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Papers of the Bi-National Conference on the War Between Mexico and the United States

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Palo Alto Battlefield National Historic Site (Agency : U.S.)

University of Texas at Brownsville

El Colegio de la Frontera Norte

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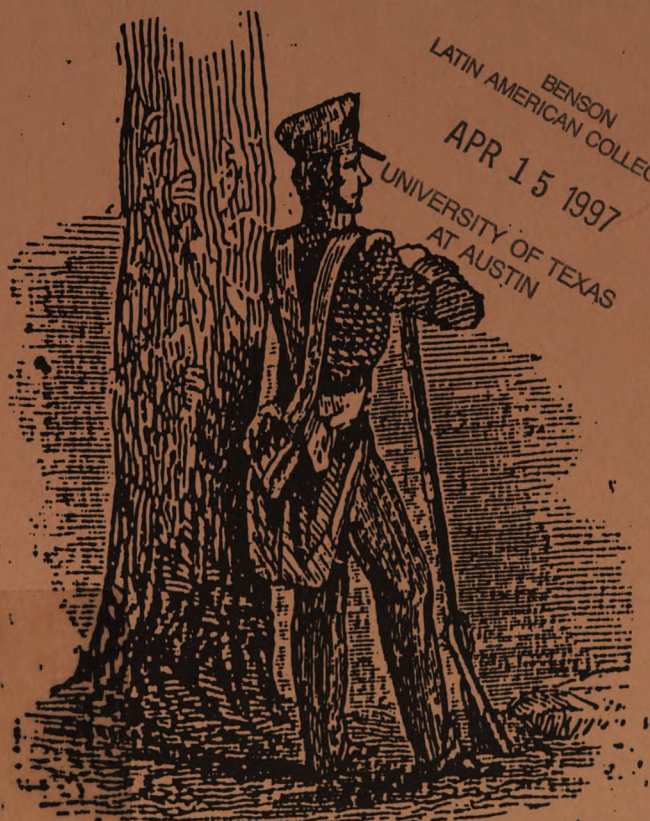
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**PAPERS
OF THE
NATIONAL CONFERENCE
ON THE
WAR BETWEEN
MEXICO AND THE UNITED STATES**

Matamoros, Tamaulipas/Brownsville, Texas
February 10-11 1995



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**Papers
of the
Bi-National Conference
on the
War Between Mexico and the United States**

**edited by
Douglas A. Murphy**

**National Park Service
Palo Alto Battlefield National Historic Site
Brownsville, TX 78522
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United States Department of the Interior
1997**

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Richard Bruce Winders

The First Alabama Volunteers: Portrait of a Regiment

Steven R. Butler

INTRODUCTION

In February 1995, scholars from Mexico and the United States met for what may have been the first truly binational conference to focus on the Mexican-American War. The gathering was sponsored and organized on both sides of the border; by Palo Alto Battlefield National Historic Site and the University of Texas at Brownsville and by the Colegio de la Frontera Norte in Matamoros. Conference rooms were set up on each side of the Rio Grande; on the campus of the University of Texas/Texas Southmost College in Brownsville and in buildings of the Preparatoria Ricardo Flores Magón in Matamoros. A call for papers encouraged participation from both countries on topics of interest to each nation. By including Mexican and American speakers in the same sessions, with simultaneous translation of papers, every effort was made to foster binational discussion and open interchange on the subject. The conference committee even altered the name of the assembly, from the Palo Alto Conference to The Bi-National Conference on the War Between Mexico and the United States, to better reflect the desire to encourage friendly academic exchange on a topic that has often divided these two neighbors.

This binational conference also maintained another tradition of its forerunner meetings: the inclusion of a broad range of participants. Like the First and Second Palo Alto Conferences before it, the 1995 conference featured a number of professional historians, from a variety of colleges and universities. Also participating were a number of first-time conferees, student researchers, representatives of the field of public history, and subject area "enthusiasts" with a range of experience in this type of conference format. This intermingling of Mexican and American, experts and novices, professionals and enthusiasts, participants and on-lookers produced important interchanges of opinions, source materials, insights, and information that benefitted those of all experience levels.

The spirit of this conference has been somewhat more difficult to capture on paper. During the gathering, the conference organizing committee invited participants to submit their presentations for possible publication. As papers came in, there was a marked absence of papers that demonstrate Mexican perspectives on the war. Fortunately, several excellent papers by Mexican scholars now seem headed for print in a separate Mexican collection. Of those papers that did arrive, some were rejected on the basis of length, some lacked proper documentation, and several interesting oral

presentations simply did not transfer well to the written word. These will not appear here, although several may emerge at a later date in a different collection. What does remain is a compilation of ten papers of various lengths and styles, representing a range of academic interest and experience, and selected without a conscious eye toward developing a specific theme or subtopic. Despite these limitations, the final product is an interesting series of glimpses of American political and military life during the formative years of the United States.

As a whole, these pieces offer a view of a confident United States, sure of its destiny but, at the same time, weighed with insecurity and still defining the bounds of its democracy. Robert Johannsen points to the war as a defining moment of the Republic, a time when America proved its strength and demonstrated itself to be a model for the world. Others back this view, showing that nation and its confidence were not necessarily so strong in the years leading up to the conflict. Wesley Riddle, for example, shows a country in an uncertain courtship with Texas, with union achieved only when Texans determined a merger to be in their best interest. Likewise, Lawrence Taylor shows a nation eager to expand, but responding to fear of British domination as it proclaimed its vaguely-defined destiny to conquer the continent. Indeed, as Taylor points out, Democratic politicians in the United States played upon fears of British intrigues in Texas, California, and throughout Mexico, to rally support for annexation and war against a sister republic. At the same time, President James Polk toned down his rhetoric and settled the Oregon issue to avoid a second showdown against a more equal military foe.

War with Mexico would boost America's confidence in its strength and its future, but also raised new concerns. Joseph Grenier demonstrates that the nation had not yet broken into purely sectional factions by 1848, but the terms of peace with Mexico would hasten that process. As Riddle notes, the annexation process in Texas was closely tied to the slavery debate. Grenier points out the actual timing of the process remains in doubt, but questions of whether to extend the franchise into the lands taken from Mexico would polarize the political system and lead to a fracture of the Union. Still, Johannsen indicates that the conflict may have raised an even more profound concern for the nation. If the proud showing of professional and citizen soldiers against Mexico swept aside doubts about the military capacity of a democracy and assured them that America would be a beacon to the world, it also led some to conclude that America had sacrificed its moral compass. By demonstrating that it could wage war like the European empires, they asked, had the Republic sacrificed the virtue that distinguished it from those realms?

The issue of the balance of democracy and power had already made its appearance during the course of the war. On a purely military plain, U.S. forces demonstrated the vibrant, innovative, "can-do" spirit in which Americans took pride. As Paul Clark and Edward Moseley indicate, in their study of the assault on Veracruz, U.S. forces were able to overcome political debates and apparently insurmountable military obstacles to achieve stunning victories. Specialized units like the company of sappers, miners, and pontoniers, discussed by Stephen Riese, included some of the finest technical minds of the time. Soldiers from the veteran leader Winfield Scott to young Lieutenants like Lee, Beauregard, and McClellan demonstrated a flair for innovation and versatility that their countrymen prized in any profession.

Nevertheless, the army also highlighted darker themes that represented the underside of the war effort and American society. If the United States was accomplishing remarkable feats in Mexico, this success was built as much upon the valor of unassimilated, often unwanted, immigrant footsoldiers as on the strategies and leadership of native-born officers. As Steven O'Brien notes in his discussion of the priests assigned to the army, these clergy were requested not only to smooth relations between the troops and Catholic Mexico, but to help win the continued loyalty of the Irish and German Catholics who formed a large part of the U.S. force but had never found a niche in their adopted homeland.

Likewise, if America viewed its military as the strong arm of democracy, it often overlooked the undemocratic methods that made this institution a success. As Dale Steinhauser points out, that innovation, so highly prized in American society, often manifested itself in the invention of new and cruel punishments. For those Americans who reassured themselves that the United States could impose a democracy on Mexico by force, the hierarchical and iron-fisted rules of military laws might have revived fears of the corrupting influence that often surrounds men and nations in positions of power.

It is more likely that many simply ignored the potential lessons to be found in the regular army and focused on the positive aspect of the citizen-soldier. Bruce Winders points to the volunteer regiments as the true mixing place of democracy and military. The volunteers were imbued with a sense of patriotism and a clear belief in their rights under a democratic government. As Winders documents and as Steven Butler illustrates in his travelogue of the Alabama regiment, these soldiers rejected firm discipline, demanded in democracy in the ranks, and viewed themselves as the vanguard of "manifest destiny." Still, as is illustrated in the Alabama account, many of these proud soldiers saw very little action, and the bulk of the fighting fell upon the regular army regiments who were "more suited" to regulation and punishment.

Victory in war obscured but did not resolve these issues for American society. Citizen-soldiers returned from Mexico as heroes; immigrant soldiers were often forgotten. Officers of the army were lauded for their leadership; few citizens recalled their command methods. The United States emerged as an international power that extended "from sea to shining sea." The question of America as a democratic beacon to the world faded as the country succumbed to a bloody civil war over more immediate issues. But basic questions of how to balance democracy and power, of the role of the United States in the world, and of the nature and purpose of the American military have frequently resurfaced--most recently as the nation assesses its role in the post-Cold War era. As is demonstrated by these papers, by the interest in this conference, and by the growing numbers of scholars dedicating their research to this subject, the Mexican-American War and its era has returned to prominence as students of history strive to understand a pivotal moment in the formation of modern U.S. political, military, and social policies.

Moreover, though it is unfortunately not well represented here, a similar impulse is underway in Mexico. Students of Mexican history are increasingly coming to view the years and events surrounding war with the United States as an equally vital moment in the formation of Mexico's political, military, and social framework. Mexican participation in this conference, in the preceding two Palo Alto Conferences, in a subsequent series of seminars with the conflict as a central theme, and in numerous other fora has both responded to and motivated a new level of discussion

of the event. It is hoped that these studies will, in time, be of equal importance in broadening the understanding of Mexican nation-building and the development of modern society.

And it is extremely important that the development of these two national perspectives occur in concert. It is unfortunate, though perhaps inevitable, that this conflict between republics became such a defining moment for each combatant. It is even more unfortunate that Mexican and American studies of this war often unfold in a vacuum, with scholars unaware of shared interests and concerns across the international border. It is hoped that the Binational Conference on the War Between the United States and Mexico in time will stand out as a starting point for the breaking down of academic divisions, for the encouragement of a dialog, and for the creation of a better understanding of the shared threads of continental history.

CONFERENCE PROGRAM

February 10
Preparatoria Ricardo Flores Magón

1:00 p.m.

Welcome

Dr. Cirila Quintero, El Colegio de la Frontera Norte--Matamoros

2:30-3:50 p.m.

Prelude to War: From the Alamo to Annexation

"Reclaiming 'Hallowed Ground': An Overview of the 'Rebuild the Alamo' Controversy"

Kevin R. Young, Forest View Historical Associates, San Antonio

"The Treaty Between the Republic of Texas and the Mormon Church, 1844: Could the War Have Been Avoided?"

Michael Cunningham, Kopperl High School, Kopperl, Texas

"The Annexation of Texas and its Consequences"

Wesley Allen Riddle, United States Military Academy

Chair: Sondra Shands, The University of Texas at Brownsville

Reconstructing the War: Living History and Battlefields

"Sabers and Soapsuds: The Fort Leavenworth Living History Program"

J. Patrick Hughes, Combined Arms Center History Office, Fort Leavenworth

"Condiciones originales y actuales del campo de batalla de la Angostura"

Carlos Recio Dávila, Universidad Autónoma de Coahuila

"Update of a Survey of Mexican-American War Battlefields in the United States"

Neil C. Mangum, National Park Service, Santa Fe, New Mexico

Chair: Aaron Mahr, Palo Alto Battlefield National Historic Site, Brownsville, Texas

4:00-5:20 p.m.

Padres, Punishment, and Pooches: Lesser Known Aspects of the Mexican War

"Soldiers in Black: Fr. John McElroy and Fr. Anthony Rey in the Mexican-American War"

Steven O'Brien, Boston College

"Bucking and Gagging: A Punishment in the Mexican-American War"

Dale R. Steinhauer, Center For Army Lessons Learned, Fort Leavenworth

"Dogs of Destiny, Hounds From Hell: American Soldiers and Canines in the Mexican War"

Douglas Murphy, Palo Alto Battlefield National Historic Site

Chair: Donald Chipman, University of North Texas

Profiles of the Men Who Fought: Groups and Individuals

"Made of Different Clay: Volunteers in the Mexican War"

Richard Bruce Winders, Texas Christian University

"The First Alabama Regiment in the War with Mexico"

Steven R. Butler, Descendants of Mexican War Veterans

"An Irishman at Buena Vista"

Bob Burke, Descendants of Mexican War Veterans

Chair: Joseph Chance, University of Texas--Pan American

February 11
University of Texas at Brownsville/Texas Southmost College

9:30-10:30 a.m.

Internal and External Challenges of the War

"El peligro de una guerra en dos frentes: El papel de Gran Bretaña en la guerra entre México y los Estados Unidos"

Lawrence Douglas Taylor Hansen, El Colegio de la Frontera Norte--Tijuana

" 'The Capstone to Our Misfortunes: 'Personalist Hurdles to State-Building in Mexico During the War with the United States"

Pedro Santoni, California State University--San Bernardino University

Chair: Joseph Sánchez, Spanish Colonial Research Center, University of New Mexico

Impact of the War in South Texas and Northern Mexico

"Social and Economic Effects of the Mexican-American War on Rancheros in the Trans-Nueces, 1846-1860"

Armando Alonzo, Texas A&M University

"La guerra entre México y los Estados Unidos y su impacto en Nuevo León"

Miguel A. González Quiroga, Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León

Chair: Ben Neece, Brownsville Historical Association

10:45-Noon

The War From the Mexican Perspective

"La inevitabilidad 'retórica' de la derrota"

Arturo Zárate Ruiz, Colegio de la Frontera Norte--Matamoros

"Un herida sin cerrar: la historica oficial mexicana en torno a la guerra del 1847"

Fernando Alanis Enciso, Colegio de la Frontera Norte--Nuevo Laredo

La intervención norteamericana de 1846-1848 en el Museo Nacional de las Intervenciones: Un tema para reflexionar

Laura Herrera Serna, Museo Nacional de las Intervenciones

Chair: Mara Hernández Triana, Colegio de la Frontera Norte--Matamoros

The Role of Engineers in the War

"Engineers on the Rio Grande in 1846"

Aaron P. Mahr, Palo Alto Battlefield National Historic Site

"Company A, Corps of Engineers, in the Mexican War"

Stephan Riese, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Fort Leavenworth

Chair: Douglas Murphy, Palo Alto Battlefield National Historic Site

1:30 a.m.-2:50 p.m.

American Occupation and Its Consequences

"Grupos clandestinos de resistencia a la ocupación norteamericano en Nuevo México, 1846-1848"

Martín González de la Vara, El Colegio de la Frontera Norte, Cd. Juárez, Chihuahua

"La ocupación americana como detonadora del libre comercio en el norte del estado de Tamaulipas"

Octavio Herrera, Universidad Autónoma de Tamaulipas

"The Joint Naval and Army Operation at Veracruz"
Edward H. Moseley and Paul Clark, Jr., University of Alabama

Chair: Joseph Stout, Oklahoma State University

The Aftermath: Immediate and Long Term Consequences of the War

"Southern Unity and the Oregon Debate, 1848: Test Case For the Wilmot Proviso"

John E. Grenier, United States Air Force Academy

"Vivir en tierra extraña: La repatriación de mexicanos después de la guerra de 1847"

Manuel Ceballos Ramírez, Colegio de la Frontera Norte--Nuevo Laredo

"The Magonista Movement in South Texas, 1904-1919: A Renewal of the Mexican War"

Carlos Larralde, Carlos Esparza Library, Long Beach, California

THE WAR WITH MEXICO AND THE AMERICAN REPUBLIC

Robert Johannsen
University of Illinois

The Mexican War was America's first foreign war, regarded at the time as the most important episode in the nation's history since the American Revolution. The first major crisis to be faced during a period of unprecedented economic and social change, the war came at a crucial moment in the young life of the United States. Rapid commercial and industrial expansion, with new concerns for material advancement--the trappings of incipient liberal capitalism--were changing people's lives, and with those changes came new challenges to the ways they looked at themselves and at their country. The popular mood of mid-nineteenth century America was charged with tension and anxiety, a restlessness and a growing sense of uncertainty regarding the role of the individual in a rapidly changing economic and social environment. Questions were raised as to the true nature and purpose of the republic, as the older values of a classical republicanism seemed to be giving way before the new opportunities and patterns of belief. With the passing of the Revolutionary generation--Jefferson and Adams in 1826, Jackson in 1845, and John Quincy Adams in 1848--Americans felt a loss of contact with their national origins. The ideals which attended the birth of the nation seemed to be eroding.

For a time and for some people, the war with Mexico offered reassurance, by giving new meaning to patriotism, by providing a new arena for heroism, and by reasserting the popular assumptions of the value and superiority of republican government. The war was seen as a test of democratic government. In addition to capping the country's greatest period of territorial expansion--expanding the area of freedom, as Andrew Jackson had said--the war brought new prestige to republican government, demonstrating to doubting Europeans monarchs that a republic, without a military tradition and establishment, and relying principally on its citizens, could wage a successful foreign war. The war seemed to legitimize the long-held convictions of America's mission and destiny, of the country's role as the world's "model republic." The United States, still in the process of formation, it was said, had found its identity and had come of age. With the end of the war with Mexico,

one writer boasted, "our country has entered on a new epoch in its history."¹

The Mexican War touched the lives of the American people more intimately and with greater immediacy than any event to that time. Coinciding with the "print explosion" of the mid-nineteenth century, of which the penny press was but one manifestation, the war was reported in more detail than "any previous war in any part of the world."² Fast steam-powered presses, innovative techniques in news gathering, the employment of war correspondents for the first time, the use of the new magnetic telegraph, and the rapid proliferation of books and periodicals, all combined to carry the war into people's lives on an unprecedented scale. The episodes of the war, the experiences of its combatants in camp, on the march, and in battle, even the intentions and feelings of the enemy were "more thoroughly known...than those of any war that has ever taken place."³

Among those who helped meet the public's appetite for information about Mexico and the war were the soldiers themselves, many of whom reported the war for their home-town newspapers. The first news of the war was greeted by an outburst of enthusiasm from one end of the country to the other: public demonstrations, bonfires, and illuminations, war rallies from Massachusetts to Illinois. "A military ardor pervades all ranks," wrote Herman Melville from his New York home. "Nothing is talked about but the "Halls of the Montezumas."⁴ President James K. Polk's call for volunteers coincided with the reports of the army's victories on the Rio Grande. The response was electric, as the quotas assigned to the various states were quickly oversubscribed. Thousands of young men had to be turned back: Baltimore's quota was filled in thirty-six hours, ten times Tennessee's quota responded, Ohio's quota was filled in two weeks, and Illinois provided enough men for fourteen regiments when only four were called. "How can this be accounted for?" asked one newspaper, "this sublime spectacle of military preparation." There was no simple answer, but some suggested a clue might be found in America's commitment to a republican form of government. Where the people were the rulers, the security of the country was in its citizens. The citizen-soldier, the volunteer who put aside his civilian pursuits to answer the call of his country, became a republican symbol.⁵

¹ *American Review*, (April 1849): 334.

