

**THE USE OF ARTILLERY  
AT  
THE BATTLE OF SAN PASQUAL**

**George Hruby  
San Pasqual Battlefield Site Location Project**

Foreword  
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The use of artillery at the Battle of San Pasqual on December 6, 1846, has been a point of controversy for many decades. Two main issues that have persisted concerning this topic are: Was any artillery piece ever actually fired at this battle and if so, what piece? If artillery was utilized at this battle, what was fired (ie. cannon balls, shell, canister, grape shot, etc.)?

The controversy is in large part produced because after the battle, General Kearney writes in his official report of the event, that neither of the Army's two howitzers were "brought into action." This statement lies in direct conflict with other eye witnesses at the battle including military officers.

Although there is no hard evidence to answer with 100% certainty any of the above listed questions, new findings have emerged in recent years by the SPBSLP that may help shed some light on this subject. It should be noted that this submission is but the opinion of this office based on all the current facts known. Of course, new findings into the next century may yet reveal even more on this matter.

It should also be noted that the following material is based on research into the battle conducted between 1991-1996, including field research conducted on site. Such as was done at the Custer Battlefield, this office has initiated certain law enforcement investigative procedures, applying them to an historical event. In the case of the Battle of San Pasqual, every first-hand account available from witnesses and actual participants of the event have been taken, and a recreation of the event made based on their statements. This has produced the first ever, chronological breakdown of the Battle of San Pasqual on an almost minute-by-minute basis.

The first hand accounts by those that participated in the actual event were obviously the most important in recreating what actually occurred at this event. Alone and segregated, the statements at times do not seem to tell the same story or do not seem to agree with the other. However, like putting pieces of a jigsaw puzzle together, once the stories were intertwined together, overlaid a top the other, a master picture of the battle begins to emerge.

Concerning the use of artillery, the primary sources are from the following participants and witnesses: Private Dunne, Dr. Griffin, General Kearny, Captain Henry Smith Turner, Volunteer Phillip Crosthwaite, Californios – Jose Serrano, Lorenzo Soto, Juan Alvarado, San Pasqual Indians Chief Panto and his daughter – Felicita, Lieutenant

Beale via Captain Du Pont, Lieutenant Emory, Artist John Stanley, John Hollingsworth, and Scout Kit Carson. Also included are two second-hand accounts. The first made by Dr. George D. Lyman in the foreword of Dr. Griffin's diary publication. The second is an interview conducted of Major Swords by a newspaper reporter approximately thirty days after the battle and printed in the Sandwich Islands News on January 13, 1847.

Although it is sometimes argued that certain individuals named above, did not participate in the actual fighting, with the exception of Dr. Lyman, they were nevertheless there and therefore exposed to immediate visual and auditory assessments of the event. Dr. Lyman made some very interesting comments and descriptions giving rise that he had heard such things from his very best friend, Dr. Griffin (ie. Captain Moore's horse was white).

Many of the participants and witnesses' statements come in the form of dairy entries, reports, letters, and interviews made of them by others. With this, I have been able to recreate the battle as has never been done before.

Using this work as my source of opinion in the matter of artillery use at the Battle of San Pasqual, I state the following opinions concerning this issue.

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Three pieces of artillery were present at the second engagement of the Battle of San Pasqual. They were two 12 lb. Mountain Howitzers and the 4 lb. Russian made "Sutter" Gun. Crime scene reconstruction techniques applied so far to the Battle of San Pasqual have produced several interesting discoveries, two of which are as follows:

1. It was initially thought that Lieutenant Davidson, the Officer in Charge of the two Army howitzers attempted to bring cannons into action at the middle or towards the end of the approximately 20 minute engagement but this has been found to not be so. Davidson attempted to place the battery into action almost immediately or within approximately five minutes of the **second engagement**. The reason he did not bring the battery into action, or should I say 'could not,' was because he could not open fire without hitting his own men upon the field. The second reason he could not bring the battery into action was because he may not have had any immediate ammunition available but I will cover that a little later.

It should be noted that just after the **first engagement** nearly half-a-mile away, Captain Gillespie had his men dismount and fan the area on foot searching for the enemy in hiding in the area of the Indian Village. It was at this point, that Davidson, who was originally traveling behind Gillespie's Volunteer unit, proceeded onward towards the **second engagement** with his two Mountain Howitzers in tow. This is how he arrived approximately five minutes into the **second engagement** and attempted to deploy his howitzers into action. He was

trying to follow other Dragoons around the point (where State Monument of Battle is located off of Highway 78).

