. Retiring with his wife in Washington, DC, approximately a mile from the White House, he remained a burr under the Army’s saddle. In a 9 June 1942 letter to Secretary of War Henry Stimson L. Stimson, Herr wrote, “Although I am now retired, I cannot sit idly by and view with complacency, the dastardly sabotage of the American cavalry.” Despite the demise of horse cavalry, he continued to write and speak out in defense of his beloved branch.

Herr continued to ride horses in nearby Rock Creek Park after leaving the Army and served as the president of the Army Mutual Aid Association from 1947 to 1950. He also co-authored a book, *The Story of the U.S. Cavalry*, with Edward S. Wallace in 1953. Written during the waning days of the Korean War, Herr continued to advocate the use of horse cavalry in the atomic age. He passed away on 12 March 1955 at Walter Reed Army Hospital and was interred at Arlington National Cemetery.

Major General John K. Herr was an important, but little known or appreciated figure in U.S. Army history. He never wavered in his advocacy for the cavalry. Herr was not opposed to change, but wanted “change within tradition,” as the Chinese proverb goes. His concept of change was limited mechanization of cavalry with continued traditional reliance upon horse cavalry as a mainstay of the U.S. Army. One cavalry scholar, John Broom, has commented that Herr had the proper combat power ratio inverted; rather than three horse to one mechanized, the ratio should have been three mechanized to one horse—as good a summary of the problem as has ever been articulated.

The balance sheet for Herr is mixed. The proponents of mechanization were correct—the tank had arrived, but Herr, to a lesser extent, was also correct in maintaining that the day of the horse in war was not yet over. Horse cavalry was still viable in World War II—witness the eight German and numerous Soviet cavalry divisions that fought during the war. The American and British armies’ lack of horse cavalry, as English historian Gervase Phillips has written, was the exception rather than the rule among land forces in World War II.

Herr maintained that many did not understand horse cavalry. By and large, he was correct. The public, and Congress to an extent, thought of the branch in the archaic form of

Napoleonic romanticism and massed cavalry charges of a bygone era that were a gross simplification that Herr was unable to overcome. He remained combative and sincerely defended what he knew, the cavalry, maintaining his beliefs up to his death. His opinions deserve scholarly respect, not ridicule. Herr remains a fascinating figure of U.S. military history and one worthy of additional scholarly study.

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

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The Battles of Palo Alto and Resaca de la Palma

By

Kristine Withers

Of all the important battles fought by the United States military, among the most overlooked are the battles of Palo Alto and Resaca de la Palma at the start of the Mexican-American War. Contemporary historians consider the American victory over Mexico was preordained. But that view is wrong.

Poor relations between Texas and Mexico intensified in 1844 when Texas applied to become an American state. Mexico declared that it would consider U.S. annexation of the region an act of war. Concerned, President John Tyler directed the U.S. Army to assemble a force called the Army of Observation at Fort Jessup, Louisiana, near the Texas border. After the United States officially annexed Texas on 4 July 1845, the newly elected President James K. Polk ordered the troops to advance into Texas. Polk’s decision served as the catalyst for the opening battles of the Mexican War at Palo Alto and Resaca de la Palma in the disputed borderlands.

On the eve of the war, Mexico appeared better prepared for war than the United States. Its
Army numbered 18,882 regular troops, 10,495 active militiamen, and 1,174 irregulars. In comparison, the U.S. Army's authorized strength was 8,613 and its actual establishment only 7,365.

The American army's infantry consisted of eight regiments, each containing ten companies. Each company supposedly possessed fifty-five men, but at the onset of the war most were understrength, averaging only thirty-five. The Army had two cavalry regiments, both organized into five squadrons, each containing two companies. American light field artillery batteries were supposed to have three 2-gun sections. Because of manpower shortages, however, most could only mount four guns at the onset of the Mexican War. The primary field piece was the bronze 6-pounder, which weighed 880 pounds and was accurate to fifteen hundred yards. Twelve-pound pieces weighing 1,800 pounds were also employed. Each light battery came with a large number of horses to transport the guns, ammunition, and most of its crew. As a result, the artillery was highly mobile and able to respond to tactical threats over what were great distances by the standards of the 1840s. The U.S. Army also used 18- and 24-pound pieces, heavy guns designed primarily for sieges and coastal defense.

The Mexican army maintained twelve permanent infantry regiments, each divided into two battalions of eight companies with eighty men per company. Mexico's cavalry was organized into nine regiments, each containing four squadrons made up of two companies. In theory, the Mexican artillery deployed at a ratio of four guns for every one thousand soldiers. In reality, brigades usually possessed few guns of mixed types and calibers: 2-, 4-, 6-, 8-, 12-, and 16-pound guns cast from iron and bronze. As a result, Mexican artillery lacked sufficient logistical support and was generally ineffective on the battlefield. The guns were often quite old, mostly forged in the 1770s.

Growing to 3,554 men, about half of the Regular Army's strength, the Army of Occupation spent seven months on the plains of Corpus Christi. The weather was pleasant during the late summer, but the cold, wet winter that soon set in made life difficult for the troops. Even so, the men spent up to eight hours a day during much of their encampment practicing regimental and brigade maneuvers, marksmanship, and bayonet techniques, and conducting parades, reviews, and other necessary drills. Those efforts honed the ability of both officers and troops to mount large-scale operations.

Large unit tactics were a skill not much practiced since the War of 1812, even though Winfield Scott had established brigade-size camps of instruction in the 1830s, and the army had employed brigades during the Black Hawk and Second Seminole Wars. The training would prove invaluable during the initial battles of the war.