² Frank Luther Mott, *American Journalism: A History of Newspapers in the United States Through 250 Years, 1690 to 1940* (New York: n.p., 1941), 248-249.

³ *Niles' National Register* 21 November 1846, 179-180.

⁴ Melville to Gansevoort Melville, 29 May 1846, in *The Letters of Herman Melville*, eds. Merrel R. Davis and William H. Gilman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960), 29.

⁵ *New York Herald*, 28 May 1846.

The war with Mexico came at a time when Americans were reaching out beyond their borders, when the expansion of commerce, an increase in travel made easier by improvements in transportation on the land, the rivers, and the oceans, and a heightened interest in exploration carried Americans to the far corners of the globe. For the volunteers, the war was a first exposure to a strange and ancient land they had only imagined before. They were travelers to a distant and exotic clime, fascinated with alien manners and customs and language, and with an antiquity they found lacking in their own country. "Mexico! Land of romance and boyhood's waking dreams!" exulted a volunteer in Zachary Taylor's army. "To revel among the intoxicating perfumes and flowery plains," wrote another, "to gaze upon the magnificent scenery and wonderful exhibitions of Aztec civilization...to plant the flag of our young republic upon the capital reared centuries ago above the ruins of Montezuma's palaces! What prospect more captivating to the youthful imagination?"⁶ Filled with the spirit of adventure, the volunteers sent their impressions to the folks back home in their letters, diaries, and especially in the many published accounts of their campaigns, travel narratives in their own right. To those who stayed at home as well as those who went to war, the conflict with Mexico became a window on the outside world.

The war entered the stream of American popular culture in a myriad of ways. The conflict was celebrated in poetry and song, in paintings and lithographs, and in great "national dramas" performed on the stage in the nation's theaters. Music publishers were quick to exploit the popular interest, and the chronology of the war could be told in the titles they issued. Published in piano arrangements in sheet-music form, invariably embellished with imaginative engravings depicting the war's events, they covered the conflict with such pieces as General Taylor's Encampment Quickstep and the Matamoros Grand March, the funeral marches lamenting the deaths of Samuel Ringgold at Palo Alto and of Henry Clay, Junior at Buena Vista, the thunderous piano renditions of The Battle of Resaca de la Palma and The Storming of Monterey, and the "elegant pianistic effects" of Stephen Foster's Santa Anna's Retreat From Buena Vista.

The Mexican War was dramatized before the facts were known, but authenticity of detail was never a concern for playwrights and producers who sought to recapitulate the war's events on the stage. Capacity audiences thrilled to such stage creations as "The Siege of Monterey, or, The Triumph of Rough and Ready," which was so successful in New York that it went on tour, giving people the opportunity (according to its advertisement) "to exult in the triumph of American arms."

Book publishers met the popular demand with a flood of romantic tales, known as novelettes, with Mexican War settings. Bound in bright yellow covers, illustrated with crude woodcuts, printed on rough paper in double-columns, they became America's first popular paperbacks. Combining all the popular Gothic elements--romance, intrigue, mystery, and suspense--they bore such titles as The

⁶ S. Compton Smith, *Chile Con Carne; or the Camp and the Field* (New York: Miller & Curtis, 1857), 2-3; Luther Giddings, *Sketches of the Campaign in Northern Mexico* (New York: G. P. Putnam, 1853), 26-27.

Chieftain of Churubusco; or The Spectre of the Cathedral; The Mexican Ranchero; or The Maid of the Chaparral; and The Mexican Spy; or The Bride of Buena Vista. Published in editions of as many as one-hundred thousand, they are almost impossible to find today. Passed around, from hand to hand, they were literally used up!

Not all the publications were such "catch-penny affairs." James Fenimore Cooper, disappointed that the navy played a lesser role in the war, made up for it by writing a novel of the Mexican War at sea in which he imagined encounters between the United States and Mexican navies. For Cooper, America had embarked on a mission to break the "crust" that enclosed Mexico in bigotry and ignorance, and to bring the "blessings of real liberty" to the Mexican people. To the young eccentric George Lippard, one of the country's most widely-read novelists, the Mexican War was the Crusade of the Nineteenth Century, an extension of the American Revolution, decreed by God to lead the nation to higher purposes and to awaken Americans from their sleep of avarice and dissipation. His 1847 publication, *Legends of Mexico: The Battles of Taylor*, which he described as a "rhapsody on the romance of war," told of chivalric American volunteers displaying generosity to the vanquished foe and capturing the hearts of the *señoritas*.⁷

The southern novelist and poet William Gilmore Simms celebrated South Carolina's Palmetto Regiment and, like both Cooper and Lippard, found echoes of the American Revolution in the Mexican War. From his Brooklyn editorial office, Walt Whitman wrote eloquently of the victories in Mexico. Like the others, he saw the war as part of America's great democratic mission which would, he insisted, "elevate the true self-respect of the American people."⁸

No single individual did so much to kindle the war-spirit as the prominent historian and chronicler of the sixteenth-century Spanish conquest of Mexico, William Hickling Prescott. It was an ironic distinction, for Prescott was a dedicated antislavery New England Whig, strongly opposed to what he termed this "mad and unprincipled" war. The immense popularity of his *History of the Conquest of Mexico*, published just two and a half years before the war, turned public attention towards Mexico, stimulated interest in that country, and familiarized countless Americans with the titanic struggle between Cortes and Montezuma. As relations between the United States and Mexico deteriorated, the example of sixteenth-century Spain's conquest of Mexico was fresh in the American mind. Prescott deplored the "dare-devil war spirit" (as he called it) that seemed to overrun the country following the first battles in May 1846, but what he did not realize was that his own work had much to do with provoking that spirit. By describing "the *past* Conquest of Mexico"

⁷ James Fenimore Cooper, *Jack Tier; or The Florida Reef* (New York: Burgess, Stringer, 1896), iv.; George Lippard, *Legends of Mexico: The Battles of Taylor* (Philadelphia: T. B. Peterson, 1847), 12, 17.

⁸ William Gilmore Simms, *Lays of the Palmetto: A Tribute to the South Carolina Regiment In the War With Mexico* (Charleston: n.p., 1848); Walt Whitman, *The Gathering of the Forces*, eds. Cleveland Rogers and John Black, (New York: Harper & Bros., 1920), I, 82-85.

so vividly, it was said, Prescott had in fact "foretold the *future* one."⁹

The war heightened the popularity of Prescott's *History* and his publisher brought out new editions to meet the demand. Volunteers read and re-read it and many of them carried copies of the book with them into Mexico. Prescott had seen in the Spanish conquest a "beautiful epic," characterized by "daring, chivalrous enterprise, stupendous achievements, worthy of a age of knight-errantry, a magical country, the splendors of a rich barbaric court, and extraordinary personal qualities in the hero." And that was precisely the way many Americans viewed their conquest of Mexico. One young Tennessee law student volunteered in order to satisfy his "long cherished desire" to visit the scenes of Cortez's conquests; an Indiana volunteer was so captivated by Prescott's history that he joined the war hoping to relive some of its episodes. For the soldiers in Winfield Scott's army, the book served as a guide-book along the route to the Mexican capital. As they marched and fought, they felt the presence of the past; their sense of history, shaped by Prescott's book, came alive and it was only a small imaginative leap for the soldiers to see themselves as successors to the sixteenth-century *conquistadores*.¹⁰

Prescott, in spite of his antiwar attitude, expressed an admiration for the nation's citizen-soldier and felt that they reflected the American character. They were, he said, the "pioneers of civilization." Without conceding that the war was either just or necessary, he judged the American campaigns to be as brilliant as those of the great sixteenth-century Spaniard himself. To some, it was only logical that Prescott should become the historian of the Second Conquest of Mexico, as he had of the First, and a number of people, including Winfield Scott, appealed to the historian to consider the task. Prescott was tempted but, in the end, rejected the proposal.¹¹

Prescott's attitude towards the war reflected the ambivalence of many Americans whose opposition to the conflict was tempered by the enthusiasm with which others supported it. Indeed, some of the war's opponents professed to find and ultimate good in the conflict. Among such individuals were members of the peace movement in the United States, the early nineteenth-century effort to outlaw war as an instrument for settling international disputes. The Mexican War caught them by surprise. Their energies had been directed toward the crisis with Great Britain over the Oregon boundary question, and little attention had been given to the worsening relations with Mexico. War between the United States and Great Britain, the world's two leading Anglo-Saxon nations, was appalling and unacceptable; war between the

⁹ *The Correspondence of William Hickling Prescott, 1833-1847*, ed. Roger Wolcott (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1925), 648, 614-15, 597, 645.

¹⁰ *The Literary Memoranda of William Hickling Prescott*, ed. C. Harvey Gardiner (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1961), II, 29; John Blount Robertson, *Reminiscences of a Campaign in Mexico* (Nashville: J. York, 1849), 60; Lewis Wallace, *Lew Wallace, An Autobiography* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1906), II, 88-89.

¹¹ Wolcott, ed., *Correspondence of William Hickling Prescott*, 648; Gardiner, ed., *Literary Memoranda of William Hickling Prescott*, II, 181; George Ticknor, *Life of William Hickling Prescott* (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1864), 272.

United States and Mexico seemed an entirely different matter.

Early in the conflict, members of the American Peace Society became convinced that the Mexican War would result in "eventual good" to their cause. For example, Emma Hart Willard, pioneer in female education and founder of the Troy Female Seminary, argued that the Mexican War was a "providential occurrence," God's way of promoting the cause of world peace. With its new prestige of victory, the United States was able to assume leadership among nations that demonstrated their "ability in war." America's peace mission was strengthened, for pacifists could no longer be taunted for supporting the outlawry of war because their country was too weak to fight one.¹²

Peace advocates were not alone among the war's opponents who looked for positive benefits in the Mexican War. Members of the Whig party denounced the war as unjust and immoral; it was, moreover, unnecessary, for Mexico, they said, would have fallen anyway before the peaceful advantage of America's "superior" civilization. Yet some Whigs, although opposed to the war, urged that once it had begun it must be prosecuted with all the strength the country could muster. While branding the conflict as the "great political and moral crime" of the age, they also contended that patriotism demanded every citizen to support it. Others maintained that the Mexican people, heretofore held in the tight grip of "ignorance, bigotry, vice and degradation," could not help but benefit from the introduction of "American liberal principles." One anti-war editor insisted that it was God's purpose to "bring out of the war a better condition of things."¹³

A principal concern among both critics and supporters of the war was the relationship between the Mexican War and the principles of republican government. Americans had always pointed proudly to their country as the world's "model republic." It was at once the source of their uniqueness, setting them apart from other nations, the basis of their mission, and the dominant feature of their national identity. Few disagreed that war was unnatural and inimical to the meaning and purpose of republics, that republics were by their very nature dedicated to the "arts of peace." War and conquest were relics of barbarism, characteristics of authoritarian regimes rather than of governments that rested upon the consent of the governed. War, however, was not the only challenge to republicanism. For decades, articulate Americans--writers, political leaders, clergymen--sought to reconcile the obligations of citizens in a republic with the changes that were altering their lives in so many unexpected and unsettling ways. The dramatic growth of industrial production, the extension of the suffrage and the emergence of a new mass democracy, the incredible technological developments that conquered both time and space, and the vision of an expanding nation--in short, what some have described as the rise of a liberal capitalism--all placed traditional, or classical, republicanism under severe strain.

¹² *Advocate of Peace* (July 1847): 84; Emma Willard, *Last Leaves of American History: Comprising Histories of the Mexican War and California* (New York: G.P. Putnam, 1849), 38, 92, 97-98, 103-105.

¹³ *American Review* (April 1847): 325; *American Review* (June 1846): 578; *American Review* (March 1847): 239; *Scientific American* (January 2, 1847): 117; *New Englander* (July 1847): 388-401.

Republics, as everyone knew, existed for the good of the people. Republican government rested on the sovereignty of the people, hence was no better or no worse than those who supported it. Success, indeed the very survival, of a republic depended upon what was termed the "public virtue." "A republican form of government," stated a writer in one of the influential periodicals early in 1846, can "never be established and maintained, except among a virtuous and intelligent people." It required the "sacrifice of private interest to the public good, the suppression and control of individual passions,...and above all, that high moral and mental culture which enables each citizen to sustain his part in the administration of the affairs of the nation of which he is a member." Service and sacrifice were the watch-words that defined the obligations of citizens in a republic.¹⁴

As the midpoint in the century approached, the press was filled with ominous assessments of the impact of the new commercial spirit of republican virtue. Commerce denoted corruption, and corruption was the antithesis of virtue. Those civic responsibilities that defined the very soul of the nation seemed to be in danger of falling before the growing pursuit of material gain. One of the outspoken critics of the corruption nurtured by "selfish greed" and the "base love of gain" was the popular novelist Henry William Herbert. Chivalry, Herbert complained, had become a "bye word and a mockery" and the "deathless love of liberty and country" had been all but extinguished. America's "fat and lazy days of peace" had raised utility, wealth and trade to positions of power and dominance. In a telling remark, Herbert declared that even war was welcome if it would elevate the "minds of the multitude" and demonstrate that there were still such things "as truth and honor, as patriotism and glory."¹⁵

To eighty-seven year old Albert Gallatin, whose long and distinguished career as a diplomat, fiscal expert, and presidential advisor spanned five decades, war was a threat to public virtue rather than a means for strengthening it. Gallatin's interest in the Mexican War was two-sided. The founder of the American Ethnological Society in 1842, he had just published a scholarly study of Mexican and Central American antiquities. He recognized that the war would advance his own ethnological research, and to this end he maintained a correspondence with officers in General Stephen Watts Kearney's Army of the West, seeking information on the native peoples of New Mexico and Arizona, and urged General Winfield Scott to collect books and documents relating to Mexico's ancient civilization. At the same time, he was profoundly disturbed by the war's impact upon the integrity of America's republican government.

The people, Gallatin believed, had been blinded by the "romantic successes" of their armies in Mexico; their minds were captured by an "enthusiastic and exclusive love of military glory." More importantly, they had forgotten the mission God had assigned them, the mission to improve the "state of the world" and to demonstrate that republican government was attended by the "highest standard of private and political virtue and morality." Instead, he argued, Americans had

¹⁴ *DeBow's Review* (February 1846): 132.

¹⁵ Henry William Herbert, "Long Jakes, The Prairie Man," *New York Illustrated Magazine* (July 1846): 169.

abandoned the lofty position of their fathers, and had carried patriotism to excess. While he conceded that the army's success in Mexico was little short of astonishing and while he shared the pride in the skill and bravery of America's fighting men, he denounced the use of force to carry out the country's mission.¹⁶

Gallatin's statement had little effect on public opinion in spite of its sincerity and uplifting tone. Its publication coincided with the signing of the peace treaty; the war was over and Gallatin's views seemed irrelevant. Of more importance in shaping popular perceptions of the war were those who saw the conflict in terms of the duties and responsibilities of citizens in a republic, who believed that the Mexican War strengthened the bond between the citizenry and the republic. While they agreed that war was alien to the true purpose of a republic, they also maintained that there were some wars that even republics had to fight. The Mexican War, they insisted, was one of these.

According to this view, the war with Mexico assumed the force of moral imperative. War, it was said, was ever ready to burst upon the world, like a volcano, when "great moral causes stimulate its action." Mexico had suffered "debasement enough to drag down any nation"; its people were held in ignorance by the selfishness of its rulers; its wealth was squandered. This "blood-steeped land" required drastic surgery. The Mexican War became a necessary stage in the course of human progress. "in the nineteenth century, the era of progress," wrote a Massachusetts commentator, "the civilized world will not permit a great country like Mexico to relapse into enduring barbarism."¹⁷ As the world's leading republic, the United States had the duty to rescue its benighted neighbor, to see that justice be done its people, and not incidentally, to prevent the country from falling under the sway of European monarchical oppression. By so doing, America would be true to the "great cause of liberty, justice, and humanity" as well as to the principles of republican government. War, to be sure, was a calamity that every true patriot must strive to avoid, but it was also an instrument for advancing human freedom and for securing to the "citizen of every clime" a just and permanent government.¹⁸

Through all the talk of American superiority, of America's providential destiny, and of its republican mission, there ran this theme of regeneration, or renewal. While some scholars have doubted the sincerity of those who argued the reform character of the Mexican War, the belief that it was America's duty to redeem the Mexican people was too widespread, too pervasive, to be dismissed as nothing

¹⁶ Albert Gallatin, *Peace With Mexico* (New York: Bartlett & Welford, 1848), 24, 25-26, 27, 28-29, 30.

¹⁷ *Democratic Review* (May 1847): 455; (February 1847): 101; *Literary World* (December 11, 1847): 455; (August 28, 1847): 82; [*Hunt's*] *Merchants' Magazine* (February 1848): 142.

