

The Path to Cahuenga

Native American Participation in the Conquest of California

The 26-star US flag could not be displayed in Mexican territory. So Jessie Fremont designed and made this variation.

The flag incorporated the stripes of the national flag, with an eagle holding a peace pipe in its talons.

The original flag is archived at the Autry Museum of the American West.



Source: Autry Museum of the American West

The Path to Cahuenga - Background

- The “Naval Battalion of Mounted Volunteer Riflemen,” or California Battalion, led by Lieutenant-Colonel John C. Fremont, arrived at Mission San Fernando on January 11, 1847.
- The California Battalion accepted the surrender of the last Mexican Army, in what is now the United States, at Campo de Cahuenga, on January 13, 1847.

The Battalion – Origins

- Fremont, a United States Army officer, led five important scientific expeditions to what is now the western United States (1842-1854).
- On August 16, 1845, Fremont's 3rd Expedition (3X), of +60 "Topographical Engineers" and escorts, left what is now Kansas City for California. Fremont and an advanced detachment arrived at New Helvetia (Sacramento) on December 10th, 1845.
- On July 5, 1846, following the "Bear Flag revolt," at Sonoma, the 3X began its transformation into the California Battalion.

The Battalion - Native Americans

- At full strength, in November 1846, the California Battalion (CB) was comprised of about 425 men.
- The 3X was mostly Anglo-American and French-Canadian, as was the CB. Several African-Americans also served with the CB.
- At least 60 Native Americans served with the 3X and/or the CB. These included Metis, Delaware, Chinook, Miwok, Walla Walla, Yokuts, Ohlone, and Chumash Indians.
- Company H (Scouts) was almost entirely Indian.

Native American Contributions

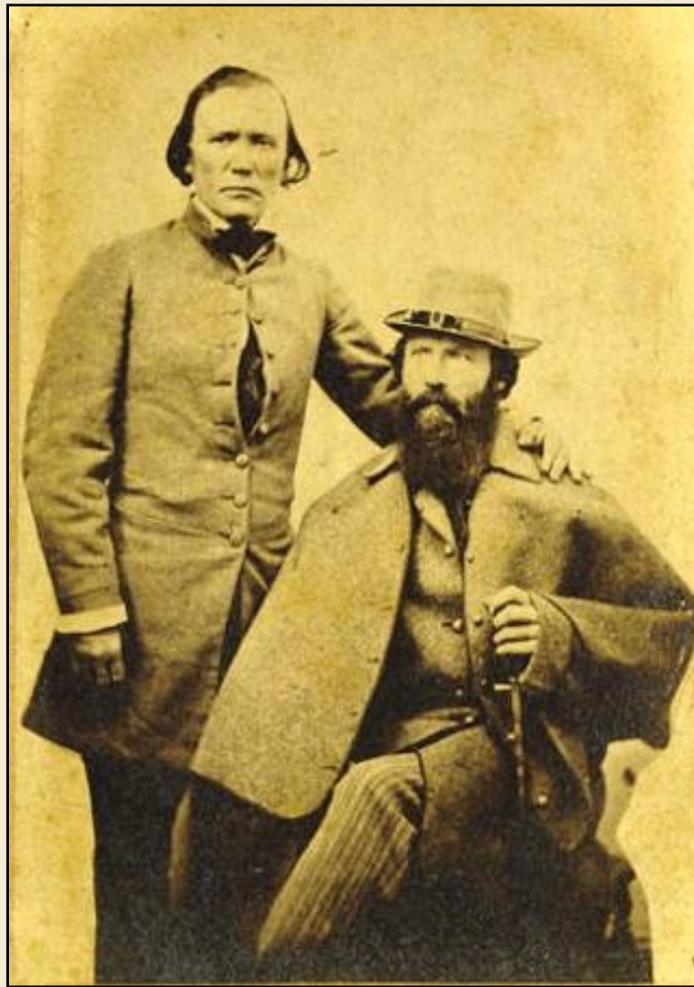
- The Native Americans were deployed mainly as “scouts and spies,” guides, hunters, muleteers, and vaqueros. But they fought when it was required.
- Six Walla Walla and two Delaware fought at the Battle of Natividad, near Salinas. Tom Hill, a Delaware-Walla Walla, distinguished himself, and was promoted from scout to trooper (\$10 a month vs. \$25 a month!).
- Natividad was the CB’s only fight on its own. Only 2 of 8 companies were present at Natividad; the entire Battalion never fought a battle. About a dozen men, from both sides, were killed or wounded.

This presentation focuses on
the Native Americans that
participated in
the 3rd Expedition and
the California Battalion

But there were many
other interesting people
participating

The most famous was
undoubtedly Kit Carson

Carson and Fremont,
later in life



The United States to-be
in "The Year of
Decision" 1846

Note THREE
western territories:

Greater Texas

The southern 1/2 of the
Oregon Territory

The Department of
California;
and New Mexico



STANDARD ATLAS OF THE WORLD

XXIX

Early photo of American soldiers in Mexico

There are no known photographs of the Mexican-American War in California

The story will be told here using a variety of photos and paintings



Idealized painting of
John C. Fremont
supervising the signing of
the Articles of Capitulation

Note this depiction shows
the American's in new/clean
uniforms

And WHERE IS
EVERYONE?

The place should be
crowded with troops
and on-lookers!



The California Battalion
on the move
in Central California

Kit Carson and Delaware
scouts out in front

Fremont and BOTH
American flags
close behind

Cavalry troops
following the Colors

Note NO wagons –
we are WAY out west



The Indians came from at least 8 different tribes

They are presented here in the order that Fremont encountered them

Fremont worked with French-Canadians and METIS from the 1st Expedition in 1842

Here we see “The Trapper's Bride” - An idealized image of the union of French and Native American people



METIS man with two
wives 1825-26

This is a generation
before the Mexican-
American War



Metis family, and carts western North Dakota 1883,
Two generations after the Mexican-American War -
Today the Metis are a legally recognized ethnic group
in Canada



A dozen or more
DELAWARE men served
with Fremont beginning with
the 1st Expedition