After a final attempt to pressure Mexico to settle on a boundary for Texas and to sell California, Secretary of War William L. Marcy ordered General Taylor to move his army to the Rio Grande on 8 March 1846. Taylor's destination was on the river's north bank, directly opposite the Mexican town of Matamoros, which stood at a natural choke point on the river and controlled access to well-traveled routes to the south. The Army of Occupation began constructing an earthen fortification called Fort Texas, the present-day site of Brownsville. Point Isabel at the mouth of the Rio Grande served as Taylor's supply depot.

General Mariano Arista commanded Mexico's Army of the North defending Matamoros. Responsible for guarding the Texas frontier, his force was the best trained and motivated in the Mexican army. Arista considered Taylor's arrival on the Rio Grande an act of aggression and demanded that the Army of Occupation withdraw north of the Nueces River. When Taylor refused to leave the region, Mexican cavalry ambushed a dragoon detachment under Capt. Seth B. Thornton on 25
April 1846. American losses were 11 dead, 6 wounded, and 46 captured. Although there had been earlier skirmishes with Mexican irregulars, the Thornton skirmish became the official start of hostilities. News of the engagement reached President Polk on 9 May 1846. Two days later a declaration of war message was sent to Congress.

General Arista planned to cross the Rio Grande downriver from Fort Texas and sever Taylor's supply line. Taylor, however, received intelligence of Arista's actions and hurriedly assembled a 2,300-man relief force to secure his supplies at Point Isabel. He left 500 men under Major Jacob Brown to guard Fort Texas. Departing on 1 May 1846, Taylor's force reached Point Isabel before Arista could cut the route to the depot. Once there, it began to load 270 wagons with supplies for Fort Texas.

Unable to prevent Taylor's move, General Arista decided to destroy Fort Texas and its defenders before the American force at Point Isabel could return. Crossing the Rio Grande on 3 May, the general divided his army into two columns. One under his own command blocked the road between Point Isabel and Matamoros to bar Taylor's return to Fort Texas. The other column moved on Fort Texas, where it began a heavy bombardment that lasted over five days. The defenders withstood everything the Mexicans could throw at them, but their commander, Major Brown, died at his post.

Taylor's force at Point Isabel could hear the cannonade against Fort Texas and hurried to complete its mission. With the depot's defenses well in order and his wagons loaded, Taylor's column began a slow march back to Fort Texas on the afternoon of 7 May. The force traveled only seven miles before bivouacking for the night.

When Mexican scouts found it the next morning, General Arista ordered his men to take up position on a broad plain at Palo Alto, eight miles northeast of Fort Texas on the Point Isabel-Matamoros road. Palo Alto, "Tall Timber," was a two-mile-wide flat prairie with several small ponds located on its perimeter. The center of the plain was marshy owing to several days of heavy rain. The area was covered with sharp, shoulder-high grass, and sections were lightly wooded with mesquite trees that extended southward toward the Rio Grande. General Arista stationed 3,702 men on the south side of the field and faced due north, forming a line that stretched from the road eastward to a tree-covered rise. His flanks were protected by dense chaparral-short, thorny underbrush-that limited movement. He hid part of his irregular cavalry to the far left of this line in an attempt to quash any chance that the Americans could flank his position from that direction. When he was done, the only way Taylor could reach Fort Texas was through the Mexican Army of the North.

The Mexican line was approximately one mile long. On their far left, General Antonio Canales' irregular cavalry was positioned in the chaparral to the west of the Point Isabel road. Blocking the road and holding the center of the line were a brigade of cavalry under the command of Brig. Gen. Anastasio Torrejon and several infantry brigades led by General Jose Maria Garcia. The infantry units contained Garcia's 4th and 10th Infantry regiments and General Romulo Diaz de la Vega's 6th and 1st Infantry regiments. On the right stood the Tampico Corps, the 2d Light Infantry regiment, and a sapper battalion. Light cavalry anchored the extreme eastern end of the line, holding against a tree-covered rise. Two 8- and six 4-pound artillery pieces were dispersed along the Mexican front.

Facing due south, General Taylor concentrated his troops across a half-mile expanse. He divided his force into two wings
under Colonel David E. Twiggs and Lieutenant Colonel William Belknap. Twiggs controlled the units on the right wing, with Lt. Col. James S. McIntosh's 5th Infantry regiment and a battery of 6-pounders under Brevet Major Samuel Ringgold anchoring the position's extreme right or western flank. They were positioned just beyond the Point Isabel-Matamoros road. Two 18-pounders commanded by Lieutenant William H. Churchill and the 3d Infantry regiment led by Captain Lewis N. Morris held the road itself. Captain George W. Allen's 4th Infantry regiment guarded Morris' left. Captain Charles A. May's squadron of dragoons was held to the rear in reserve.

Belknap commanded the left wing, which included a battalion of artillerymen Americans at a range of one-half mile. In response, Major Ringgold and Captain Duncan pushed their batteries two hundred yards ahead of Taylor's line and initiated counter battery fire. American artillery decimated the Mexican infantry, time and again hitting specific targets in the ranks. In one instance, a gunner in Ringgold's battery used a single explosive shell to lay waste an entire regimental band playing to rally the troops. Lieutenant Churchill's cumbersome 18-pounders soon joined the cannonade. He and Ringgold concentrated their firepower on the Mexican's left, while Captain Duncan continued his counter battery fire.

In an attempt to aly the effect of the American artillery, General Arista ordered a western flanking maneuver to turn Taylor's right wing and destroy his supply train. Torrejon's cavalry, supported by two 4-pound guns, closed within fifty yards of the American's right through the thick chaparral. Observing the Mexican advance, Taylor warned Twiggs, who ordered the 5th Infantry regiment into a square formation and directed First Lieutenant Randolph Ridgely to rush his two-gun section to the area. When Torrejon's force emerged from the chaparral and charged the west side of the square, concentrated musket and 6-pound artillery fire forced it to pull back. The Mexicans regrouped and attempted to swing further west around the 5th Infantry's arc of fire to strike the American wagons, but blundered into range of the 3d Infantry. Deployed in a square, the force poured fire into the attacking cavalry. In the end, Torrejon retreated to the Mexican line with heavy casualties. The Americans lost no more than a few wounded. For the moment, the American supplies were safe.