¹⁸ [Nahum Capen], *The Republic of the United States of America: Its Duties to Itself, and Its Responsible Relations to Other Countries* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1848), 38, 52-53, 152, 159, 162-3.

more than an attempt to mask ulterior desires for power and gain. People from all walks of life, including the soldiers in Mexico, and from all parts of the country echoed the belief that it was their country's mission to bring Mexico into the nineteenth century. Critics of the war, like Prescott and Gallatin might scoff at the exaggerated rhetoric of the war's supporters, but they too shared the view that America's role in Mexico was a regenerative one. Pacifists, discouraged by the apparent popularity of the war, consoled themselves with the thought that the war's benefits for Mexico would more than compensate for the bloodshed. A new era would dawn upon Mexico, it was said, "and she would at length participate in the progress of the age."¹⁹

Winfield Scott gave official sanction to the theme of regeneration in his first proclamation to the Mexican nation, issued from Jalapa on May 11, 1847, three weeks after the bloody engagement at Cerro Gordo. The war, he declared, was an evil. Nations, however, "have sacred duties to perform, from which they cannot swerve." Mexican republicanism had become the "sport of private ambition" and cried out for rescue. Scott admonished the Mexican people to throw off the old colonial habits and to "learn to be truly free--truly republican." It is doubtful whether Scott's proclamation reached many Mexicans, but it had a deep effect on the men in his army. When the army moved in Puebla later in the summer, one of the Mexican residents noted that the soldiers "talk of nothing but fraternity between the republics, and say they have only come to save the democratic principle."²⁰

If one goal of the Mexican War was the restoration of true republicanism to Mexico, its twin was the strengthening of America's role as the world's "model republic." Events in the spring of 1848, following closely the signing of the peace treaty with Mexico, seemed to give credence to the national mission beyond the wildest dreams. When the British Cunard steam packet *Cambria* docked in New York on March 18, it brought news of turmoil in Europe. Within hours, the *New York Herald* was on the streets, its bold headlines screaming of a revolution in France, the abdication of the French King, and the proclamation of a French Republic "on the model of that of the United States."

The news sent shock waves throughout the country, reaching even the soldiers in their camps in Mexico. Few people believed that revolutionary activity could be confined to France. People gathered in the streets of the large cities to sing *La Marseillaise*. Within a week, New York's Bowery Theatre was advertising a "new national drama" entitled "The Insurrection of Paris," and in Boston a Millerite announced that the revolution was a sign that Jesus Christ would return to earth in 1848.

Editors, orators, and politicians heralded the final contest between republicanism and monarchism, and predicted the speedy demise of the monarchical form of government. Of America's role in the revolution, there was no doubt. "This

¹⁹ [Hunt's] *Merchants' Magazine* (February 1848): 140, 142.

²⁰ *House Executive Document 60*, 30th Congress, 1st Session, 971-74; *Littell's Living Age*, XIV, (August 21, 1847): 383.

republic," declared the Herald, "is the model and exemplar of the revolutionists in France, and all of Europe." The French uprising began of February 22, the birthday of George Washington, a providential coincidence Americans were not allowed to forget. The explanation of the European events seemed obvious. As a result of the Mexican War, commented one editor, "we possess one of the highest characters in the world, at this time." The country's military power, demonstrated on the battlefields in Mexico, had won new prestige and respect for republicanism and had propelled the United States into a position of leadership in the "history of civilization and the human race." Clearly the French revolution was a consequence of the Mexican War.²¹

Americans had watched anxiously for European reactions to the war, believing from the beginning that republicanism was being tested on Mexican battlefields. For years the press had reported plans and schemes to place a European prince on a Mexican throne. It was widely known that the French King Louis Philippe and his foreign minister, François Guizot, had plotted to place Louis Philippe's son at the head of a Mexican monarchy. Less well known but strongly suspected was Spain's negotiation with the Mexican General Mariano Paredes following Paredes' seizure of power early in 1846. Spain made no secret of its contempt for Mexican republicanism and found support for its plan to install a Bourbon prince in Mexico among some elements of the Mexican population. England apparently contemplated the establishment of a protectorate over the country. Fear of such monarchical designs, although founded on suspicion, rumors, and fragmentary reports, was widely felt among Americans and played no small part in arousing their war spirit.

The American victories in Mexico seemed to put an end to the threat of European intervention and turned anxiety and concern into confidence that the first round in the struggle between republicanism and monarchy had been won. European critics who had taunted Americans for their military weakness and ineptitude were silenced. Military observers in England and on the continent instead expressed amazement that America's out-numbered and ill-trained soldiers could defeat Mexico's army with such apparent ease. One English journal found it "so extraordinary, so perfectly unaccountable" that it concluded "there must be some mystery--some leading cause, imperfectly understood on our side of the Atlantic."²²

That their country was "imperfectly understood" abroad most Americans would agree, but they disagreed that there was "some mystery" involved in their success in Mexico. When President Polk reviewed the results of the Mexican War, he found its real meaning in the nation's demonstration that a democracy could successfully prosecute a foreign war "with all the vigor" normally associated with "more arbitrary forms of government." Critics, he noted, had long charged republics with an inherent lack "of that unity, concentration of purpose, and vigor of execution" that characterized authoritarian governments. A popularly-elected representative

²¹ *New York Herald*, 19, 20, 21, 25, 30 March; 11 April 1848.

²² *Fraser's Magazine*, XXXVIII, (October 1848): 434.

government with a volunteer army of citizen-soldiers had bested a military dictatorship. No more persuasive argument for the strength and superiority of the republican system could be advanced.²³

Polk's view was widely shared. The United States was yet a young and fragile nation, and its people were sensitive to the fact that in the eyes of the world they were still an unproven experiment in popular government. Europeans had scoffed at America's national aspirations, its bluster and spread-eagle rhetoric, ridiculed its romantic faith in the popular voice, and magnified the weakness of its institutions. The republic, it was thought, would surely collapse into disunity and paralysis at the very thought of waging an offensive war. Americans responded with a defensiveness that bordered on paranoia. To them, the Mexican War was a giant stride in their quest for national identity.

Many of those who had opposed the war now maintained, once it was over, that Americans had shown the world that a people "devoted to the arts of peace" could vanquish a "military people, governed by military despots." The strength of democratic government had been demonstrated to "doubting monarchists." Combining freshness of spirit with manly vigor, America had settled the question of a republic's capacity to wage a successful war upon foreign soil. "Woe to the crowned head," warned a soldier in Mexico, "That interferes with rising, onward, onward America!"²⁴

The United States, wrote James Fenimore Cooper, had taken a moral stride "in its progress toward real independence and high political influence." The guns that filled "the valley of the Aztecs with their thunder" were heard "in the echoes on the other side of the Atlantic." To many Americans, the Mexican War signalled that nation's coming of age, the advance of the United States from youth into manhood. "The Young Giant of the West," it was said, now stood forth in the "full flush of exulting manhood."²⁵

²³ James D. Richardson, comp., *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1897*, (Washington: n.p., 1897), IV, 587-88, 631-32.

²⁴ [Hunt's] *Merchants' Magazine* (April 1848): 463; Nathan Covington Brooks, *Complete History of the Mexican War* (Philadelphia: Grigg, Elliot, 1849), 539; William Seaton Henry, *Campaign Sketches of the War With Mexico* (New York: Harper, 1847), 116.

²⁵ James Fenimore Cooper, "Introduction," *The Spy: A Tale of the Neutral Ground* (New York: Burgess, Stringer & Co., 1848), vii-viii.

CROSSROADS TO DESTINY: THE ANNEXATION OF TEXAS AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

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Crossroads Texas

On February 19, 1846 Anson Jones, the last President of the Republic of Texas, officially ended his term and turned executive authority over to J. Pinckney Henderson, elected the preceding December 15 as the first governor of the state of Texas. The Lone Star Republic had become the Lone Star State. In the crowd that gathered to watch the short ceremonial proceeding, some "Texian" patriots cried.¹ But for most, the occasion marked a joyous event; it seemed that at last the twenty-eighth star was inextricably affixed to the great Union Constellation. Anson Jones's words were short and emotional:

We have this day fully entered the Union of the North American States. Let us give our friends, who so boldly and nobly advocated our cause, and the friends of American liberty, no reason to regret their efforts in our behalf. Henceforth the prosperity of our sister states will be our prosperity, their happiness our happiness, their quarrels will be our quarrels, and in their wars we will fully participate.²

¹ Mark E. Nackman, *A Nation Within A Nation: The Rise of Texas Nationalism* (Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1975), 84, 109.

² Quoted in Annie Middleton, "The Texas Convention of 1845," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 25:1 (July 1921): 60.

Five days earlier, Jones had eloquently addressed a small group of legislators and citizens with these immortal words:

The lone star of Texas, which ten years since arose amid clouds over fields of carnage, and obscurely shone for a while, has culminated. . . . The final act in this great drama is now performed. The republic of Texas is no more.³

The "great drama" was a multi-act play with numerous subplots and intricate twists. The cast of characters was replete with the era's most high ranking political and diplomatic celebrities. The story line included its share of foreign intrigues and schemes. From the opening scene to the closing curtain in 1846, the drama over the annexation of Texas included actors representing the Republic of Texas, the United States, Mexico, Britain and France. Annexation was finally the result of decisions reached by two independent nations. Uncoerced, Texas found a common destiny with the United States. Significantly, however, the views held by each nation and the reasons for assenting to annexation were entirely different.

The Spanish claimed the area of Texas early in the European conquests of North America, but Spain could never hope to exercise complete control over the vast expanse of land. A revolt led by Republican forces was put down in 1813, but that revolt was symptomatic of widespread disaffection with Spanish rule throughout her Central- and North-American holdings. The Spanish yoke was finally broken in 1821 with the Mexican Revolution, and Spanish possessions passed into the hands of a new but weak Mexico. To control marauding bands of Indians and bandits, Mexico did not stringently enforce the conditions of immigration or colonization, including requirements for Mexican citizenship, avowal of Catholicism, and the ban on slavery. Mexico was content to have the area settled and civilized, even though almost all the immigrants came from the United States.⁴

The period of Mexico's salutary neglect ended abruptly, however, with Santa Anna's coup d'etat in 1831 and the establishment of a military dictatorship. Mexico began to enforce regulations that were philosophically and pragmatically alien to the Texas colonists' Anglo-American religious and political heritage. The Texan reaction was not unlike the American Revolutionary response to British imperial reorganization policies in the 1760s and 1770s. Between 1831 and 1836 Texans sought unsuccessfully to persuade the Mexican government to consider their grievances. In 1834 Santa Anna angered Texans by imprisoning Stephen F. Austin, the important emissary sent to negotiate with the Mexicans. Instances of friction and violence between Mexican officials and Texan colonists continued to increase until

³ Quoted in Frederick Merk, *Slavery and the Annexation of Texas* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1972), 176.

⁴ See Julia Kathryn, *Green Flag Over Texas: A Story of the Last Years of Spain in Texas* (New York: Cordova Press, 1969); William H. Goetzmann, *When the Eagle Screamed: The Romantic Horizon in American Diplomacy, 1800-1860* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1966), 25.

Texans declared their independence on March 2, 1836.

Santa Anna led a large army into Texas, but Texas patriots under Sam Houston, remembering the Alamo and Goliad, eventually dealt the Mexicans a decisive defeat at San Jacinto and captured the general on April 21, 1836. Negotiations were held, and the Treaty of Velasco recognizing Texan independence was signed May 14, 1836. The Mexican Senate, however, later repudiated the treaty, and Santa Anna no longer felt bound by his word when he was returned safely to Mexico. Nevertheless, Texas became a *de facto* independent nation, if not a *de jure* one as well.

Temporary President of Texas David G. Burnet organized popular elections, and Sam Houston was elected President of the new republic. Inauguration ceremonies were held on October 22, 1836. Voters also decided heavily in favor of annexation when the question was put before them in September.⁵ Sam Houston, consistent with his personal preference at the time and backed by the mandate of the people, wrote his friend President Andrew Jackson to urge annexation. Houston sent William H. Wharton to Washington as dual minister and agent to negotiate both recognition of Texan independence and annexation to the United States.

Though Jackson personally approved of annexation, Congressional realities and the upcoming Presidential election convinced him that recognition was the most the United States could do at that time. Congress doubted Texas' ability to remain independent, and fear that annexation would precipitate war with Mexico was widespread. Additionally, North-South sectionalism was already apparent, and the North was resistant to any addition of territory which might involve the extension of slavery.⁶ Indeed, Wharton found himself in an environment uncondusive even to the goal of recognition. Memucan Hunt was sent from Texas and joined Wharton in February of 1837 to help promote the Texan cause. A bill passed the House on February 28, 1837 and was approved by the Senate on March 1 essentially leaving the decision of recognition up to the President. Jackson's last official act concluded the work of Wharton and Hunt when he appointed a *chargé d'affaires* to the Republic of Texas and so recognized the independence of Texas on March 3, 1837. Wharton withdrew from service and Hunt stayed to manage diplomatic affairs between the two nations.

Support in the U.S. Congress for annexation waned further after the election, which brought the Van Buren Administration to office. But because Martin Van Buren, as well as many important members of the executive branch, personally favored annexation, Hunt formally reopened the question in a long document submitted August 4, 1837. Hunt stressed the common cultural ties between Americans and Texans and pointed to economic advantages the United States would accrue. The arguments were well known, for it had been at least tacit U.S. policy for twelve years to acquire Texas. The American Secretary of State John Forsyth replied on August 25, however, in terms that were both disappointing and unmistakable. Forsyth said it would be useless to push the question due to "party trammels," the

⁵ Joseph William Schmitz, *Texan Statecraft: 1836-1845* (San Antonio: The Naylor Company, 1941), 32.

⁶ Goetzmann, *When the Eagle Screamed*, 33.

relationship with Mexico, and "furious opposition by all the free States."⁷ On January 4, 1838 a congressional attempt to bring about annexation soundly failed. In June and July 1838 John Quincy Adams, the champion of the anti-slavery cause in the House of Representatives, led Congressional efforts which killed subsequent annexation attempts.

The Texans meanwhile lost their ardor for annexation. In the spring of 1837 Houston sent J. Pinckney Henderson to Europe to secure recognition and trade agreements, as it appeared that Texas might have to stand on her own in the family of nations for some time to come. Henderson arrived in London in October 1837. Hunt resigned his post in Washington on June 5, 1838, and Houston appointed Anson Jones in his stead. Jones announced formal withdrawal of the annexation offer on October 12, 1838.

The withdrawal was subsequently ratified by the Texas Congress on January 23, 1839 in a joint resolution expressing Texas' will not to reopen the annexation question. In November 1838 Texans elected Mirabeau Buonaparte Lamar, another veteran-hero of the War for Texan Independence, to the presidency of the Republic. Lamar was unalterably opposed to annexation and perceived a future for Texas rivaling that of the United States. Lamar aggressively encouraged Henderson's European efforts.⁸

Since 1825 British policy had been to support Mexico as a buffer against the United States. Britain had little to no interest in Texas in 1837 and, like the United States, was unconvinced that Texans would maintain their independence from Mexico. Even so, Henderson succeeded in negotiating a trade agreement with the British foreign minister Lord Palmerston. Texas' Anglo-Saxon character immediately won her some British sympathy, even if this favor was at the expense of longstanding Mexican relations.⁹ The trade agreement was officially proclaimed on July 4, 1838.

Henderson then went to France, arriving in Paris in late April where he met the French foreign minister Molé. France and Mexico were embroiled in a dispute over French claims for \$600,000 to pay for losses sustained in disorders since 1828, and relations between the two countries were very uncertain. Lamar unofficially extended an offer of Texas military aid should France need it. France took military action and ended hostilities on her own, but the Texan offer favorably disposed her to consider relations with Texas. Henderson secured a commercial agreement in October 1838, followed by recognition and a broader commercial treaty signed on September 25, 1839. In early October 1839, Alphonso Count de Saligny was appointed French chargé d'affaires to Texas.¹⁰

⁷ Schmitz, *Texan Statecraft*, 57-8, quote on 58.

⁸ Herbert Gambrell, *Anson Jones: The Last President of Texas* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., 1948), 66.

⁹ For an interesting analysis of British and American stereotypes of Mexicans during the period, see David J. Weber, *New Spain's Northern Frontier: Essays on Spain in the American West, 1540-1821* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1979), 295-307.

¹⁰ Schmitz, *Texan Statecraft*, 66-79.

As Lamar sought political and economic relations with European nations, he also sought to negotiate peace with Mexico. In February 1839 Lamar sent Colonel Barnard E. Bee, his Secretary of State, to Mexico. Travelling to New Orleans for passage, Bee met Richard Pakenham, the British minister to Mexico. The two had a cordial visit, and Bee convinced Pakenham that it was to Britain's advantage that Mexico recognize Texas. Indeed, a large debt owed British bondholders by Mexico would scarcely be paid, as long as Mexico waged war on Texas. When Bee arrived in Mexico, however, he found Vera Cruz in a state of anarchy and could not receive a hearing. He returned to Texas, and Lamar sent instead a secret agent named James Treat in August 1839 to see sympathetic elements within the Mexican government and to negotiate for the recognition of Texas independence.

With a successful Federalist revolution in Mexico's northern states, however, Mexican nationalism ran high to reconquer both the Federalists and the Texans. Sympathetic officials--including Cañedo, the Mexican Secretary of State--could not afford politically to open negotiations with Texas. Meanwhile, Treat struck up a very good friendship with Pakenham, and the latter spoke on Treat's behalf to Cañedo, who finally arranged a meeting. Nevertheless, substantive relations did not change, and in July 1840 a revolution in the capital threatened the Mexican regime. Another revolt occurred in the Yucatan peninsula, and it became apparent that the Mexican government stood no chance of survival if it entertained the unpopular Texan proposals. Treat and Pakenham even found the situation untenable for discussion of an armistice. Frustrated, Treat boarded a schooner for Texas but died of consumption en route on November 30, 1840.¹¹

While Treat was in Mexico, Lamar continued to negotiate with England. Through his emissary, General James Hamilton, he continued to seek English recognition and to enlist British pressure for Mexican recognition of Texan independence. When news of Treat's failure reached Texas in early December 1840, Lamar asked the Texas Congress for armed forces to compel Mexican acknowledgment of Texan independence. In London, Hamilton had already boldly and prematurely threatened England with the consequences of not granting recognition. Failure to negotiate would invite deleterious effects from a British perspective, including the conquering of Mexican territory, application of Texan commercial levies, and closer ties with the United States. The tactic led successfully to the signing of three treaties with Great Britain in November, including the recognition of Texan independence. The Texas Senate ratified the treaties in January 1841, only days after ratifying a diplomatic and commercial treaty with Holland. Realistically, it was doubtful that Texas could have launched any grand offensive into Mexico. Lamar's expensive military expeditions against Indians and Mexicans during his tenure had already brought Texas to the brink of bankruptcy. To compound matters, drought and poor harvests led to a general economic depression beginning in 1840. The news of Hamilton's success encouraged Lamar to try one more diplomatic mission to Mexico under James Webb, the Texas Secretary of State. Webb was flatly refused an interview by the Mexican Secretary of State, despite the vigorous insistence of Pakenham. Webb returned to Galveston, Texas on June 28,

¹¹ See Schmitz, *Texan Statecraft*, 92-4, 100, 110-27; and *Telegraph and Texas Register* (Columbia, Texas), 21 August 1844, 1.