This is Chief Sagundai,
who served with the 2X
The 3X and the CB

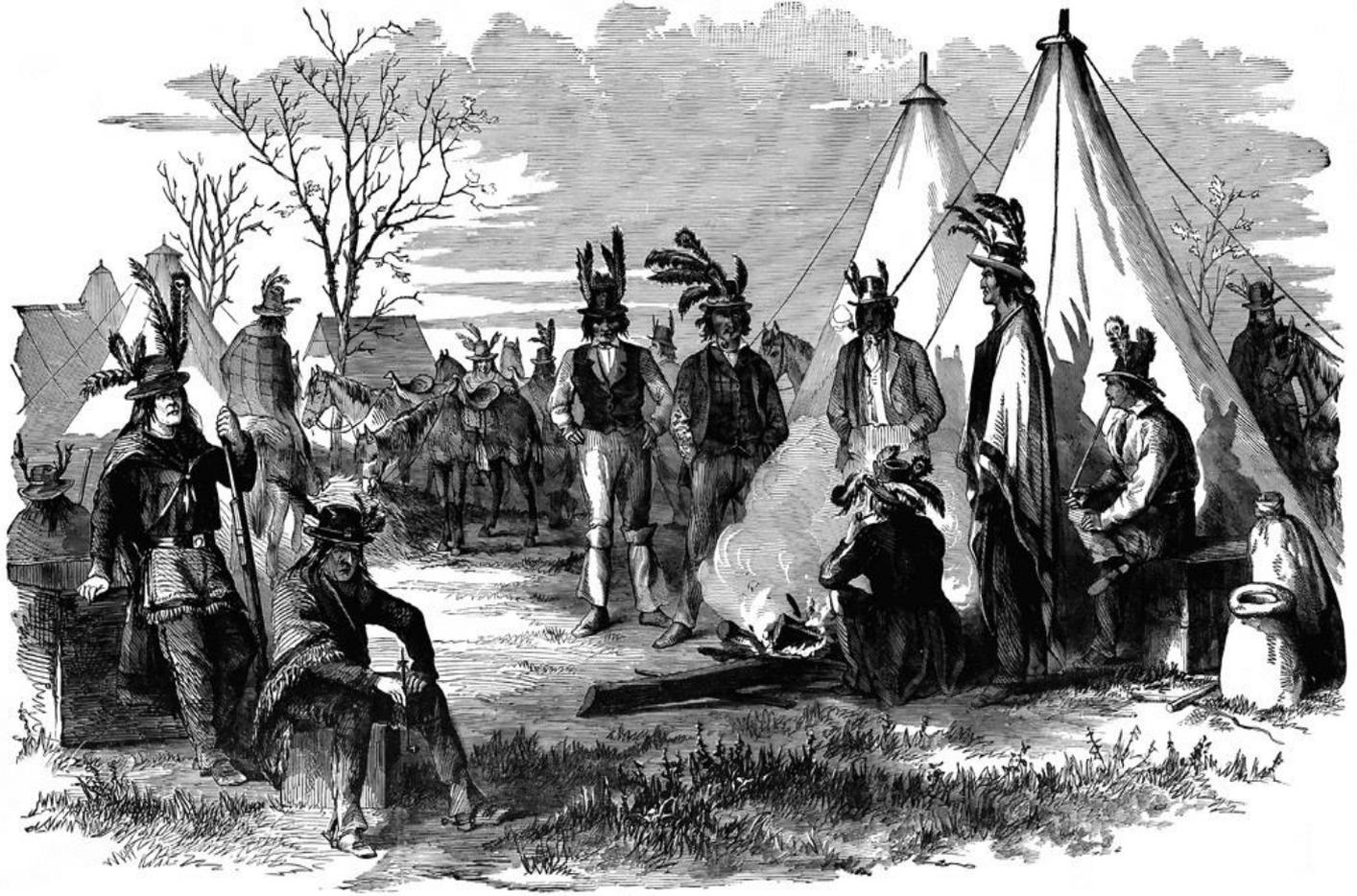
The Delaware were
Fremont's personal
bodyguards

Sagundai and the rest of the
Delaware were at Cahuenga



An image of
Fremont's
Union Army
DELAWARE
Scouts
about 1862

Although this is
later in time, it gives
an idea of what the
Delaware may have
looked like during
the Mexican-
American War



CHINOOK Indians
from Columbia River
region

19-year old William
Chinook joined the
2X in 1845 and later
served with the 3X
and CB

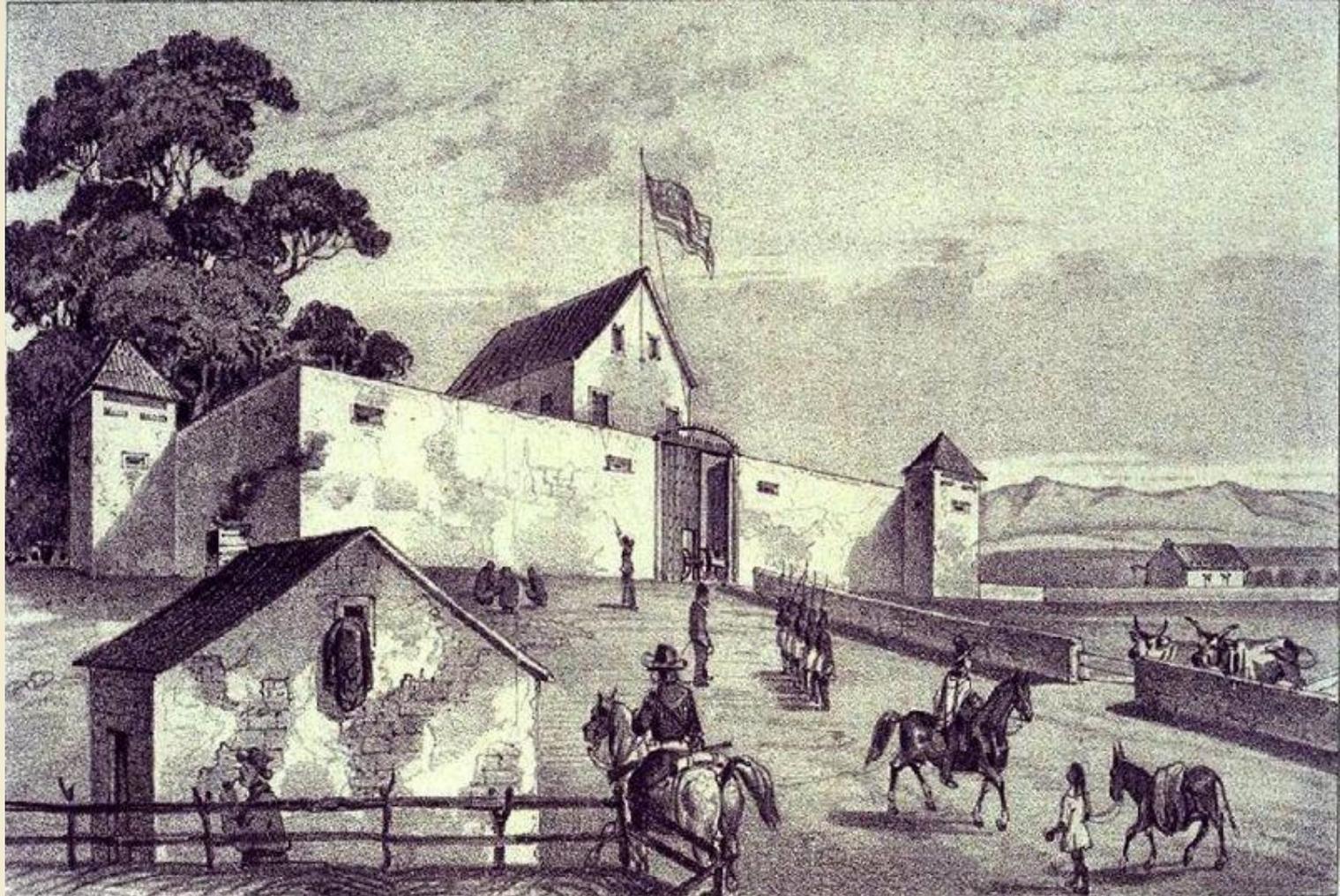


Both the 2X and 3X
visited New Helvetia
(Sacramento)

New Helvetia was
founded by the
Swiss-German
John Sutter and a
dozen Kanakas
(Hawaiians)