As the U.S. forces asserted control, Major Ringgold moved his guns farther forward and continued to target the Mexican infantry. The onslaught halted only at four o'clock, when a fire caused by burning paper wads from the guns ignited the prairie grass and obscured the battlefield. During the pause, officers allowed men overwhelmed by the heat of the day and the blazing fire to fall out of line and refill their canteens at a nearby pond.

After a lull of about an hour, Taylor adjusted his line, advancing his 18-pounders approximately one thousand yards forward on the right side up the Camino de los Indios and pulling his left wing back to maintain a continuous and unbroken line of battle. General Arista responded by moving his left flank to the rear while pushing units on the right forward.
some four hundred yards. In effect, the two sides had rotated the battle's orientation counterclockwise by approximately thirty-five degrees while maintaining the one-half mile separation between their main lines. At five o'clock the fighting renewed. General Arista began the contest aggressively by ordering Torrejon's cavalry to make another assault on the American's right. Fire from Churchill's 18-pounders and several volleys from Colonel Child's artillery battalion, which had formed a defensive square, beat back the advance. Arista then ordered his artillery to concentrate on Ringgold's battery, which had closed to within four hundred yards of the Mexican line and was, therefore, within effective range of the Mexican cannons. The heavy fire that followed mortally wounded Ringgold and forced the American guns to pull back.

In a final attempt to destroy Taylor's supplies, Arista tried to turn the American left or eastern flank with a force of light cavalry supported by his 2d Light Infantry regiment.

An American Dragoon uniform and mount

Obscured by smoke from the still smoldering grass, the Mexican force seemed to have an unimpeded path around the 8th Infantry to the American wagon train. Captain Duncan, however, saw the enemy emerging from the dense chaparral. Racing his battery to the front of the flanking force, he poured canister shot (a large number of small-caliber metal balls loaded into a metal container that produced a shot-gun effect when fired) directly into its center and right flank. The 8th Infantry and Captain Ker's dragoons moved forward as well to provide additional support. With their advance checked and suffering heavy casualties, the Mexicans retreated. Duncan pushed his battery forward in pursuit and unlimbered again less than three hundred yards from the Mexican right flank. After hours of being pounded by the American artillery, the Mexican line began to falter. When a force of light cavalry retreated across the front of the Mexican position, it caused a general panic, but units at the Mexican center nonetheless held firm, stabilizing Arista's line and preventing a rout.

By seven o'clock, the Mexicans had nearly exhausted their supplies. With darkness falling, Arista's battered troops withdrew to the rear of the battlefield and camped for the night. At that point, Taylor decided against ordering a night assault to finish the Mexican army. Another encounter would thus be necessary to do the job. In all, the Mexican force had lost about four hundred men dead and an undetermined number of wounded and missing. United States losses came to six dead and forty wounded. Overall, the engagement represented a tremendous tactical victory for the American Army.

Shortly before dawn on May 9th, General Arista decided against engaging Taylor again at Palo Alto primarily because of the effectiveness of U.S. artillery on open ground. Searching for more favorable terrain, the Mexican commander led his army some five miles south to Resaca de la Palma, a place dominated by rolling hills covered with a thick tangle of trees and chaparral that greatly hindered visibility and mobility. There, a resaca, or dry riverbed, cut a two-mile-long, two-hundred-yard-wide, twelve-foot-deep furrow across the area. Both banks of the cut were heavily forested. The troops pitched camp in an open field at a point where the resaca crossed the Point Isabel-Matamoros road. Areas of wet swampy ground also protected the Mexican line. Arista and his staff had chosen a defensive position well calculated to minimize the effectiveness of the American artillery.

Arista ordered the troops besieging Fort Texas to join his command at Resaca de la Palma. This concentration of forces gave him about 3,600 men. Meanwhile, Taylor remained unaware of Arista's movement until his scouts observed the rear guard of the Mexican army departing Palo Alto shortly after daybreak. Calling his senior officers to a council of war to debate options, Taylor decided to construct an earthwork at Palo Alto Pond to protect his supply wagons and then to move his force forward to...
locate and destroy the Mexicans. Captain Ker's dragoons shadowed the enemy force to Resaca de la Palma. Taylor sent a light battalion of the 4th Infantry under the command of Captain George A. McCall to reconnoiter the position.

At approximately two o'clock Taylor ordered Ringgold's battery, now commanded by Lieutenant Ridgeley, to move down the Point Isabel-Matamoros road. The 3rd, 4th, 5th, and 8th Infantry regiments and May's squadron of dragoons followed. In all, Taylor had 1,800 men to fight at Resaca de la Palma. He divided them into two brigades: the 1st, composed of the 4th and 8th Infantry under Colonel Belknap, and the 2nd, made up of the 3rd and 5th Infantry and the dragoons commanded by Twiggs. This left nearly 500 men—Churchill's two 18-pound guns, Duncan's battery, Ker's dragoons, and Child's red-legged infantry battalion—to guard the supply train.

As General Taylor began his march from Palo Alto, First Lieutenant Stephen D. Dobbins and several volunteers under Captain McCall's command deliberately exposed themselves to draw enemy fire and pinpoint Mexican positions. They found that Arista had arrayed the bulk of his infantry on the north bank of the Resaca. On the Mexican right or eastern flank, straddling the Matamoros road, stood the 6th, 10th, and 1st Infantry regiments along with a sapper battalion and the 2nd Light Infantry. On the left were the 2d and 4th Infantry regiments and the Tampico Battalion. Arista's artillery pieces covered the Resaca and the Matamoros road to prevent an American breakthrough. Skirmishers were in position several hundred feet to the front to screen the Mexican line. Several light and heavy cavalry regiments meanwhile held in reserve just south of the Resaca.

