



# **Soldier-Artist of the Great Reconnaissance: John C. Tidball and the 35th Parallel Pacific Railroad Survey**

*Eugene C. Tidball*

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## **Soldier-Artist of the Great Reconnaissance: John C. Tidball and the 35th Parallel Pacific Railroad Survey** Eugene C. Tidball

**In 1853, a survey team under Amiel W. Whipple** set out for California from Fort Smith, Arkansas, in search of a transcontinental railroad route. In addition to studying the engineering obstacles for the railroad, the party collected natural history specimens in this unexplored and dangerous corner of America—and when the expedition entered New Mexico, it requested an additional military escort to guard against hostile Indians. An 1848 West Point graduate, Lt. John C. Tidball had only recently arrived at Fort Defiance in New Mexico, when he received his orders to join the surveying party. Although his official duties were strictly military, Tidball began sketching as soon as he joined the expedition, and his talents made him an indispensable member of Whipple's artistic staff. This book offers a new look at the Whipple expedition through the lens of a newly discovered manuscript of Tidball's memoirs—the only firsthand account of the 35th parallel survey to be discovered in nearly thirty years. *Soldier-Artist of the Great Reconnaissance* includes much of the material from this manuscript, giving us John Tidball's pungent observations on the journey as well as striking examples of his artwork. Melding the observations of several diarists—which sometimes presented opposing viewpoints—author Eugene Tidball offers a new perspective on the Whipple expedition that focuses on the diverse personalities of the party and on the Native Americans they encountered along the way. The Pacific Railroad Surveys were among the most important explorations of North America ever undertaken. Eugene Tidball's account of this journey tells how the artistic and literary contributions of John Tidball, his distant cousin, enrich our understanding of what the survey party saw and thought as they crossed the continent. *Soldier-Artist of the Great Reconnaissance* recaptures the Whipple expedition's trials and triumphs as it documents the unusual talents of one of its most versatile members.

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