

# Charles S. Eigenbrodt

*Alvarado Civil War Hero*



**Timothy Swenson**

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## Introduction

Researching the life of an individual born more than 150 years ago can be difficult. In the case of Charles Eigenbrodt, I found information in various bits and pieces, like snap shots of his life. This document is a summation of a variety of historical source materials. While it does not give a full accounting of his life, but it is as close as one might possibly come.

Today, most people recognize the name Eigenbrodt as a street in an industrial park in Union City. However in the 1860's, the name was much better known; in politics, fraternal work and in the general Alvarado community. Charles Eigenbrodt did not live long in Alvarado, but he did leave his mark and did what he could for the community in the short time he was here. Were it not for the Civil War, he would have continued to be an important person in the community and his name would have been widely known.

## Charles Eigenbrodt

Charles Eigenbrodt was born in Jamaica, New York on March 20, 1825. His father was Lewis Ernest Andrew Eigenbrodt, a German immigrant and a "well-known" educator. Lewis Eigenbrodt graduated from the University of Giesen in 1793, with skills in seven languages, mathematics, astronomy, engineering and divinity. He immigrated to the United States in 1793 and in 1797 was made principal of Union Hall Academy in Jamaica, New York. He died on August 30, 1828.

Charles Eigenbrodt had two older brothers, David and William. David Lamberson Eigenbrodt, was born in Jamaica, New York on September 5, 1810, graduated from Trinity College in 1831, and became a physician. William Ernest Eigenbrodt was also born in Jamaica, New York, on June 10 1813 and became a clergyman. Charles also had a sister, Sallie Eigenbrodt. Sallie established the Eigenbrodt Cup at Trinity College in remembrance of her brother David.

Charles Eigenbrodt attended West Point and graduated sometime in the late 1840's. At that time the only degree program was in Civil Engineering. Other subjects taught were art of war, French, English, Mathematics, Philosophy, Mechanics, Optics, Astronomy, Electricity, Chemistry, Mineralogy, and Geology. President Andrew Jackson called it "the best school in the world." The graduates of West Point would go on to design and build the major roads, dams, canals, harbors, and railroads.

Charles Eigenbrodt came to California on June 5, 1849, when he was 24 years old, and settled in San Francisco. An 1850 San Francisco City Directory shows him working for Vandervoort & Company at 275 Montgomery St.

## Umpqua Expedition

In the spring of 1850, the firm of Winchester, Payne, & Co. of San Francisco organized an expedition to explore the Klamath River, plot a town, and mark out blocks of land for settlement.

The trip would be funded by local investors, each buying a share of the expedition. With an additional investment of \$50, each investor could go along on the expedition, which is what Charles Eigenbrodt did.

The original plan was to depart in June of 1850. On June 14, there was a large fire in San Francisco that consumed the homes and fortunes of a number of original investors. Instead of canceling the expedition, the organizers sought more investors and planned for a July departure date. The original ship chartered for the trip, the *James L. Day*, found other work. The *Samuel Roberts* was soon chartered for the expedition. At the time of sailing, a total of seventy shares were sold and thirty five men were taking the trip.

On July 1, 1850, the schooner *Samuel Roberts* set sail. Captain Coffin was in charge of the schooner with Peter Mackay as first mate. The schooner carried provisions for the men to survive in the northern wilderness, including a four pound carronade with nails and old screws for ammunition, a dozen muskets, three small boats, and a number of small arms for protection. The crew also included two surveyors and their equipment.

After some initial sailing difficulties, the *Samuel Roberts* sailed through the Golden Gate and headed north. After fourteen days of sailing they arrived just north of what they thought was the latitude of the Klamath River. They sailed close to shore and headed south, looking for the nearest river. Once they reached the mouth of a river, the first mate and five men set out in one of the small boats to check a sand bar and ways to navigate around it. The high surf caused the small boat to flounder, casting all men overboard. The schooner went their aid, rescuing four men from the clutches of hostile Indians. The Indians had pulled the men from the surf to rob them of their possessions. The other two men were lost in the surf. After two days, their bodies were found and buried.

