

Dragoon Springs

Some of you may be surprised to know that for a rather short period of time Arizona was a Confederate Territory and provided troops to the Confederate States Army (CSA). Briefly it happened this way: On July 27, 1861, Colonel John R. Baylor in command of the Second Texas Rifles defeated the Union forces at the Battle of Mesilla and declared that Arizona was a Confederate Territory. Baylor proclaimed himself the governor of the Arizona Confederate Territory, which was then in existence until mid-1862 when the territory was recaptured by the federal forces under the California Column.

Captain Sherod Hunter was appointed by Governor Baylor to be the captain of the first company to be formed. They were known as Company A, Baylor's Regiment of Arizona Rangers, and were assigned to act as a defense force in the Tucson area. On May 5, 1862, a small Company A detachment of unknown size, under the command of Sergeant Samuel Ford, was sent to the abandoned Butterfield Overland Stagecoach Station at Dragoon Springs, located about 16 miles east of present-day Benson, Arizona. Their task was to round up stray cattle in the area and bring them back to Tucson. When they entered a narrow box canyon where the springs are located, the party was ambushed by a large band of Apache warriors, numbering as many as 100 men and commanded by the great war chiefs, Francisco and Cochise. Most of the detachment managed to escape, but they left behind four dead comrades. They also lost 25 horses and 30 mules. The number of Confederate wounded and Apache dead and wounded is unknown. The four men that were killed are noted for being the most westerly Confederate battle deaths of the war, and the only such to occur within the confines of what is today modern Arizona.

Captain Hunter ordered another detachment of unknown size to return to the area of Dragoon Springs and to recapture the lost livestock and exact some measure of revenge for the death of their comrades. On May 9, 1862, the soldiers encountered an unknown number of Apaches, and the Second Battle of Dragoon Springs was far more successful. They killed five Apaches, wounded an unknown number, and they recovered their livestock. The Confederates suffered no casualties and they were able to bury their dead from the first battle. All four of the dead are buried in distinct, but unmarked, graves near the remains of the old stage stop. The known dead are Sgt. Samuel Ford and Private Richardo, a Hispanic youth with an unknown last name. One of the graves is probably that of John Donaldson based on an obituary in the Tucson newspaper at the time. The fourth grave is of an unknown soldier. It is also unknown today as to who is buried in which grave as all markings, if any, no longer exist.

The two battles at Dragoon Springs are not as well-known as the Battle at Picacho Pass which occurred on April 15, 1862, and resulted in a

Confederate victory. This battle is known as the western most battle of the Civil War. The remains of the two Union privates buried at Picacho were later removed to the Presidio in San Francisco, but Lieutenant Barrett's grave, near the present railroad tracks, remains unmarked and undisturbed. Union reports indicate two Confederates may have been wounded, but there is no confirmation of this. A reenactment is performed at the battle site in March of every year.

The remains of the stage station are preserved and, along with the four graves, can be viewed. To get there take exit 316, Dragoon Road, off of I-10 between Wilcox and Benson, Arizona. Follow this road until you reach the town of Dragoon and cross over the railroad tracks. Immediately after crossing the tracks Dragoon Road curves to the left, but you will turn right off the paved road onto a dirt road. Follow the dirt road around the northern edge of the Dragoon Mountains. After several miles you will see some Forest Service signs that will direct you to the site of the "Butterfield Overland Mail Stage Station." The road is primitive and rough in places but the family sedan can make it. You will need to walk over a bit of rough terrain for maybe 100 yards to find the graves and the remains of the old stage station.



Confederate Graves at Dragoon Springs



On May 5, 1862, a Confederate foraging party rounding up cattle near the abandoned Butterfield Overland Mail Station battled a group of Apaches. The soldiers were members of Company A, Governor John R. Baylor's Regiment of Arizona Rangers, under the command of Captain Sherod Hunter. Captain Hunter's command was based at Tucson and engaged in operations against Union forces from California. Four of Hunter's men were killed, and the Apaches took 25 horses and 30 mules. It is unknown whether any of the Apaches were slain.

From the Apache point of view, the Confederate party represented yet another unwelcome threat to the security of their homeland. The Chokonen band of the Chiricahua Apache, including the famous leader Cochise, was then living in the Dragoon Mountains and the nearby Dos Cabezas, Chiricahua, and Peloncillo Mountains. Relationships with the United States, already uneasy, became

markedly hostile in 1861 after a young U.S. Army officer, Lt. Bascom, falsely accused Cochise's group of kidnapping a child from a Sonoita Valley ranch. By 1862, the Apaches viewed any soldiers, whether Union or Confederate, as enemy invaders. Two months after the Confederates were killed near Dragoon Springs, the Apaches would do battle with Union forces at Apache Pass in the Chiricahua Mountains.

The fallen Confederates of the 1862 skirmish were hastily buried a few yards from the stone walls of the recently abandoned Butterfield Overland Mail Station. Two of the graves are marked—Sergeant Samuel Ford and Richardo, a Hispanic cattle drover. There are no markers on the other two burial mounds, but one probably holds the remains of Captain John Donaldson. The fourth burial remains unknown. These soldiers are the only Confederates known to have been killed in battle within the boundaries of modern-day Arizona.



The First National Confederate Flag, or Stars and Bars, which flew over the Arizona Territory.

This historic site is maintained by the Arizona Division, Sons of Confederate Veterans.

Coronado  National Forest

