Capt. Joseph Aram midst Mustard Stalks

The establishment of Methodism in Santa Clara Valley can be dated to the sheltering of Cpt. Aram's wagon train at the Mission, Oct. 1846. Their arrival happened shortly after the outbreak of the Mexican War. So, Cpt. Joseph Aram's story in relation early American emigration and related war is worth showing.

One thing to be mindful is the name of an emigrant train often varied. Wagon Companies were rarely recalled for a single captain since officers often rotated or new ones elected. Hence, Aram's group is also identified with Imus as well as Isbell. Caravans might also join larger trains *en route*, as was the case with Aram while they traveled briefly alongside the ill-famed Donner Party. Once in Santa Clara, even James Reed added to their number.

Nonetheless, the title, 'Captain', stuck with Mr. Aram throughout his life. This started with his election to caravan officer in Missouri. Yet, upon reaching Sutter's Fort—and the Party learning of the unrest in California-- Aram was made a U.S. Army Captain by Maj. John C. Fremont. Fremont commissioned him with a thirty-two-man muster to protect Mission Santa Clara.

Numerous troubles met the American pioneers at Santa Clara, namely, sickness (which took the life of J. Aram's youngest child) as well as the Spanish refusing to sell food. Unfortunately, adobe buildings proved unfit habitation since they were previously used as stables. The company's embattlements included the belfry as watchtower, light trenchwork, and barricades through felled willow trees on La Alameda.

However, after the repulse of a U.S. garrison in Los Angeles, Mexican insurgency moved northward. In the San Francisco theatre, 150-mounted Californios under Cpt. Sanchez managed to pin down Yankee outposts. According to Mrs. Hecox, Sanchez regularly menaced Americans at both the Pueblo & Mission. Several of Aram's men transferred to Cpt. Weber's irregular U.S. Rangers to better guard San Jose & vicinity.

On Jan 2, 1847, after laying an overnight siege on the Mission, Sanchez openly attacked American troops sent to the rescue the emigrants while crossing Saratoga Creek. The show of force, as it turned out, is known as the "Battle of the Mustard Stalks". Here, the muddy creek and field of shoulder high mustard trapped the American cannon. Californios seized an opportunity, probing for a proper calvary charge.

However, behind Cpt. Marstan's Yerba Buena company was Cpt. Maddox from Monterey. Sanchez realized he was outgunned, if not outmanned, and withdrew. The Rangers surely did their part, pushing back Californios with rifle once horse and cannon was left in the mire.

Frederic Hall says Cpt. Aram also marched his men out from the Mission into the fray, helping close the conflict with their approach. Few injuries occurred, and an Armistice was drawn, sealed by a horse swap at the Mission corral. The Mustard Stalks proved the largest battle in the Northern Department, altogether ending conflict here.

During the 1847 Spring, Cpt. Aram and other methodist families moved to the Monterey area. There, Aram improved the old Presidio, supplying the Navy. In 1849, Cpt. Aram then returned to San Jose to establish the county's first nursery, west of Coyote Creek. His notable public service included California's Constitutional Convention as well as our first Legislature. He was an early member of Rev. E. Anthony's methodist class & longtime regent for the Wesleyan College. Cpt. Aram's grave can be found in Oak Hill Cemetery, and there are a two plaques along the El Camino Real commemorating the Mustard Stalks. –

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