With Captain McCall's battalion advancing in a skirmish line to provide support, General Taylor sent Lieutenant Ridgeley's guns forward on the Matamoros road. As additional regiments came up, Taylor deployed them piecemeal into the chaparral to follow McCall's skirmishers. The 3d Infantry deployed to the west of the road on the extreme right. The 4th Infantry straddled it, and the 5th Infantry occupied the extreme left to its east. The 8th Infantry initially stood in reserve. As these forces moved into place, Taylor planned to use the light artillery to locate weaknesses in the Mexican line that May's dragoons and the infantry could exploit.

Shortly after Ridgeley pushed forward, McCall's troops became scattered in the heavy chaparral and lost contact with the artillery. Meanwhile, the rest of the American force came under heavy fire from the Mexican skirmish line hidden in the underbrush. McCall struggled to organize his men for an attack to relieve the pressure, but found a concerted advance impossible because of the difficult terrain. Instead, his men broke into small groups to navigate through the chaparral, each led by a lieutenant or a noncommissioned officer. There was no coordination between the various squads as they moved forward, but after some sharp fighting, these units successfully drove the Mexican skirmishers to the edge of the Resaca. They could not, however, make any headway against Arista's main line, which was firmly positioned on the forested edges of the ravine.

Arista tried to pave the way for an attack of his own by sending a detachment of cavalry out of reserve to eliminate Ridgeley's battery. With his infantry support out of contact, the redoubtable lieutenant beat back the Mexican advance with canister. After stemming the assault, however, he came under heavy fire from a Mexican battery and requested aid from Taylor.

In response, Taylor ordered May's dragoons to capture the battery. Ridgeley exchanged a volley with it, and May's men charged forward before the Mexicans could reload their cannons. The momentum of the thrust, however, carried the dragoons beyond the guns and exposed them to heavy fire from the Mexican infantry lining the bank of the resaca. Facing annihilation, the force retreated hastily, forfeiting its chance to capture the battery. Even so, it did manage to capture one of Arista's commanders, Brigadier General Romulo Diaz de la Vega.
Realizing that a full-scale infantry assault was necessary if he was going to make any headway, Taylor ordered the 5th Infantry forward and brought the 8th Infantry out of reserve. As before, the two units found it difficult to advance through the tangled underbrush in line formation, ultimately breaking into small groups. Nevertheless, rushing forward as best they could, they took the Mexicans on in bloody hand-to-hand combat with bayonets and rifle butts, capturing the guns. The Mexican's right quickly collapsed after that, but the Americans' success came at a price, eight dead and thirty-five wounded.

While the battle raged on the enemy's right, several companies of the 4th Infantry commanded by Captain Robert C. Buchanan found a small trail on the western flank that circumvented the Mexican's left. General Arista observed the American force flanking his position and rushed reinforcements into the area, but a company under Capt. Philip Nathan Barbour nonetheless drove through the Mexican line, crossed the resaca, captured an artillery piece, and turned the Mexican's left. Arista counterattacked the small American contingent twice but failed to dislodge it. With the Mexican infantry physically and emotionally exhausted, the failure of these counterattacks caused the entire Mexican line to disintegrate and flee from the field in an all-out rout. Surprised by the sudden collapse of his army, Arista abandoned his headquarters, leaving all his personal possessions behind. Taylor attempted to finish the Mexican force by sending Captain Ker's dragoons, a battery from Palo Alto, and the 3d Infantry in pursuit, but they were unable to catch the rapidly retreating Mexicans.

Involving a force that had been outnumbered two to one by an enemy who held a strong defensive position, General Taylor's victory at Resaca de la Palma was decisive; but it was more costly than the one at Palo Alto, which was won mainly by the artillery. Out of the 1,800 Americans engaged on 9 May, Taylor lost 45 killed and 98 wounded, most in vicious hand-to-hand combat. Official Mexican casualties were 154 killed, 205 wounded, and 156 missing.

Many of the missing men most likely drowned while attempting to swim the Rio Grande to escape the pursuing Americans. Besides General de la Vega, Taylor's men captured a number of Mexican soldiers during the two battles. They were repatriated on 10 May 1846 in exchange for the 46 Americans captured in the Thornton ambush.

Taylor thus succeeded in securing the southern border that the United States claimed. His victories would pave the way for an invasion of northern Mexico that began on 18 May 1846, when American forces crossed the Rio Grande and occupied Matamoros unopposed.

It should also be noted that while the American forces won the battle, it could have gone the other way. If the Mexican forces had managed to defeat Taylor's forces, not only would half of the American army have been defeated but there would have been nothing to stop the Mexican forces from advancing to New Orleans. The United States would also have been denied the Mexican cessations, and in all likely hood not have become the global power it became.

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**Christmas at Fort Robinson, 1882**


This article is one of many included in *Indian War Veterans: Memories of Army Life and Campaigns in the West, 1864-1894*. The essays in this book tell the story of soldiers on the Western frontier, written by the veterans of those campaigns and years of service.

I am reminded of one Christmas especially which is a sample of our experience in
those never to be forgotten days out in the Sioux country. Troops H, M, and F of the Fifth U.S. Cavalry and Company C of the Fourth U.S. Infantry were quartered at Fort Robinson, Nebraska, at the time in this story. Little children of the army were just as anxious for the advent of Santa Clause as the somewhat more highly favored little ones in the midst of the civilized East. [In December, 1882, I was]... a corporal in Troop H, Fifth Cavalry. I was ordered on detached service by the commanding officer. My orders were to report to the Quartermaster at Fort Sidney, the nearest railroad point, to get the Christmas goods for the fort. A driver and a six-mule team were detailed for the purpose.

