

Fighting at Apache Canyon and Glorieta Pass

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In late March of 1862 military activity was relatively light in the major Eastern and Western theatres of the war. In Virginia, Major General George McClellan was in the process of moving his Army of the Potomac from Alexandria to Fort Monroe in preparation for the Peninsula campaign. At Lincoln's insistence, McClellan was ordered to leave a portion of his command to protect Washington from any offensive by the Confederacy. Elsewhere, in the east the Shenandoah Valley Campaign was just commencing, with Confederate General Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson retreating southward to avoid direct confrontation with a much larger Union army.

The major fighting during this period occurred in the far west in the New Mexico Territory. This included two engagements, the first being at Apache Canyon and the second at Glorieta Pass, which were part of a Confederate attempt by Brigadier General Henry Hopkins Sibley to gain control over New Mexico. In the aftermath of the February 21 victory at Val Verde, Sibley divided his army with plans to move against the last major northern position in the territory, Fort Union. On March 26, a small southern force under Major Charles Pyron was surprised by a superior northern detachment and a significant percentage of his men were captured. Following the battle's conclusion, Union forces fell back to Pigeon's Ranch near Glorieta. Among those present at this battle was Major John M. Chivington, a controversial figure who would lead the brutal assault against the Cheyenne at the Sand Creek Massacre two years later.

The second engagement in New Mexico took place two days later at Glorieta Pass. Following the fighting at Apache Canyon, Pyron's Confederates were reinforced by about 800 men under Lieutenant Colonel William Scurry. On March 28, the Confederates advanced towards Glorieta Pass, where they met a Federal force commanded by Colonel John P. Slough. The Confederates gained the initiative and forced the Yankee force of regulars and Colorado volunteers to slowly fall back. A Confederate victory seemed likely, until Colonel Scurry heard that disaster had struck his supply wagons parked at Johnson's Ranch in his rear.

While the fight raged, Major Chivington had led about 400 Federals over the mountains and taken the Confederates at Johnson's Ranch completely by surprise. Chivington's men quickly captured or drove off the small Confederate guard placed there. He then ordered the wagons burned and the horses and mules slaughtered. This event completely reversed the outcome of the battle. The Confederates now had no supplies to press their advantage, and Scurry ordered a retreat. The Confederate army had suffered casualties of 36 killed, 70 wounded, and 25 missing; while the Federals lost 38 killed, 64 wounded, and 20 missing. The two engagements in New Mexico had resulted in considerably weakening the Confederate forces within the territory. With a thinning army and dwindling supplies Sibley eventually evacuated the territorial capital at Santa Fe and the territories of New Mexico and Arizona, ending southern dreams of a western empire.

While Union and Confederate forces fought for control of the New Mexico desert, in the Eastern and Western theaters the stage was being set for battles in the coming months. In Virginia, General McClellan prepared a move against Yorktown and ultimately Richmond, while in Tennessee, Confederate Generals Albert Sidney Johnston and P.G.T. Beauregard began

organizing their forces in preparation for attacking the Union position at Pittsburg Landing.

Major clashes in both the East and the West were now unavoidable.