The schooner sailed up the river and found a small bay just behind the beach and set anchor. At low tide, they found the small bay had shrunk to the point where they hardly had four feet of water around them. They figured that this was not the Klamath River and decided to explore the area to determine if it was the Rogue River.

A party of men was formed to head south, overland, to see if there were any rivers between their present position and Point St. George (just north of present day Crescent City, Calif.). The party was composed of six men, with Dr. E. Fiske leading the party, and Charles being one of the members.

The party set off at 5 a.m. with provisions for each man for four days. They headed south walking along the beach, traveling about 20 miles the first day. The next day they continued south, but realized their calculations on provisions were incorrect and that they would run out of food soon. Positive that the Klamath was just over the next rise or around the next bend, Dr. Fiske pressed onward. The provisions lasted until noon of that day. By evening the brandy that they had brought was consumed, mostly by Dr. Fiske.

On the evening of the second day, they camped in a small ravine filled with driftwood. With no more provisions, they gathered some local mussels and built a fire to cook them. The wind gusted, spreading the fire to the entire half-acre of driftwood. This attracted the interest of the

local Indians, who came down to the shore to see what was happening. The party set out a few sentinels and went to sleep. It was the disturbances of the local Indians that woke them late the next morning.

With no provisions and being forty miles away from the schooner, the party decided to head back north. Dr. Fiske was exhausted and was only able to walk five miles before he could walk no further. Leaving him to his fate, the men continued. Another man dropped about noon. The next morning Charles Eignebrodt was unable to walk any further. At ten o'clock another man dropped out of the trek. In the end only one man was able to make it back to the schooner. A rescue party was sent out after the men who stopped along the trail. Provisions were brought and after a good meal and some rest, the whole group was able to make it back to the schooner.

Two more scouting parties were sent overland to survey the surrounding area, and party of twenty men was sent out in two of the small boats to survey the river itself. After rowing upstream for fifteen miles, it was decided that it was not a good idea to leave the small remainder of the men on the schooner, given the large number of local Indians. In the evening the boats turned back, taking only two hours to cruise down the river, which had taken them ten hours to travel up.

The party spent five more days surveying what they believed was the Rogue River. They then sailed north and explored the Umpqua River, being the first vessel to enter that river. They found that the river easily navigable and that a wagon road could easily be put in from the river to the inland mines of Oregon. Once the party was positive on this, they returned to San Francisco.

## **Vigilance Committee of San Francisco**

During the Gold Rush, large numbers of men were coming to San Francisco to try their luck in the gold fields. Along with the miners, business men came to San Francisco to strike gold, not in the hills, but from the pockets of the miners. There was good money to be made selling equipment to the miners.

San Francisco became the port of entry for the gold fields and the main location of commerce in the Bay Area. The men coming to San Francisco were not always the best types. With the population growing daily, so was the crime rate. The local lawmen found it difficult to handle the increase in crime. People were hopeful of the new wealth but fearful of the rising rate of crime.

Charles Eigenbrodt was working on Jackson St. and living at the foot of Jackson St.. In June 1851, Charles signed as one of the members of the San Francisco Committee of Vigilance, soon after it was founded. He was the 714th member on the Committee rolls



SAN FRANCISCO IN 1849.

(Map showing location of wharfs at end of Jackson St. Yerba Buena Cove was filled and is now covered with buildings)

The Committee was founded with the follow statement in its charter:

*“Whereas it has become apparent to the Citizens of San Francisco that there is no security for life and property either under the regulations of Society as it at present exists or under the laws as now administered, - therefore the Citizens whose names are hereunto attached do unite themselves into an association for the maintenance of the peace and good order of Society and the preservation of the lives and property of the Citizens of San Francisco and do bind ourselves each unto the other to do and perform every lawful act for the maintenance of law and order and to sustain the laws when faithfully and properly administered but we are determined that no thief burglar incendiary or assassin shall escape punishment, either by the quibbles of the law the insecurity of prisons the carelessness or corruption of the Police or a laxity of those who pretend to administer justice.”*

On the same night that the Vigilance Committee was formed, they took their first action. A man by the name of Jenkins has been caught stealing a safe from a store. Jenkins, an ex-convict from Sydney, Australia, was known to be a local ruffian. The Committee formed a court that night and set about putting Jenkins on trial. Given the overwhelming evidence, Jenkins was quickly convicted and sentenced to hang. Jenkins was given a few minutes with a preacher, but spent his time cursing at him, instead of praying. This incited the Committee members further and Jenkins was quickly hung.