1841 and Lamar immediately determined to make an alliance with Yucatan. This was never accomplished, however, because Sam Houston repudiated the policy once he was reelected and resumed office December 12, 1841.¹²

Houston changed almost all of the Republic's diplomatic personnel including Hamilton, who was replaced by Ashbel Smith as chargé d'affaires to France and England. Hamilton had been on the verge of new treaties with England, committing the British to mediation between Texas and Mexico. Meanwhile, the Melbourne ministry in England had been replaced by Peel as Prime Minister; thus Palmerston's position was filled by Lord Aberdeen and Pakenham was replaced by Charles Bankhead. Smith arrived in London to continue the negotiations in May 1842, and a successful settlement was finally reached July 28, 1842. Anticipating a quick exchange of ratification, Captain Charles Elliot was appointed Consul-General and sent to Texas, arriving August 28, 1842.

In 1842 Texas-Mexican relations reached a crisis as several Mexican incursions into Texas occurred, including one that captured San Antonio in September. Houston resisted popular cries for armed reprisal, offering instead vigorous rhetoric to mollify the hawks. He vetoed a bill authorizing offensive war, because there was no money in the treasury to conduct it and because he opposed the concept of assuming an aggressor's role. Houston was committed to untangling and mending Texas' financial morass, and he was also sympathetic to reopening the annexation question with the United States.¹³

Intervening years of economic difficulty and insecurity had reignited Texan popular support for annexation. In the United States, William Henry Harrison had been elected President but died of pneumonia soon afterwards. John Tyler, a supporter of annexation, assumed office in 1841. Houston appointed James Reily chargé d'affaires to the United States, succeeding Barnard Bee. Reily was instructed to assess the U.S. government's attitude towards Texas and to encourage annexation. He proceeded slowly and deliberately, deciding first to seek United States mediation with Mexico. President Tyler approved of the idea, and Waddy Thompson was instructed to offer the help of the U.S. government to end hostilities. U.S.-Mexican relations became strained when Mexico made a sharp and discourteous refusal to entertain American mediation. Moreover, this occurred just weeks after tense and only partially successful negotiations to obtain release of Americans captured in Lamar's ill-fated Santa Fe expedition. In addition, Reily advanced Texan goals by negotiating an amity, navigation and commerce treaty with the United States. While the proposal was completed in August 1842 and subsequently approved by the Senate in January 1843, its amended form was unacceptable to Texas, because it deleted the original fourth and fifth articles providing for free river navigation and free commodity importation. Reily, shortly after the August negotiations asked to be

¹² Schmitz, *Texan Statecraft*, 128-39; Nackman, *A Nation Within A Nation*, 97-8; William Ransom Hogan, *The Texas Republic: A Social and Economic History* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1946), 291.

¹³ Schmitz, *Texan Statecraft*, passim; *The Autobiography of Sam Houston*, eds. Donald Day and Harry Ullom (Norman: University of Oklahoma, 1954), 173-6 and 200.

relieved, and Isaac Van Zandt was appointed to replace him.¹⁴

Meanwhile Houston instructed Ashbel Smith in Europe to continue advancing the measures begun by Lamar, which would strengthen Texan independence should the United States still be found averse to the annexation of Texas. Smith managed to exchange ratification of the English treaties and went to Paris to secure French mediation with the Mexicans as well. Houston had hoped to involve the United States, England and France in a tripartite mediation, but when Smith returned to England, Lord Aberdeen informed him that England would not enter into joint efforts with the United States or France to secure the peace between Texas and Mexico. English sentiment was nominally pro-Mexican, even if it was a bit utilitarian. Indeed, England wished to keep relations poor between the Mexicans and the Americans and between the Mexicans and the French, in order to protect her monopoly of trade with Mexico. Van Zandt continued his part of the tripartite plan in the U.S., and both President Tyler and Secretary of State Daniel Webster were favorably disposed. News from Thompson in Mexico City was that Santa Anna would rather reconquer Texas, but then to everyone's surprise, Santa Anna offered his own peace plan, suspending matters for a time and ending Texan attempts to secure tripartite mediation.¹⁵

In 1842, the Mexican political situation was extremely volatile and factious. Mexico had neither the resources nor governmental cohesiveness necessary to reconquer Texas, notwithstanding the ability to mount substantial cross-border raids. Santa Anna needed time to strengthen his position at home, so he temporarily (and expediently) sought "peace" with the Texans. The proposed peace plan was the product of a meeting between Santa Anna and James W. Robinson, a former Texas Lieutenant-Governor captured in the Mexican raid on San Antonio. Santa Anna signed the agreement on February 18, 1843 and sent Robinson home to press the Texas government to accept it. The terms of the proposal were six-fold: Texas would acknowledge the sovereignty of Mexico; a general act of amnesty would be passed for past acts in Texas; Texas would form an independent department of Mexico; Texas would be represented in the general congress; Texas would institute or originate all local laws, rules and regulations; and no Mexican troops under any pretext whatever would be stationed in Texas. Of course, Texas would never submit to Mexican sovereignty, but Houston decided to use Santa Anna's current disposition to Texas' benefit. Houston asked Elliot to have Pakenham push for an armistice, and Robinson wrote Santa Anna that an armistice was necessary to give Texas time to consider the proposal. As a result of British, as well as French urging, Santa Anna consented and Houston proclaimed June 15, 1843 an end to hostilities pending peace negotiations.¹⁶

News of British involvement in securing the armistice caused great concern in Washington. Relations between Britain and the U.S. had been poor since at least

¹⁴ Washington D. Miller to President John Tyler, 30 January 1843, Miller Collection, Barker Texas History Center: University of Texas, Austin Texas, 1.

¹⁵ Schmitz, *Texan Statecraft*, 172-192.

¹⁶ Schmitz, *Texan Statecraft*, 195-7.

1837. By 1842, Tyler had made it clear to Great Britain the U.S. wanted Oregon, and relations between the two nations were at a low ebb. Tyler had become very concerned over suspected British designs.¹⁷ His concern was fueled by an ardent annexationist named Washington D. Miller, an influential Texas editor and close friend of Sam Houston, who told him that English commercial and military ties were advantageous to Texas. This sparked Tyler's fears, so that Tyler was amenable to Miller's suggestion to renew negotiations for an annexation treaty.

Will the United States **voluntarily** see England take such a foothold upon the Gulf? **Remember that Texas cannot help it.** In such an event, British shipping would command Mexico and Texas, if not the whole Gulf, besides and **cutting off** from the people of Texas and the United States, the valuable trade of an immense extent of Mexican territory. The English and Mexican Navies [would] attack New York in case of rupture with the United States; and if the command of the Gulf be yielded to those two powers the same thing may take place as to New Orleans.¹⁸

The new U.S. Secretary of State, Abel P. Upshur, was especially suspicious of British intrigue. Intelligence even reached Washington that Britain was making preparations for war.¹⁹ On June 13 and 20, 1843 the radical World's Convention of Abolitionists met in London and made wild unofficial plans to ban slavery in Texas, but Americans incorrectly associated the plans with Lord Aberdeen and the British government and to significant British political leverage in Texas. Unfounded rumors were nourished and fanned by sensationalist reporting in the American press. Indeed, Britain did not want Texas incorporated into or even protected by the United States or any other country, but she had no serious designs on Texas domestic institutions, especially those consistent with her economic interests. As long as Texas remained independent, the British stood to gain commercially by avoiding U.S. tariffs and by reducing its reliance on the U.S. for cotton, a dependence which had increased seven-fold prior to the Texas Revolution. Britain also wished to halt U.S. western expansion and maintain a balance of power on the continent.²⁰ Aberdeen was somewhat perplexed by the vehement American reaction, and Smith provided him an assessment which would prove extremely perceptive of future developments:

The people of the northern states are very generally opposed to slavery. Nevertheless, almost to a man they would unite with the south, to repel any outside

¹⁷ David M. Pletcher, *The Diplomacy of Annexation: Texas, Oregon, and the Mexican War* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1973), 13, 105-10.

¹⁸ Washington D. Miller to President John Tyler, 30 January 1843, Miller Papers, 4-5.

¹⁹ See *Abridgment of the Debates of Congress, 1839-1843* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1860), 14:passim.

²⁰ Pletcher, *The Diplomacy of Annexation*, 11; Merk, *Slavery and the Annexation of Texas*, 50.

or foreign interference at the risk of any consequences, however extreme.²¹ U.S. fears prompted Upshur to write Van Zandt on October 16, 1843 requesting that he be empowered to begin anew the negotiations on annexation. This time Houston was not as inclined to enter into annexation negotiations, because doing so would jeopardize the armistice with Mexico, as well as good relations with Britain and France. The future of an independent Texas was looking more promising and was increasingly viewed with public optimism.²² Isaac Van Zandt received a letter from a good friend and advocate of annexation in Texas, R. T. Wheeler, expressing the mood of confidence. Though Wheeler strongly supported annexation, he said that Texans felt they simply did not *have* to depend on the United States. For as he stated,

[t]he people of Eastern Texas are already in every respect which concerns their personal ease and comfort, in a condition far more prosperous than at any former period. Our population is steadily increasing. Institutions of learning are springing up. The people begin to feel more secure in their persons and property. Confidence is becoming restored and a feeling of permanency and stability seems at length to prevail.²³

Wheeler was no doubt relieved when Houston submitted the question to the Texas Congress anyway. The Texas Congress accepted the offer to review negotiations, so Houston sent J. Pinckney Henderson to Washington to assist Van Zandt.

Because of possible Mexican reaction, Van Zandt secured guarantees of military protection from Upshur and Tyler, only after which Houston began to openly advocate annexation. Houston and Anson Jones, now Texas Secretary of State, sent sample treaties to Van Zandt, and the latter worked out most details with Upshur. Before Henderson arrived, however, Upshur was killed inspecting the *U.S.S. Princeton* in a naval gun explosion. John C. Calhoun became the new U.S. Secretary of State, and he promptly reaffirmed the U.S. military guarantees. Houston thus abandoned any pretext for further peace negotiations with Mexico under terms of Mexican sovereignty. Since Mexico would accept no less, hostilities resumed between Texas and Mexico in March 1844. Calhoun, Van Zandt and Henderson finalized the details of the annexation treaty, which proposed to annex Texas as a territory, to take over the public lands of Texas, but to assume Texas' public debt and liabilities in return. The treaty was signed April 12 and sent to the Senate April 22, 1844.²⁴

Van Zandt and Henderson were optimistic. They wrote Anson Jones, "The

²¹ Ashbel Smith, *Reminiscences of the Texas Republic* (Galveston, Texas: Historical Society of Galveston, 1876), 57.

²² Stanley Siegel, *A Political History of the Texas Republic, 1836-1845* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1956), 255.

²³ R.T. Wheeler to Isaac Van Zandt, 3 April 1844, Isaac Van Zandt letters, Barker Texas History Center, University of Texas, Austin.

²⁴ See Schmitz, *Texas Statecraft*, 203-6.

indications from all quarters of the Union show evidently that a large majority of the people are in favor of annexation."²⁵ The timing was extremely poor, however, given the approaching Presidential election and the Senate's uneasiness and uncertainty over American public opinion. Tyler and Calhoun continued to worry about increasing British influence; moreover, Calhoun found it useful to purposely exaggerate the British threat to further the aim of speedy annexation. Less than a week before Senate deliberation of the treaty, however, Calhoun made a costly strategic blunder by publishing an impolitic and pro-slavery tract on behalf of annexation. The letter served to stir anti-slavery sentiment and cement the treaty's fate in the hands of annexation's opponents. The Senate rejected the treaty 35 to 16 on June 8, 1844.²⁶ Van Zandt, however, was not discouraged since it was clear that temporal political considerations more than anything else had defeated annexation. Van Zandt and Henderson wrote to Jones:

You will see from the speeches made during the discussion that the majority of those who voted against ratifying the treaty are in favor of annexing Texas at some future period. It cannot be disguised that party considerations influenced many of those who voted against the ratification, to oppose it. The question of the annexation of Texas to this government has (as you doubtless have seen from the newspapers of this country) become strictly a party question between the democrats and Whigs in the pending contest for the next Presidency, and should the former party succeed in electing their nominee we cannot doubt that Texas can be annexed under his administration if she still desires it.²⁷

Three days later Van Zandt wrote his own letter to Jones:

While many object to any affirmative action at the present session, a very large majority of both Houses express themselves friendly to the measure at a future period. The indications of popular sentiment, in almost every quarter, seem favorable to its ultimate success, should Texas continue to desire the Union.²⁸

In the same letter Van Zandt submitted his resignation, so he was soon replaced by Charles H. Raymond.

The Texas government's reaction to Senate treaty rejection was one of perturbation and anger. Houston pushed forward with an option he had wisely kept open throughout the annexation proceedings. Even with the treaty pending before the U.S. Senate, Houston courted close friendships with Elliot and Saligny, the British and French diplomatic representatives. Houston knew that, even if it were general

²⁵ Isaac Van Zandt and J. Pinckney Henderson to Anson Jones, 25 May 1844, Isaac Van Zandt letters.

²⁶ Pletcher, *The Diplomacy of Annexation*, 143-4.

²⁷ Isaac Van Zandt and J. Pinckney Henderson to Anson Jones, 10 June 1844, Dispatches of the Texas Legation in Washington and Texan Consular Correspondence, 1836-1845, 122:515, Texas State Library, Austin.

²⁸ Isaac Van Zandt to Anson Jones, 13 June 1844, Dispatches of the Texas Legation, 123:517.

knowledge, such relations might encourage the treaty's success by making the United States jealous of European powers. Ironically, and to his chagrin, Calhoun had intimated an official British conspiracy to abolish slavery in Texas should annexation fail and, from there, to menace the institution in the United States. Calhoun was duped by his own desire to believe such a plot and by intentional propaganda from the Texas agents in Washington.²⁹ While conspiracy lacked foundation, British diplomatic and commercial interests would have been served by destroying cheap slave labor, at least in the United States. Moreover, should Texas be induced to give up the institution, a Texas without slavery would certainly become a haven for runaway slaves from the U.S., as well as a possible staging ground for revolution against slavery in the South. The British aim was ultimately agricultural, however, and not humanitarian. The object of British hope was that her sugar and cotton would become more competitive relative to American goods if slavery in the U.S. were curtailed--or if American control over the percentage of cotton supply declined. Calhoun overestimated the domestic appeal of his conspiracy argument; moreover, such tactics angered Lord Aberdeen, who resolved to press efforts to prevent annexation.³⁰

Aberdeen contacted Guizot, now the French Foreign Minister, and obtained support for a diplomatic move guaranteeing the independence of Texas, which he then proposed to Ashbel Smith. The two European powers would force Mexico to recognize Texan sovereignty through the threat of British and French sanctions, on condition that Texas not become part of the United States. The arrangement would have had the obligations of a treaty, and would have given "to the European Governments, parties to it, a perfect right to forbid, for all time to come, the annexation of Texas to the United States." Britain and France also offered liberal commercial arrangements should Texas relinquish the option of annexation. Smith was impressed with the proposal, and he negotiated details with Aberdeen and relayed news of it to Houston. Houston received the communication soon after the annexation treaty's defeat and ordered Anson Jones, Texas Secretary of State, to instruct Smith to make the consummating pledges.

Anson Jones, the President-elect after September 1844, *simply ignored the order*. It is a distinct possibility that, had Jones followed Houston's order, Texas would be independent today. Ironically, the American agent in Texas, Andrew Jackson Donelson, thought Jones leaned towards annexation.³¹ Indeed, that was the impression held by the Texas agents in Washington:

²⁹ Merk, *Slavery and the Annexation of Texas*, 174; Pletcher, *The Diplomacy of Annexation*, 122-3.

³⁰ Justin H. Smith, *The Annexation of Texas* (New York: Baker and Taylor Co., 1911), 87-90.

³¹ Charles Bankhead to Lord Aberdeen, 30 July 1845, *Dispatches of the Texas Legation*, 78:2; Annie Middleton, "Donelson's Mission to Texas in Behalf of Annexation," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, 24:4 (April 1921): 267, 268; Ashbel Smith, *Reminiscences of the Texas Republic*, 62-4; and William Curtis Nunn, "A Study of the Part Anson Jones Played In the Annexation of Texas," (M.A.Thesis: University of Texas, 1930), 70.

One of the first acts of President Jones was to inform me that the Annexation of Texas to the American Union was a measure earnestly desired by the government, and to instruct me to use my most strenuous exertions, in every proper manner for its accomplishment.³²

But Jones probably preferred independence. Raised in New England and educated as a medical doctor, Jones had become disenchanted with his life and traveled to Texas in 1833. In 1836 he drafted the Texas resolutions for independence and helped fight in the Texas Revolution. He wanted both maximum control and perhaps, maximum glory for his own administration. In fact, all the Presidents of Texas had farsighted aspirations of empire, if not the power to achieve them. Even Houston had hoped that Texas might be able to acquire Oregon. During the Lamar years in which Texas claimed land all the way to the Pacific, people in the United States might well have said, "Conquer Texas before she conquers us." It was with some disappointment that Texas Presidents found their people, though maverick and high-strung, still more likely than not to support integration with the United States, which Texans regarded almost universally as a homeland.³³

Assuming office in December 1844, Jones retained many people from Houston's administration and generally pursued similar policies. He did not mention annexation in either his inauguration address or his first message to the Texas Congress. To his credit, Jones did not exert undue influence by using his executive authority to prejudice the legislature against annexation. Rather, Jones decided to provide the legislature a choice. Of course, understanding much of the popular sentiment to be in favor of annexation, Jones was politically restrained from refusing at least one more opportunity for the United States to annex Texas. At any rate, President Jones followed two parallel courses of action: to keep the path for annexation clear *and* to lay the foundation for independence as a nation, should annexation again fail.³⁴

Jones decided that the Texas Congress would have a choice between independence assured by Britain and France or union with the U.S. In either case, Jones resolved to make Europe and the United States compete for Texas' favor. Jones used mutual British and American mistrust to secure and insure the best offers from both:

Texas found the lever of Archimedes, or, in nautical phrase, rigged a purchase, and, overcoming the obstacles of rocks and mountains, and heaving the massy bars, burst them both open, and had the

³² Charles H. Raymond to Ebenezer Allen, 19 May 1845, Dispatches of the Texas Legation, 147:47.