We started about December 10 [on] a six day journey. The weather was ideal, clear, sunny days, and we arrived at Fort Sidney on time but were delayed two days owing to the non-arrival of the goods that were coming over the Union Pacific Railroad. They finally arrived the morning of the 18th. We loaded our wagon at once and pulled out for Fort Robinson 125 miles to the north. The weather had turned cold and frost began to fly through the air indicating a storm. We made good time that first afternoon, camping just before dark.

The next morning the storm broke in all its fury, a regular blizzard raging. We had to face or head into the storm. We made Camp Clark, where the Sidney-Black Hills Trail crossed the Platte River, a toll bridge, general store, and post office being kept at this point. Here we obtained shelter for ourselves, mules, and horses. The lady had a hot breakfast and coffee ready for us about daybreak. The storm had increased during the morning, a report of the storm and that we would try and make the fort if possible to the commanding officer. The bridge tender and his wife advised us to stay until the storm should pass, as they did not think we could travel in such a blizzard. As much as we disliked to leave the snug quarters and hot meals (we were to enjoy for the next three days only a ration of frozen bread and bacon), we bid them goodbye and headed into the storm. Without shelter or fire for three days and two nights, when we thought each day would be our last, we traveled over an open country for about fifty miles and had to break trail all the way, it being 30 to 40 degrees below zero. The mules were going home. [That] was the only reason we were able to make them face the blizzard. We had plenty of corn and oats for mules and the horses, and at night we tied them so the wagon would act as a wind break and [we] covered them with blanket lined covers. We would spread our tent on the snow, roll out our bed, and pull part of the tent over us and let the storm howl.

We got to the stage station on the Running Water after dark the night of the 23rd. Here we had hay for the mules and horses and a good fire and warm place to cook our supper. How good that hot coffee tasted. The stage for the Black Hills and Deadwood arrived about 3 a.m., the first in three days. The stock tender awakened us at 4 a.m. and had the coffee hot. It gave us new life and courage for the last twenty miles of our journey. The stage had broken the trail to the top of Breakneck Hill, the storm had passed, the sky cleared, the sun shone bright, and the Valley of the White River lay before us. The fort was only five miles away. We got safely down the Breakneck, crossed White Clay Creek, and broke trail across the valley, arriving at the fort about 2 o'clock the afternoon of the 24th.

I rode ahead to report to the commanding officer. When I passed the officers quarters the kiddies were all out running up and down the walks for the first time in five days, having been housed up on account of the storm. When they saw me they began to shout, "The Christmas Wagon has come." The officers and
men hearing them came out and asked if it was true. They could hardly believe it until the teamster drove his six weary mules up and we began to unload the Christmas goods. Even the officers were willing to help.

Major Edwin V. Sumner was post commander at Fort Robinson. The teamster who drove the mule team was a man by the name of Fry. The youngster who got the rocking horse was Conrad Babcock, son of Captain John B. Babcock, in command of Troop M, Fifth U.S. Cavalry at that time. Captain John M. Hamilton was in command of Troop H, Captain John Scott Payne of Troop F of the Fifth and Captain Alfred Morton of Company C of the Fourth [sic Ninth] U.S. Infantry. One year later I was promoted to First Sergeant of Troop H.

From our BioCav Files:
Morton McDonald Jones, Jr.

Morton McDonald Jones, Jr. was born on August 9th, 1918 in Asheville, N.C., the son of Lt. Morton McDonald Jones (U.S. Cavalry) and Elizabeth Webb Long Jones. The oldest of four boys, Mac, as Morton was known to his friends, was raised a Cavalry “Brat” and lived on many Army posts from the Texas border to the Philippine Islands. Mac was a dedicated Boy Scout and proud to have obtained the rank of Eagle Scout (with Gold Palm) in 1936. Mac’s life-long dream was to obtain entrance to West Point.

Upon graduation from Manilla High School in 1936, Mac returned to the United States as a work-away (passage for work) on a freighter to attend the West Point Preparatory School at Ft. McPherson, Georgia. He entered West Point in July 1937 as a Congressional appointee from his home state of North Carolina. There he engaged in many sports for fun, played lots of bridge, and graduated in 1941. After graduation leave in 1941, Mac joined the 2nd Cavalry Division, just in time to participate in the Louisiana maneuvers and ride over 600 miles on horseback. At the end of the maneuvers, he attended the 6th Basic Horse and Mechanized Course at the Cavalry School, Ft. Riley, Kansas. Mac then reported to the 6th Cavalry stationed at Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia. He joined the 15th Cavalry Group and fought with the unit throughout World War II, rising to executive officer of the 17th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron. Post WWII commands included: command, 710th Tank Battalion (1953 - 54, Ft. Campbell, Kentucky); commander, 71st Ordnance Group 1964 - 65, Korea); and Commanding General, U.S. Army Support Command (1967 - 68, Saigon, Vietnam).

Other assignments were with the Cavalry School (1942 - 43); the G-3 Sections of the Seventh and Third Armies in Europe (1945 - 47); instructor, Command and Staff Department of the Armor School (1948 - 50); JUSMAC-Philippines (1950 - 53); chief of the Blast and Shock Division of the Armed Forces Special Weapons Project (1956 - 60); project manager of General Purpose Vehicles, AMC (1966 - 67); and vice director of the Defense Communications Planning Group (1968 - 70). Mac earned a Basic Parachutist Badge, three Legions of Merit, three Bronze Stars for valor, two Air Medals and the French Croix De Guerre with Silver Star. In addition, Mac was awarded the appropriate theater of operations ribbons.

