

Thorn, Herman

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THORN, HERMANN; born at _____, New York ,
_____, 18__; son of Herman Thorn and _____.

Appointed from New York as 2d Lieutenant, 2d U. S. Infantry, October 15, 1846; transferred to 3d U. S. Dragoons, April 9, 1847; Brevet 1st Lieutenant for gallant and meritorious conduct at the battles of Contreras and Churubusco, August 20, and Brevet Captain for like conduct at the battle of Molino del Rey, September 8, 1847, where he was wounded; Aid-de-camp to Brigadier General John Garland in the Valley of Mexico; participated in the battle of Chapultepec, September 13, 1847.

Promoted 1st Lieutenant January 1, 1849, and assigned to Company F, 2d U. S. Infantry; the Company was ordered to California via Cape Horn but, on the advice of his physician that the long sea voyage would endanger his health, he secured permission to travel overland; left Fort Leavenworth May 16, 1849, with 7 companies of regular troops commanded by Colonel E. B. Alexander and arrived at Santa Fe early in July; placed in command of 30 men of the 1st U. S. Dragoons to escort James Collier, appointed by President Taylor as Collector of Customs at San Francisco, and 28 other men of his party; there were also 14 New Mexican packers with about 200 pack mules and J. H. Hatcher as guide, who received \$1,500 for his services; left Santa Fe August 17 and traveled via Albuquerque to Laguna to Zuni, and thence across what is now Central Arizona, where they were repeatedly attacked by Apaches (probably Tontos) from September 17 to 20, during which a Dragoon was shot through the forearm and had both

bones broken; arrived at the junction of the Salt and Gila Rivers about October 1; proceeded down the Gila and reached its mouth on October 15; Lieutenant Cave J. Coutts, then in command at Camp Calhoun (now Fort Yuma), California, kept a diary in which he wrote:

"On the 16th Capt. Thorn was hard at work crossing the party, using the paddle in his own industrious hands, his men sitting on the bank seeing it well done. By hard work I managed to see him on the 16th, but then he just waded ashore, dressed only in his shirt and drawers, to shake hands with me and was off.

"He had succeeded in crossing every thing and, just at dusk took the canoe over to bring a few remaining men. On his return the canoe (or canoes, as the two were fastened) was capsized, drowning four of the party, Capt. Thorn, Pvt. Besté, and two Mexicans. Capt. Thorn was a good swimmer, but an old Mexican got him in his embrace, and he was unable to extricate himself from the dying man's grasp. He came a long way to meet his sad fate, which could not have happened at a more unpropitious time. "

On Thursday, November 1, 1849, Lieutenant Coutts made the following entry:

"Found today the remains of the lamented Capt. Thorn and the old Mex. who drowned him. The marks of the old man's fingers are very plain on the Captain's left thigh, where he was clinched by the hand of death."

Lorenzo D. Aldrich wrote in his Journal of the Overland Route to California and the Gold Mines on November 12, 1849:

"Thorn's body was found about six miles below this spot (Camp Calhoun) and was interred there. There has a team arrived today from San Diego to carry his remains to the States."

Lieutenant E. D. Beckwith, who assumed command of the escort, made the following report of his death:

"He had been laboriously employed with crossing his baggage and party, the former of which he had completed and, anxious to complete the transfer of his command and party before it was entirely dark, overloaded his boat, which, struck by an eddy, shipped water, was filled and sunk, and Captain Thorn and others drowned. I witnessed for several days the gallantry of Captain Thorn at the head of his command during various skirmishes with the Apache Indians from the 17th to the 20th of September, which could not have been excelled."

J. W. Audubon, who crossed southern Arizona en route to California about the same time as Thorn, made the following entry in his journal for October 17, 1849, just after his departure from the Colorado River:

"On the road we heard that Captain Thorn had been drowned. So ends the life of an officer of distinction, whose quiet, gentlemanly manner, won from me my admiration and good-fellowship during the few hours of intercourse we had engaged."

Sources of Information

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