The grim work of the Committee was well received by the local citizens, with more of them signing up to join. Governor McDougal issued a statement against the work of the Committee, but he took no actions to stop the Committee.

After about 30 days, with four criminals hung, and 30 banished from San Francisco, the Committee decided that their work was done and disbanded.

## **Move to Stockton and back to San Francisco**

After being in San Francisco for a while, Charles Eigenbrodt moved to Stockton and became a partner of John M. Horner. This is the same John Horner that founded the small town of “Union City” and “Union City Landing”, which would become part of Alvarado. Charles Eigenbrodt became active in the International Order of Odd Fellows, Charity Lodge No. 6. In 1854, Charles Eigenbrodt moved back to San Francisco and stayed there until 1858, when he would to Alvarado.

## **Alvarado**

In 1858, Charles Eigenbrodt moved from San Francisco to Alvarado and purchased “one of the best ranches in Alameda County.”

Charles Eigenbrodt had some dealings in Alameda County before making the move to Alvarado. On Sept. 26, 1855, the San Francisco Daily Herald published a notice of foreclosure of a mortgage and sale of a property in Washington Township. One of the persons mentioned in the article is “Charles Eighdenbroat.” This could be a misspelling of Eigenbrodt, based on the phonetic sound of the German last name.

Other published histories state that Charles parents came to California with him, settled in Alvarado, and established a large farm. There is no documentation to support this point. Charles is the only Eigenbrodt listed by the California Pioneer Society as having come to California before 1850. Additionally, the elder Eigenbrodt was an educator more familiar with being a headmaster than being a farmer. A property tax assessment in 1859 shows an E. S. Eigenbrodt with an assessment of \$11,500. Some say this is reference to Charles’s father, but his first name was Lewis. It is more likely someone mistakenly wrote an E instead of a C, and this would be the right initials for Charles.

### **International Order of Odd Fellows, Crusade Lodge No. 93**

On November 26, 1859, the Crusade Lodge, No. 93, of the International Order of Odd Fellows (IOOF) was organized in Alvarado. Charles Eigenbrodt was one of the founding members and the first Noble Grand, meaning the Presiding Officer of the Lodge. Charles Eigenbrodt was also a Past Grand, meaning that he had presided over an Odd Fellows Lodge in the past and could have been either the Charity Lodge in Stockton, or the Templar Lodge in San Francisco.

### **Alameda County Supervisor**

On November 6, 1860, when he was 36 years old, Charles Eigenbrodt was elected to the Alameda County Board of Supervisors representing Washington Township. While a Supervisor, he spoke in favor of building a good road through Alameda County, one that can be traveled in good weather and bad. He was reelected on November 4, 1861 with 423 votes.

After serving for two years as County Supervisor, Charles Eigenbrodt went back to his military roots and joined the Second Brigade of the California Militia. He was given the rank of Major and served on the staff of Brigadier General John S. Ellis.

### **Forming the California Battalion**

When the Civil War broke out, Californians joined the US Army. Most of these volunteers were placed with units in California and the regular US Army forces were moved from California to states where the action was taking place. A number of Californians were not interested in just sitting out the war in California and wanted to see action. They decided their best option was to join a military unit from another state. In the summer of 1862, a deal was made with Governor John Andrew of Massachusetts where one hundred California volunteers would form a company and join with a Calvary regiment forming in Massachusetts. This group would be known as the

“California Hundred.” Once in Massachusetts, they would form Company A of the 2nd Regiment of Calvary, Massachusetts Volunteers.