2. The Battle of San Pasqual is the first time in recorded military history where the U.S. Army utilized two-animal drawn gun carriages for the howitzer in an actual military engagement. This was documented by eye-witness testimony from the battle. When the driver of one of the gun carriages lost control of the two mules pulling the gun at the second engagement, it is noted that witnesses refer to the plural, “**mules**” and not ‘mule’ when describing the incident. Gillespie stated, “... **and the two mules faced to the rear.**” Lieutenant Beale referred to the incident in speaking with DuPont, stating, “...**the howitzer was drawn by wild mules.**” Hollingsworth wrote in his journal, “... **the mules ran away with one gun ...**”. Kearny wrote in his official report concerning the lost of one howitzer, “... **the two mules before one of them got alarmed, and freeing themselves from their drivers ran off & among the enemy, and was thus lost to us.**”

In meeting with the head curator at the Fort Leavenworth Military Museum, George Moore, a known expert in the field artillery used by these soldiers from this Fort, said they were never aware of two animals pulling one gun. He stated that in fact, the guns definitely left the Fort in June of 1846, each being pulled by just one animal. It was agreed that if such a modification had been made, it was probably done in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Ironically, Moore brought to my attention that it was immediately after the Mexican War that the Army issued its first official two-animal gun carriages for artillery. I submit that the Battle of San Pasqual may have been the first time in U.S. Military History where an artillery unit was utilizing two-animal drawn gun carriages. Further investigation and confirmation of this fact was made by the Director of the Fort Leavenworth Military Museum and also expert in U.S. Army Field Artillery, Steve Allie.

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Two interesting quotes coming from Kearny and Griffin will probably never be fully understood by scholars concerning their true meaning.

In his official report of the battle, Kearny wrote, “***Our howitzers were not brought into action but coming to the front at the close of it, before they were turned so as to admit of being fired upon the retreating enemy....***” The question left by this statement is what did Kearny mean by it? Were the howitzers fired or not?

Griffin wrote, “***The men wheeled, and by this time a howitzer being rallied on the gun, and drove the enemy off.***” Likewise, the question left by this statement is what did Dr. Griffin mean by it? Was a howitzer fired or not?

A couple comments concerning Kearny’s statements are as follows:

Kearny's comments stating that the guns came "**to the front at the close of it**" referring to the close of the **second engagement** can be adequately reputed. When Lt. Davidson first pulled up to the second engagement at the onslaught, the fight was indeed in progress but not for long. Kearny was already at the front of it. Davidson's position would have been towards the rear of the engagement site where he was immediately trying to bring the guns into action. This is further corroborated by the fact that he couldn't fire them without hitting his own men. There is no mention of General Kearny with Lt. Davidson at this time and in fact, Davidson rides off into battle and later returns with his uniform cut and superficial wounds received.

It wasn't until later, probably 10-12 minutes into the **second engagement** that Kearny is noticed by witnesses to be at the remaining howitzer with Lieutenants Warner and Davidson having just returned from the fight which is still ensuing. Kearny didn't know what had happened with Davidson earlier *because he wasn't there*.

The times listed, although approximate, are fairly accurate. The times are arrived at by overlapping all of the statements made by the battle's participants and placing them into some sort of chronological order. For example, let's say we have 37 incidents recorded. Once all 37 incidents are placed into a chronological order, we then know for example, that incident 25 could not have occurred until incidents 1 thru 24 have taken place. Incident 30 we then know occurred before incident 37 and *after* incident 25, and so on. Then, we begin to estimate the time involved for certain incidents to occur realizing that the entire battle lasted but approximately 20 minutes.

In Kearny's case involving the howitzers, we know that Kearny was part of the first initial group of soldiers to ride around "the point" and engage the Californios. Lt. Davidson was already moving towards them on the road leaving Captain Gillespie behind with his dismounted troops fanning the first engagement site.