His laborers were
mostly MIWOK

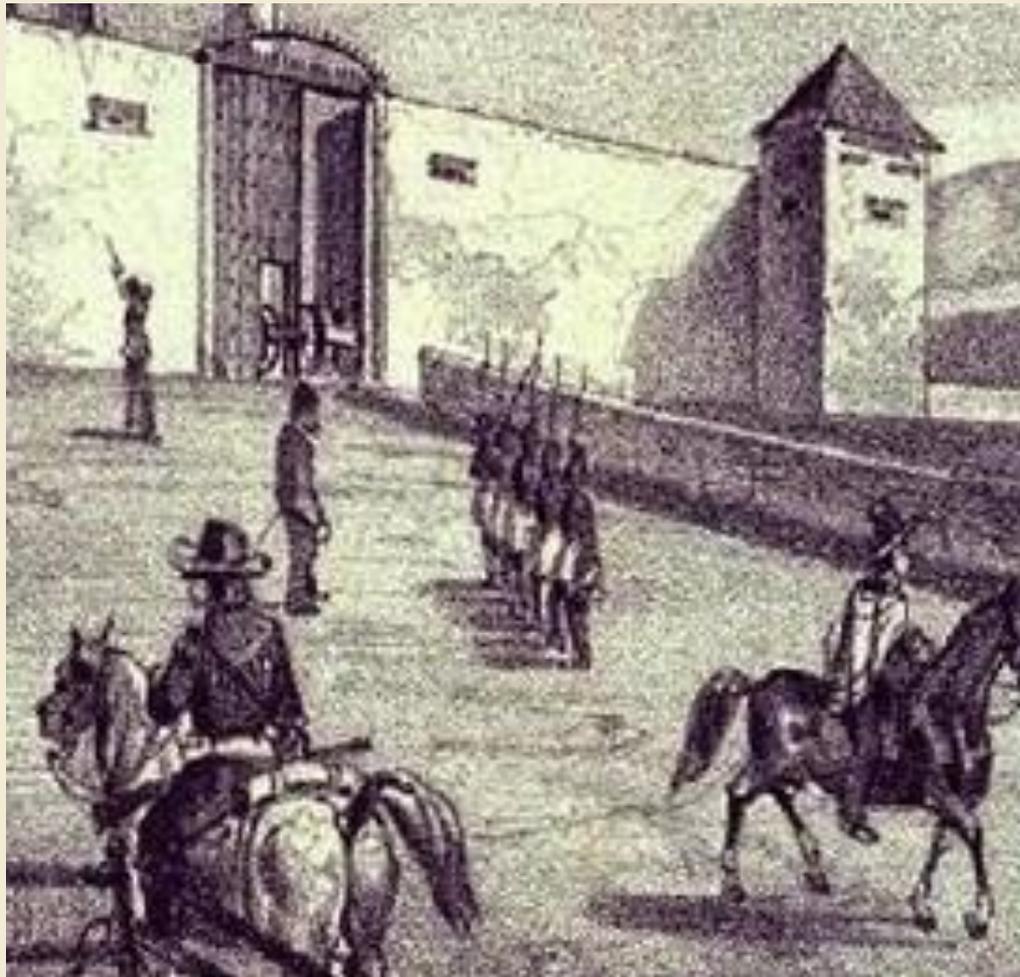
Note MIWOK soldiers
at lower right



Detail of MIWOK
soldiers at
New Helvetia
ca. 1845

When the Russians
left Fort Ross, they
sold their equipment
to Sutter

Including about 20
Imperial Russian
Army uniforms,
which Sutter soldiers
wore on formal
occasions



Contemporary MIWOK
dancer from the
Western Sierra Nevada
foothills

Although many Miwok
worked for Sutter many
were still independent,
in the
Sierra Nevada
foothills, where they
continue to live today



Early in 1846 the Mexican
authorities ordered the 3X
to get out of California,
con pronto -

So they rode north,
to Klamath Lake, Oregon

Here, on May 10, 1846,
United States

Marine Lieutenant
Archibald Gillespie
caught up with Fremont

War with Mexico was
expected at any time –
The 3X had to return to
California



That night Klamath
(or maybe Modoc) Indians
attacked and killed
Denny, a Metis,
Basil Lejeunesse,
a French-Canadian,
and Crane, a Delaware

Fremont named the place
Denny's Creek

After taking revenge and
several scalps,
the 3X returned to
northern California



Where, the Mexican-American War was about to begin

The ORANGE areas were about to be acquired by the United States

A BIG area was about to be conquered by about 1000 Americans

Note Fremont in the north, Kearny on the south, and the US Navy on the coast



- Disputed territory
- Ceded by Mexico in 1848
- ★ American victory
- American forces
- ★ Mexican victory
- Mexican forces
- ▲▲▲ U.S. naval blockade

- Indian Cultures, c. 1500
- Thirteen Colonies
- French & Indian War
- U.S. Territorial Expansion
- War of 1812
- Texas Revolution
- Mexican War
- United States in 1860
- Indian Wars
- Slave Trade into the U.S.
- African-American Population
- Hispanic-American Population
- U.S. Immigration

So, what happened?

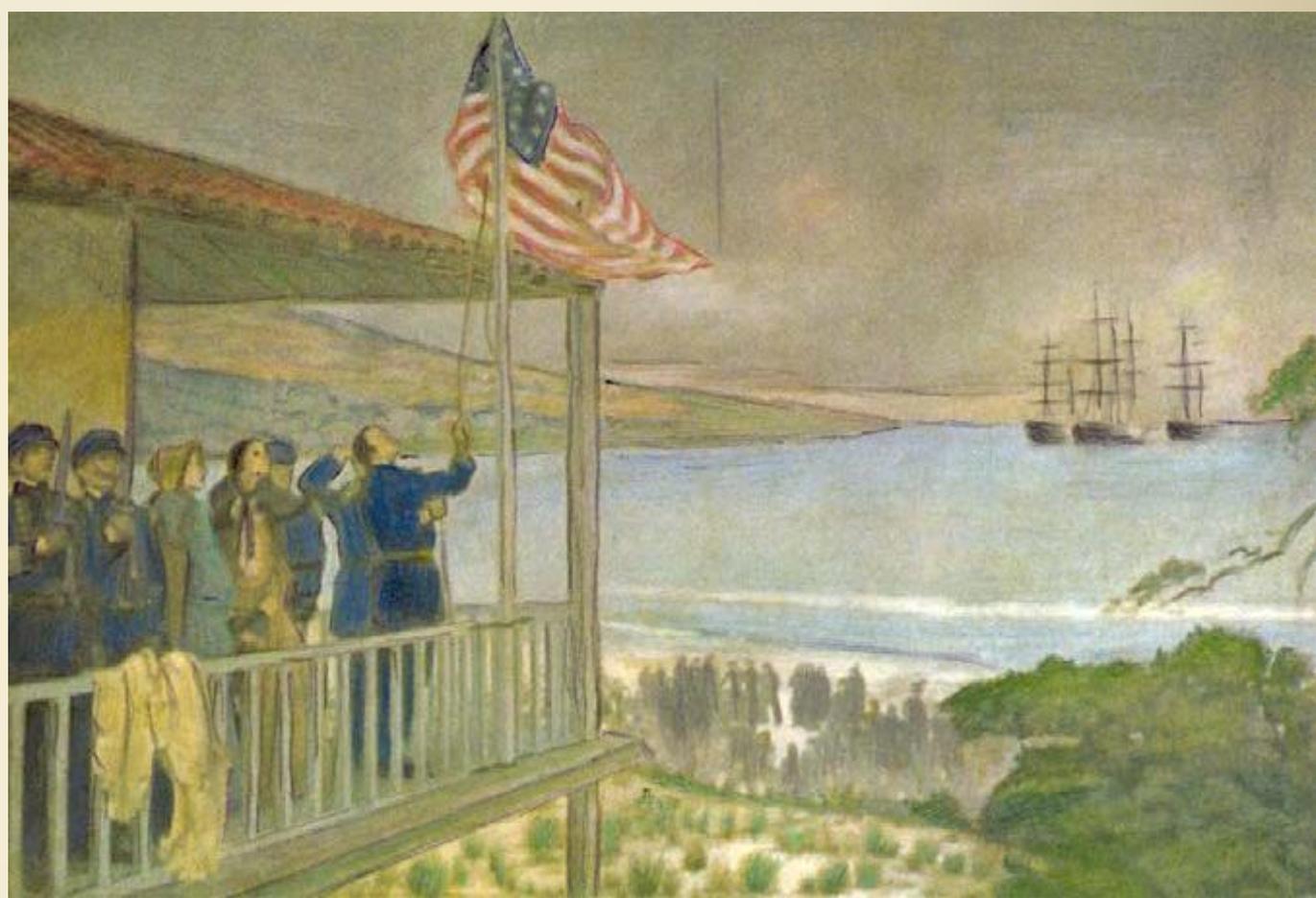
- The 3X arrived in northern California- Mexican territory- at a time that 100s of illegal American settlers were moving into the Sacramento Valley. General Castro, the Mexican commander, fed up, ordered the illegal settlers out, now.
- But now, with the 3X at hand, the Osos (Bears- the settlers) took matters into their own hands. So, on June 14, 1846, some 40 Osos boldly took over the town of Sonoma, seized the munitions stored there, and declared the California Republic.
- Sadly, in late June, Mexicans captured and murdered 2 Osos.
- Badly, Kit Carson and other Americans then shot-dead 3 Mexicans.
- War had come to California AND NO ONE IN CALIFORNIA KNEW IF THE UNITED STATES AND MEXICO WERE ACTUALLY AT WAR.