Given the success of the first California volunteers, more men would be recruited to join the Massachusetts Calvary. Major DeWitt Clinton Thompson received permission from the Secretary of War to recruit more Californians. On January 15th, 1863 a notice appeared in the “Alta California” newspaper requesting recruits for:

“...three years or the war, under the Massachusetts Quota, and will leave for New York on the 11th of February next. Transportation has been provided for and sufficient funds are now under the control of Hon. Ira P. Rankin to pay all necessary expenses of the organization. Uniforms, quarters, sustenance and necessary outfit will be furnished to the men as soon as accepted.”



*Captain Charles S. Eigenbrodt  
(Photo courtesy Sutter's Fort State Historic Park)*

In January, Charles Eigenbrodt joined the unit. His enlistment date is March 19, 1863, because he needed to have 85% of the Company in place for him to show as the Commander. Charles Eigenbrodt left his staff position with Brigadier General Ellis, was appointed Captain and assigned the command of Company A. Also in Company A was John T. Campbell and Hiram Clark, who were also from Alvarado. John Campbell enlisted on February 26 and Hiram Clark on February 5. Published newspaper sources state that John Campbell was given the rank of 2nd

Lieutenant, but later records show that he started as a Private and reached the rank of Corporal. Hiram Clark would promote out of the Company and become an officer in another Battalion.

The Battalion originally had their headquarters in the Assembly Hall in San Francisco, but they would move to Platt's Music Hall on Montgomery St. The main hall would be used for formation and drilling. The front hall in the second floor would be used for the officers, and the upper story would be assigned to the enlisted men as quarters.

Just before departing San Francisco, there were 4 companies, A, B, C & D with the following officers assigned:

Company A:	Capt.	Charles S. Eigenbrodt
	First Lieut.	Rufus W. Smith
	Second Lieut.	Henry H. Crocker
	103 Enlisted Men	
Company B:	Capt.	Z. B. Adams
	First Lieut.	William c. Manning
	Second Lieut.	Josiah A. Baldwin
	98 Enlisted Men	
Company C:	Capt.	George A. Manning
	First Lieut.	Alvin W. Stone
	Second Lieut.	John C. Norcross
	84 Enlisted Men	
Company D:	35 Enlisted Men	

Captain DeMerritt of Company D and First Lieut. Stone of Company C remained in San Francisco to recruit more men to fill the entire Battalion.

## Setting off for War

On March 23rd, four companies marched down to Folsom Street wharf and boarded the *S. S. Constitution* for the first leg of the journey to the East Coast. The Battalion was escorted to the wharf by the local military units, with the streets lined with crowds cheering and ladies waving their handkerchiefs at the brave young men heading off to battle. A number of smaller sailing vessels were around the ship, full of spectators. Amidst much cheering from both those on the ship and those on the shore, the soldiers marched up the gang planks to get on board. At 11:30 am, the *S.S. Constitution* started turning her paddlewheel, with the sound of a band playing "Home, Sweet, Home" and the artillery firing a salute, and she left her berth. She turned north to head for the golden gate and then to head south for Panama. As she passed the Federal sloop of war *Cyane*, it dropped its colors in a form of salute.

As with most ocean voyages of the time, the food was not quite the same as the meals the men were used to at home. After some grumbling, Major Thompson, Captains Eigenbrodt and Manning went ashore at Manzanillo, Mexico, to gather some supplies. They returned with several baskets of eggs, which were served to the men.

During the trip south, a group was formed calling themselves Constitution Guards, who were men that had previous military training. They were armed and prepared to defend the ship against any attacks from Confederate pirates.

Once the men arrived in Panama, they would travel across the isthmus and catch another ship for New York. Once on the east coast of Panama, the *Ocean Queen* picked up the men and took them on to New York.



*1st Lieut. John C. Norcross*  
(Photo Courtesy Sutter's Fort State Historic Park)

On April 14, 1863, the *Ocean Queen* arrived in New York and was met by Colonel Howe, State Agent for Massachusetts. The Battalion was escorted to Park Barracks where the men would live for their short stay in New York. The next day the Battalion was given a speech by Governor Nye of Nevada (then a Territory). They were then reviewed by New York Mayor George Updyke in City Hall Park. After the review, they marched up Broadway and down to the docks to load on a boat for Boston.

