

**EARTHQUAKE IN
CALIFORNIA, APRIL 18,
1906; SPECIAL REPORT**

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Earthquake in California, April 18, 1906; Special Report by Adolphus W. Greely

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ADOLPHUS W. GREELY

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EARTHQUAKE IN CALIFORNIA
APRIL 18, 1906.

SPECIAL REPORT

OF

MAJ. GEN. ADOLPHUS W. GREELY, U. S. A.,

Commanding the Pacific Division,

ON THE

RELIEF OPERATIONS CONDUCTED BY THE MILITARY
AUTHORITIES OF THE UNITED STATES AT
SAN FRANCISCO AND OTHER POINTS,

WITH

ACCOMPANYING DOCUMENTS.



WASHINGTON:
GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE.

1906.

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SPECIAL REPORT OF MAJ. GEN. ADOLPHUS W. GREELY,
U. S. A., COMMANDING THE PACIFIC DIVISION.

○ HEADQUARTERS PACIFIC DIVISION,
San Francisco, Cal., July 30, 1906.

SIR: In accordance with the instructions of the Hon. William H. Taft, Secretary of War, under date of June 29, 1906, I have the honor to submit herewith a comprehensive report of the services of the United States Army in connection with the recent earthquake and conflagration in the city of San Francisco, Cal., and the relief measures rendered necessary by these disasters. D

I had left the Division of the Pacific on April 16 for a short leave, and learned of the occurrence of the earthquake and the beginning of the fire while passing through Omaha. From that city I telegraphed General Funston, expressing my confidence that, under him, the army would afford the necessary aid and assistance. Necessarily I was obliged to proceed to Chicago, where my baggage had preceded me. On my arrival in that city the magnitude of the disaster was so evident that I returned direct to San Francisco on the fastest train—the Overland Limited—and reached here on April 22.

○ The report of operations of Brigadier-General Funston, who was temporarily in command during my absence, from April 18 to 22, follows in full:

I have the honor to make the following report of the work of the troops in connection with the recent earthquake and conflagration in the city of San Francisco, from the morning of the 18th of April, 1906, until the return of the division commander on the 22d of the same month:

I was living at 1310 Washington street, near Jones, and was awakened by the earthquake shock at 5.16 a. m. of April 18. Realizing from the intensity and duration of the shock that serious damage to the city, with attendant loss of life, must have occurred, I dressed, and, finding that the street cars were not running, hastened on foot to the business part of the city. My route was down Jones street to California and along that street to Sansome. That portion of California street between Jones and Powell being one of the most elevated in the city, I had noticed that columns of smoke were arising in various localities, particularly in the region south of Market street. Reaching Sansome I saw that several fires were already burning fiercely in the banking district and that the firemen who were on the scene were quite helpless owing to lack of water. This, in connection with the number of fires I had seen from the higher part of California street, convinced me that a most serious conflagration was at hand, and that, owing to the great extent of the area in which fires had already appeared, the police force of the city would be totally inadequate to maintain order and prevent looting and establish and hold the proper fire lines in order that the fire department might not be hampered in its work. By this time the streets were full of people, somewhat alarmed but by no means panic stricken. Encountering a patrolman, I inquired of him how I could most quickly communicate with the Mayor or Chief of Police, and was informed that the entire telephone system was paralyzed, but that he felt sure that both of those officials

would immediately repair to the Hall of Justice on Portsmouth Square, which surmise proved correct. I requested this man to hasten to the Hall of Justice and leave word for the Chief of Police that I would at once order out all available troops and place them at his disposal. There being no means of transportation available and quick action being imperative, I then ran from the corner of Sansome and California streets to the quartermaster's stable, on Pine street, between Leavenworth and Hyde, a distance of slightly more than a mile, directed my carriage driver to saddle a horse, and, while he was doing so, hastily wrote on a leaf from a notebook a brief note addressed to the commanding officer, Presidio, directing him to turn out the entire garrison and report for duty to the Chief of Police at the Hall of Justice. The man was directed to stop at Fort Mason on his way to the Presidio and give a verbal message to the same effect to the commanding officer of that post. From here I proceeded on foot to the headquarters of the Department of California, Phelan Building, at the corner of Market street and Grant avenue, a distance of about a mile. Here I found several officers of the staffs of the Pacific Division and the Department of California, as well as a number of clerks and messengers who had already, under the direction of the chief clerk, Mr. A. R. Holzheid, engaged in getting the more important records in shape for removal from the building, if necessary. At about 7.45 a. m. arrived the first troops from Fort Mason, Companies C and D, of the Engineers, Capt. M. L. Walker commanding. These troops had already been reported to the Mayor and the Chief of Police, and had been directed by the former to guard the banking district and send patrols along Market street to prevent looting. The arrival of these troops was greeted with demonstrations of approval by the many people on the streets. At about 8 a. m. the garrison from the Presidio, consisting of the 10th, 29th, 38th, 60th, 67th, 70th, and 105th Companies of Coast Artillery, Troops I and K, 14th Cavalry, and the 1st, 9th, and 24th Field Batteries, Col. Charles Morris, Artillery Corps, commanding, began to arrive. Detachments were sent to guard the mint and post-office, while the remainder assisted the police in keeping the dense crowds of onlookers away from close proximity to the fire and in patrolling the streets to prevent the people from breaking into stores and saloons. Most fortunately the latter had already been ordered closed by the Mayor, so that one source of danger had been removed. Δ