And then, on July 7, 1846,
Commodore Sloat and the
Pacific Squadron arrived,
and the US Marines
occupied Monterey

Sloat thought that Fremont
was SURE that the US
and Mexico were at war

But NO, Fremont had
acted on his own authority!

Sloat, in a huff, appointed
Commodore Stockton as
senior officer, and set sail
for home.



The 3rd Expedition becomes the California Battalion

- After Sloat arrived, Fremont linked up and from now on probably displayed both flags.
- After Sloat left, Commodore Stockton authorized the “Naval Battalion of Mounted Volunteer Riflemen.” AKA the California Battalion.
- Now that the CB was ready to ride, Stockton decided that the CB would make an amphibious landing (sans horses) in San Diego (! The military). And then it would ride north. It worked! Outflanked, what little Mexican Army there was dissolved, and on August 13, 1846, Stockton and Fremont’s forces jointly occupied Los Angeles.
- On August 14th, the Mexicans surrendered. The War in California was over!

Not.

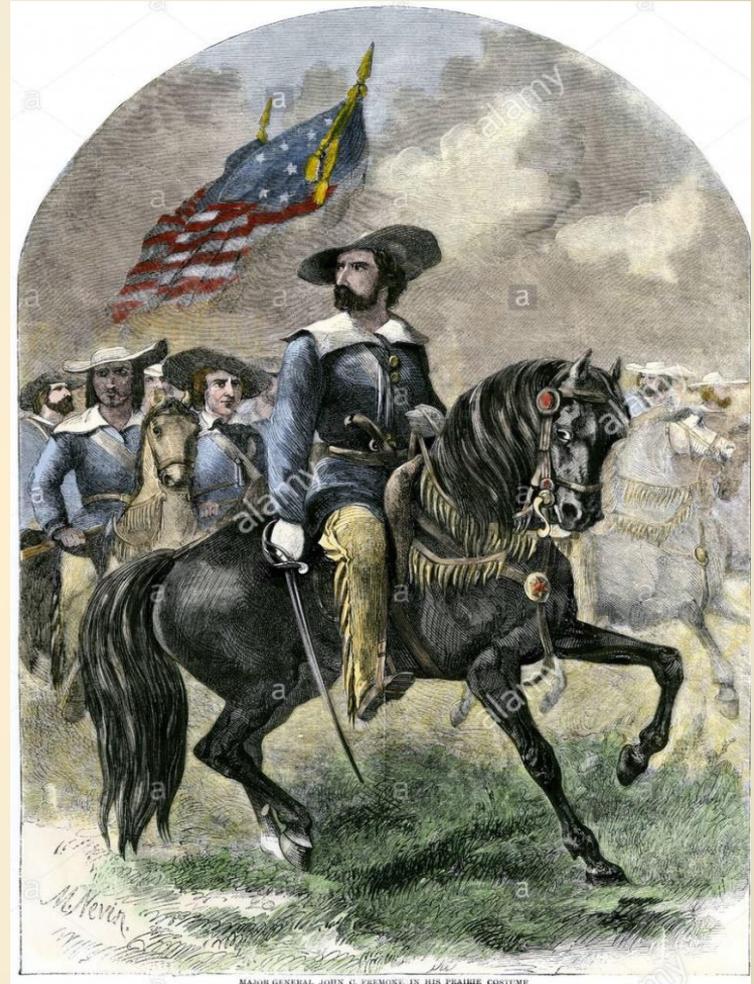
The American occupation forces were disrespectful and on September 23, 1846, the Mexicans in southern California revolted

The CB, now back in central California, would have to ride south after all

By now, the CB had semi-distinct uniforms: a blue Navy blouse, jean or buckskin trousers and Mexican wide-brimmed hats

Boots were hard to come by, so most of the men wore moccasins

Note Indian at left



MAJOR GENERAL JOHN C. FREMONT, IN HIS FRAIRIE COSTUME

About the time the CB was ready to ride,
word arrived that 1000 WALLA WALLA warriors
were about to descend on Sacramento
and kill everyone,
so the CB and the Navy rode (or sailed)
to the rescue

In fact, it was only friendly old Chief Piopiomoxmox
and 40 of his men, with their families, come to trade

And they were willing to work for wages –
So a dozen or so of the Walla Walla
signed up with the CB



Stand-ins for the
WALLA WALLA

Plains Indians
parade in the
City of Walla Walla
1914

This is what the
settler's thought
was coming at
them – the
Walla Wall
did have a
reputation as
kick-asses

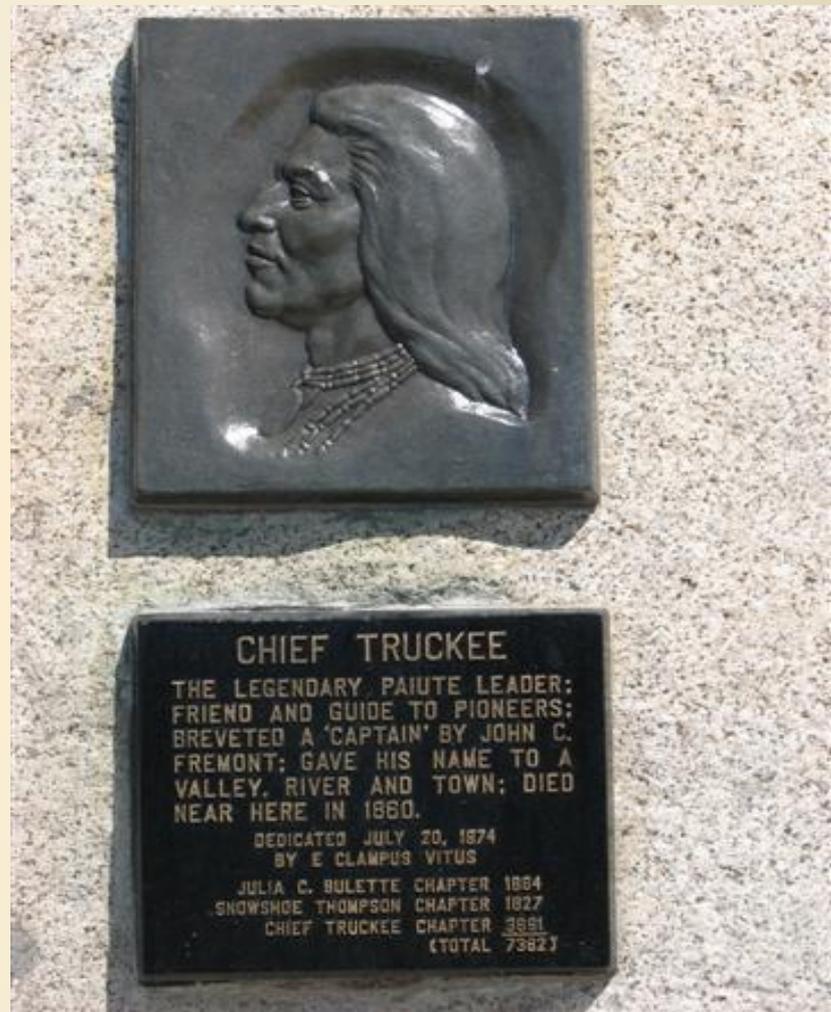


And now, numerous California
Indians were added to the
CB and to the northern garrisons

Including PAIUTES

This figure shows one of the few
acknowledgements of the
California Indian participation in the
United State military in California

The Chief Truckee
plaque in
Truckee, Nevada



At least 40
California Indians
also joined the CB

20 of these men had
Spanish names – they
probably belonged to
missionized tribes
from around San
Francisco Bay

