

## 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.



**Butterfield Overland Stagecoach Station at  
Dragoon Springs as of May 2011**

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 Sergeant 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.

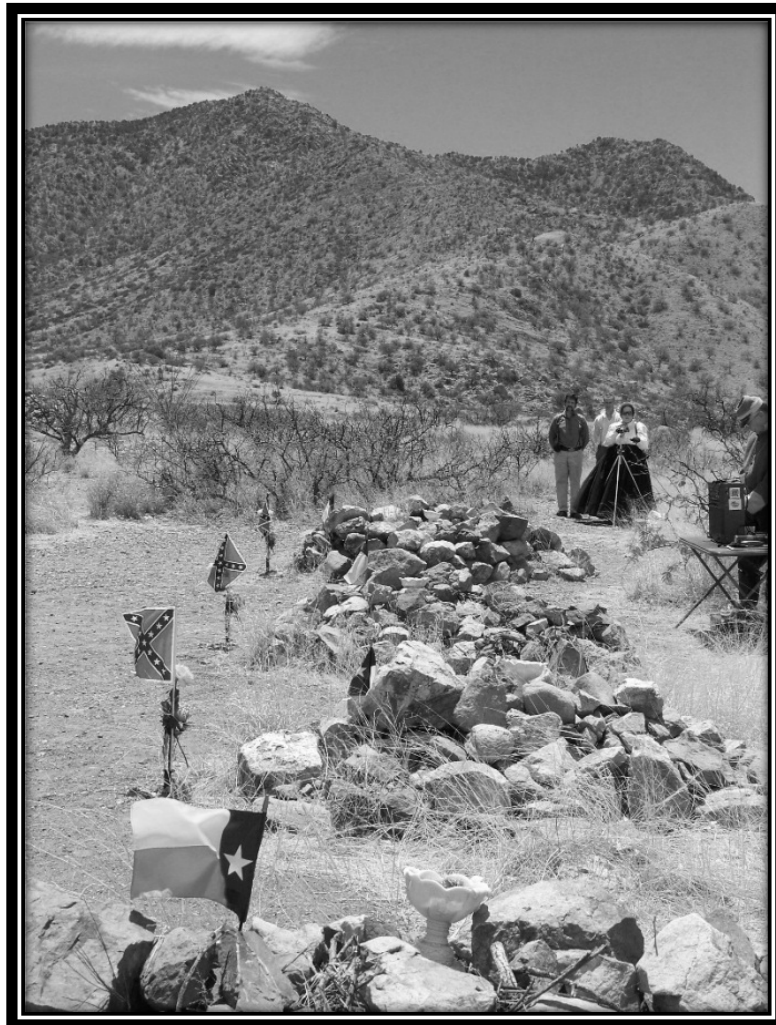


**Graves of the four Confederate Veterans**

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.



**Each year on Confederate Memorial Day, the Sons of Confederate Veterans hold a ceremony to honor the four soldiers buried here. This photo is from the May, 2011 Memorial Day. (Author's Collection)**