

# GEORGIA

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# BATTLEFIELDS

Published by Georgia Battlefields Association, Inc., a non-profit organization dedicated to preservation of Georgia's Civil War history and sites. Contact newsletter editor by e-mail: [info@georgiabattlefields.org](mailto:info@georgiabattlefields.org)

## Society for Women and the Civil War conference in Atlanta 26-28 July

The [Society for Women and the Civil War](#) will hold its [annual conference](#) in Atlanta in 2024. See details in the June 2024 newsletter. Register before 1 July [here](#).

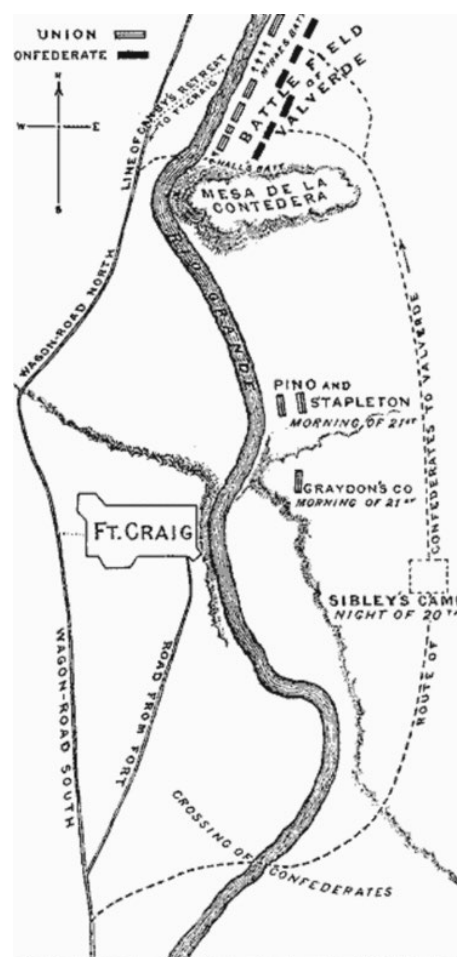
## Battlefield road trip: Fort Craig and Valverde, New Mexico

Confederate Brigadier General Henry Sibley's 1862 invasion of the U.S. Territory of New Mexico proceeded from San Antonio to El Paso, Texas, then northward along the long-established road between Mexico City and Santa Fe, which had been the capital of northern Mexico before it became the capital of the New Mexico Territory, established in 1848. The road ran along the west side of the Rio Grande, an important source of water for any traveler transiting the desert. Fort Craig was built in 1853-1854 between the road and the river, not so much to defend against attack as to serve as a base for U.S. Army operations against the Apache and Navajo. In any case, it was squarely on the Confederates' invasion route. Sibley's force was about 2,500 mostly mounted men.

Despite his pre-war service in New Mexico Territory, Sibley seemed unaware that most New Mexican residents abhorred Texans, and his hope that many New Mexicans would support the Confederate cause was in vain. Further, he counted on capturing U.S. Army supplies, especially at Fort Craig, to reduce his dependence on the supply line back to El Paso. With the ultimate Confederate objective being the silver and gold mines of Colorado, the supply line—and any supplies the Confederates could capture enroute—would be crucial.

When Sibley observed Fort Craig on 16 February 1862, he saw more cannons than he expected (he couldn't discern that some of them were logs painted to look like guns) and new revetments, and he couldn't estimate the size of the garrison, though the number of troops camped outside the fort walls (New Mexican volunteers under Kit Carson's command) indicated the 1,200 U.S. Army regulars, commanded by Sibley's pre-war compatriot Colonel E.R.S. Canby, had been reinforced. Sibley knew he could not take the time or sustain the casualties that an attack or siege of the fort would require.