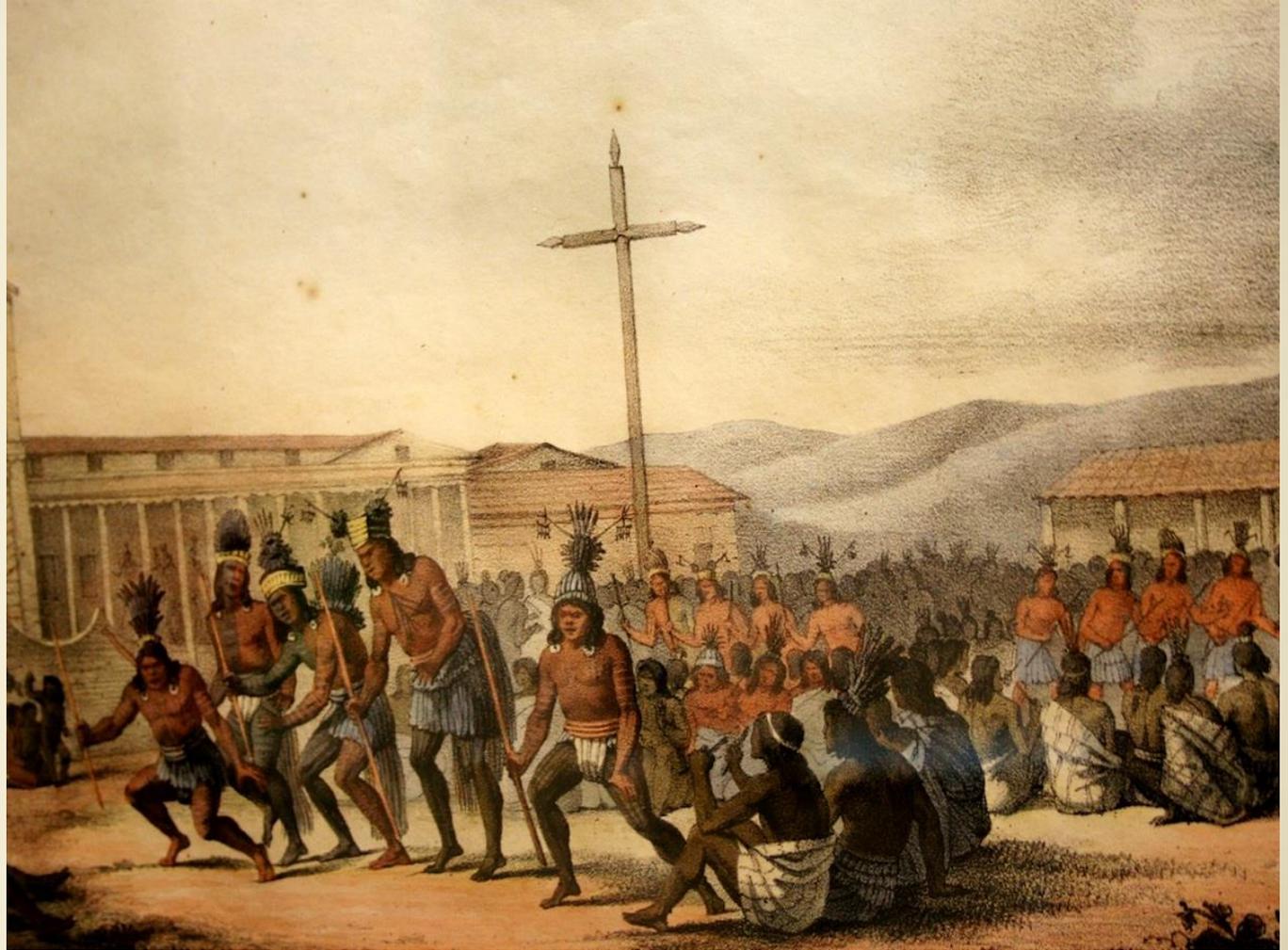
Here we see OHLONE
ceremonial dancers at
Mission San Jose in
1816



The Ohlone people performing a ceremonial dance
at Mission San Jose, by José Cardero (1816).

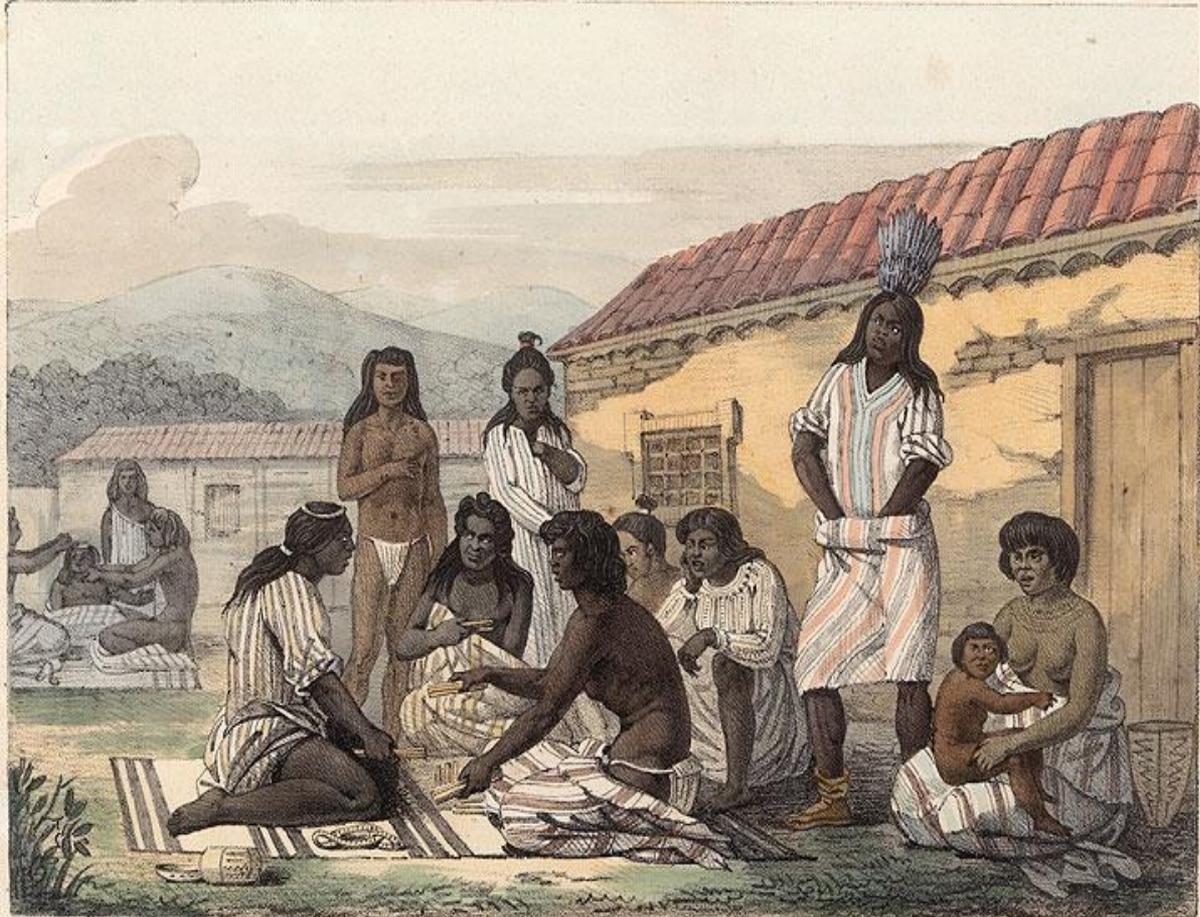
Another painting of
Mission Indians -

Here OHLONE
dancers at
Mission
San Francisco
in 1816



After secularization many of these Indians returned or moved to the Sierra Nevada foothills and became "Horsethief Indians," who raided the coastal pueblos and ranchos