In addition to attending the Cavalry School, Mac graduated from the Advanced Course, the Armor School, Airborne School, Command and General Staff College, Armed Forces Staff College and the National War College. Mac also attended the University of Virginia, where he earned a MA in Nuclear Physics.

After retirement from the military in 1970, Mac moved to Tulsa, Oklahoma, where he became vice president for marketing with LaBarge Electronics. Subsequently, he was the business manager for a group of eight dentists.

A highlight of Mac’s life was meeting his life-long companion while in the Philippines. Mac married his high school sweetheart, Billie Marie, in December of 1941. He had five dollars in his pocket and five dollars in the Broadway National Bank. Billie had to pay for the wedding expenses and would never let him forget it. Over the years, Mac and Billie had four wonderful children; Mac III, Candy, Bill, and Sally, in that order. They were blessed with two granddaughters, Kate and Emelie.

Mac and Billie moved to Austin, Texas, where they custom-built their retirement home in 1976. They enjoyed full retirement by traveling...
extensively throughout the United States, visiting friends and family members, and attending numerous reunions. They also traveled to Australia and Costa Rica. Billie passed away Thanksgiving Day 1999. Mac continued to travel and go to reunions as time and health permitted up until his death in February 19, 2010.

Real turkey on the menu for soldiers in war zones
By Amanda Kim Stairret
Originally in the Killeen Daily Herald 11/24/10

"All of our troopers on the frontier are getting real baked turkey with all the trimmings," he added.

This is the first deployment for Pfc. Nicholas Mayora, a tanker from Dallas in Charlie Company, 2nd Battalion, 7th Cavalry Regiment. He is in his 14th month of military service and said he missed home. "Being a first-time deployer, you're not used to being miles away from your family for that long," he said in an e-mail from Iraq. "This isn't like our field training exercises. It's hard not being able to see them every day or call as often as you like."

Preparing Thanksgiving Dinner in the Desert

Mayora said he stays involved in activities while deployed to keep from thinking about home too much. He didn't know what to expect for his first Thanksgiving deployed, but "if they have something planned for the soldiers I will take part in it." Mayora said he missed everything about Thanksgiving at home. "I miss the family gathering around, my friends and definitely the home-cooked food," he said. "It's a festive time at our house and you get the day off from work to rest."

Spc. Alejandro Guzman, another 2nd Battalion, 7th Cavalry soldier, said he will also miss the quality time with family and home cooking that comes with being home for Thanksgiving. He plans on using his job to help others during the holiday season.

Guzman is the battalion chaplain's assistant and said he'd spend Thanksgiving with the chaplain in "trying to encourage others and helping to keep morale up."

It's important to celebrate Thanksgiving while deployed because it is one of the most important holidays, said Col. Brian Winski, the brigade's commander.

"When we are deployed, this holiday gives us the unique opportunity to celebrate and give thanks with our Long Knife family and
comrades in arms," Winski said in an e-mail from Iraq.

During a lifetime, an individual may celebrate 80 or more Thanksgivings — most of which will be forgotten as the years pass, he went on to say. "The Thanksgivings soldiers celebrate overseas are ones they will remember forever," he said.

Aside from the unique surroundings, the soldiers — by being in harm's way — form incredible bonds that make holiday celebrations in combat so indelibly memorable, Winski said. It is that bond between soldiers that has helped Winski get through six Thanksgivings in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan and Iraq. Knowing that he can't spend that time with his family but he has his Army family helps prepare him for that time away from home, he said.

While the soldiers make that connection while deployed, the families build those relationships with each other at home, Winski said. The family sends care packages. He and his family build those relationships with others who are in the same boat, and they celebrate together. Though separations can get harder during the holiday season,

Happy Troopers
Winski said it was important to remember that the brigade is a family.

"Your spouse, son, daughter, parent or friend trained hard before we deployed to ensure he or she is ready for everything they will face here in Iraq," he said to the families. "They are doing a tremendous job with a very challenging mission. We thank all of our families for the sacrifices they make when we deploy. Their support is incredible."

Planning for Thanksgiving begins in spring across the services, Thanksgiving preparation for deployed troops began in early spring, according to information from the Defense Department. That includes providing 244,000 pounds of turkey, 8,600 cans of sweet potatoes and more than 38,000 pies to about 225 locations in Iraq and Afghanistan.

"Providing traditional holiday meals to these American heroes is one of the single most important things we do all year," said Air Force Brig. Gen. Scott Chambers, Defense Logistics Agency Troop Support commander. "It is an expression of our thanks and appreciation for what they are doing for America every day." Officials expect to serve more than 48,000 U.S.

troops in Iraq, more than 95,000 in Afghanistan, and thousands of allied troops and U.S. contractors, according to information from the Defense Department.

Famous Cavalry Mounts: Rienzi
From The Famous Cavalry Horses Files
In the Spring of 1861, when the Civil War was in its infancy, Philip H. "Fighting Phil" Sheridan held the dubious distinction of being the lieutenant with the longest service in that rank. All of his West Point classmates as well as many lower classmen had moved far up the promotion ladder as the army expanded to meet its wartime need for manpower. Sheridan had been passed over for promotion several times since graduation nine years earlier because his commanding officers considered him to be hot-tempered, rebellious and lacking in cooperation. He was a troublemaker, they said, impatient with routine garrison life and lacking in respect for his superior officers — a "lone wolf" rather than a team player.

