

# The Civil War Post

Patricia A. Kaufmann

## Vedette Mail From Tucson to Los Angeles via Fort Yuma

Vedette mail is military mail carried by vedettes, a French military term. Vedettes are defined as mounted sentries or outpost pickets whose function was to relay information, give signals, warnings of danger, etc., to the main body of troops. Navies use the term vedette to refer to a small scouting or patrol boat.<sup>1</sup>

Shown in Figure 1 is a July 1862 vedette mail use from Union-occupied Tucson, in the Military District of Arizona, to Los Angeles, via Fort Yuma.

**Figure 1. July 1862 vedette mail use from Tucson to Los Angeles via Fort Yuma.**

**Below: *The Vedette, 3rd New Jersey*, by Keith Rocco. Image courtesy of the artist.**





The cover is endorsed "Soldier's letter, 1st Lt. J.P. Hargrave, Act. Adj't." It is addressed to "Mrs. Clara S. Nye, Macomb Co(nty), Memphis, Michigan," in the hand of De Witt Vestal, from a known correspondence. The addressee, Mrs. Clara Sutherland Nye, was a widow who operated a successful millinery business.<sup>2</sup>

The letter was carried by vedette mail from Tucson to Fort Yuma, then by another vedette rider to Los Angeles, where it entered mails with a "Los Angeles Cal. Aug. 1" circular datestamp and "10" in an oval due handstamp, which replaced the earlier device requiring the manuscript rate.

Figure 2 shows a newspaper obituary of DeWitt Clinton (D.C.) Vestal (1836-1914), explaining his move west from North Carolina at the age of 14, arriving in California in 1850. The obituary explains he was part of the volunteers in the Union army sent to guard the Arizona border against Texas Confederate troops, fighting both the rebels and the Indians. He was a second lieutenant in Company D, First California Infantry.<sup>3</sup> Figure 3 is a photo of Vestal in later years.

## D. C. VESTAL DIES AT HIS HOME IN CITY; PIONEER GRADUATE OF COLLEGE OF PACIFIC

The date of the funeral of D. C. Vestal, pioneer of this county, and formerly a member of the common council, has not yet been set. The deceased was 78 years of age.

Mr. Vestal was born in North Carolina. At the age of 14 he crossed the plains in an ox-team with his parents, arriving in California in 1850, after an eventful trip, during which great hardships were endured.

After landing in California Mr. Vestal mined for a short time, then came to San Jose and began teaming. He followed this five or six years, then took to farming. His orchard was one of the oldest in the valley. Mr. Vestal married Miss Sallie Hall, who, together with several children, survives him.

The surviving children are Dr. Hall Vestal, Maxwell, Logan and Darlel Vestal, Mrs. E. C. Hubback and Mrs. R. C. Rosenberg of San Francisco, and Mrs. C. C. Kennedy of Hilo, H. I.

Mr. Vestal was a member of the first graduating class of the College of the Pacific, formerly known as the University of the Pacific. He enlisted in the union army at the outbreak of the civil war and was sent out with other California volunteers to guard the Arizona border against Texas troops. Three years later he was mustered out in a worn-out condition physically. It took him a long time to recuperate. Mr. Vestal was a member of the Pioneers' association and of the G. A. R.

Figure 2. Newspaper obituary hails DeWitt Clinton (D.C.) Vestal as a California pioneer.

The rare Figure 1 vedette mail cover passed through Fort Yuma, which was the staging area for Union troops preparing to invade the Confederate territory of Arizona. The fort

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was in Imperial County, Calif., across the Colorado River from Yuma, Ariz. Fort Yuma was on the Butterfield Overland Mail route from 1858 until 1861. The Overland Mail route was frequently subjected to Indian attacks, resulting in interference with the mail and telegraph services, but also with lethal threats to human life and heavy losses of merchandise while in transit.

A companion to the first use is shown in Figure 4. It is a March 1862 cover addressed and endorsed by D.C. Vestal, with a red manuscript re-endorsement "Soldiers Letter, Co. D, Ben C. Cutler, 1st Lt. & Adj., 1st Inf. C.V. (California Volunteers)." It was carried from Fort Yuma by vedette to Camp Drum, Calif., then by military courier to Los Angeles where it entered the mails with a "Los Angeles, Cal. Mar. 30" (1862) circular datestamp and "DUE 10 CTS" oval handstamp with a manuscript rate. Camp Drum, built between 1862-63, is located near the Port of Los Angeles.