The CB Company H included over 30 of these people



par Roblin d'après Chouss

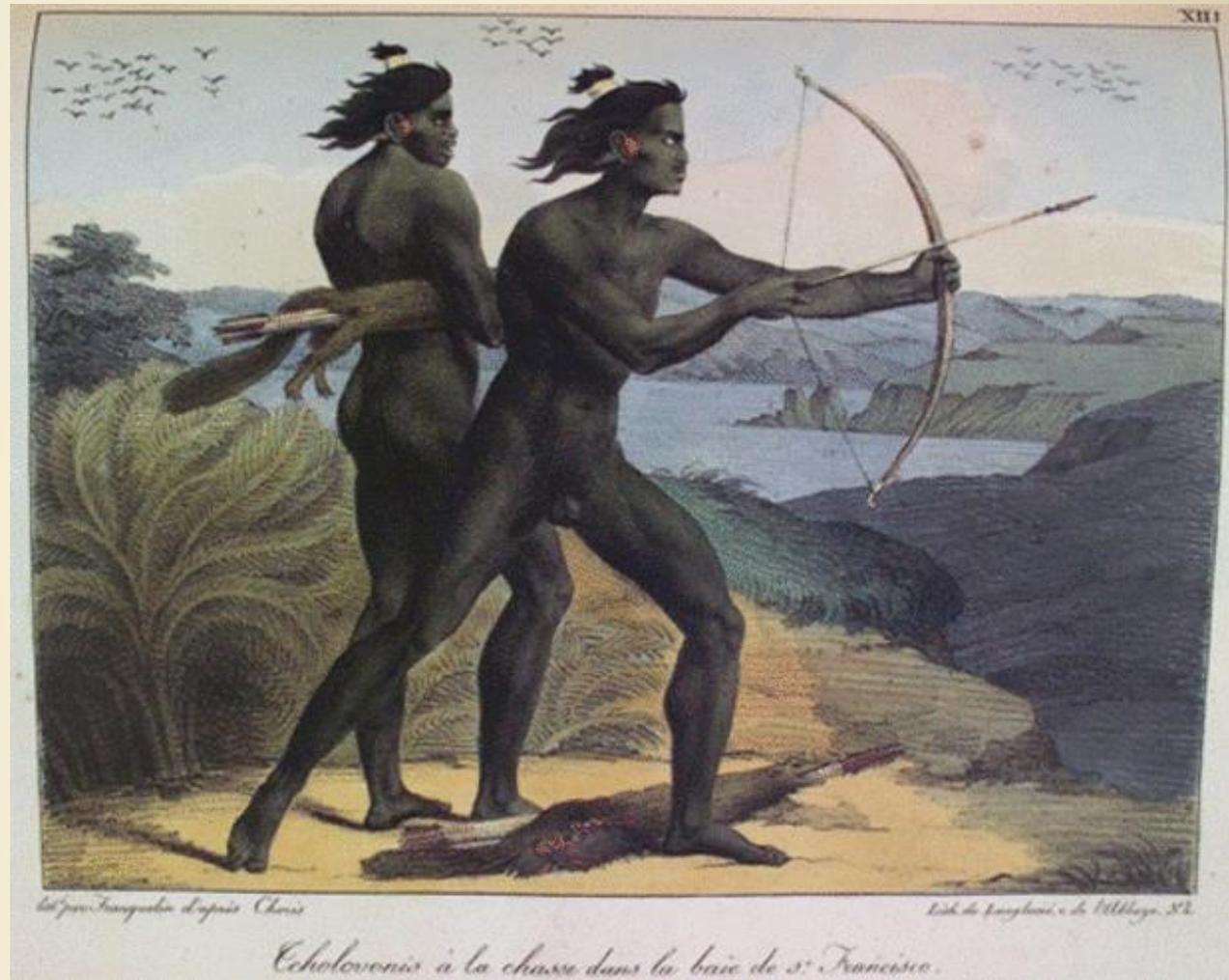
Lith. de Langlumé, s. de l'Albany 84

Les Habitans de Californie.

YOKUTS people also served in the CB

These are CHULAMNI YOKUTS in 1816, near San Francisco Bay

Note: all the best depictions of California Indians are by Russian or French artists



Finally, late in November 1846,
the +400- man CB moved out of
San Juan Batista

One person that saw them
wrote,
“A vast cloud of dust appeared
first, and thence in a long file
emerged this wildest wild party”

A US Chaplain wrote that they
were: “all well mounted – the
ground seemed to tremble
under their heavy tramp – their
untrimmed locks and their black
beards, with white teeth
glittering through, gave them a
wild savage aspect”

Would you mess with
these guys?



In San Diego, things were not going so well.

On December 6, 1846, General Kearny and only +100 Dragoons , having advanced for some 2,000 miles, blundered into Andres Pico and the “Greyhounds” at Rancho San Pascual

It was a disaster-
Almost half of the command were killed or wounded

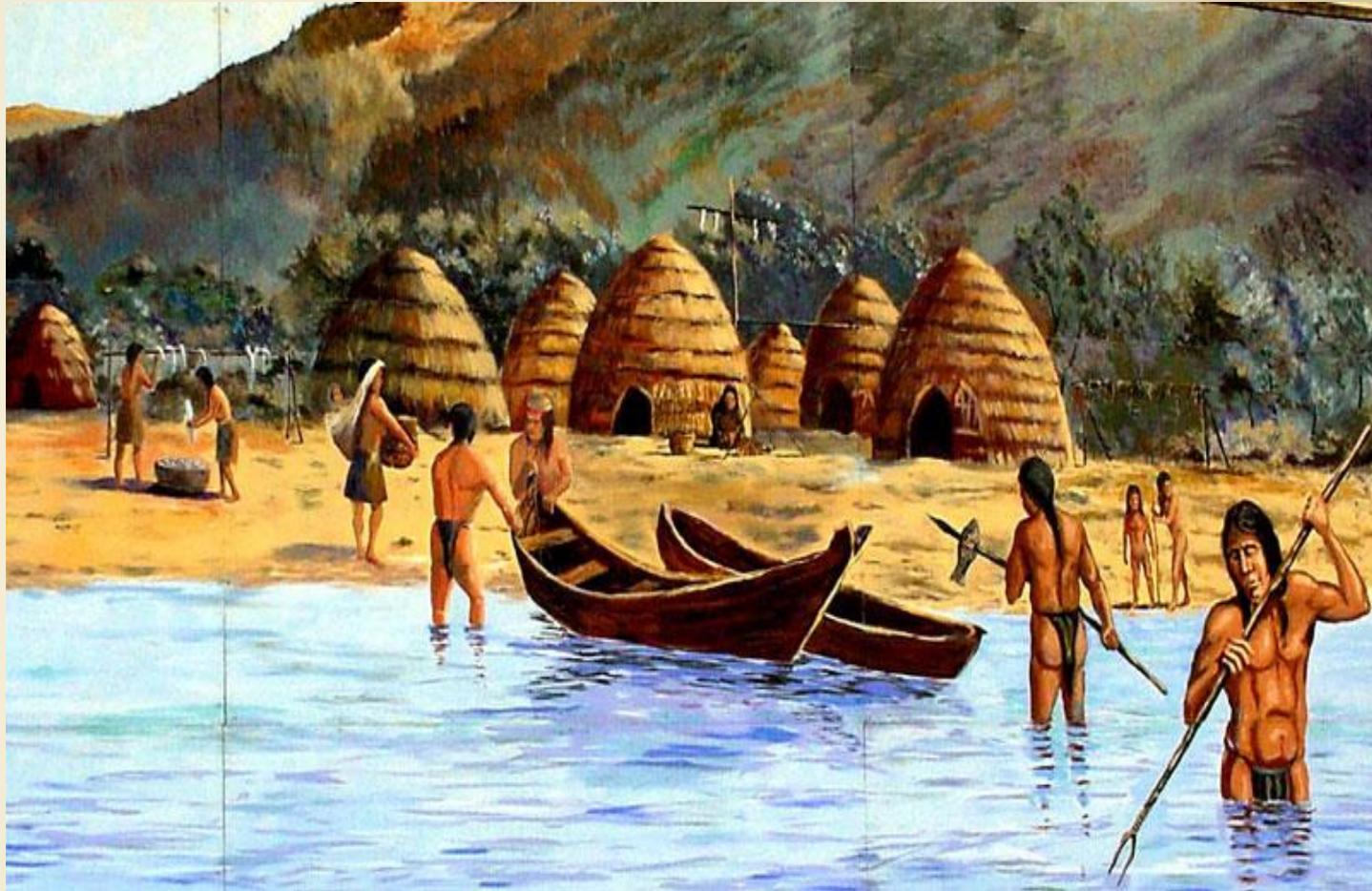
San Pascual was the most significant Mexican victory during the war