³³ Gambrell, *Anson Jones*, 36, 54-5; Merk, *Slavery and the Annexation of Texas*, pp. 171-2; and Justin Smith, *The Annexation of Texas*, 99.

³⁴ *Telegraph and Texas Register* (Columbia, Texas), 16 April 1845, 2; William Curtin Nunn, *A Study of the Part Anson Jones Played*, 69.

choice given her to enter which she pleased.³⁵

Jones recalled Smith and determined that further negotiation with Britain would be held in Texas. George Terrell, an advocate of independence, replaced Smith in London.

In the United States, the election of James K. Polk appeared an expression of popular will on the annexation issue, since the Democratic candidate had run on a "Re-annexation of Texas" platform.³⁶ Polk had been a dark-horse candidate, but this "Young Hickory" had the advantage of being a protégé of the revered and ailing Old Hickory himself. Moreover, fellow Tennessean Sam Houston finally persuaded his friend Jackson to voice his opinion. Jackson's strong support was highly publicized, and it helped Polk immensely in the close popular election, as did sympathy and respect for the elder statesman, who died June 8, 1845. Tyler, desperate to counter perceived British designs, took advantage of the new political climate and proposed annexation by joint resolution. Calhoun and Tyler not only believed annexation to be critical to stopping British geopolitical encroachment, they also held the issue to be one of grave national economic import.³⁷

To Texas, the latest U.S. offer must have resembled the promise of an inveterately doubting suitor. Nevertheless, the measure had the advantage of requiring majorities in both houses of the U.S. Congress, rather than the two-thirds Senate vote required to approve a treaty. Whigs argued the dubious constitutionality of the measure, but there was no explicit guidance in the constitution. Moreover, the Louisiana Purchase offered no clear or comforting precedent to those looking to see how a strict constructionist might have dealt with similar opportunity in the past. Even before final results of the election were known, Calhoun was confident a joint resolution would pass the U.S. Congress. He worried about another problem, however, less susceptible to his control. Earlier he had written the American chargé in Texas, Tilghman A. Howard, that the real challenge was to keep the Texans interested a while longer. "The danger," he wrote, was "that the revolution of disappointed hopes, highly excited, may be seized upon by an interested and wily diplomacy, and made the means of seducing them" into forming a disastrous alliance with England. Whereas "temporary causes" had defeated the treaty, Calhoun believed the cause of annexation had "taken such deep and general hold upon the public mind that it must ultimately triumph, should it not be abandoned by the Government and

³⁵ Anson Jones, *Letters Relating to the History of Annexation* (Galveston, Texas: The Civilian Office, 1848), 10.

³⁶ "Re-annexation" referred to the Jacksonian Democratic belief that Texas had been part of the original 1803 Louisiana Purchase and had been illegally traded by the Whiggish Secretary of State John Quincy Adams, in order to secure Florida from Spain in the Adams-Onís Treaty of 1819.

³⁷ *Autobiography of Sam Houston*, 209; Pletcher, *The Diplomacy of Annexation*, 168-70; *Telegraph and Texas Register* (Columbia, Texas) 16 October 1844, 1-2; Merk, *Slavery and the Annexation of Texas*, 160.

People of Texas."³⁸

In September, Van Zandt wrote Jones expressing a similar confidence that Polk would be elected and that annexation was certain "if Texas continues to desire [it]."³⁹ Unfortunately, Howard died soon after receiving Tyler's correspondence, and in November 1844 Tyler sent Andrew Donelson, Andrew Jackson's nephew, to take his place and to entreat the Texans to support the joint resolution measure. Calhoun impressed Donelson with the importance and responsibility of the mission:

I cannot tell you how much depends upon its decision for weal or woe for our country and perhaps to the whole continent. It is sufficient to say, viewed in all its consequences, it is of the very first magnitude, and it gives to the mission, at this time an importance that raises it to the level with the highest in the gift of the Government.⁴⁰

Donelson was also directed to "communicate...fulfillment of [U.S.] pledges of protection."⁴¹ Indeed, as early as August, Van Zandt was writing his wife:

If Santa Anna or his troops make their appearances in Texas they may find somebody else besides our own people to deal with. Texas is able to do the work herself but then we shall not be alone. Let Mexico know, the people of this country are not all traitors. After all the Whig noise, . . . the Democrats [are the] majority.⁴²

Tyler appointed Duff Green Consul at Galveston on September 12, 1844, but Green had secret orders to go also to Mexico City and see Wilson Shannon, newly appointed U.S. minister to Mexico, and to give him certain dispatches concerning the acquisition of Texas. Subsequent attempts to discuss purchase or negotiations over Texas led Green and Shannon to conclude that conditions were still too unstable in Mexico to openly conduct meetings on the subject. Duff Green returned instead to Galveston, where he made efforts to aid annexation by discrediting Jones and by spreading unfavorable publicity about Jones' supposed British connection. Ebenezer Allen, temporarily the Texas Secretary of State, nearly expelled Green. This could have been a significant set-back for U.S. annexation efforts, but Donelson smoothed relations again, and Green voluntarily gave his post up to a deputy.⁴³

In addition to use of the joint resolution as a vehicle to circumvent the treaty

³⁸ See Chapter 6 in Merk, *Slavery and the Annexation of Texas*; John C. Calhoun to Tilghman A. Howard, 18 June 1844, Annie D. Middleton Papers.

³⁹ Isaac Van Zandt to Anson Jones, 11 September 1844, Isaac Van Zandt Papers.

⁴⁰ John C. Calhoun to Andrew J. Donelson, 17 September 1844, Annie D. Middleton Papers.

⁴¹ Charles H. Raymond to Anson Jones, 18 September 1844, Annie D. Middleton Papers.

⁴² Isaac Van Zandt to wife Fanny, 6 August 1844, Isaac Van Zandt Papers.

⁴³ See Merk, *Slavery and the Annexation of Texas*, 161-164.

ratification process, annexation proponents in the U.S. House of Representatives designed the proposal to skirt any potentially controversial points. In view of the uncertainty over annexation in Texas, Donelson wrote Calhoun urging just such an approach:

Let us get annexation on any terms we can, taking care not to have anything in form or substance that would render doubtful its ratification by Texas. The battle about slavery, boundary east of the Nueces, and the number of states, will come up in the Constitution to be hereafter formed by the people of Texas, when there will be no danger of loss of the Territory from British intrigue or other causes.⁴⁴

On January 13, 1845 the proposal was introduced in the House. After debate on the disadvantages and advantages of annexation, the proposal passed by a healthy margin on January 25. The measure went to the Senate on January 27, 1845 and was referred to the Foreign Relations Committee. On February 4, the committee submitted the resolution to the full Senate, with the recommendation the resolution be rejected on constitutional grounds. The only thing that saved the proposal was an amendment February 27, which empowered the President to offer Texas the choice of the joint resolution or a new treaty of annexation. The amendment also authorized \$100,000 for necessary negotiation expenses. The amendment overrode the committee's negative report 27 to 25, and the Senate approved the amended resolution the same day by the same vote.⁴⁵

The House subsequently approved the Senate Amendment 132 to 76 on February 28, and President Tyler signed the joint resolution on March 1, 1845 three days before Polk actually took office. Charles H. Raymond wrote to Ebenezer Allen with a great deal of excitement:

The door is at length opened for the Admission of Texas into the Union. The great struggle is over and nothing more remains to be done except to agree upon the terms of "admission and cession." The contest has been severe - the battle well and nobly fought -- annexation has triumphed, and its friends have gained a glorious victory.⁴⁶

As adopted, the joint resolution,...provided that Texas be admitted into the Union with a republican form of government to be adopted by the Texans before July 1, 1846, upon the following conditions: that all boundary questions be adjusted by the United States; that the State of Texas retain its own public lands and apply the income from these to the debts of the Republic; and that, with the consent of Texas,

⁴⁴ Andrew J. Donelson to John C. Calhoun, 25 December 1844, Annie L. Middleton Papers.

⁴⁵ Merk, *Slavery and the Annexation of Texas*, 180-182.

⁴⁶ Charles H. Raymond to Ebenezer Allen, 28 February 1845, *Dispatches of the Texas Legation*, 144:38.

new states, not to exceed four in number, might be formed out of the territory, provided that slavery be prohibited in such new states as fell north of the extended Missouri Compromise line....[Additionally, the Senate amendment] authorized the President to determine the specific manner in which Texas was to enter the Union. He could proceed on the plan as proposed by the House, or invite Texas to enter the Union upon terms to be agreed on later.

Suffering criticism but losing no time, Tyler selected the method proposed by the House, secured cabinet approval and on March 3, 1845 dispatched the resolution to Texas hours before his administration ended.⁴⁷

With some begrudgement at not having been properly consulted by Tyler, Polk nevertheless continued to press vigorously for Texas' approval of the joint resolution. Polk sent distinguished "visitors" including Charles A. Wickliffe, Archibald Yell and Commodore Robert F. Stockton to join Duff Green and Donelson in their efforts to thwart British (or Texan) machinations opposing annexation. These visitors called for public meetings endorsing annexation, and they fomented popular enthusiasm for the joint resolution. Stockton and Wickliffe even excited anti-Mexican feelings and supported war preparations aimed at Mexico, in an effort to ruin any future Texan arrangement that guaranteed peace. Donelson probably knew nothing of this particular tactic, however, because Wickliffe had a top secret, direct line of communication with the new Secretary of State, James Buchanan.⁴⁸ In addition, a letter from Buchanan to Wickliffe indicated that these visitors also had a large amount of discretionary power:

The President having learned from authority in which he places confidence, that the Governments of Great Britain and France are exerting themselves in concert through their public ministers in Texas, to defeat the reunion of that Republic with the United States, has deemed it expedient to employ a confidential agent for the purpose of counteracting their efforts: and reposing full reliance on your ability, discretion and patriotism, he has selected you for this important trust. Prudence, however, dictates that you shall not make known your official character to any other person.

The President deems it unnecessary to give you any minute instructions. You are fully acquainted with the nature and progress of this great question, in all its bearings, from the beginning; and you will use such arguments on the proper occasions and to the proper persons, as you may deem best adapted to convince the authorities and people of Texas that their reunion with the United States will promote and secure their own best interests and those of their

⁴⁷ Schmitz, *Texan Statecraft*, 225-6, long quote 225. See also George Lockhart Rives, *The United States and Mexico, 1821-1848* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1913), 689-90 and appendix.

⁴⁸ Merk, *Slavery and the Annexation of Texas*, 172-3; Nunn, *Texan Statecraft*, 76; Pletcher, *The Diplomacy of Annexation*, 200.

posterity.⁴⁹

The visitors naturally played on popular anti-British sentiments in Texas. Indeed, the latent hatred felt by most Texans toward the pretensions of Great Britain began to make itself felt. Many of the fathers of those who were concerned with the annexation question had fought in the War of 1812, and anti-British prejudice was still keenly felt in 1845.⁵⁰

Meanwhile, Mexican and British reactions to the joint resolution were sharp and forthcoming.

The reaction of the Mexican minister to the United States, Juan N. Almonte, to the passage of the resolution was unmitigated anger, and he announced his intention to withdraw from the United States. Soon after, the American minister in Mexico was dismissed, severing formal relations between the U.S. and Mexico.

The U.S. position remained fixed, however. Buchanan announced that annexation was "irrevocably decided, so far as the United States is concerned," and "nothing but the refusal of Texas to ratify the terms and conditions on which her admission depends, can defeat this object." To a new Democratic administration with the people's mandate, the prospect of war with Mexico was a risk worth taking. Even war itself seemed fair price to pay, in order to halt British designs, to further the Providential design of Manifest Destiny, and to enhance U.S. commercial power. Reflecting the latter propensity during the Mexican-American War, Tyler bluntly told a friend:

...Texas was of right to be regarded as entirely independent, and as such had treaties with the leading powers of the world. The certainty of Mexican displeasure would not have prevented me from urging annexation. We were in pursuit of a dear right, that of negotiating with an independent nation, and that dear right would not have been abandoned by me even at the hazard of war. As it is, I regard the monopoly of the cotton plant, now almost exclusively possessed by the United States, as worth, in the estimate of our power and control over the affairs of the world, an expenditure quadruple that which can occur from a Mexican war of any continuance.⁵¹

While the resolution effort was going on in the United States, Britain had moved feverishly to eliminate any remaining obstacles to her diplomatic initiative. Under orders, Charles Bankhead, British minister to Mexico, pressured the Mexican government under interim President General Herrera to recognize Texas. Bankhead stressed to Herrera and Luis Cuevas, the Mexican Foreign Minister, that the move

⁴⁹ James Buchanan to Charles A. Wickliffe, Department of State letter, 27 March 1845, Barker Texas History Center, University of Texas, Austin.

⁵⁰ Siegel, *A Political History of the Texas Republic*, 250.

⁵¹ *Telegraph and Texas Register* (Columbia, Texas), 30 April 1845, 2; and December 25, 1845, 1; James Buchanan to Juan Almonte, 10 March 1845; John Tyler to Brantz Mayer, 1 July 1847, Middleton Papers.

was Mexico's only recourse to otherwise forcing the Texans to enter into annexation with the United States for protection. Moreover, annexation of Texas by the United States was the worst possible prospect for Mexico in the long run. The French minister in Mexico, Baron Alleye de Cyprey, echoed Bankhead's sentiment. Meantime Elliot and Saligny were instructed to oppose annexation in Texas. They won early favor in the Texas government and preempted Donelson by securing with President Jones and Ashbel Smith, now Texas Secretary of State, interviews concerning the diplomatic act. Jones and Smith were favorable to the diplomatic act and wished to make a proclamation endorsing it, but the Texas government also demanded concrete assurances from Mexico that she would accept the terms. If Mexico agreed within 90 days, Jones promised to announce the preliminaries of peace with the following terms: Mexico agree to acknowledge the independence of Texas; Texas would stipulate in the treaty that it would not to annex itself or become subject to any country whatever; limits and other conditions would be matters of arrangement in the final treaty; and Texas would be willing to remit disputed points, respecting territory and other matters, to the arbitration of umpires. The protocol to this effect was signed late in March 1845.⁵²

Jones continued to walk a straight line between annexation and the Mexican alternative, seeking to obtain the best guarantees possible for Texas. Jones cautioned in personal notes he wrote to himself:

Texas [in the matter of annexation] is passive, not active. She would equally advance the cause of free Government standing alone Texas may well fear that, the United States are close when wooing, they will prove niggardly when married.⁵³

His ambivalence continued as the drama entered the final act of diplomatic maneuvering.

Elliot left secretly for Mexico to secure her assent to the peace terms, and Smith left for Europe to conclude the final arrangement with Britain and France. Donelson, who had temporarily gone to New Orleans, passed them in transit bringing news of the joint resolution's passage in the United States. Ebenezer Allen became acting Secretary of State in Smith's absence. Allen was a staunch opponent of annexation, and Donelson was discouraged at U.S. prospects. News of the joint resolution's passage spread through Texas "like wild fire," however, and there was renewed popular fervor in favor of annexation which could not be ignored. News of victory at San Jacinto in 1836 had "scarcely excited such general and enthusiastic rejoicing." About this time, Elliot was recognized and his mission surmised. News of the "Man in the White Hat" excited a flurry of suspicions and rumors of British plots throughout Texas and the United States. Two weeks after Donelson's arrival, almost every county in Texas had either held a public meeting demanding annexation or had set a date for one. Donelson shrewdly obtained a statement in favor of annexation from the ever-popular Sam Houston, which fueled public pressure all the more, even though Houston gave his approval grudgingly and said he favored the

⁵² See Schmitz, *Texan Statecraft*, 227-30; Nunn, *A Study of the Part Anson Jones Played*, 71.

⁵³ Notations made on Donelson's letter of 31 March 1845, quoted in Nunn, *A Study of the Part Anson Jones Played*, 73.

Senate amendment. Houston's statement had the effect of clearing him, in the public eye, from involvement with the British, while heaping more accusations and criticism on Anson Jones. In fact, both Houston and Jones had attempted to play the U.S. and England off against each other, in pursuance of Texas' interests.⁵⁴

To satisfy public clamor and to allay increasing public criticism, Jones said he would call the Congress. He nevertheless set the meeting date for June 16, 1845 to allow more time to receive word back from Mexico, as it "would have been as easy for the session to be held on the 16th of May as on the 16th of June." Popular demands also included a convention to draw up a constitution, one of the stipulations of the joint resolution. To delay that development, Jones capitalized on regional differences in opinion over fair apportionment in Texas. He used these as pretext to announce that elections for convention delegates could not be held until July 4, 1845.⁵⁵

In Mexico, Elliot and Bankhead met indecision and hesitation by Cuevas, now the new Mexican Minister of Affairs, and this caused delay of over a month. Had Mexico acted more expediently, it is certain at least that the treaty would have received a much more favorable popular reception in Texas before U.S. agents and local media had thoroughly whipped up support for annexation. The European ministers, Bankhead and Cyprey, urged that a secret agent be sent to Texas to make up for the delay. A letter from Bankhead to Lord Aberdeen on March 31, 1845 expressed the consternation of the British and French ministers faced with Mexican inaction:

The French Minister and I thought that it would answer a good purpose if we could prevail upon the Mexican government to send a secret Agent to Texas who might be authorized to receive any propositions on the part of the President of that republic touching the acknowledgment of her independence and who might for that purpose place himself in confidential communication with Captain Elliot and M. de Saligny.

We accordingly presented the subject to Señor Cuevas' notice and urged His Excellency to obtain the opinion of the President thereupon Señor Cuevas told us that the President was averse to sending such a person at the present moment, and preferred waiting until some intelligence should be received from Texas.

To all our remarks on the policy of seizing the present time for the purpose of acquiring through such a channel, a knowledge of the real

⁵⁴ Schmitz, *Texan Statecraft* 230-1; *Telegraph and Texas Register* (Columbia, Texas) 2 April; 26 March 1845. Merk, *Slavery and the Annexation of Texas*, 170; Siegel, *A Study of the Part Anson Jones Played*, 251; Justin Smith, *The Annexation of Texas*, 99.

