

Battle of San Pasqual re-enactment on Sunday

PAM KRAGEN - pkragen@nctimes.com | Posted: Sunday, December 6, 2009 12:00 am

SAN PASQUAL VALLEY ---- The pikes will be raised and the hoofs will be flying when the 1846 Battle of San Pasqual roars back to life on Sunday, Dec. 6.

Re-enactors, volunteers and officials at the San Pasqual Battlefield State Historic Park and Museum will re-create the tumultuous battle that pitted U.S. Cavalry dragoons against the Californio lancers in what became the bloodiest battle of the Mexican-American War.

Sunday's events, from 10:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., will include two re-enactments and a number of free historically themed activities at the San Pasqual Battlefield State Historic Park.

On a sunny day, as many as 4,000 spectators turn out to watch the half-hour battle re-enactments, which will be staged at 11:30 a.m. and 2:30 p.m., said Ron Hinrichs, a battlefield volunteer for more than 25 years.

According to the park's Web site, the original battle between the Cavalry and the Californios took place Dec. 6, 1846, in the San Pasqual Valley. It was one of many battles fought for control of the California territory between the U.S. and Mexican forces. The battle of San Pasqual was waged between U.S. troops under the command of Brig. Gen. Stephen W. Kearny and Mexican Californios led by Major Andres Pico.

On Dec. 5, Kearny's troops ---- led by the Western scout Kit Carson ---- arrived hungry and exhausted in the Ramona area after a hard ride from what is now Santa Fe, N.M. Although not prepared to fight, the U.S. soldiers were forced to face off against Pico's better-supplied and rested men after Pico's scouts discovered their encampment that evening.

On the cold, rainy morning of Dec. 6, the battle began. The U.S. troops' short swords and guns (with wet gunpowder) proved no match for the long, pointed lances carried by Pico's Californios. Pico lost just one soldier, while the United States lost 18 soldiers in battle and another four who died later from their wounds.

The next day, Kearny's troops tried to ride out of the valley toward San Diego, but they were surrounded by Californios on a hillside that came to be known as Mule Hill (near Lake Hodges), where they survived a bloody standoff until reinforcements arrived on Dec. 12.

Playing the role of the dragoons will be park volunteers and re-enactors on horseback. Some will be dressed as dragoons and others will be dressed as mountain men (who helped in the original battle). Local vaqueros (Mexican cowboys) will play the roles of the Californios. Twenty to 30 re-enactors are expected at the battle re-creation, which will also feature cannons firing, Hinrichs said.

Besides seeing the battles, the public can visit a soldiers' encampment to meet the re-enactors and learn about life in the mid-1800s. There will be period entertainment, period craft demonstrations and hands-on projects for children, including candle-dipping, cornhusk doll-making, adobe brickmaking and a "needle in the haystack" game for small children. Local American Indians will be describing Indian life in the 19th century, and there will be period weapon displays.

Hinrichs said all activities and parking are free, but donations are encouraged to support the cost of operating the battlefield memorial, which he estimates at \$7,000 to \$10,000 a year.

"This is our big event of the year, and we depend a lot on the donations we raise on that one day," Hinrichs said. "We hope everyone will come out and have fun and learn something about local history."

Battle Day Schedule

Hours: 10:30 a.m. ---- 3:30 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 6

Battle re-enactments: 11:30 a.m. and 2:30 p.m.

Where: San Pasqual Battlefield State Historic Park, 15808 San Pasqual Valley Road, San Pasqual Valley (1.5 miles east of the San Diego Zoo's Wild Animal Park on Highway 78)

Admission: Free but donations accepted

Information: 760-737-2201

Web: parks.ca.gov, www.sanpasqual.org