Lt. Davidson positioned himself at the rear of the field of the **second engagement** site (Kearny was at the "front") and saw the fight way out in the field in front of him. Maximum range of canister shot is 350 yards so the "front" was that or less from the two artillery pieces. When Kearny and the others made their retreat back across the field to the rear (where they later rallied around the remaining howitzer), Captain Gillespie and his men rode into the middle of this movement. Gillespie and the howitzer that was with the "runaway mules" ended up in the "center" of the field. During all of this, Davidson had to leave the guns and go fight before returning back to the remaining howitzer. Remember, when he left to go fight, the battery was intact. Later, when Davidson was with Kearny and Warner, only one howitzer is there. As Hollingsworth tells us – "**... the mules ran away with one gun during the action after Davidson left the battery.**"

At about 15 minutes into the 20 minute engagement, two very interesting observations are made and are very significant concerning the question of artillery usage.

The first observation is that the remaining howitzer was brought up from its previous position, closer onto the field. (Gillespie – "**I met the second howitzer coming up which was placed in battery at once.**") This is significant because it shows clear "intent" on the Army's part to again attempt to use artillery in the second engagement. To move the piece from its first firing position to a second, clearly shows that Davidson, with Kearny and Warner now present, fully intends to fire artillery in an attempt to stop the attack by the Californios.

Captain Gillespie is wounded and at the remaining howitzer as well. Also present is General Kearny and Lieutenants Warner and Davidson. Gillespie then sees Lieutenant Emory arrive on the scene with **“fixed ammunition”** on his back. This further strengthens the idea that Kearny was desperately trying to fire his remaining artillery piece.

This statement is also very significant because it indicates that ammunition is *not* traveling with the artillery pieces but rather, separately. The lone, single, remaining howitzer could not fire anything because there was possibly nothing to be fired! I suspect that this may have also been part of the problem that Lt. Davidson encountered when he initially tried to bring the guns into action. I suspect the ammunition was probably being carried along on pack-mules which may have fallen behind as many participants wrote how the mules were straggled out.

Captain Gillespie further confirms this by stating, **“... they [howitzers] *having been brought up by Lieut Davidson, without any supply.*”** Being that Gillespie is with the remaining howitzer but uses the term **“they,”** he is referring to when Davidson first arrived at the second engagement with both guns.

There is no doubt that Davidson brought ammunition for the artillery but if the ammunition was in fact being carried on slow moving mules, there is no doubt he arrived at the second engagement site with both guns way ahead of the ammunition mules coming slowly behind. There is no doubt that this is where Lt. Emory was arriving from when he went to fetch ammunition for the remaining howitzer.

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So, was an artillery piece discharged at the Battle of San Pasqual? If so, was it the remaining howitzer, the Sutter Gun, or both?

General Kearny clearly stated that no howitzer was brought into action. Yet, the evidence is overwhelming that down to the last minute, Kearny, Warner, and Davidson were trying to bring the remaining howitzer into action. After all that was done to bring the remaining gun into action, why would they have ‘not’ fired it? All their actions and statements indicate they were trying to fire the howitzer so why suddenly ‘not’ fire the gun?

Did General Kearny not tell the truth when he stated that he did not bring the artillery into action? On the other hand, others have accused Captain Gillespie of exaggerating his version of his official report of events in describing how two artillery pieces, both the howitzer and the Sutter Gun were in fact fired during the second engagement. Unlike General Kearny’s short description of the artillery not being brought into action, Gillespie’s account is very detailed, naming specific people and actions taken. So what happened?

The evidence appears strong that up to the last minute, Kearny was trying to get the remaining howitzer to fire. In addition to the General, four other officers were attempting to see the field piece discharged as well. Lieutenants Davidson (Artillery OIC) along with Warner and Emory who is bringing ammunition up on his back and Captain Gillespie who is trying to assist in lighting the fuse.

Major Swords, the Quartermaster, who during the battle sat one mile away atop San Pasqual hill in charge of protecting the supply train with a small detachment, told the following as reported by a newspaper reporter just barely 30 days after the battle, “... **and Capt. G [Gillespie], striking a light with his steel and machero, fired the gun. This drove back the Californians and the Americans were left in possession of the field.**” Some have argued that Swords was merely repeating what he had heard from Gillespie since Swords himself was not in the fight and could not have possibly observed Gillespie’s physical actions. However, at 6:30 a.m. on a cold valley floor in 1846, could Swords in fact have heard an artillery piece being discharged just one mile away and the answer to that is “yes.” What matters is that Swords knew that an artillery piece had been discharged and was in a position to witness it by being within proximity to hear such an event.