⁵⁵ *Telegraph and Texas Register* (Columbia, Texas), 23 April 1845; Schmitz, *Texan Statecraft*, 232.

state of the parties and feelings in Texas and of thwarting the intrigues that would undoubtedly be set on foot by the United States to hurry on the annexation, Señor Cuevas turned a deaf ear -- it is to this lamentable system of procrastination that all their misfortune may be traced.⁵⁶

The treaty representing the terms of the Texan-British protocol finally won Mexican congressional approval on May 19, 1845, and Elliot quickly returned to Texas arriving at the seat of government June 3, 1845. On June 4 Jones immediately announced the preliminary peace agreement and cessation of hostilities with Mexico, too late to quell anti-Mexican hatred fanned by Wickliffe and Stockton. Jones then laid the matter in the hands of the Texan people and on June 16, 1845, submitted both the Mexican proposal to recognize Texan independence, as well as the U.S. joint resolution offering annexation, before the Texas Congress.⁵⁷ A Presidential proclamation issued just prior to the legislative session explained Jones' position:

Maturely considering the situation of affairs,...the Executive felt that it was incumbent upon him not to reject this opportunity of securing to the people of this country, untrammelled by conditions, a peaceful, honorable and advantageous settlement of their difficulties with Mexico, if they should see fit to adopt that mode of adjustment.... The people speaking through their chosen organs, will not determine as they shall judge right. But in the meantime, and until their pleasure can be lawfully and constitutionally ascertained, it is the duty of the Executive to secure to the nation the exercise of choice between the alternatives of peace with the world and Independence, or annexation and its contingencies.⁵⁸

The Senate unanimously rejected the Mexican offer and both houses unanimously approved the U.S. joint resolution for annexation. At the convention on July 4, 1845, the Ordinance of Annexation was quickly approved with just one dissenting vote, then given to Donelson for forwarding to the U.S. Secretary of State Buchanan. Some convention delegates were so displeased with Jones for delaying annexation and for entertaining separate peace guaranteed by Great Britain, that an attempt was made to establish a provisional government. Had Donelson not opposed the move for sheer efficiency's sake, Jones may have been forced from office before the expiration of his term.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Charles Bankhead to Lord Aberdeen, 31 March 1845, *Dispatches of the Texas Legation*, 32:10-11.

⁵⁷ Nunn, *A Study of the Part Anson Jones Played*, 80; and Siegel, *A Political History of the Republic of Texas*, 252.

⁵⁸ Jones quoted in *Telegraph and Texas Register* (Columbia, Texas), 11 June 1845, 1.

⁵⁹ *Autobiography of Sam Houston*, 210; Middleton, "The Texas Convention," 49-54.

When news of the convention's adoption of the ordinance reached Mexico, Bankhead sought to allay angry Mexican reactions and wrote Lord Aberdeen a very perceptive update on the recent events:

I regret sincerely that the Texans have thrown away their independence at the moment that the governments of England and France had, through my colleague and myself succeeded in advising Mexico to acknowledge it. It is a step fraught with danger to this country, and at the same [time] I think, will present many difficulties to the United States.... The present addition of a slave holding state into the Union will be viewed with great jealousy and dislike by those states which have abolished slavery.⁶⁰

The convention took nearly two months to draw up a constitution, which was ratified by the Texas electorate on October 13 and then by both houses of the U.S. Congress. The final action by the U.S. Congress approving annexation was again made over stout protests in the House and eloquent rebuttals in the Senate, notably one by Daniel Webster opposing admission of Texas on anti-slavery grounds. Webster knew, however, as he had earlier remarked, "that the same stream of public opinion that would elect Mr. Polk would also annex Texas." The time was right for annexation, though clearly deep regional and philosophical divisions in the United States remained. They would grow worse in fact as westward expansion pushed a host of divisive issues to center stage. For the moment, however, regional and philosophical divisions were set aside in the spurious fit of excitement over redcoats and Manifest Destiny. Months before, a prominent Texan land speculator, James Morgan, had commented: "We shall be annexed with the Curses of fully one-half of the people of the United States."⁶¹

On December 3, 1845 Polk, in his first annual Presidential message, declared: In contemplating the grandeur of this event it is not to be forgotten that the result was achieved in despite of the diplomatic interference of European monarchies. Even France, the country which had been our ancient ally... most unexpectedly, and to our unfeigned regret, took part in an effort to prevent annexation and to impose on Texas, as a condition of the recognition of her independence by Mexico, that she would never join herself to the United States. We may rejoice that the tranquil and pervading influence of the American principle of self-government was sufficient to defeat the purposes of British and French interference, and that the almost unanimous voice of the people of Texas has given to that interference a peaceful and effective rebuke. From this example European Governments may learn how vain diplomatic arts and intrigues must ever prove upon this continent against

⁶⁰ Charles Bankhead to Lord Aberdeen, 30 July 1845, *Dispatches of the Texas Legation*, 78:1-2, 5.

⁶¹ Daniel Webster, quoted in *Telegraph and Texas Register* (Columbia, Texas), 20 November 1844; James Morgan to Anson Jones, March 28, 1845, quoted in Siegel, *Political History*, 254.

that system of self-government which seems natural to our soil, and which will ever resist foreign interference.⁶²

On December 29, 1845 Polk signed the Texas Admission Act making Texas the twenty-eighth state. Elliot and Saligny both remained in Texas until the formalities of annexation were over.⁶³

Late April 1846 saw war between the United States and Mexico begin. In fact, while the Texas convention was approving the annexation statute in July 1845, Zachary Taylor was already in Louisiana with a force of 1500 men on his way to the Rio Grande.⁶⁴ During the Mexican War, Tyler assessed and justified events this way:

The importance of Texas cannot be overlooked. So thought the government of Great Britain as was manifested in its powerful and uniting exertions to prevent annexation. "The Man with the White-hat," as Mr. Elliot was called, was never a moment at rest, and but for the prompt, and I may say, energetic action on the part of the Executive, his efforts would most probably have succeeded. He had prevailed with Mexico to acknowledge the independence of Texas on the single condition that she should not annex herself to the United States. It cannot be rationally doubted that the terms would have been accepted but for the certain hope, then held out, of annexation to the Union.⁶⁵

While Tyler's estimate contains truth, it is only partial. He can be forgiven for patting himself on the back, but Tyler's motives were certainly every bit as intriguing as those of his British counterparts. The Tyler-Polk tactics were at least as conspiratorial as anything the British did.

It would be childish to attribute [Tyler's and Polk's] policy to friendship for Texas. Nations and political parties have no cousins. [They] coveted Texas for their own fame, for their own political advantage, for using it as subservient to the strength of the United States.⁶⁶

In the end, however, Texas held the cards. Raymond foretold in December 1844 what eventually occurred:

Annexation is the great and all-absorbing question of the day in this

⁶² James Polk, quoted in Merk, *Slavery and the Annexation of Texas*, 175.

⁶³ Schmitz, *Texan Statecraft*, 234-5.

⁶⁴ Walter Millis, *Arms and Men: A Study in American Military History* (New York: Putnam, 1956), 104.

⁶⁵ John Tyler to Brantz Mayer, 1 July 1847, Middleton Papers.

⁶⁶ Ashbel Smith, *Reminiscences of the Texas Republic*, 74.

country -- the whole South and a considerable portion of the north are in its favor, and determined on its accomplishment. It will be for Texas to say whether she will consent to annexation, and upon what terms.⁶⁷

There had been times of hardship in the Republic of Texas' history when the people and the government would have embraced independence protected by European powers. At other times, Texans would have clamored for annexation.⁶⁸ But in 1844 times were good, and the government of Texas, less affected by U.S. or European intrigues, could counter-balance great powers against each other and produce a choice for her people among enviable alternatives. Jones' parallel strategy assured that choice in the end:

If jealousy of European powers had been the efficient cause of the immense change of sentiment in the United States which had taken place in less than two years in [annexation's] favor, it might be well to keep this jealousy alive a little longer...It is true, there may be some who thought, that as soon as Texas was tolerably secure of Annexation, it would be best to kick away the ladder by which she had ascended to it, but independent of the fact that such unworthy and uncivil conduct would have disgraced the country forever, it appears to me that annexation was not absolutely certain, and that such a step under the circumstances, would be entirely unwise and impolite. We might again, as on so many other occasions, want their favor.⁶⁹

Whether Jones used brilliant diplomatic strategy or just prudent caution, his actions checked Mexico as the U.S. and Britain vied over Texas. Notwithstanding Jones' apparent preference for independence, his actions insured that Texas did not have to crawl to either side. Indeed,

Texas assumed an erect posture. *She placed herself in a proper attitude before the world--she cultivated the friendship of the most influential nations--she took care to impress them with correct sentiments in regard to her vast undeveloped resources and her ultimate importance in an agricultural and commercial point of view--she enlisted their interest in her behalf. The interests of these great powers happened to be adverse and different. She took a proper advantage of that circumstance. She took especial care to sooth and never to wound the pride and vanity of Mexico. She pursued the Annexation and Independence at the same time, openly and fairly. . . . Texas was satisfied to obtain the offer of Independence or*

⁶⁷ Charles H. Raymond to Anson Jones, 4 December 1844, Dispatches of the Legation of Texas, 78:6.

⁶⁸ Anson Jones, *Two Letters on the Annexation of Texas* (Philadelphia:n.p., 1852) 8.

⁶⁹ Anson Jones, *Two Letters*, 20, 24.

Annexation, or both together and have the privilege of choosing which she would take and which she would reject. The great competition went on becoming from day to day more and more active, and each party pursuing its favorite scheme and using all its power and influence to accomplish it.⁷⁰

The United States finally won the competition, because the people of Texas determined that was in their best interest. Two republics found a common destiny. Two nations at crossroads chose the same path into an *uncertain* future, uncertain because the decision by the United States was fraught with dissent and qualifications. Texas in 1844-1846 was mostly concerned over her security and the self-determination of her people. In contrast, the United States overcame her qualms about expansion of slavery, to quench imperial designs and to edge out a commercial rival.

The war with Mexico over Texas ended in an American victory, sealed by the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848. The year 1850 brought crisis over slavery in the territories. The 1854 Kansas-Nebraska Act would nearly complete the political polarization of the United States, if not quite its physical separation, into hostile, competing sectional camps of North and South. In 1859 Anson Jones took his own life, depressed over widespread and relentless misunderstanding concerning his efforts to engineer the proud choice of alternatives Texas was finally offered. Two years later the Union came apart after the firing on Fort Sumter. Sam Houston, opposed at first to secession, started to advise the South on how to win the Civil War and Texas on how she might insure her most fundamental right to self-determination. Houston would have a son seriously wounded at Shiloh. Other average Texas citizens and soldiers like John Holland Jenkins, who fought the Mexican Army in 1836 and the Union Army in 1861, shouldered the burden of both struggles in essentially the same way, viewing their duty first and foremost "to be faithful to Texas throughout her troubles."⁷¹

Part II. Crossroads United States

The year 1845 is an approximate demarcation for the end of the Jacksonian Era in American history and the beginning of something else. It coincides with the annexation of Texas. It is an ending, because Andrew Jackson himself dies in June of that year; likewise, it is the wake of a close Presidential election (1844) in which dark horse James K. Polk's successful candidacy marks a distinct change in personnel, as well as the driving concerns and issues of the Democracy and nation at large. John L. O'Sullivan, editor of the *Democratic Review*, coined the term "Manifest Destiny" the same year, and the concept of territorial expansion advanced several orders of magnitude from what it was before. The prospect that year of

⁷⁰ Ibid., 28.

⁷¹ Merk, *Slavery and the Annexation of Texas*, 176 and 181; Gambrell, *Anson Jones*, 439; *Autobiography of Sam Houston*, 274-5; John Holland Jenkins, *Recollections of Early Texas* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., 1958), 232.

annexing Texas enlarged American expansionist ardor, notwithstanding a history of steady American expansion prior. True, O'Sullivan named what was already in the hearts and minds of many. But the preordained and explicit Providential right to conquer the continent literally captured the imaginations of over half the electorate and laid the foundations for American imperialism in North America before the Civil War, as well as overseas in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁷² Indeed, O'Sullivan's rhetoric in the pages of the *Democratic Review* justified almost anything. During the Mexican War, he would write:

The Mexican race now see, in the fate of the aborigines of the north, their own inevitable destiny. They must amalgamate and be lost, in the superior vigor of the Anglo-Saxon race, or they must utterly perish.... This occupation of territory by the people, is the great movement of the age, and until every acre of the North American continent is occupied by citizens of the United States, the foundations of the future empire will not have been laid.⁷³

Henry Clay would have been elected President in 1844 but for Texas. It would have taken an adept politician indeed to straddle the issue of annexation or to oppose it altogether and win; Clay's equivocations lost him expansionist votes in the South and "conscience" votes in the North. Ironically, it was the "conscience" faction within Whig ranks which posed the most serious challenge to the long-term efficacy of the Whig party and hence the Second American Party System. Polk was unabashedly pro-annexation on the other hand, and the election results gave he and Congress a public mandate to acquire Texas. The South relished extension of its "Cotton Kingdom" and a reassertion of its national political dominance. The War of 1812 was still fresh in the minds of many Americans, so that suspected intrigues by the British and French to estrange Texas from the United States and to assert European political and economic leverage, produced popular agitation for immediate annexation. Moreover, European influence in Mexico, as well as political instability there, boded ill for American interests, should Mexico reassert her sovereignty over Texas and the Texans fail to maintain their tenuous hold on independence. While reports of imminent foreign interventions were largely erroneous or propagandist, the fears they raised were real enough, proving again that perceptions are often the same as reality.⁷⁴

The year 1845 reached the political threshold in the United States necessary to produce a joint resolution in Congress to annex Texas. At the same time,

⁷² Julius W. Pratt, "The Origin of 'Manifest Destiny'," *American Historical Review* 32 (July 1927): 795-8; and Julius W. Pratt, "John L. O'Sullivan and Manifest Destiny," *New York History* 14 (July 1933): 213.

⁷³ John L. O'Sullivan, *The United States Magazine and Democratic Review* (February 1847): 100; (October 1847): 291.

⁷⁴ George Rawlings Poage, *Henry Clay and the Whig Party* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1936), 151; Frederick Merk, *The Monroe Doctrine and American Expansionism, 1843-1849* (New York: Knopf, 1966), 35-9, 285-9.

annexation was potentially more likely to precipitate war with Mexico, owing to the domestic climate of political instability in Mexico, which invited the 1846 takeover by extremists hostile to the United States after receiving the news that annexation had been consummated. Annexation (including the *method* of annexation by joint resolution instead of by treaty) and the ensuing war with Mexico (1846-8) polarized the nation in a way not seen again until Vietnam. Americans and Mexicans alike frequently overlook the fact that the Mexican-American War produced serious divisiveness in the domestic political environment. The war at home provided the genesis for American traditions of conscientious objection and civil disobedience. Annexation of Texas was opposed by abolitionists and others who did not wish to countenance further extension of the institution of slavery. Annexation was also opposed by politically threatened sectional interests; by those who sympathized with Mexico's territorial claims; by those who wished to continue "Good Neighbor" relations or avoid war; and by many who viewed expansion or war deleterious to the economy (many felt the development of industry would be hurt by the siphoning of labor and capital westward).

Most Whigs opposed annexation and the War. The *American Whig Review* took grave issue with "Manifest Destiny" and said that wars should be fought only "for the redress of grievances."⁷⁵

While adamantly supporting the Monroe Doctrine, the *American Whig Review* believed that the Mexican War was "purely an Executive war" fought to acquire territory; hence, it was no legitimate strategic move to block European influence on the continent. The Democracy's propaganda to the contrary was just "specious" argument, which hid the fact that President Polk invited a war that could have been avoided. Without provocation, the United States had disturbed "the repose of Christendom, after a continued peace of thirty years." Such action constituted "one of the greatest crimes that can degrade a country."⁷⁶

Even if most Whigs did not break political or military ranks, the Whig party may be seen as the closest thing to an organized American political "conscience" at the time. In addition, Whigs knew that any party risked dissolution if it pressed loyal opposition beyond acceptable patriotic bounds, as the Federalists had done in the War of 1812. Certainly, Whig accounts provide the most sober and objective assessments of the conflict, as well as considerable sympathy with Mexico as a sister *Christian* republic. Whigs defined their nationalism in fundamentally different ways from the Democrats. Manifest Destiny did not mesh well with the Union as qualitatively conceived by Whigs, that is, as an entity involved in constant internal improvement over time. Thus while Democratic nationalism was quantitative and spatial, Whig nationalism tended to be qualitative and linked closely to time-purpose premises in

⁷⁵ *American Whig Review* (October 1847): 332, 338; see also (June 1850): 570.

⁷⁶ *American Whig Review* (January 1846): 20; (July 1846): 1, containing quote; (March 1847): 217-30; (June 1846): 571-80, quote 571; (September 1845): 229.

Whig historicism.⁷⁷ This sense of nationalism would later affect the Republican party. In the meantime, the Democratic version of nationalism won out and an important aspect of two-party competition was eliminated, weakening the two-party dialectic. The parties moved from debating expansion to debating slavery. This made the two-party system much more vulnerable to sectional antagonism.

In 1845, unbeknownst to itself, the Whig party was in mid-life approaching old age. Begun as organized opposition to the policies and personality of Andrew Jackson, its continued viability turned on the start of intense sectionalism. This sectionalism was apparent well before the Mexican War, but it was American victory, preceded as it was by favorable settlement of the Oregon boundary dispute with Great Britain and followed as quickly by Texas annexation and acquisition of large territories from Mexico (New Mexico and California), that produced a characteristically unique and serious national dilemma. Whigs had "opposed the annexation of Texas because of the difficulties it was to bring with it." War with Mexico over annexation and border disputes transformed American forces into an "army of occupation" and so violated "first principles" of moral nations. Whigs had also opposed war to obtain Oregon, but they were satisfied that the treaty reached with Great Britain was "honorable." Regardless of the way territory was obtained, however, as settlements pushed westward and disputes over slavery increased, the political balance between North and South was upset.⁷⁸

The expansion of the nation into newly acquired territories forced the vital confrontation with a veritable hydra's head of political, economic, social and moral facets involving not just the institution of slavery per se, but also competing free labor ideology, the intent of the Founding Fathers, and the nation's very future in the largest sense. Moreover, the acquisition of Texas was potentially the acquisition of five states, according to terms of the joint resolution as adopted. Expansion of the Union placed the whole Union at stake, in other words. The Mexican War also engendered a permanent division of "proto-conscience" Whigs within the party, who could not countenance passive opposition during actual hostilities in the name of patriotism, and who began to challenge the more conservative leadership. A small paper, *The Boston Whig*, became the organ for this faction in 1846.⁷⁹ The future was theoretically tractable, however, amenable to the influence of common men as never before, thanks to the advance of suffrage during the Age of Jackson.