This reputation was certainly well deserved, for as far back as his cadet days Sheridan had frequently been in hot water. In his

Cadet Sheridan in the middle of George Crook (l) and John Nugen (r) at West Point

senior year he had received a rebuke from Cadet Sergeant W.R. Terrill and in return attacked him with a bayonet — an action for which he was punished by being "turned back" a year to graduate with the following class. Now, less than ten years later, Terrill was a brigadier general. Sheridan was routinely promoted to the rank of Captain, and Assigned as Quartermaster of the Army of Southwest Missouri. Even after
Sheridan was promoted to the rank of captain prospects for wartime fame, glory and promotion seemed far out of reach.

In his new post as quartermaster, Sheridan soon discovered that his assistant was a thief, the head of a gang that stole horses from the local farmers, forged bills of sale, sold the stolen horses to the army and pocketed the payments. Sheridan promptly had the assistant brought to trial and became impatient with the delays that the defense counsel managed to bring about. He complained so emphatically and frequently that he became a nuisance to his commanding general, who relieved him and sent him to higher headquarters for reassignment. Sheridan departed to report to General Henry W. Halleck, the Union commander west of the Mississippi.

As it happened, General Halleck had a problem at this time; the new volunteer Second Michigan Cavalry was without a commanding officer and none of the other officers of the regiment had any active duty experience. On the afternoon Sheridan reported for reassignment it had just been brought to Halleck’s attention that there was no qualified officer available to take command of the regiment, which had been ordered to set off on a week’s raid behind Confederate lines the next morning. At his wit’s end, Halleck decided to take a chance and send Sheridan— the only regular officer available — to take temporary command, cautioning him not to be too impetuous.

Independent command was exactly suited to Sheridan’s nature, and the qualities of impatience and combativeness which had hampered his career in the peacetime army proved to be just what the cavalry needed in wartime. When the Second Michigan returned from its raid it was obvious that the new commander had made soldiers out of his green troopers. Morale and discipline (which always go hand in hand) were of a high order, and the “on-the-job” training under Sheridan’s tireless leadership had paid off handsomely in the many skirmishes behind the lines in which the regiment had been engaged. Sheridan was rewarded by being given permanent command of the regiment and jumped in rank from captain to colonel. Within a month he was a brigadier general, commanding two regiments.

Sheridan started the raid with the Second Michigan on a borrowed horse, far to gentle and pokey for his requirements. One of his troop commanders, Captain Archibald Campbell had a big, strong Morgan gelding—a handful for an inexperienced rider. Campbell was not much of a horseman and readily admitted to being somewhat afraid of his mount, finding him difficult to control. Noting Sheridan’s displeasure with his quiet old hack, Campbell offered him the Morgan and Sheridan accepted, naming the horse Rienzi for the Mississippi town that was the objective of the raid. Thus began a partnership of horse and man which was to make them both famous— Sheridan as the preeminent cavalryman of the Union army and Rienzi as the army’s best known horse.

At the time this happy partnership began, Rienzi was a three-year-old, already grown to sixteen hands (very tall for a young horse, and especially so for a Morgan). He was black except for three white ankles, very well built and had a natural fast walk of five miles an hour. Inasmuch as Sheridan was a small man— almost jockey-size— the combination made Rienzi appear even taller than he really was; he was regarded as a giant of a horse by men who saw horse and rider at a distance. The two were inseparable during the four years of combat that followed. Sheridan rode Rienzi continuously in every battle and campaign and wrote in his memoirs that the big black horse “never once fatigued despite long marches and short rations.” As a battlefield leader, Sheridan was frequently under fire at close range; miraculously he was
never wounded, but Rienzi was not that lucky, being wounded “several times.” (Sheridan lost exact count, but it was believed that Rienzi took at least five bullets.)

From the beginning, the war went very well for the Union in the West (where Sheridan was commanding the Cavalry) and badly in the East (where Robert E. Lee was plaguing a succession of Union commanders). Finally President Lincoln called on General Ulysses S. Grant, who had succeeded Halleck and had earned a reputation as the best Union general, to come east and assume overall command of the Union army. One of Grant’s first actions after assuming this new and exalted position was to send for Sheridan and place him in command of all cavalry forces in the East.

Up to this point the Confederate cavalry, under superb leaders such as Jeb Stuart and Wade Hampton, had been having things pretty much their own way. Unlike the Southern cavalry, the Union horsemen had been dispersed as messengers and train guards on security duty rather than being organized into hard riding assault troops. Sheridan quickly changed this waste of horseflesh forming his cavalry units into well-disciplined combat organizations, and sent them out to meet the Confederates wherever they could find them. The combination of Grant and Sheridan, two superb leaders of troops, marked the beginning of the end for the Confederacy.

Both armies were soon to learn the caliber of the new commander and his black horse. Grant decided that the war could be shortened by a devastating raid on the Shenandoah Valley, the “bread basket” of Virginia, and ordered Sheridan to command the campaign. The Confederates, under famed General Jubal Early strongly defended the valley, and the opposing forces found themselves stalemated at Cedar Creek, about eleven miles from Winchester. Both sides were holding defensive positions, awaiting reinforcements and supplies, and catching their breath. Secretary of War Edwin Stanton ordered Sheridan to Washington for consultation and planning;

Sheridan rode over to Martinsburg, the nearest railhead, loaded Rienzi in a boxcar and traveled to Washington for the meeting.

When the meeting ended, Sheridan was impatient to return to his troops. A special train was ordered to take him and Rienzi back to Martinsburg together with two engineer officers who were to survey the defenses at Cedar Creek. One of the engineers, a Colonel Alexander, was enormously fat and not accustomed to riding; consequently the party moved slowly after leaving the train and got only as far as Winchester, where they stayed that night in a private home.

The next morning at breakfast, gunfire was heard from the direction of Cedar Creek. Sheridan called for Rienzi to be saddled. Leaving the others to follow, he took off at a steady trot toward the sound of the action. He soon ran into a large number of panicked Union soldiers fleeing to the rear and learned that foxy old Jubal Early had taken advantage of the Union commanders’ absence to launch a surprise attack, which had been highly successful. The Union forces, except for a few pockets of determined cavalry, were in full rout and Sheridan faced disaster.

