

# San Pasqual Battlefield State Historic Park



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### **San Pasqual Battlefield**

### **State Historic Park**

**15808 San Pasqual Valley Road**

**Escondido, CA 92027**

**(760) 737-2201**

*Detail of Battle of San Pasqual painting by  
Col. Charles Waterhouse, USMCR*

*The concept of  
“Manifest Destiny” held  
that the United States  
had a divine right to  
expand its borders from  
the Atlantic to the Pacific.  
After the battle at San  
Pasqual, that concept  
came closer to reality.*



**F**rom high on the slope of a south-facing hill, **San Pasqual Battlefield State Historic Park**

commands a sweeping view of the San Pasqual Valley. The park also overlooks the site of the bloodiest battle fought in California during the U.S.-Mexican War. During this skirmish, American forces sought to take California, and Mexican forces sought to keep it. At the end of the battle, both sides would claim victory.

**THE BATTLE OF SAN PASCUAL**

Early on December 6, 1846, General Stephen W. Kearny led a contingent of the First Dragoons into battle with a group of Californios (persons of Hispanic descent living in California after the Mexican Revolution) in what is now the San Pasqual Valley. Led by Captain Andrés Pico, brother of Pío Pico, one of the last governors of Mexican California, the Californios were resisting American military occupation of their homeland.

**United States vs. Mexico**

When President James K. Polk took office in March 1845, relations between the U.S. and Mexico were already severely strained. While Texas was still under Mexican rule, the U.S. had made it the 28th state of the Union. In anger, Mexico quickly broke off relations with the U.S. and began to prepare for the possibility of war.

Realizing the potential of Mexican California's coastline to maritime trading, Polk sent an envoy to Mexico with an offer to purchase California. When Mexico refused, President Polk ordered General Zachary Taylor and his troops south to the Rio Grande River, into territory claimed by both sides.

The U.S. claimed that the Rio Grande was Mexico's border with Texas, but Mexico said that the border was the Nueces River, 150 miles farther north. Taylor's men built a small fort across from the city of Matamoros, Tamaulipas. This action brought a detachment of Mexican cavalry across the Rio Grande to attack the U.S. patrol, killing or wounding 16 American soldiers. Citing that Mexico had "invaded our territory and shed American blood," Polk declared war on Mexico.

**The San Pascual Pueblo**

The native northern Kumeyaay, known as the Ipai, were the largest indigenous group in today's San Pasqual Valley.

After the missions were secularized, mission lands were divided into large ranchos. In 1835 the Mexican government established the San Pascual ("Pasqual" is used today) Pueblo with 81 native residents. Following the death in

1874 of their highly respected chief, Capitán José Pedro Panto, non-Indians increasingly homesteaded the remaining acreage in the valley. With the formal eviction of native people in 1878, the pueblo ceased to exist, so its residents resettled elsewhere.

**Stephen W. Kearny**

In June 1846, Colonel Stephen W. Kearny and his soldiers were ordered by President Polk to take Santa Fe for the U.S. The First Dragoons left Fort Leavenworth (in what is now Kansas) and peacefully seized Santa Fe. In October Kearny, now a Brigadier General, led the Dragoons to California, where he met frontier scout Kit Carson. Carson told him that Commodore Robert F. Stockton had raised the American flag over San Diego, and California was now in American hands.

Believing the war over, Kearny sent most of his troops back to Santa Fe. Guided by Kit Carson, Kearny continued to San Diego with about 100 men.

On December 5, the First Dragoons met Lieutenant Archibald Gillespie, sent to escort Kearny to San Diego. Gillespie told Kearny that Andrés Pico was camped at San Pascual village with a force of insurgents.

**Andrés Pico**

Captain Andrés Pico and his brother, Pío Pico, owned the Rancho Santa Margarita, which was near the San Pasqual Valley.

Andrés Pico had led his group of local Californio ranchers and landowners south from Los Angeles, headed to San Diego. The Californios, some with homes in Los Angeles and San Diego, were intent on defending their land from the Americans. On the night



*Stained glass images of American soldiers (left) and a Californio (right), on view at visitor center*

of December 5, in the middle of a heavy rainstorm, the Californios took shelter in San Pascual Pueblo.