The Union retained control of Fort Yuma when the First California Infantry replaced regular army soldiers sent east in December 1861. The southern half of New Mexico Territory seceded, becoming the

Confederate Territory of Arizona until 1862 when the California Column,<sup>4</sup> marching from Fort Yuma, expelled the Confederate troops; they marched as far as western Texas. In 1863, the Union established control of the region known as the Arizona Territory. There was no battle action at the fort, since they were far from most of the fighting.

### Joseph Priestly Hargrave and Fort Whipple

Joseph Priestly Hargrave, sender of the Figure 1 cover, was born April 12, 1830, in Union County, Ill. He moved to California in 1849 as a young man. Hargrave enlisted in the U.S. Army in San Francisco April 28, 1862, and initially spent his time fighting Indians.

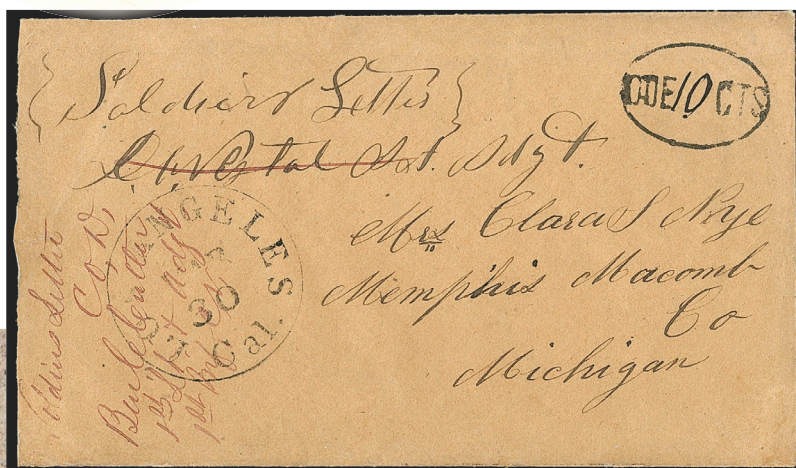
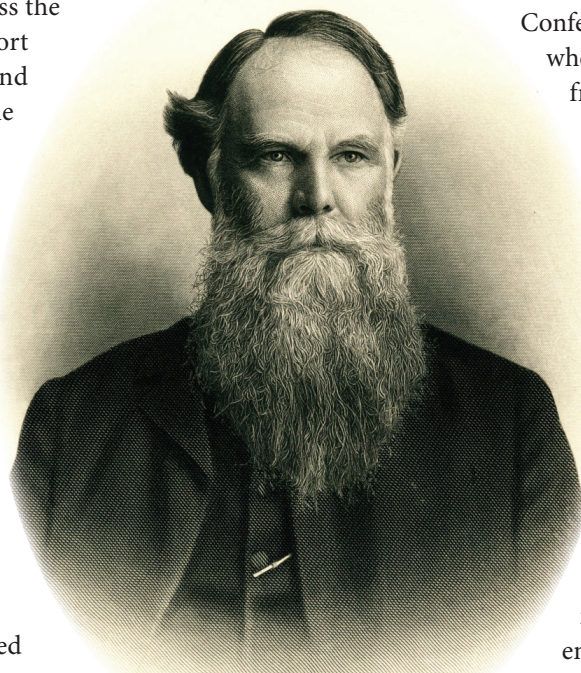


Figure 3 (top). DeWitt Clinton Vestal in later years.

Figure 4 (above). March 1862 vedette mail use from Fort Yuma to Camp Drum and Los Angeles.

Figure 5 (left). Del Rio Springs historical plaque, marking the original site of Camp Whipple.

Hargrave served in Company F, 1st Regiment, California Volunteers during the Civil War. He was promoted captain of Company C on Aug. 24, 1862, about a month after the cover was sent, and eventually left the army with the rank of captain from Los Piños, N.M., Aug. 31, 1864.

Hargrave was one of three officers appointed to choose a site for Fort Whipple, where his company (Company C) served in the initial garrison. It was temporarily established at Del Rio Springs, north of present-day Chino Valley, Ariz., in December 1863. Figure 5 is a historical marker for the seminal Camp Whipple at Del Rio Springs.



Figure 6 (right). Fort Whipple historical plaque in Prescott, Ariz.

Figure 7 (below right). Amiel Weeks Whipple (1817-63), for whom Fort Whipple was named.