Shortly after arriving at department headquarters, I had sent the chief signal officer of the department, Capt. L. D. Wildman, to get into communication with the commanding officer at Fort Miley, and order the troops from that post into the city. Captain Wildman hastened to the Presidio in an automobile, and finding the telephone line from that post to Fort Miley in working order, delivered my orders to Maj. C. H. Hunter, the commanding officer at Fort Miley. The troops from that post, the 26th and 64th Companies of Coast Artillery, had a march of about 5 miles, but reached the Phelan Building at 11.30 a. m. A detachment of the 25th Company proceeded to the United States mint for guard duty, the balance of the company marching to Ingleside to guard the county jail. The 64th Company assisted in patrolling the streets. Captain Wildman also delivered to the master of the quartermaster steamer *McDowell* a written order from me to Col. Alfred Reynolds, 22d Infantry, commanding at Fort McDowell, to embark his command on the *McDowell*, land at the foot of Market street, march to the Phelan Building, and report to me for duty. These troops, consisting of headquarters and 1st Battalion, 22d Infantry, arrived at 10 a. m. For a short time they were held in reserve on O'Farrell street, but later were utilized in patrolling the business district of the city and in assisting the firemen in handling fire hose. Company D was detailed to guard the appraisers' building. \rightarrow I have no doubt, and have heard the same opinion expressed by scores of citizens, that had it not been for the prompt arrival of this large force of regular troops, who were acting under orders to shoot all looters, the saloons would have been broken into and then, the crowd, becoming turbulent, would have begun sacking the banks and jewelry stores. The city police, however brave and efficient, would have been totally unable, from mere lack of numbers, to have dealt with such a situation.

By 9 a. m. the various fires were merging into one great conflagration, and were approaching the Palace Hotel, Grand Hotel, Cal Building, Emporium, and other large buildings from the south. Before this time the task of removing from the Phelan Building the records of the Department of California and from the Grant Building the records of the Pacific Division had been begun, and was carried on under great difficulties, owing to the fact that the elevators in these

buildings were not in operation. There was practically no wind in the forenoon, but in the afternoon there was a light westerly breeze, so that the fire had to work its way to windward, causing it to advance very slowly. This, unfortunately, gave people hope that the business portion of the city would not be entirely destroyed. Apparently for this reason no energetic efforts were made by citizens to remove much of the valuable property which might have been saved.

Early in the morning, shortly after it was seen that a serious conflagration was at hand, the acting chief of the fire department had sent a message to the Presidio, requesting that all available explosives, with a detail to handle them, be sent to check the fire, as the earthquake had broken the water mains and the fire department was practically helpless. The commanding officer of the Presidio ordered Capt. Le Vert Coleman, post ordnance officer, to provide the necessary explosives. Under these instructions 48 barrels of powder in field battery caissons were sent to the Mayor under charge of First Lieut. Raymond W. Briggs, Artillery Corps. As the caissons were not suited to carrying large amounts of explosives, two large wagons were procured and in them was loaded the remaining powder, with about 300 pounds of dynamite procured from the civilian employees of the Engineer Department. Captain Coleman at once proceeded to the Hall of Justice and reported to the mayor. Shortly afterwards a large amount of dynamite was obtained from the California Powder Works, and Captain Coleman and Lieutenant Briggs, acting under directions from the Mayor and the acting chief of the fire department, engaged in the destruction of buildings. While many of the older and more fragile buildings could be destroyed by high explosives, it was found that the modern steel-and-concrete buildings were practically impervious to anything except enormous charges. In addition to the dynamite used Captain Coleman used a small quantity of gun cotton, which had been brought down from Mare Island.

The troops continued during the day to assist the police and fire department in every possible manner. The work done by them was effective in keeping the most perfect order and in clearing the streets in the vicinity of the fire of the idle onlookers and anxious citizens, who seemed too dazed to act intelligently in their efforts to save their own property. As soon as it was possible I sent to the War Department a telegram, stating that the troops had been turned out to assist in fighting the fire, aiding the police, and saving property. In fact, that everything would be done to render assistance, and that I would trust to the War Department to authorize any action I might have to take.

○ About 10 a. m. the commissary depot was destroyed, and I wired an estimate of the extent of the disaster. I considered it necessary to make an estimate of the number who would be rendered homeless by the fire in case the conflagration could be checked within reasonable bounds. I asked, therefore, for tents and rations for 30,000 people. As the fire progressed, however, it became evident that not 30,000, but probably more than 100,000, people would be homeless before midnight. Telegraphic request was therefore made that all available tents and rations be forwarded as soon as possible. This step was considered necessary, as it seemed then that all supply warehouses, not only for food but for bedding and shelter, would inevitably be destroyed without the hope of saving even a small percentage of their contents. A fact which made the saving of property most difficult was that no wagons of any kind appeared to be in the vicinity of the fire to carry away any goods that it might have been possible to save.