An onus of responsibility thus devolved upon the Whig and Democratic parties to articulate and mediate an acceptable version of the future, in order to avert a national calamity. The Whigs felt an especially grave burden, since in 1845 they

⁷⁷ Daniel Walker Howe, *The Political Culture of the American Whigs* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 20-1; Howe and Major L. Wilson, *Space, Time, and Freedom: The Quest for Nationality and the Irrepressible Conflict, 1815-1861* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1974), 108 and see chapters 3-5.

⁷⁸ *American Whig Review* (March 1848): 217, 219; (August 1846): 114, 171-9; (February 1846): 114-28.

⁷⁹ William R. Brock, *Parties and Political Conscience: American Dilemmas, 1840-1850* (Millwood, N.Y.: KTO Press, 1979), 190-5.

represented the party of peace but not the party in power. Clearly evident, though yet not fully visible, was the high-stakes competition for America's future. Whigs believed only they could reconcile the past with the present, the present with a future to be hoped for. Only Whiggery could reconcile growth and change with balance and stability, and sectional differences with the overarching interest of the Union held in common.⁸⁰ Whigs were alarmed

that so much ignorance, passion, and short-sightedness should be at the polls.... [What was needed was] for the good and great men--the high-minded, honest, sensible and experienced men--to take hold of the politics of the country, and place themselves where they belong, at the head of the masses, to guide, teach, and save them.⁸¹

But that was not the Jacksonian legacy, and Whig political theory proved ill-equipped to handle the challenges of *democratic* sectionalism in the United States. The day for elite politics was over. After 1850, Whigs could no longer hold primary dissenting elements constructively, or even benignly, within their own party structure. The Compromise of 1850 proved to be a pyrrhic victory, indicative of permanent schisms in the party, which gave way in the election of 1852 and helped make the whole political system susceptible to collapse with passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act in 1854. If the Whig solution of compromise in 1850 was futile, the Democratic alternative of popular sovereignty in 1854 proved still more volatile. In hindsight, the choice of paths at the crossroads of 1845 made much, if not 'all the difference.' Considerable political danger inhered in the chosen path of annexation.

Growing economic prosperity, along with social stress, meant that there were numerous middle-class men and women with education, income and leisure to devote to social causes. After 1836, there were over 500 anti-slavery societies in the North. By the end of the decade, there were 100,000 Northerners enrolled in some 1,000 local anti-slavery societies.⁸² Members of William Lloyd Garrison's umbrella-group, the American Anti-Slavery Society, usually abstained from political participation in either party and very often refused to vote. Their abolitionist efforts were directed towards moral suasion and not towards achieving political mandate. Disappointment with the slow and limited inroads of moral suasion and apparent Southern intransigence led some abolitionists to seek a political solution. Moreover, this was a move consistent with popular notions of Jacksonian majoritarianism, even if abolitionists were a hopeless minority.

The break of "political" abolitionists in New York from the parent, nonpolitical organization led to the formation of a third party in 1840 called the Liberty party. Wealthy New York City businessmen Arthur and Lewis Tappan supported the party, while Garrison continued to disdain established politics and to

⁸⁰ Kenneth E. Shewmaker, ed., *Daniel Webster, "The Completest Man"* (Hanover, N.H.: Dartmouth College; University Press of New England, 1990), xxvi.

⁸¹ *American Whig Review* (November 1846): 442.

⁸² Eric Foner and Olivia Mahoney, *A House Divided: America in the Age of Lincoln* (New York: Norton; Chicago Historical Society, 1990), 44, 49.

radicalize the parent organization along philosophical lines. The Liberty party nominated Ohio abolitionist and publisher James Birney for President in 1840 and again in 1844, but to the rising party's chagrin, its 1844 election support resulted in splitting the Whig vote. Support was diverted from Clay, throwing New York's electoral vote and the entire national election to James K. Polk. In addition, reported Tappan brother initiatives to foster British financial offers to Texas actually played into annexationist hands.

The Liberty party merged into the Free Soil party in 1848, a broadly based, moderately anti-slavery coalition, which opposed slavery primarily for the racist (and very popular) reason of wanting to keep land for exclusive white settlement. The Free Soil party nominated Martin Van Buren for President and polled 300,000 votes in the 1848 election. Thus, confirming Whig speculations and political concerns, anti-slavery had spread well beyond the ranks of abolitionists by that time. The Free Soil party dwindled with the effects of the political compromise reached in Congress in 1850. Democrats like Van Buren returned to their party fold, but many did not. Northern Whigs and Democrats who returned to their parties remained significantly influenced by the Free Soil experience. The Compromise of 1850 certainly did not leave most Free Soilers anxious to become committed Whigs; rather, many Free Soilers were willing to try again in 1852. The bulk seemed poised to enter an even larger coalition as circumstances developed. Whigs felt inordinately exposed to the political challenge of Free-Soilers, as they had to the Liberty Party. Political and cultural cross-currents had changed the political landscape rapidly since 1845. Certainly the situation in 1850 was a far cry from that in 1820.⁸³

The Whiggish *New Englander* had predicted that war with Mexico would disturb the delicate balance in "relations between the States and the Union" and so risk another war.⁸⁴ The *American Whig Review* repeatedly predicted that annexation of Texas would exacerbate sectional conflict:

The reception of this foreign territory [Texas] might deeply affect [the South's] dearest interests. Such an **expansion** of the national being might...proportionably **restrict** the free exercise of those national prerogatives she had conceded for the common benefit of the confederacy.... Her interests might clash... with those of some other members of the original Union, and here she would compromise,... because mutual concession was in the national bond.⁸⁵

The *Review* was well aware that the nation and the Whig party were not in ordinary times and that acquisition of the new territories had made the crucial

⁸³ Foner and Mahoney, eds, *A House Divided*, 51; Peter B. Knupfer, *The Union As It Is: Constitutional Unionism and Sectional Compromise, 1787-1861* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 175-6; *American Whig Review* (February 1845): 119; (July 1845): 4-5; (August 1848): 193; (October 1852): 371.

⁸⁴ *The New Englander* (March 1847): 604-12.

⁸⁵ *The New Englander* (January 1845): 78.

difference. Whigs, including Daniel Webster, also understood that the nature of anti-slavery had become crucially different somehow from the time of the Missouri Compromise:

Twenty years since, the subject of slavery was regarded at the North as a political question solely; it has now come to be looked upon as a question of religion and humanity.⁸⁶

Taken together, the situation was actually worse than Whig expectations. Compromise for the sake of compromise, the classic Whig solution, had only short-lived viability remaining. Despite apparent political consensus in the Compromise of 1850, Henry Clay's conservative vision would soon be overtaken by sectional visions averse to compromise through mutual concession.⁸⁷ The annexation of Texas was certainly an immediate contributor, if not *the key component event*, in what would be a process of dissolution in the United States that culminated in civil war. Ironically, as Texas entered the annexation agreement aimed at furthering her self-determination, the United States entered a contract that nearly spelled her self-immolation. In his memoirs, Ulysses S. Grant assessed Texas and the Mexican War in relation to the American Civil War. Referring first to the Army as an "army of occupation" that moved into disputed territory "to force Mexico to initiate war," Grant writes: To us it [Texas] was an empire and of incalculable value; but it might have been obtained by other means. The Southern rebellion was largely the outgrowth of the Mexican War. Nations, like individuals, are punished for their transgressions. We got our punishment in the most sanguinary and expensive war of modern times.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ *The New Englander* (April 1849): 331; Webster in the *American Whig Review* (July 1850): 102.

⁸⁷ Knupfer, *The Union As It Is*, 5, 168, 185; William E. Gienapp, *The Origins of the Republican Party, 1852-56* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 227.

⁸⁸ Ulysses S. Grant, *Personal Memoirs of U.S. Grant* (New York: C.L. Webster & Co., 1885-86), 38.

EL PELIGRO DE UNA GUERRA EN DOS FRENTES: EL PAPEL DE GRAN BRETAÑA EN EL CONFLICTO ENTRE MEXICO Y LOS ESTADOS UNIDOS DE 1846-1848

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Cuando James K. Polk asumió el cargo de presidente de Estados Unidos en marzo de 1845, existían dos zonas de conflicto internacionales potenciales: en la parte sur de Texas, en contra de México, y en el territorio de Oregón ¹ en el noroeste en contra de Gran Bretaña. De los dos países, los estadounidenses consideraban al último como el más peligroso. Para muchos estadounidenses, sobre todo los que pertenecían al Partido Demócrata, la Gran Bretaña, gobernada por una monarquía y centro del imperio más poderoso del mundo en aquel tiempo, pareció ser la personificación de la tiranía y de la agresión.

Gran Bretaña había sido el adversario de Estados Unidos en dos guerras largas y sangrientas, la memoria de las cuales todavía era fuente de mucho rencor entre los ciudadanos de éste. Durante la primera de estas dos guerras, la de 1775-1783, los estadounidenses habían realizado los primeros intentos para extender sus territorios a lo largo del continente, al llevar a cabo una campaña dirigida contra Canadá con el objetivo de conquistarlo por la fuerza de las armas.² A pesar del

¹ La área conocida como Oregón abarcaba los estados modernos de Oregón, Washington, e Idaho, así como pequeñas porciones de Montana y Wyoming que se ubicaban al oeste de la vertiente continental de la Sierra Madre occidental. También se extendía hacia al norte a un punto indeterminado al sur de Alaska. Bernard DeVoto, *The Year of Decision: 1846* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1943), 5-6.

² Para descripciones detalladas de las operaciones militares de la campaña de 1775-1776 para conquistar a Canadá y Acadia por la fuerza de las armas, véase Justin H. Smith, *Our Struggle for the Fourteenth Colony: Canada and the American Revolution* (2 tomas, New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1907); W.B. Kerr, "The American Invasion of Nova Scotia," *Canadian Defence Quarterly*, 13:4 (July 1936): 433-444; y J. Mackay Hitsman, *Safeguarding*

fracaso de esta empresa, algunos estadounidenses nunca perdieron la esperanza de eventualmente posesionarse de las colonias británicas del norte. Tres décadas después, durante la guerra con Gran Bretaña de 1812 a 1814, los estadounidenses hicieron otro intento infructuoso para subyugar al territorio.³

Desde el fin de aquel conflicto, las relaciones entre Estados Unidos y Gran Bretaña no habían sido muy cordiales. El mismo duque de Wellington comentó que "lo más probable es que tendremos una guerra antes de poder arreglar nuestros problemas con los Estados Unidos." El tratado de Webster-Ashburton de 1842, que definió de manera más o menos definitiva las fronteras entre Maine y Nueva Brunswick, había sido concluído por una administración Whig (el predecesor del Partido Republicano), que los demócratas interpretaron como el triunfo de una reclamación británica fraudulenta, así como la pérdida de una porción de territorio de importancia estratégica --aquella parte cedida a la Nueva Brunswick-- que debería pertenecer a Estados Unidos.⁴

Durante este mismo período, la noción de "Destino Manifiesto", o la expansión preordenada del pueblo estadounidense sobre una extensión de territorio no definida con precisión, alcanzó su etapa de plena madurez. Su órgano de difusión principal fue la revista mensual *The Democratic Review*, fundada en 1837 por John L. Sullivan, inmigrante de origen irlandés. En una serie de artículos publicados en esta revista, Sullivan argumentaba que la política anexionista estadounidense era necesaria para evitar que otras naciones se apoderaran del continente. No sólo deberían ser anexados los territorios de Texas y California, sino también aquellos que eran gobernados por los británicos, o a través de empresas comerciales de esta nacionalidad, tales como la Compañía de la Bahía Hudson. "De hecho", Sullivan comentaba, "existe mucho anexionismo que todavía no ha ocurrido, dentro de la vida de la generación actual, a lo largo de toda la extensión de la frontera del norte."⁵

Canada, 1763-1871 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1968), 21-45.

³ Julius W. Pratt, *Expansionists of 1812* (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1957), 17-59, 153-188; J. Mackay Hitsman, *The Incredible War of 1812: A Military History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965), 61-237; J. Mackay Hitsman, *Safeguarding Canada*, 79-109.

⁴ Wilbur D. Jones y J. Chal Vinson, "British Preparedness and the Oregon Settlement," *Pacific Historical Review*, 22:4 (November 1953): 354. Para un estudio detallado de los problemas en torno a las negociaciones para fijar los límites entre Canadá y Estados Unidos en el noreste, véase Howard Jones, *To the Webster-Ashburton Treaty: A Study in Anglo-American Relations, 1783-1843* (Chapel Hill, N.C., University of North Carolina Press, 1977).

⁵ "Annexation", de John L. O'Sullivan, publicado por vez primera en la revista *The Democratic Review*, el 17 de julio de 1845, y reproducido en Louis M. Hacker, comp., *The Shaping of the American Tradition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1947), 563-568. Véase también Julius W. Pratt, "John L. O'Sullivan and Manifest Destiny," *New York History* 14:3 (July 1933): 222-224, así como "The Origin of 'Manifest Destiny'", del mismo autor, en *The American Historical Review* 32:4 (July 1927): 795-798. Para muchos expansionistas estadounidenses de este período, Canadá era más atractivo como un territorio potencial de adquisición que otras regiones del hemisferio, a raíz de que los canadienses parecían

Durante los años inmediatamente anteriores a la guerra entre Estados Unidos y México, algunos estadounidenses había expresado la opinión de que los británicos estaban en el proceso de cercar a la Unión Americana por todos lados. No sólo constituía la frontera entre los Grandes Lagos y el Pacífico una región desde donde se podría originar un futuro ataque inglés, sino que Texas, California, y ciertas áreas de México, América Central y el Caribe parecían estar en peligro de caerse bajo el control inglés y así limitar las posibilidades para que los estadounidenses pudieran extender su territorio.

Con referencia a Texas, por ejemplo, en 1842 circulaban rumores en los periódicos estadounidenses de que algunas casas bancarias inglesas habían prestado dinero al gobierno mexicano con el propósito de financiar la reconquista de aquel territorio. En el transcurso de los dos años siguientes, se rumoraba de que algunos capitalistas ingleses habían ofrecido al gobierno de Texas un préstamo, respaldado por el gobierno británico, como medida para la eliminación de la esclavitud en la región. Según los propagadores de tal rumor, la abolición de la esclavitud en 1833 en los territorios del imperio había conducido al estancamiento de la economía inglesa. Para restaurar la competitividad británica, era necesario acabar con la institución de la esclavitud en las demás regiones del mundo. En el caso de que tuviera éxito en tal empresa, Gran Bretaña tendría nuevos mercados para absorber sus productos manufacturados, el poder competitivo de Estados Unidos sería destruido y Texas se convertiría en un satélite económico de los británicos.⁶

La única parte verídica de estos rumores consistió en el hecho de que, como Lord Aberdeen, el Secretario de Asuntos Exteriores del gabinete del primer ministro inglés William Peel, había informado a Edward Everett, el ministro estadounidense en

semejantes a los estadounidenses en cuanto a los elementos básicos de carácter nacional y vida política. Albert K. Weinberg, *Manifest Destiny: A Study of Nationalist Expansionism in American History* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1963), 355-364; Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981), 130-131, 208-227; Thomas R. Hietala, *Manifest Design: Anxious Aggrandizement in Late Jacksonian America* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1985), 132-172. Algunos expansionistas opinaban que los canadienses ya habían mostrado evidencias de su "carácter rebelde" durante las insurrecciones de 1837 en las regiones del Alto y Bajo Canadá y que, por ende, estaban predispuestos a unirse con los Estados Unidos voluntariamente. Intervención del senador Sidney Breese de Illinois en el Senado, en *Congressional Globe*, 27 February 1844, 28th Congress, 1st Session, 330-338; Intervención del senador Levi Woodbury en *Ibid.*, 4 June 1844, Appendix, 760-775; Editorial de John Sullivan, en *New York Morning News*, 14 July 1845, citado en Frederick Merk, *Manifest Destiny and Mission in American History: A Reinterpretation* (New York: Vintage Books, 1963), 50. Para algunas opiniones semejantes, véase los comentarios editoriales del *New York Herald*, 30 November 1845, y del *New York Morning News*, 7 July 1845, citados en la misma fuente, 50; Discurso de Lewis C. Levin, diputado congressional de Pennsylvania, en *Congressional Globe*, 29th Congress, 1st Session, 9 January 1846, Appendix, 95-96; así como Ephraim D. Adams, *The Power of Ideals in American History* (New York: AMS Press, 1969), 74-79.

⁶ Abel P. Upshur a W.S. Murphy, 8 August 1843, en *Senate Document 341*, 28th Congress, 1st Session, 18-22.

Gran Bretaña, el gobierno británico había aconsejado a que México reconociera a la República de Texas con la esperanza de que la emancipación de los esclavos pudiera ser incluido como parte del acuerdo de paz entre los dos países.⁷ Sea como fuere, los rumores aumentaron la agitación en favor de la anexión de Texas a Estados Unidos con el pretexto de evitar el apoderamiento del territorio por parte de los británicos.⁸ De manera semejante, los consejos por parte de los gobiernos inglés y francés a los texanos en el sentido de que les convenía preservar su independencia, mientras que urgían a que México concluyera un tratado de paz con Texas como manera de asegurar esta independencia, fue interpretada por los anexionistas como un intento de introducir la práctica europea de "balance de poderes" al Nuevo Mundo con el propósito de mantener a los pueblos de América divididos entre ellos mismos.⁹

También circulaban rumores acerca de intentos británicos de adquirir a California y anexarla al imperio.¹⁰ Se decía, por ejemplo, que el gobierno mexicano contemplaba entregar el territorio a tenedores de bonos británicos como forma de pago de la deuda externa mexicana o, en el peor de los casos, simplemente venderlo a Inglaterra para conseguir los fondos que siempre necesitaba. Una propuesta por parte del gobierno mexicano para hipotecar alrededor de 40,000 hectáreas de tierra en los territorios del norte con el propósito de abrirlas a la colonización, no se concretizó debido a que los tenedores de bonos ingleses preferían ser pagados con dinero en lugar de tierras. Un intento por parte del presidente Mariano Paredes de vender el territorio a Gran Bretaña en cambio por un préstamo en mayo de 1846

⁷ Ibid., 38-42. Véase también la petición firmada por A.S. Ruthven y otros residentes de Galveston y Houston, Texas, incluida con la carta del Sr. William Kennedy, del consulado británico de Galveston, dirigida a Lord Aberdeen, 8 July 1844, en "British Correspondence Concerning Texas," ed. Ephraim Douglas Adams, *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 19:1 (July 1915): 91-93.

⁸ *Senate Document 341*, 25-26. Como ejemplo de las supuestas pruebas de las intenciones de los ingleses en este sentido, véase el debate entre Lord Brougham, el líder del partido de oposición (Whig) y Lord Aberdeen en la Cámara de los Lores, *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates* 71 (18 August 1843), 915-917.