On April 16th, the Battalion arrived in Boston and marched to Camp Meigs in Readville, Massachusetts. Once at Camp Meigs, the Battalion joined the 2nd Massachusetts Regiment and formed the second Battalion, Companies E, F, L, and M. Capt. Eigenbrodt was in command of Company E, with John C. Norcross as First Lieut. and Henry H. Crocker as Second Lieut.. Captians DeMerritt, Adams and Manning would get Companies F, L, & M respectively. While at Camp Meigs the Battalion received Calvary training. Some men that were originally from the area, were given a few days of leave to visit family in the general area.

## Facing Action

In May, the California Battalion left Camp Meigs and headed to Gloucester Point on the York River to meet up with the first Battalion, who had been camped there a number of weeks. The Battalion headed south for duty around Washington D.C. While in the D.C. area they engaged in patrols both in Maryland and Virginia.

On July 29, 1863, a Court of Inquiry was set up to investigate charges against Capt. Adams, with Major W. Forbes as President and Capt. Eigenbrodt and Lieut. Smith as the other officers. The specific charges and specification are:

*Charge - Habitual violation of the third paragraph of Army Regulations  
Specification in this that, the Captain Z. B. Adams, of the 2nd Mass. Calvary Vols., did on or about the 19th day of July, 1863, while in portion of the regiment was at a halt, on line of march near Centreville, VA., in a threatening & insulting manner, say to the non-commissioned officers and privates of Co. "F" 2d Mass. Cav. "Keep your horses in line God damn you, or I will chop your heads off." And that he Capt. Z. B. Adams, frequently uses insulting and abusive language toward the enlisted men belonging to Co. "F". 2d Mass. Cav. Vols.*

The Court called a number of witnesses that attested to hearing Capt. Adams make the above mentioned statement and of his prior use of abusive language. A number of witnesses also stated that they had not heard Capt. Adams use any abusive language in the past. After some deliberations, the three officers found Capt. Adams not guilty of either the Charge or the Specification.

In the middle of August, Capt. Eigenbrodt was ordered to pursue a number of Confederate "bushwackers" from Mosby's unit, who were making raids in Virginia, just south of Washington D.C. Capt. Eigenbrodt left on a Sunday night with a skirmishing party of twenty four men and headed south on the road to Fairfax Court House. After traveling all night, Eigenbrodt's men came across a party of thirty or forty of Mosby's men, and gave chase. Mosby's men ran as fast as they could, leaving bits of plunder along the road, in an effort to lighten their load. After pursuing the Confederates for seven miles, Capt. Eigenbrodt had to stop the chase as their horses were too tired from traveling all night. The skirmishing party returned with two Union soldiers, captured by Mosby's men, five horses, and a considerable amount of plunder.

From the Muster Rolls that each Company had to file, are two entries written by Capt. Eigenbrodt himself:

*From the 30th day of June to the 31st day of August 1863*

*Regt made a reconnaissance July 12 1863 at Ashby Gap and has a skirmish in which two privates were kill and four privates were taken prisoners & four wounded Moved to Centreville. July 22/63 Made several reconnaissance in Warrenton, Leesburg, Middleburg, & and surrounding country*

*The Co. also did picket and scouting duty at Chain Bridge & near Fort Ethan Allen Dept of Potomac Aug 24/63 a party leading horses from Washington was attacked near Coyles Tavern & one Corp and two Privates taken prisoners.*

*Station: Vienna, Va*

*Chas S Eigenbrodt  
Capt Comdg Co*

*From the 31st day of August to the 31st day of October 1863*

*Did picket and Patrol duty on the Pike between Fairfax C.H. and Annandale from Sept 9th till October 10th 1863 during which time joined Col. Lowell and the greater portion of my command (leaving one Sergt and twelve men to guard my camp in the Pine Woods) on a scout to Leesburg Va on Sept 19 1863 - also on another scout to Snickers Gap October 2nd 1863 and again returned to Picket duty Va Camp. and then reported at Head Quarters at Cav. Camp 2nd Mass Cav. Vienna Va. 10th October 1863 on the 18th Inst. While out on a scout with a portion of my command, and detachments from other Regiments fell in with a small party of Mosbys Guerillas under command of Lt. Williams also wounded near Stewarts old road 1 1/2 miles below Fairfax C.H. Killing one Mason and taking 3 prisoners viz: Jack Barnes, Dr. Stratton, and Harrover & wounding Lt. Williams.*