Fort Whipple was a wooden stockade fort named after Union Civil War General Amiel Weeks Whipple (1817-63) who was mortally wounded at the Battle of Chancellorsville. Figure 6 shows a historical marker for Fort Whipple. Brigadier Gen. Whipple was posthumously promoted to major general by his personal friend, President Abraham Lincoln.<sup>5</sup>

Shown in Figure 7, Lt. Amiel Weeks Whipple was a West Point graduate who was referred to as the wheel horse<sup>6</sup> among the Army's Corps of Topographical Engineers, surveying Arizona during the 1850s. He participated in the challenging survey establishing the new boundary between the United States and Mexico after the Mexican-American War. He also led the survey of a possible transcontinental railroad route along the 35th parallel from Arkansas to Los Angeles.<sup>7</sup> His expedition explored from Little Rock, Ark., through present-day Oklahoma, New Mexico and Arizona, then through the Mojave Desert to Los Angeles. Fort Whipple served as Arizona Territory's capital prior to the founding of what is now the surrounding town of Prescott in 1864. The fort's purpose was to protect miners and settlers from Indian raids.

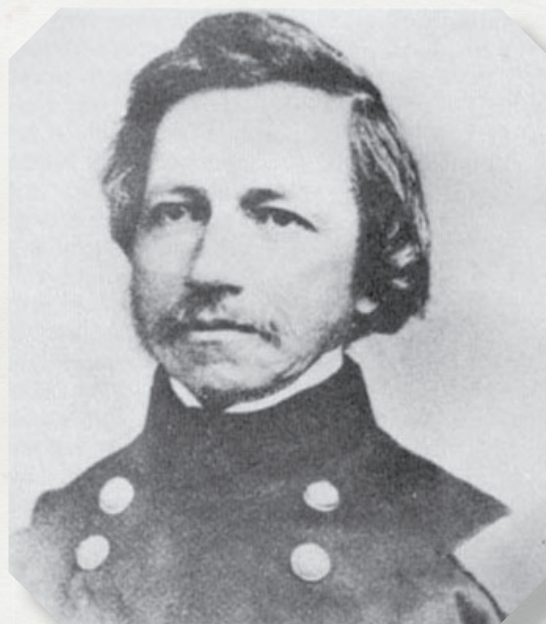
After mustering out, Capt. Hargrave settled in Prescott, Ariz., where he practiced law and was considered one of the foremost attorneys of Arizona. He resided in El Dorado County, Calif., in 1860 and 1864, and from there resided in Arizona/New Mexico in 1870. He served on the councils of the Arizona Territorial Legislature in 1873 and 1875 for the Yavapai District. His residence was listed as Prescott, Ariz., in 1880 and 1890. Hargrave married Jenny B. Wardner (born in Vermont about 1845) in 1878 in Arizona.<sup>8</sup> He died circa 1890 in San Bernadino, Calif.

**Acknowledgements:** My thanks to Robert A. Siegel Auction Galleries for use of images. 📷

#### Endnotes

1. "Vedette," Military Wiki, <https://wc.rootsweb.com/trees/109883/100708/josephpriestly-hargrave/individual/>, accessed July 27, 2022.
2. William Lee Jenks, *History of St. Clair County, Michigan, Its History and Its People: A Narrative Account of Its Historical Progress and Its Principal Interests*, Volume 2, The Lewis Publishing Company, Chicago and New York, 1912, page 826.
3. Dewitt Clinton Vestal, Find A Grave, [www.findagrave.com/memorial/88761281/dewitt-clinton-vestal/](http://www.findagrave.com/memorial/88761281/dewitt-clinton-vestal/), accessed July 27, 2022.
4. The California Column was a force of Union volunteers sent to Arizona and New Mexico. They marched more than 900 miles from California through Arizona and New Mexico Territory to the Rio Grande and as far as El Paso between April and August 1862. It originally consisted of 10 companies of the First California Infantry. They followed the established route of the Butterfield Overland Mail.
5. There was another Fort Whipple in Arlington County, Va., also built during the Civil War. In 1881, it was renamed Fort Myer. As a result of the 2005 Base Realignment and Closure Commission initiative, the Army's Fort Myer and the Marine's Henderson Hall became the first Joint Base in the Department of Defense.
6. A horse (as in a tandem) in a position nearest the wheels; a steady and effective worker.
7. Maj. Gen. Amiel Weeks Whipple, Military Engineer and Soldier, <https://whipple.one-name.net/amiel/>, accessed July 27, 2022.
8. Joseph Priestly Hargrave, Rootsweb, <https://wc.rootsweb.com/trees/109883/100708/josephpriestly-hargrave/individual/>, accessed July 27, 2022.

Patricia A. (Trish) Kaufmann was first introduced to Confederate postal history in 1965. She became actively involved in organized philately in 1969, became a dealer in 1973 and today specializes solely in Confederate stamps and postal history. She enjoys hearing from readers and may be reached at [trishkauf@comcast.net](mailto:trishkauf@comcast.net).



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