### Engagement

Kearny sent Lieutenant Thomas Hammond to scout the valley, and his presence was betrayed by a barking dog in Pico's camp. A sentinel fired at Hammond and his men. Fleeing, they dropped pieces of military equipment marked "U.S. Army."

When Hammond reported that they had been seen, Kearny gathered his men to attack the village. The Dragoons and their mounts, exhausted from their desert trek, were in no condition to fight. The riders' cold hands could barely maintain a grip on their reins. Wet gunpowder made their weapons useless, and the low-lying fog obscured their vision.

Spotting Pico's campfires, Kearny ordered Captain A.R. Johnston to trot into the village. In error, Johnston passed on the order to charge. When Pico's men fired on them, Captain Johnston was the first fatality.

A return charge by the mounted Californios inflicted heavy casualties among the American soldiers. Many Americans, mounted on mules and unable to discharge their firearms, could only use their inadequate sabers against expert horsemen armed with long, sharp lances. Twenty-one Americans fell; the Mexican forces lost at

least one man and several were wounded.

The Americans spent the rest of the night burying their dead. The next day, as they continued toward San Diego, they were again engaged by the Californios at a place now called Mule Hill. On the morning of December 11, Stockton's troops, arriving from San Diego, reached Kearny's men and escorted them to San Diego.

On December 29, a combined force of Stockton's and Kearny's men, the California Battalion and some Californios sympathetic to the American cause set out for Los Angeles. In early January, General José Maria Flores, commander of the Mexican Militia, proposed to the Americans that both sides should try to come to an agreement.

Refusing the offer, the Americans continued toward Los Angeles. On January 10, 1847, the Mexican Militia surrendered to the Americans. On the 13th, Andrés Pico, newly appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Mexican forces in California, signed the Articles of Capitulation, thereby ending the war with Mexico in California.

### EVENTS

**Battle Day**—Commemorating the historic battle, an annual reenactment takes place on the Sunday closest to December 6, with music, entertainment, a military encampment, children's activities and craft demonstrations.

**Living History Days**—These are scheduled for the first Sundays of January through June, and in October and November.

**San Diego Archaeological Center**—Located on state park property, the center is dedicated to the curation of historic artifacts found in the San Diego area.

### CLIMATE

The climate here is moderate. From June through October, temperatures range from the low 60s to 100 degrees. From November through April, expect temperatures from the 40s, warming up to the mid-70s.

### TRAILS

**Battlefield Monument Trail**—This one-mile round trip trail is near the visitor center, where it connects with the Nature Trail.

**Nature Trail**—This 0.25-mile trail beginning on the hillside behind the visitor center connects with the Battlefield Monument Trail.

### ACCESSIBLE FEATURES

The visitor center may require entry assistance. Most exhibits, restrooms, and travel routes are accessible. For updates, visit <http://access.parks.ca.gov>.

### NEARBY STATE PARKS

- Cuyamaca Rancho SP, 13652 Highway 79, Julian, CA (760) 765-3020
- Old Town San Diego SHP, San Diego Ave. and Twigg St., San Diego (619) 220-5422



# San Pasqual Battlefield

## State Historic Park

### Legend

	Major Road		Amphitheater
	Paved Road		Nature Trail
	Unpaved Road		Non-Park Building
	Trail		Park Building
	Paved Path		Parking
	Cultural Area		Picnic Area
	Parking Area		Visitor Center



This park receives support in part through the nonprofit San Pasqual Battlefield Volunteer Association, P.O. Box 300816, Escondido, CA 92030



### PLEASE REMEMBER

- Park hours are limited. Before your visit, call the park at (760) 737-2201 or visit [www.parks.ca.gov](http://www.parks.ca.gov)
- No dogs are allowed in the park (except service dogs).
- Visitors viewing battle re-enactments must remain on the park side of the highway.

