Broadside, To Arms!

By George B. Curry

This broadside was a recruiting poster printed for Captain George B. Curry by the Mountaineer Job
Printing Office in October 1861. Captain Curry raised Company E of the First Oregon Cavalry
volunteers in Wasco County.

Following the outbreak of the Civil War in April 1861, Union army officials recalled regular army
troops for service in the East. This left regional officials to find a solution for dealing with local
military responsibilities, including guarding Indians on reservations in western Oregon, policing the
Oregon Trail, and preventing violence between miners and Natives in eastern Oregon and the
territory of Idaho. Given the level of pro-Confederate sympathies in southern Oregon, government
officials were also concerned about violence between pro-Union and pro-Confederate supporters.
The U.S. Army’s Department of the Pacific initially relied on volunteers from California, but in 1862,
began the recruitment of local volunteer companies under the standard of the First Oregon Cavalry.
These companies, identified by the letters A through M, served in Oregon, Washington, and Idaho
from 1862 until 1866.

In the mid 1860s, the major military operation was a series of minor campaigns against the various
Native groups of eastern Oregon and southwestern Idaho (Northern Paiute, Shoshone, Bannock),
then known to Euro Americans as the “Snake Indians.” Violence flared up in Oregon following the
1861 gold strike near Canyon City, located just south of the town of John Day. The gold strike
brought the influx of thousands of miners, and in response to what they perceived as an invasion of
their traditional lands, the various Indian groups retaliated against the miners. Retaliation took the
form of theft, the killing of stock animals, and in some cases, armed violence against the miners.
Company E of the First Oregon Cavalry was involved in several of the expeditions against the
regional Native groups from 1863 through 1864. Despite the efforts of military officials to subdue
and control the Northern Paiute, Shoshone, and Bannock, their efforts were largely unsuccessful.
The Native peoples had the upper-hand at this time because of their adaptation to the climate, and
their superior knowledge of the regional landscape. In the late 1870s, the Paiute and Bannock
became embroiled in a series of armed conflicts with the U.S. Army. The army eventually subdued
the Native groups as a military threat and forced them onto reservations.

Further Reading:  Victor, Francis Fuller. “The First Oregon Cavalry.” Oregon Historical Quarterly 3,
1902: 123–163.

1957: 5–16.


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https://www.oregonhistoryproject.org/articles/historical-records/broadside-to-arms/