*Chas S. Eigenbrodt  
Capt. Comdg.*

*Station: Vienna, Va.*

In November of 1863, the enlisted men of the California Battalion sent petitions to the Secretary of War to be transferred from the 2nd Mass. to Col. Bakers Rangers. The men were not happy with just doing picket duty. Capt. Eigenbrodt made a report to Major Thompson about the petitions and also stated that the officers of the Battalion had not signed any of the petitions.

In February of 1864, the Battalion was sent from Vienna, Virginia to investigate Confederate forces that were said to be operating around Middleburg, Virginia. After marching a bit, Col. Lowell halted the troops and sent Capt. Adams and his Company to Upperville. Then Capt. Eigenbrodt was ordered to take his company and head to Middleburg to meet up with Capt. Adams' Company. Once near Middleburg, Capt. Eigenbrodt noticed a number of rebels working in squads. A courier was sent to inform Col. Lowell, but he was captured by the enemy. Capt. Eigenbrodt wanted to take his company into town, but a guide suggested not as the rebels troops outnumbered Company E. Capt. Eigenbrodt reluctantly turned and headed back to the main column.

Also in February, William E. Ormsby, of Company E, deserted to the Confederacy, taking with him two fully equipped horses and a number of guns. It seems that Ormsby had a relationship with a woman in Aldie, with close ties to the Confederacy. A group of sixty from the Battalion was sent out to recover Ormsby and the equipment. They met up with a number of rebels at Aldie, being led by Ormsby. The Californians charged the rebels and chased them off the field of

battle. Ormsby was captured after he left his horse and tried to get away on foot. He was brought back to the Regiment to face charges of desertion.

A Drums Head Court Martial was convened and Ormsby was brought before it. The Court took testimony and then recessed to reach a verdict. The next morning, Ormsby was informed that he was found guilty and would be shot that day. At 11 pm, Ormsby was led out to the place of execution. He asked to address his company and was given permission. He specifically addressed Capt. Eigenbrodt and asked for his forgiveness. When addressing the men of the Company, he warned them to take heed of his poor example.

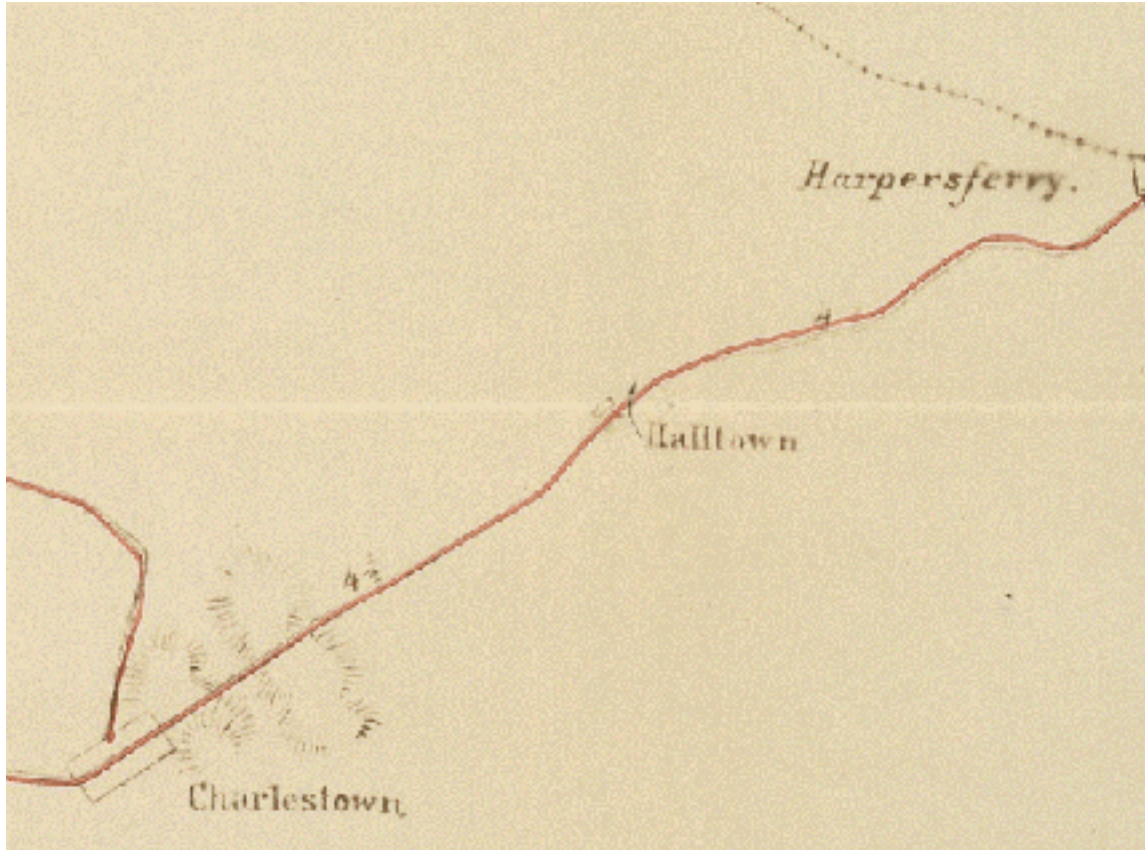
Once Ormsby reached his mark he opened his shirt and said to the firing squad, "Boys, do your duty; aim right here." His hands were tied and he was blindfolded. On the order, 12 rifles did their duty.

