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*Re-enacting the 1846 Battle of San Pasqual, a band of Californios gallop to battle with the U.S. Army on Sunday at the San Pasqual Battlefield State Historic Park. (Photo by Bill Wechter - Staff Photographer)*

ESCONDIDO: Reliving the battle for California

By RENEE RAMSEY - For the North County Times

ESCONDIDO ---- A pivotal battle in the struggle for California was replayed Sunday in a re-enactment of the 1846 Battle of San Pasqual in a rural Escondido field ringed by low-lying hills.

Fake rifle shots and cannon smoke filled the air as sword-wielding members of the San Pasqual Battlefield Volunteer Association, dressed as soldiers from the Mexican-American War, faced off on horseback on the grounds of the 1846 battle.

More than 250 onlookers, many seated on a hillside or standing in groups on the other side of a road facing the field, watched the annual re-enactment from what today is San Pasqual Battlefield State Historic Park.

"Very few battles were fought in California during the Mexican-American War. This was one of the last battles and an unusually bloody one," said association member Bob Wohl, a retired state parks executive. "This was the beginnings of the United States taking over what then was Mexico."

Gen. Stephen W. Kearny, who led the battle on the U.S. side, traveled more than 1,500 miles to the site with the aid of famed western scout Kit Carson.

Gen. Andres Pico led Mexico's troops.

The battle left 22 U.S. soldiers dead in one of the bloodier battles ever fought in a state that has experienced few wartime battles in its history. Pico's troops suffered only one casualty.

Wohl said the annual re-enactments provide a rare opportunity to see a historic battle replayed on relatively undeveloped land in what has become the country's most populous

state.

"Outside the roads and telephones, we're looking at the same environment in which they fought," he said, adding that Sunday's overcast skies also reflected the weather the day of the Dec. 6, 1846, battle.

Also still being replayed Sunday was who actually won the battle in Escondido.

"Part of it is pride," explained Leroy Ross Jr. of Vista, a past president of the association who played the role of Kearny for 20 years.

"They killed more of us, so they say they won the battle," Ross said about one version favoring a victory for Mexican soldiers.

"We held the field," he said was the explanation for a U.S. victory, since the surviving U.S. soldiers remained in place after the Mexican troops departed.

The U.S. troops then continued toward San Diego, where they were met with reinforcements.

A month later, in January 1847, Pico signed the Treaty of Cahuenga to end the hostilities in California. The Mexican-American War, which had begun in 1846, ended in 1848, ceding to the United States what today are the states of California, Nevada, Arizona, New Mexico and Utah.

Those who played key roles in the Battle of San Pasqual, meanwhile, were to become familiar modern day namesakes.

Pico, who later would become a U.S. citizen and state senator from San Diego, is the namesake of Pico Boulevard in Los Angeles.

Escondido is home to Kit Carson Park, named for the scout who helped Kearny reach the Escondido battlefield.

And Kearny is the namesake of Kearny Mesa, a San Diego community.