By the morning of the 19th the fire had destroyed the main portion of the wholesale and retail section of the city, and was actively burning on a line from about the corner of Montgomery avenue and Montgomery street southwest on an irregular line to Van Ness avenue at Golden Gate avenue. To the south of this it had crossed Van Ness avenue and had worked its way up Market street to about Valencia street. That part of the fire line from Golden Gate and Van Ness avenues northeast to the bay at about the foot of Broadway was most actively eating its way against a slight wind into the residence section on Russian Hill. The progress of the fire was very slow. It averaged not more than one block in two hours. At that time I could get no definite reports from the fire on the south side of the city, or what is known as the Potrero; but from the fact that the fire had gone up Market street so far, it appeared evident that all the south part of the city would be destroyed.

On the evening of the 18th, by agreement with the Mayor and Chief of Police, the city had been divided into sections, and all that part west of Van Ness ave-

nue was assigned to the regular troops, with Col. Charles Morris, Artillery Corps, in command. The remainder of the regular troops were kept in the vicinity of the advancing fire line, and assisted during the night both the police and fire department in keeping order and in fighting the fire. The troops apparently forgot for the while that they had now been on duty from 7 a. m. on the 18th for more than twenty-four hours, without rest or shelter and with but very light cold rations. They seemed as actively energetic and wide awake as when they were first called out.

Several attempts had been made to get into telegraphic communication with the commanding officer of the Presidio of Monterey, in order to bring to the city a portion of the command of that post. Owing to the telegraph lines being down it was, however, impossible to communicate with any place south of San Francisco. On the 19th the Pacific Squadron had reached San Francisco Bay, and, at my request, Admiral C. F. Goodrich, commanding, sent a torpedo boat to the Presidio of Monterey, carrying the necessary message to the commanding officer of that post. These orders were delivered with great dispatch and with the result that on the 21st headquarters, 1st and 3d Battalions of the 20th Infantry, Col. Marion P. Maus, commanding, reached San Francisco and reported for duty, being followed the next day by field and staff and the 2d Squadron, 14th Cavalry. Companies E and G, 22d Infantry, were brought to the city from Alcatraz Island on the 19th, and remained on duty from that date, and on the same day the 32d, 31st, and 68th Companies of Coast Artillery, under the command of Col. R. H. Patterson, arrived from Fort Baker, and also on the same day Companies K and M, 22d Infantry, from the depot of recruits and casuals, on Angel Island, reported and were assigned to duty. On this day telegraphic orders were sent to the commanding officer of Vancouver Barracks to proceed to this city with the entire garrison of that post.

On the morning of this day I considered it advisable to establish at some convenient point both division and department headquarters. It was therefore decided to utilize the only Government building in the vicinity of the fire available for such purpose, this being the quarters of the permanent division commander at the post of Fort Mason, where I established my headquarters, using both the division and department staffs, without, for the time being, making any attempt to segregate the duties belonging to each.

○ Anxious inquiries were made as to the extent of the injuries to the water system. No water appearing in any of the pipes in the vicinity of Fort Mason or, in fact, any part of the city covered by the troops, it appeared for the time that a water famine was inevitable. Steps were at once taken to have an examination made of all the available sources of water supply outside the regular Spring Valley supply, and it was found that there was an independent water supply in Golden Gate Park, where were also lakes of fresh water of considerable size. The Lobos Creek water supply was well understood, as it had been carefully considered previously with a view to utilizing it for the new water system of the Presidio reservation. I learned unofficially on the afternoon of the 18th that the Spring Valley Water Company was most energetically repairing its great water mains and that they hoped in a day or two to bring within the city a small amount of water through their regular mains. I was glad to learn on the 20th that my unofficial report was confirmed by the statement of Mr. Schussler, chief engineer of the Spring Valley Water Company, to the effect that he hoped to be able to deliver in the city the next day 10,000,000 gallons of water and thereafter probably that amount each day until, finally, the system would be completely restored. It was most fortunate indeed that this gentleman was in the city, as he had planned and supervised the construction of all the larger mains and was able to locate them from memory alone, as all the charts had been destroyed in the conflagration. It was from his intimate knowledge, also, that he was able to send mechanics immediately to the various streets from which branch the side lines into the burned district, and thus stop the waste of water, which must inevitably have resulted had these pipes not been closed.

By the night of the 19th about 250,000 people or more must have been encamped or sleeping out in the open in the various military reservations, parks, and open spaces of the city.

The Pacific Squadron having arrived on the 19th, Admiral C. F. Goodrich, commanding, sent ashore an officer and offered to land a force to assist in the work being done by the troops. The offer was most gladly accepted; but, as