



California Sabers: The 2nd Massachusetts Cavalry in the Civil War

R. James McLean

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California Sabers is the story of the California Battalion and Hundred, a group of 500 select men who were the only organized group of Californians to fight in the East during the Civil War. They volunteered their enlistment bounty to pay their passage across Panama and on to Massachusetts, where they became the cadre of the Second Massachusetts Cavalry.

From mid-1863 to July 1864, the Second Massachusetts fought a bloody guerilla war in northern Virginia against John S. Mosby, the confederacy's "Gray Ghost." In July 1864 the regiment became part of Sheridan's Army of the Shenandoah, and that fall it played a major role in the decisive battles of Winchester, Toms Run, and Cedar Creek.

In early 1865 the regiment was in the column that marched across Virginia destroying the vital railroad and canal that carried supplies from the Shenandoah Valley to the besieged Army of Northern Virginia. In late March, the Second Massachusetts was in the forefront of the battles at Dinwiddie Courthouse and Five Forks, the two actions that finally broke the stalemate at Petersburg and forced Lee to retreat to the west. In the ensuing chase, the regiment was the part of the cavalry spearhead that finally blocked Lee's army at Appomattox Courthouse.

This work, based on extensive research, is the first comprehensive history of this relatively unknown group and will be of great interest to Civil War enthusiasts and historians.

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