On February 21, while doing more patrol duty, the Regiment was returning to camp from the Middleburg area, via Drainsville. When just 3 miles outside of Drainsville, a number of rebels attacked the advanced guard of the column and then attacked the main column, causing confusion. During the first part of the fight, Capt. J. Sewall Reed was shot and killed. Capt. Manning took over command and rallied the troops to fight back. The men of Company M and Company E heard his rallying call and stood and fought the enemy. The rebels charged the Californians and were able to capture about 60 men, including Capt. Manning.

On August 9, 1864, Major Thompson resigned his position as Battalion Commander. He resigned because he wanted the California Battalion to be a separate unit and not part of the Mass. Calvary. Capt. Eigenbrodt was promoted from Company Commander to Battalion Commander.

## Falling in Battle

On August 25, 1864, the California Battalion, with Company E, was facing the enemy near Halltown, Virginia (now West Virginia). Halltown is a small hamlet on the road between Charlestown and Harper's Ferry. Captain Eigenbrodt was leading the charge when he was struck in the chest with a round, knocking him from his horse. He was killed instantly.



*(Hand drawn map showing the location of Halltown in relation to Hapers Ferry and Charlestown)*

There are two accounts as to what happened to Capt. Eigenbrodt after he fell in battle. In one account, it was stated that Capt. William Hussey, and others near him, carried his body from the battlefield. Another account states that the rebel forces overtook the battlefield. A number of captured rebel prisoners, taken during battle the next day, said that the rebel forces admired the bravery of Capt. Eigenbrodt and respectfully buried him. His grave would be marked so that he could be retrieved by a mortician and properly prepared for burial.



*(Later map showing location of Halltown and railroad)*

## Memorials

All of the accounts of Charles Eigenbrodt and his death used nothing but the best words to describe him. The Oakland Enquirer said, “As a daring leader Captain Eigenbrodt had no superior.” The Alta California said, “Thus perished one of California’s bravest and best men, and when the final roll shall be made up of the gallant sons of the Pacific, the name of Eigenbrodt will occupy a place beside those of Baker, Mathewson, and a host of patriots, who shed their heart’s blood for the honor and glory of our common country.”

Another reporter for the Alta California said this about the death of Charles Eigenbrodt and Charlie Meader, who died the day after Charles in the same battlefield, “two of the bravest men I have ever seen.”

In his will, Charles left \$1,000 to the International Order of Odd Fellow in Alvarado, to start their library.

Sometime after the battle, Charles’s brother, Dr. David Eigenbrodt, moved his remains and had him buried in Greenwood Cemetery, in Brooklyn, New York.

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