In the north, the CB continued to advance and several CHUMASH joined at Santa Ynez, on Dec 23, 1846

By Christmas Eve the CB had successfully reached the top of San Marcos Pass

Christmas Day was a disaster, as the CB was nearly wrecked by an intense storm, as it descended the Santa Ynez Mountains



The CB horses and mules were mostly dead, the equipment was mostly lost or abandoned, the powder was wet

But on December 27th the CB pulled itself together and rushed the Presidio

The 2-man Mexican garrison surrendered without a fight

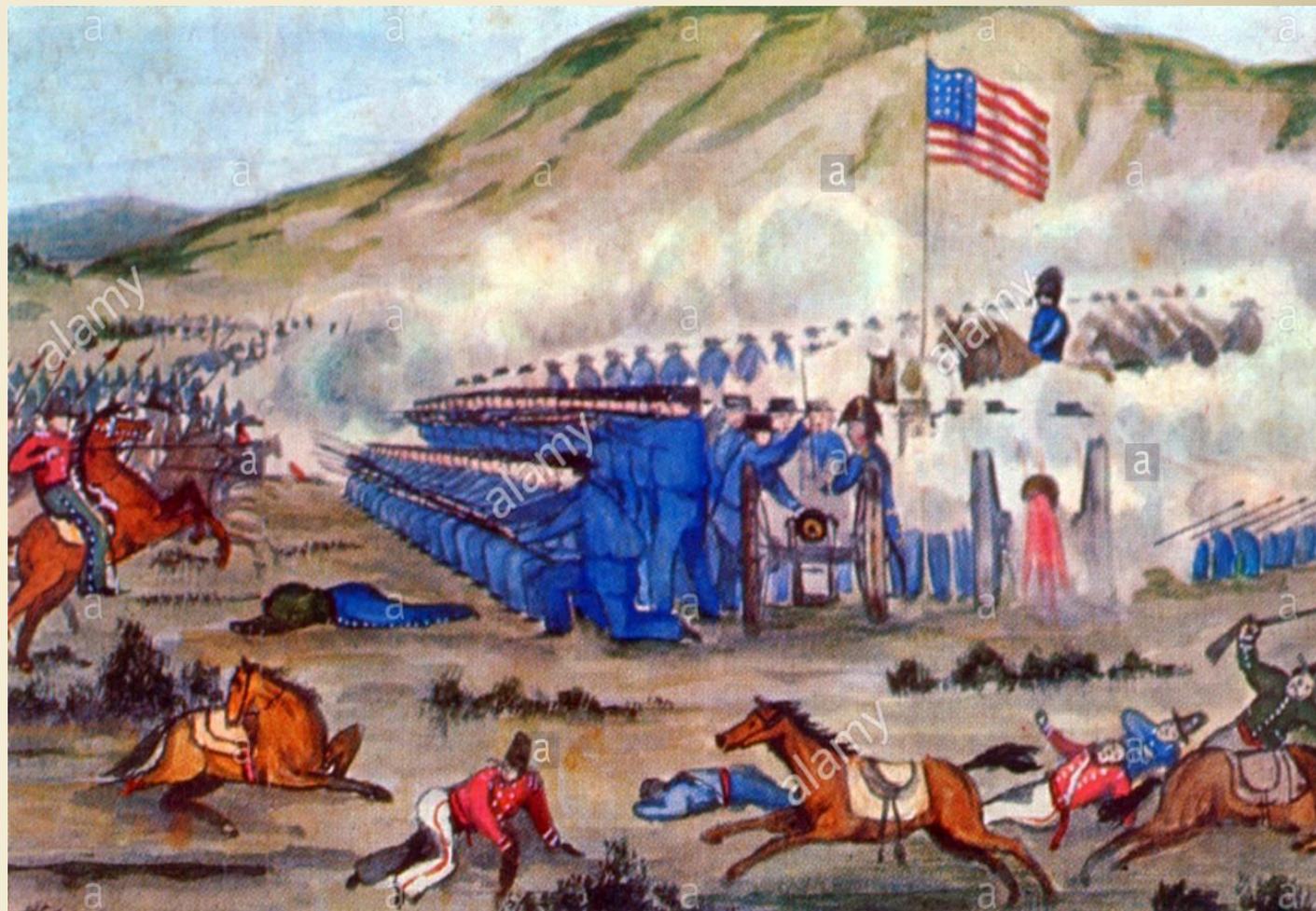
And then the sun came out –
So they spent a week recuperating



In the south, Stockton and the Navy reoccupied San Diego and Kearny and finally arrived - They combined forces and marched north

In early January 1847 The American force fought the Battle of the San Gabriel River and the Battle of La Mesa, south of Los Angeles

The Mexicans fought well but were forced to fall back, and on January 10, 1847, Los Angeles was occupied again