Sheridan rallied the fleeing men, turning them around toward the battle, and then spurred Rienzi forward in a full gallop toward the firing. The road was blocked in many places with groups of disorganized men; Sheridan forced Rienzi to dodge them, often taking to the fields and jumping fences while shouting encouragement to the frightened soldiers. The familiar sight of their beloved leader and his black charger reassured many of those who had campaigned with them in other battles; they began to feel ashamed of themselves and turned back to resume the fight. The reversal became contagious and soon almost all of the unwounded men, inspired by Sheridan on his galloping horse, began to retrace their steps. The sight of their leader racing toward the battle, waving his saber while riding at breakneck speed appealed to their pride as soldiers, and they
turned to follow him. The strain on Rienzi was great, for Sheridan was alternately asking him for extended speed and then pulling him to an abrupt halt, in order to give encouragement to his dispirited men. Although the distance between Winchester and Cedar Creek is only eleven miles, it is probable that Rienzi galloped full tilt at least twice that distance as Sheridan ranged back and forth turning his men around.

Three miles below Cedar Creek, Sheridan found his second in command, General Horatio G. Wright, valiantly conducting a delaying action with the few troops that had not panicked. A counterattack to recapture the lost ground was quickly decided on, with Sheridan personally leading it and Wright feeding in the returning troops as they arrived. It must have been thought a lost cause by all but the most stout hearted, for the Confederates were attacking in force and were encouraged at the thought of a quick victory that would rout the Yanks from their homeland. Sheridan’s first thought was to rally the troops; he remounted Rienzi, drew his saber and placed his cap on it. Then galloping across the entire front in between the lines, he swung his saber and waved it toward Early’s attacking force. Throughout the battle Sheridan raced Rienzi through curtains of Confederate rifle fire, for all the men in grey recognized the Union general and were doing their best to put him out of action by bringing his horse down.

The turn of events so shattered Confederate morale that Sheridan conquered the rest of the Shenandoah Valley in a few weeks’ time, and its resources were thereafter not available to the needy Southerners. Grant’s strategy had been right. Capturing the Shenandoah did hasten the war’s end by denying farm produce to Lee’s army. The entire country realized that Sheridan’s leadership had saved the day and that it would have been impossible — all would have been lost had he been mounted on a lesser horse than the gallant Rienzi. Rienzi was referred to as Winchester after the battle, and the name caught on with the public, but not with Sheridan or his army.

Rienzi continued to be Sheridan’s first mount during the rest of the hostilities and carried him all the way through the bitter fighting that culminated in Lee’s surrender at Appomattox. It was there that Sheridan’s cavalry blocked the retreat from Richmond and forced Lee to ask for terms from Grant. The big Morgan, having more than earned an honorable retirement, was then turned out to pasture in the daytime and bedded down comfortably in a box stall at night, receiving the best of care and enjoying the visits of the curious, who came to see the famous veteran of Sheridan’s campaigns. He lived on until 1878, always a center of attraction. When he died peacefully in his twentieth year, it was decided to preserve him by taxidermy and exhibit him at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington D.C.

**Cavalry Resources**

By Kristine Withers

In today’s world, information, goods, pictures and videos, food, and much more could be had at a touch of a button on the internet. For the Cavalry Trooper that also holds true. Cavhooh.com ([www.cavhooh.com](http://www.cavhooh.com)) is a site that no Cavalry trooper should miss. The site contains a cavalry shop section with cavalry paraphernalia of all sorts, even for baby troopers. Cavhooh’s store offers good quality products at an affordable price, and is backed by outstanding customer service.
Beyond quality cavalry merchandise, the site provides a taste of cavalry history, traditions, and equipment. The site also provides current photos, news, and resources on the cavalry troopers both deployed and garrisoned. The site features a blog spot for cavalry troopers to communicate on all sorts of subjects. The site not only features items, blogs, and resources for the troopers, but also for cavalry trooper’s family members.

The site excels because it is done by and for a real cavalry trooper, Dan Carbone. Dan is an active-duty soldier of nearly 18 years. His father and grandfather were also service-members. He has had the privilege of serving in 3-4 Cavalry and 1-4 Cavalry, as well as 2-17 Cavalry as a Banshee Troop Scout Pilot. Dan has served in Korea, Germany, Bosnia, Iraq, and Afghanistan, as well as a few stateside assignments to include Fort Campbell, KY. Dan and his family recently relocated to Fort Rucker, the home of Army Aviation, where he served as an instructor pilot, teaching the tactics, techniques, and procedures of the Air Cavalry Squadrons. Dan clearly loves his job, and is proud to be a Cavalry Trooper and USCA member. Dan is a proud father of four boys, and ably assisted by his awesome wife of 17 years, Wendy. Wendy has not only served as an Army Family Readiness Group Leader for Dan’s unit, but she also organized a “Kid’s Spur Ride” for the children of deployed soldiers. Here is a link to the news article: [http://www.cavhoohah.com/info/cavalry-traditions/spurs/kids-spur-ride/](http://www.cavhoohah.com/info/cavalry-traditions/spurs/kids-spur-ride/).

This site is highly recommended, for cavalry troopers, their families, and the interested civilian, veteran, and military enthusiasts, there is something for everyone.

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A Notice to our Readers

Dues time is here again. So please help the Association by remembering to send in your dues in a timely manner. Due to the current economic climate, we have to enforce a policy of suspending subscriptions if dues are not received. This will be the last copy sent out to non-due paying members. If your dues have been paid, The Cavalry Journal will arrive normally.
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