Acting on a suggestion from his second in command, Sibley crossed south of the fort to the east side of the Rio Grande and proceeded north (see map), hoping Canby would attack to protect Fort Craig's own supply line. Canby obliged by leading part of his 3,800-man garrison north along the west side of the river before attacking on 21 February across the river at Valverde, a few miles north of the fort. The attack initially went well, but the Confederates ultimately prevailed, and Canby retreated across the river and back to the fort and refused Sibley's day-after demand to surrender the fort and its supplies. Casualties were reported as 276 U.S. and 229 C.S. troops. More importantly, between the trek across the desert and the fight, Sibley's command lost about 350 horses and mules. His mounted invasion force was rapidly becoming dismounted.



MAP OF FORT CRAIG AND VALVERDE.  
from *Battles & Leaders of the Civil War*.



Virtual reconstruction of Fort Craig in the visitors center.

Sibley continued north to Albuquerque and Santa Fe but never reached his objective of Fort Union, where he hoped to capture U.S. Army supplies. He won a tactical victory on 29 March at Glorieta Pass (east of Santa Fe) but suffered a logistics disaster when a U.S. cavalry column destroyed all his supply wagons and killed or set loose most of his horses and mules at Johnson's Ranch. Sibley then retreated south on the west side of the Rio Grande, while Canby, who advanced north from Fort Craig on 1 April, observed the Confederate retreat from the east side of the river except for a brief engagement at Peralta on 15 April. A much-reduced Confederate force ultimately returned to San Antonio having marched almost 2,000 miles without any good result.

We're accustomed to having historic sites protected by the National Park Service (NPS), but Fort Craig is preserved by another Department of the Interior agency, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). After driving east over four miles on a dirt and gravel washboard road from New Mexico state route 1, a visitor will arrive at an expansive parking lot with a small but well-designed visitors center, manned by a well-informed and engaging volunteer who lives on site. An interactive display provides information about the fort's 30 years as an active post, as well as history of the Spanish Road from Mexico City to Santa Fe and the U.S. Army's engagements with the Apache and Navajo. A walking trail leads around the fort's remnants, most of which have succumbed to erosion (since they were built of adobe), but some of which readily suggest their original purpose, especially the three storage facilities for the commissary supplies that the Confederates so greatly wanted. Historical markers are numerous, including a few that relate to the Battle of Valverde since that battle site is not publicly accessible. Fort Craig is well worth a visit.

American Battlefield Trust's (ABT) peripatetic Director of History & Education Garry Adelman visited Fort Craig and Valverde earlier this year and gained access to the privately-held Valverde battlefield site. The site is undeveloped, though erosion, invasive plant growth, and the changing course of the Rio Grande have altered its appearance. The fighting did not involve any earthworks, and no interpretive signs have been installed. See Garry's video and related ABT content at [www.battlefields.org/learn/videos/battle-valverde](http://www.battlefields.org/learn/videos/battle-valverde).

For previous articles on the New Mexico Campaign, see newsletters from [January 2021](#) (Picacho Pass, Arizona), [September 2021](#) (Glorieta & Johnson's Ranch), and [August 2022](#) (Peralta).

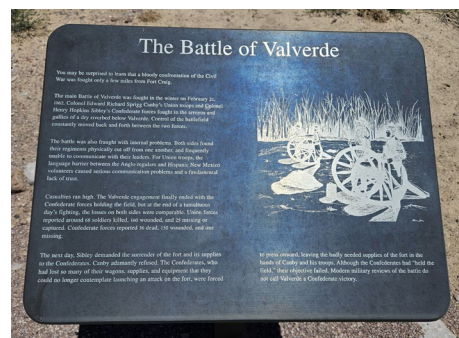
For accounts of the Confederate invasion of the southwest, see Part I of Alvin Josephy's *The Civil War in the American West*. Hampton Sides' *Blood and Thunder* and Megan Kate Nelson's *The Three-Cornered War* address not only U.S. versus C.S. forces in the southwest but also those forces versus the Apache and Navajo.



Remains of commander's quarters.



Remains of one of three commissary storage bunkers.



Fort Craig walking trail marker.

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