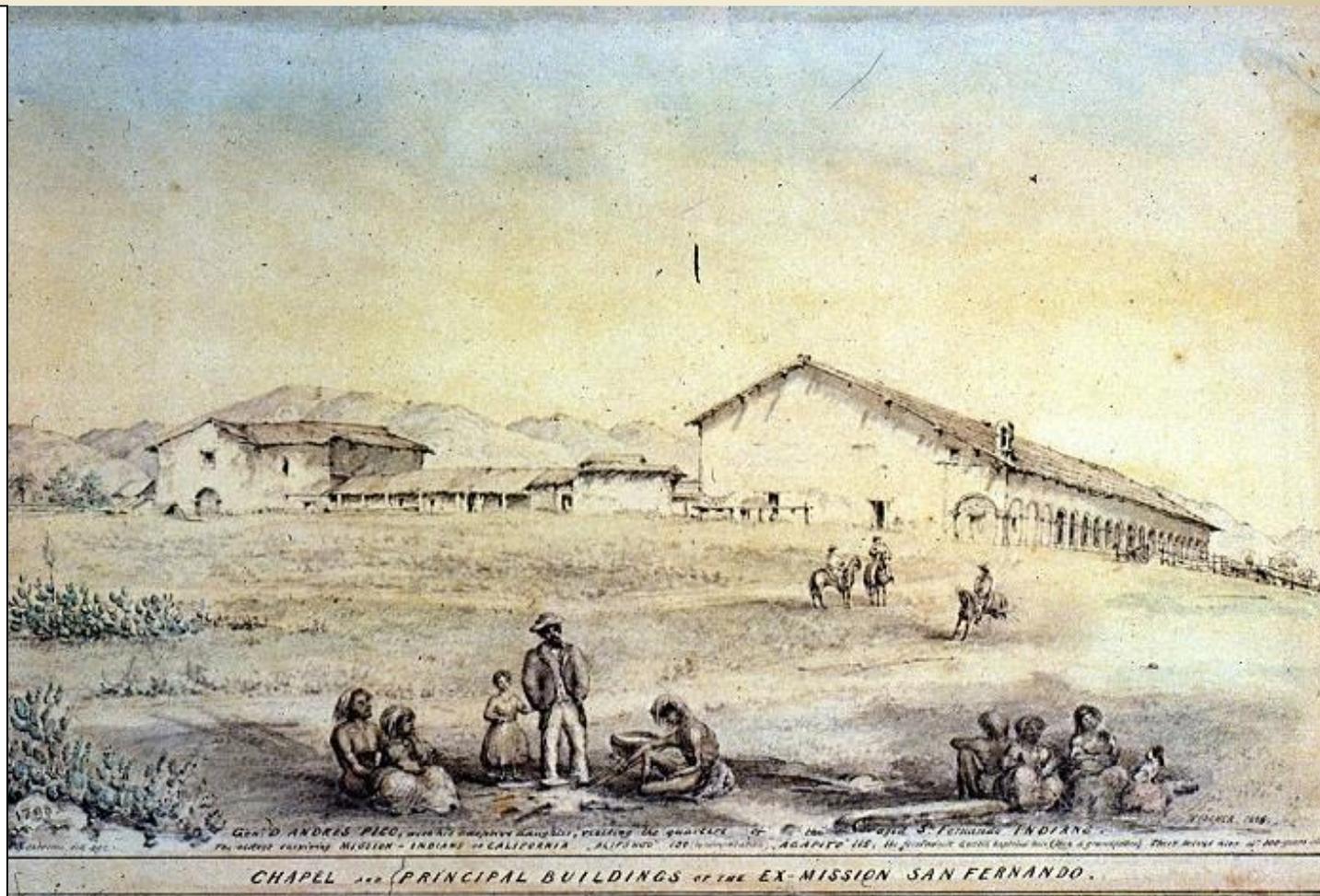


Fremont and the CB
were now in the Santa
Clara Valley and did not
know this

On January 11 the CB
occupied Mission
San Fernando;
2 emissaries
soon arrived
to sue for peace

Negotiations took place
on January 12 and both
sides agreed to meet at
Campo de Cahuenga,
the next day

Stockton and Kearny
were not informed



On January 13,
1847, the CB crossed
the San Fernando
Valley
and rode south
to Cahuenga
where the
Articles of
Capitulation were
signed

The historic record
shows that the CB
(say 400 men) was
there, as were 50-60
Mexican troops

So why aren't they
in the painting?



So the Mexicans preferred to surrender to the CB, who they had not had a battle with

Therefore, victorious, without having shed (much) blood, the CB entered Los Angeles in an intense rainstorm on January 14, 1847

'Riding with his beloved Delaware bodyguard in front of his 400 men, Fremont sat on his horse straight as a lath'



Peace had been made at
Cahuenga, in the
absence of those that
shed blood for the victory

The Cahuenga Adobe
in 1900

The original building was
demolished in the 1920's,
the area was built over,
and the original location
of the adobe was
forgotten



The City of Los Angeles built a new Campo de Cahuenga and created a small historic park in the 1950's

But no one knew where the original adobe building had been

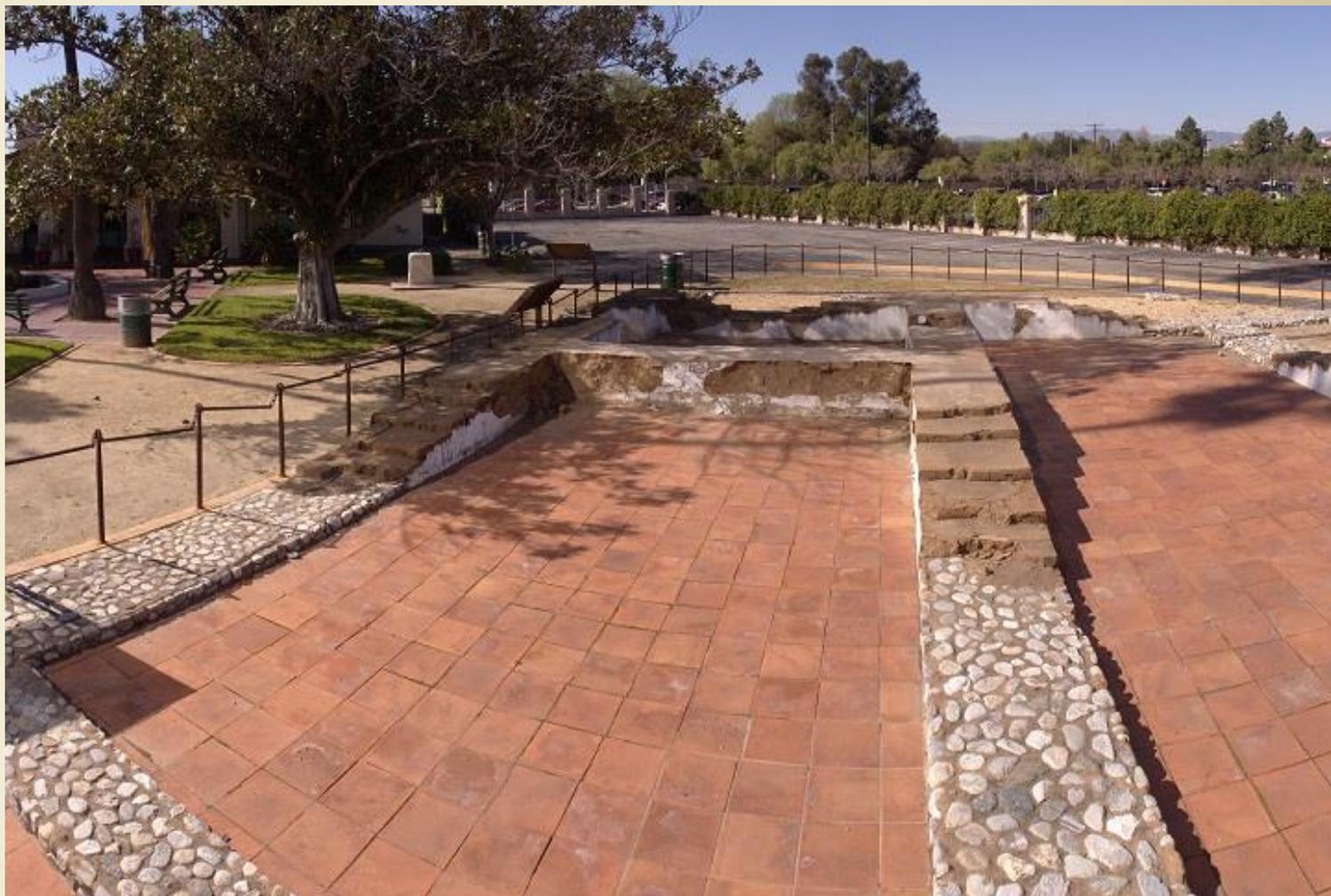
And the real story kind of got paved over too



The original adobe foundations were relocated in the park and under Lankershim Blvd. during construction of the Metro/Subway

The original story can be found too, hidden in bits and pieces in a dozen history books

But no book tells the whole story



On January 13, 1847, perhaps 500 people would have been crowded around the building whose footprint is preserved in Lankershim Blvd.

Many of the Mexicans that participated in the war in California were also Indian or part Indian

The presence and participation of Native Americans, on both sides in the Mexican-American War has been almost entirely forgotten

Which is a real shame!



Closing Notes

1. Kit Carson and about 40 members of the California Battalion were with the American force that occupied Los Angeles on January 10, 1847.
2. About 60 Native Americans served as part of or with the California Battalion. There were also other native California Indians that served with the American forces, at Fort Sacramento and other places in the north, Chief Truckee and his men, for example. Other Native American scouts served in southern California.
3. The Native American contribution to the United States armed forces, in the Mexican-American War, has never received official recognition.

This presentation is dedicated to the Native American men and women that have served, and who are serving, with the armed forces of the United States.

- Presentation prepared by Albert Knight and Ray Vincent February 2020.

Suggested Reading

1. John Charles Fremont – Memoirs of My Life. Cooper Square Press.
2. Spence and Jackson, editors – The Expeditions of John Charles Fremont, Volume 2.
3. Albert L. Hurtado – Indian Survival on the California Frontier. Pp. 72-85, Indians in the Service of Manifest Destiny. Yale University Press.
4. Neal Harlow – California Conquered, the Annexation of a Mexican Province. University of California Press.
5. Edwin Bryant – What I saw in California. University of Nebraska Press (Bryant was the 1st Lieutenant of Company H)