This brings up another possible theory that has been suggested. By studying the chronological order of events involved with the second engagement, the howitzer was fired before Emory arrived with the ammunition on his back. The question then is asked, “Was there any ammunition inside the howitzer upon being fired? Was gunpowder only inside the cannon when it was fired?” Of course, the loud boom would have definitely gotten the Californios’ attention and they would have not immediately known whether anything or not came out of the cannon barrel. This being the case, Kearny could later have legally stated that no gun was brought into action because no ammunition would have ever been fired from either howitzer.

Captain Gillespie makes a distinction between the discharge of the howitzer (fired first) and the Sutter Gun. When the howitzer is discharged, Gillespie states the result of such is that “...**the enemy were suddenly checked in their charge upon the gun.**” However, with the blast of the Sutter Gun which is said to be loaded with grapeshot, Gillespie states this blast actually clears the field.

Just after the howitzer is fired, Emory arrives with ammunition for the gun. Almost immediately thereafter, the Sutter Gun is discharged by a Midshipman named Duncan. According to Gillespie, the battle (second engagement) then came to its end as the Californios finally cleared the field.

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## Physical Evidence

The next question is, what physical evidence exists to support that any cannon was fired at the Battle of San Pasqual? Unfortunately, certain archaeologists and historians have for many years simply dismissed the possibility of any artifact debris existing on the valley floor due to it being located in the middle of a flood plain. Indeed, many catastrophic floods have torn through the San Pasqual Valley floor but would any and all artifacts related to the battle be lost? Indeed, as of this date, neither the City of San Diego, the County of San Diego, or the State of California have ever exerted an effort to look.

After several years of research already applied to this battle, I came up with an experiment in 1993. After studying statements made by participants and witnesses to the actual battle, I began to study maps of the valley floor. I then began to plot certain areas of the valley floor where I thought a part of the battle might have occurred.

Then, after the San Pasqual Battlefield Museum referred me to a Metal Detectist (one who operates a metal detector) who was interested in assisting in the project, I placed him inside Battlefield Site SLP-TS-7. It didn't take long before a round projectile was found at three inches (depth consistent with 1846). The object was first misidentified as grapeshot.

The object was a round ball, made out of lead, 630" in diameter and 383. grains in weight. There were at least two somewhat flattened areas on the ball suggesting it had been fired. There were no signs of impacting. The ball was then sent for further analysis to the Director of Fort Leavenworth Museum in Leavenworth, Kansas, Steve Allie, a known expert in the 12 lb. Mountain Howitzer. He stated that the diameter and weight of the ball fits perfectly for use in canister-shot. Knowing that Kearny specifically stated that no howitzer was brought into action, I asked Mr. Allie what the difference was between canister-shot and grapeshot? Both would be round metal balls of the same approximate size and weight so how could one tell if the ball found was canister-shot or grape? He then asked me what the metal ball was made of? I replied "Lead."

Without hesitation, Mr. Allie replied that grapeshot was made of iron and so was canister-shot *except* for the "Mountain Howitzer." Canister-shot for the Mountain Howitzer was made of *lead*.

Ironically, this piece of confirmed and fired lead canister-shot from a suspected Mountain Howitzer, happens to be found exactly on a battlefield where a Mountain Howitzer was reportedly fired on December 6, 1846. This ball of canister-shot may be the first hard evidence we have indicating that in fact, a cannon was fired at the Battlefield of San Pasqual. Also, we know that within 350 yards of the location where it was found, is the location of where the howitzer was fired and coincidentally, is consistent with Battlefield Site SLP-TS-8 where the skirmish line is believed to have existed on the east end according to SPBSLP findings.

Such finds as this confirmed piece of canister-shot and other objects located on the battlefield give much reason and support for the San Pasqual Battlefield Site Location Project. It would appear possible that other artillery-related artifacts might still be on the battlefield which might yield even more important clues concerning the use of artillery at the battle. Regardless of what Kearny wrote in his official report of the battle, hard evidence found at the site may speak the truth of what occurred at the event. If so, this would not be the first battlefield where history has not only been rewritten, but found to be different from what "Official Reports" of the time stated.