⁹ James K. Polk, "First Annual Message to Congress," 2 December 1845, en James D. Richardson, comp., *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1902* (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of National Literature and Art, 1907), 4:398-399; Frederick Merk, *The Monroe Doctrine and American Expansionism, 1843-1849* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1968), 50-51, 54-61, 63-64.

¹⁰ Tales rumores comenzaron a aparecer cada vez con más frecuencia en los periódicos de tendencia expansionista en Estados Unidos, tales como *The Baltimore Sun*, *The Democratic Review*, etcétera. En una reunión en la Casa Blanca con el senador de Texas Thomas Hart Benton el 20 de octubre de 1845, Polk expresó su temor de que los británicos quisieran apoderarse de California, un territorio que deseaba que se incorporara a Estados Unidos. Los políticos del partido whig no compartían este temor. Daniel Webster, por ejemplo, declaró en una ocasión que California podía ser adquirida por medio de una compra, a cambio de algún relajamiento en la posición estadounidense en torno a la cuestión de Oregón. Merk, *Monroe Doctrine and American Expansionism*, 105, 130.

tampoco llegó a realizarse en vista de que, para aquella fecha, el gobierno inglés consideraba que México ya había perdido su autoridad sobre la provincia.¹¹

En realidad, el gobierno británico no tenía planes para apoderarse de California. Después de las rebeliones en Canadá de 1837-1838, tenía poco interés en adquirir colonias lejanas que pudieran ser costosas para mantener o provocar problemas con otras naciones. Como Lord Ashburton comentó durante esta época, "De ninguna manera queremos colonias, sobre todo aquéllas que serían imposibles de administrar por su lejanía, y que únicamente servirán para embrollarnos con nuestro vecino."¹² Además, era esencial mantener buenas relaciones con México para que éste pagara su deuda a los tenedores de bolsa ingleses. No obstante, era cierto que el pueblo inglés, casi desde los inicios de la exploración europea en la región durante el siglo XVI, tenía interés en la región y guardaba la idea de que California podría pertenecer al imperio británico algún día. Asimismo, algunos residentes ingleses del territorio, tales como James A. Forbes, el vicecónsul británico de Monterrey, estuvieron involucrados en determinados momentos en intrigas pro-británicas. El gobierno inglés quería evitar que California cayera bajo el control estadounidense; sin embargo, entendía que cualquier intento por parte suya de apoderarse del territorio conduciría a una guerra con Estados Unidos.¹³

Algunos políticos estadounidenses expresaron preocupaciones semejantes en torno a lo que percibieron como ambiciones por parte de los británicos de apoderarse de América Central y el Caribe. Los ingleses, quienes ya se habían establecido en Belice, habían mostrado una disposición de adquirir territorios adicionales en la región, tal como la costa de los Mosquitos en el norte de Nicaragua. Cuando la provincia de Yucatán, que había intentado separarse de México en más de una ocasión desde 1821, procuró independizarse otra vez en 1846, el poeta Walt Whitman comentó que podría ser representada algún día en la bandera estadounidense como otra

¹¹ Alexander Forbes, *California: A History of Upper and Lower California* (London: Smith Elder and Company, 1839), 152-153; Hubert Howe Bancroft, *History of California* (Santa Bárbara, Cal.: Wallace Heberd, 1963), 5:215-223; Lester G. Engelson, "Proposals for the Colonization of California by England", *California Historical Society Quarterly* 18 (June 1939): 138, 143-146.

¹² Citado en Magdalen Coughlin, "California Ports: A Key to West Coast Diplomacy, 1820-1845," en Odie B. Faulk and Joseph A. Stout, Jr., eds., *The Mexican War: Changing Interpretations* (Chicago: Sage Books, 1973), 32.

¹³ Ephraim D. Adams, "English Interest in the Annexation of California," en *British Interests and Activities in Texas, 1838-1846* (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1963), 234-264; A.P. Nasatir, "International Rivalry for California and the Establishment of the British Consulate," *California Historical Society Quarterly* 46:1 (March 1967): 53-54; Coughlin, "California Ports," 25, 32; Sheldon G. Jackson, "Two Pro-British Plots in Alta California," *Southern California Quarterly* 55:2 (Summer 1973): 133; Sheldon G. Jackson, "The British and the California Dream: Rumors, Myths and Legends," *Southern California Quarterly* 57:3 (Fall 1975): 252-254.

"estrella brillante".¹⁴ El grupo gobernante yucateco, al sentir seriamente amenazado por el levantamiento en armas de los indios de la región, solicitó el apoyo de los gobiernos inglés, español y estadounidense para aplastar la rebelión, al mismo tiempo en que ofreció los derechos de soberanía sobre la provincia a aquella potencia que interviniera en la lucha en su favor.

Durante una discusión sobre el asunto en el gabinete presidencial, Polk estaba de acuerdo en la necesidad de ocupar la península, pero aclaró que aprobaría su anexión permanente únicamente como medida para evitar su adquisición por parte de los británicos. Polk luego dejó que la cuestión fuera discutida en el senado.¹⁵ Durante el debate que siguió, el senador Edward Hannegan de Indiana, presidente del Comité sobre Relaciones Exteriores del Senado, así como ferviente expansionista, declaró:

En estos momentos, Inglaterra quiere controlar la ruta más practicable para un medio de comunicación artificial entre los dos océanos, y para conseguir tal objetivo se encuentra en proceso de absorber gradual y rápidamente el istmo entero [de la América Central]. La posesión de Yucatán por parte de Inglaterra pronto sería seguida por la posesión de Cuba...; Deje que Inglaterra se posesione de [Cuba y Yucatán] y tendrá un control tan absoluto de la desembocadura del Mississipi como en el caso de la desembocadura del Támesis! No podríamos entrar o salir sin su autorización.¹⁶

El senador Jefferson Davis aseveró que algunos de los indios rebeldes de Yucatán utilizaban mosquetes de manufactura inglesa, aunque admitió que éstos pudieran haber sido vendidos a los indígenas --como de hecho fue el caso-- por contrabandistas. Se hizo hincapié, sin embargo, entre la supuesta similitud entre este caso y la distribución de armas por los británicos entre los indios de América del Norte durante la guerra de 1812. Davis también declaró que, a petición de los rebeldes, los ingleses habían enviado tres compañías de artillería a Yucatán, aunque, en realidad, el gobernador de Jamaica había enviado únicamente a 100 soldados de línea a Belice, no para apoyar a los insurrectos yucatecos, sino para defender a la colonia inglesa contra un posible ataque indígena. Ninguno de estos refuerzos cruzó la frontera a Yucatán.¹⁷

¹⁴ Editorial del periódico *Brooklyn Eagle*, 29 June 1846, citado en Merk, *The Monroe Doctrine and American Expansionism*, 196.

¹⁵ *The Diary of James K. Polk During His Presidency, 1845 to 1849*, ed. Milo Milton Quaife (Chicago: A.C. McClurg & Company, 1910), 3:430-447; "Message of James K. Polk to the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States," 29 April 1848, en James D. Richardson, comp., *Compilation of Messages and Papers*, 4:581-583.

¹⁶ *Congressional Globe*, 4, 5 May 1848, 30th Congress, 1st Session, Appendix, 591-597.

¹⁷ *Congressional Globe*, 5 May 1848, 30th Congress, 1st Session, Appendix, 599-603; *Ibid.*, 10 May 1848, 615-620; *London Times*, 22 June 1848.

Durante el mismo debate, el senador Lewis Cass, al repetir las ideas de Polk, recomendó que Yucatán fuera ocupado temporalmente por fuerzas estadounidenses para evitar su posible ocupación por parte de los ingleses. No obstante, los demás senadores no concordaron con Cass, al opinar que constituía una maniobra política para que fuera escogido como candidato presidencial en la próxima convención del Partido Demócrata. En todo caso, el entusiasmo en torno al proyecto se acabó cuando se enteraron del tratado de paz que había sido acordado entre el grupo gobernante de Yucatán y los indios. Por añadidura, el público estadounidense ya estaba cansado de la guerra entre México y Estados Unidos que apenas se había terminado y no quería que su país emprendiera una nueva empresa militar en otra región de Hispanoamérica. Algunos diputados demócratas también opinaban de que pudieran surgir problemas de tipo racial en caso de que la ocupación "temporal" de Yucatán fuera más prolongada o que un territorio con una población indígena numerosa fuera agregado a la Unión.¹⁸

También se temía de que Cuba pudiera ser conquistado por los ingleses a raíz de su ubicación estratégica en el Caribe. Los británicos ya habían ocupado la isla durante la Guerra de los Siete Años y, en caso de un conflicto armado con Estados Unidos, podrían conquistarla fácilmente debido a su superior armada.¹⁹ Asimismo, corrieron rumores de que el gobierno inglés pudiera utilizar el asunto de las deudas que el gobierno español debía a los banqueros londinenses como pretexto para tomar posesión de la isla. En 1837, éstos habían realizado un préstamo de dinero al gobierno español, para el cual Cuba y Puerto Rico supuestamente se habían quedado como una especie de garantía en caso de que los españoles no pudieran pagar la deuda. El entonces primer ministro Lord Palmerston había aseverado que su gobierno tenía el derecho de llevar a cabo una guerra con el objetivo de recuperar el dinero que los deudores extranjeros les debían a sus ciudadanos, y el Lord Bentinck había hecho la misma aseveración en el Parlamento. También existía cierta tensión en las relaciones entre Gran Bretaña y España debido al resentimiento inglés provocado por el casamiento de Isabel, la reina española, y la Infanta Luisa, su hermana menor, con pretendientes franceses en preferencia a aquellos sugeridos por los británicos, así como la expulsión del ministro plenipotenciario inglés de Madrid. En caso de una guerra entre los dos países, los británicos tomarían a Cuba inmediatamente. Como consecuencia de estas preocupaciones, el gobierno de Estados Unidos dio instrucciones a Andrew Stevenson, su representante en Londres, para que advertiera a Lord Palmerston de que el gobierno estadounidense jamás aprobaría una transferencia de soberanía sobre Cuba a una potencia marítima europea. En 1840, al recibir informes de que Gran Bretaña estaba al punto de anexar a Cuba como garantía por las deudas bancarias de ciudadanos españoles, el gobierno estadounidense declaró que resistiría por la fuerza cualquier intento por parte de los ingleses de anexar la isla. Estas mismas preocupaciones también le motivaron a intentar adquirirla por medio

¹⁸ Los indios de Yucatán disfrutaban, por lo menos en teoría, de los privilegios de la ciudadanía y de la igualdad social, que representaría una especie de anomalía si fueran incorporados a la población estadounidense. *Congressional Globe*, 5 May 1848, 30th Congress, 1st Session, Appendix, 600-601; *Ibid.*, 15 May 1848, 625-630.

¹⁹ Merk, *The Monroe Doctrine and American Expansionism*, 233-234, 236.

de la compra; sin embargo, el gobierno español rechazó tales ofertas por considerar que Cuba constituía una fuente de orgullo nacional y que no se podía contemplar su venta bajo ninguna circunstancia.²⁰

Sin embargo, de todas las regiones de Norteamérica en las cuales los estadounidenses percibieron ejemplos de la intrusión inglesa, la de Oregón constituía el caso más grave. La presencia de los británicos en esta zona representaba para ellos una nueva forma de colonización por una potencia imperial en América, que disputaría con su gobierno el derecho sobre aquellas regiones en el norte que éste reclamaba como las suyas. En febrero de 1846, cuando un político perteneciente al partido de los Whigs preguntó a John Quincy Adams si éste creía que Estados Unidos poseía el derecho de ejercer su soberanía sobre Oregón, Adams le refirió al verso bíblico que decía: "Sean fructíferos y multiplíquense; enriquezcan la tierra y domínenla". "Esta", comentó Adams, "en mi juicio, constituye la base no sólo de nuestra soberanía sobre el territorio de Oregón, sino también referente a la propiedad de los seres humanos en general." Descartó el argumento de que el descubrimiento y la exploración de las regiones fueran más importantes que la posesión y la utilización de la tierra de acuerdo con la voluntad de Dios. "Defendemos nuestro derecho de dominar aquel país", agregó, "...con objeto de que el desierto florezca a la manera de una rosa, para que se establezcan leyes, que nazcan hijos y que sea subyugada la tierra...". Gran Bretaña, afirmó Adams, deseaba Oregón sólo para "mantenerlo abierto a la navegación, para que los cazadores cazaran las fieras salvajes...para los búfalos, guerreros y salvajes del desierto."²¹

El presente trabajo no tiene como propósito el de analizar a fondo el proceso de negociación que resultó en la firma del tratado de 1846 que dividió el territorio de Oregón entre Estados Unidos y Canadá, dado que este tema ha sido quizás el que ha recibido más atención por parte de los historiadores quienes han estudiado la historia de las relaciones entre estas dos naciones. Intentará, más bien, colocar este episodio dentro del contexto total del movimiento expansionista estadounidense del siglo XX y del papel de Gran Bretaña en este proceso.

En su discurso inaugural del 4 de marzo de 1845, el presidente Polk optó por sostener la política formulada por su predecesor en la Casa Blanca, John Tyler, quien en su mensaje anual de diciembre de 1843 había afirmado que los Estados Unidos tenía el derecho de soberanía sobre la región entera de Oregón, desde el paralelo 42°, que constituía el límite septentrional de la provincia mexicana de California, hasta el paralelo 54° 40', el límite sur del territorio reclamado por Rusia.²² Polk no estaba dispuesto a dejar que el poder militar de Gran Bretaña intimidara al gobierno estadounidense para que aceptara un compromiso. "No debemos permitir que nos disuadan de cualquier política que consideremos justa y apropiada y con la cual

²⁰ *Diary of James K. Polk*, 3:482-483; Dexter Perkins, *The Monroe Doctrine*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1937), 2:167-170; *Monroe Doctrine and American Expansionism*, 141, 267, 277.

²¹ *Congressional Globe*, 9 February 1846, 29th Congress, 1st Session, 339-342.

²² "Inaugural Address", del presidente James K. Polk, en Richardson, comp., *Compilation of Messages and Papers*, 381.

Inglaterra no tiene derecho de interferir", confió a George Bancroft, el secretario de la Armada...Si tenemos que luchar en contra a Gran Bretaña, deberíamos hacerlo ahora, en lugar de dejarlo para nuestros sucesores".²³

El primer ministro inglés Robert Peel, influido por el duque de Wellington, había favorecido la adopción de una postura militante frente a la política agresiva mostrada por las administraciones de Tyler y Polk para que su país se quedara con todo el territorio. "Yo no tendría miedo de una buena dosis de jactancia preliminar por parte de los estadounidenses", declaró, "La mejor manera de afrontarla sería enviar el "Collingwood" (la capitana de la escuadra naval británica en el Pacífico)... a la desembocadura del Río Columbia."²⁴ En el transcurso de un debate sobre el tema de Oregón en la Cámara de los Comunes, Lord John Russell, el líder del partido Whig de la oposición, aseveró: "No puede ser asunto de la indiferencia, que un gran territorio sobre el cual tenemos un derecho de soberanía más justo y evidente, debería ser entregado a raíz de un pronunciamiento jactancioso por parte del presidente de Estados Unidos..."²⁵

En el caso de una guerra, Canadá constituiría el principal teatro de combate, así como el botín más grande para la nación ganadora. El papel preponderante de Gran Bretaña como potencia extranjera en todos los países de las Américas, así como su prestigio e intereses comerciales al nivel mundial, hizo que su gobierno se sintiera obligado a defender a sus colonias norteamericanas. Canadá también tenía cierto valor estratégico para una nación que dependían de su armada como primera línea de defensa, a raíz de que la madera y otros materiales que se producían allí, fueron considerados esenciales en caso de que por alguna razón se terminara el suministro de estos productos desde fuentes ubicadas en el este de Europa. Por añadidura, si bien Canadá podría ser considerado hasta cierto punto un rehén en poder de los estadounidenses para garantizar el "buen comportamiento" del gobierno británico en sus relaciones con ellos, al mismo tiempo, actuaba como una especie de "cabeza de puente" para que éste pudiera ejercer cierta presión sobre los Estados Unidos en el área de la diplomacia y política internacional. También permitiría que los británicos hicieran un despliegue más eficaz de sus fuerzas militares en el evento de un conflicto

²³ Tomado del manuscrito inédito "Biographical Sketch of J.K. Polk," de George Bancroft, de la Colección Bancroft de la Sociedad Histórica de Massachusetts, citado en Charles Sellers, *James K. Polk, Continentalist, 1843-1846* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1966), 244.

²⁴ Correspondencia intercambiada entre Aberdeen y Peel, 25, 28 September 1844, en Robert C. Clark, ed., "Aberdeen and Peel on Oregon, 1844", *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 34:3 (September 1933): 237-238. Véase también la carta de Peel a Aberdeen, 2 October 1845, reproducida en Robert C. Clark, *History of the Willamette Valley, Oregon* (Chicago: S.J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1927), 844-845; Wilbur D. Jones, *Lord Aberdeen and the Americas* (Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 1958), 66-67; Jones y Vinson, "British Preparedness," 358-359; James O. McCabe, "Arbitration and the Oregon Question," *Canadian Historical Review*, 41 (1960): 310.

²⁵ *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd Series, 76, 4 April 1845, 192-193.

armado entre los dos países.²⁶

La cuestión principal para los estadounidenses en el sentido estratégico consistía en preguntar si el territorio podría ser conquistado antes de la llegada de refuerzos británicos. Después de la guerra de 1812-1814, algunos de sus oficiales habían concluido de que su fracaso en aquel conflicto se debió en gran parte a que no se habían concentrado la mayor parte de sus fuerzas de ataque al lado derecho del Río San Lorenzo en un intento para cortar a las poblaciones principales de Montreal y Quebec de su ruta de comunicaciones con Inglaterra. Por ende, los estrategas navales estadounidenses dirigieron su atención a la planeación de una campaña ofensiva y defensiva en la región de los Grandes Lagos, con la idea de colocar a sus fuerzas en una posición de superioridad durante la etapa inicial de la lucha.²⁷ Con este objetivo, en 1843 y 1844, la armada estadounidense aumentó el número de sus buques de vapor, el mayor de los cuales era el U.S.S. Michigan, un vapor de ruedas laterales, en los Grandes Lagos.²⁸ En una serie de artículos publicados en el *National Intelligencer* en la primavera de 1845, el teniente Matthew T. Maury, el Superintendente del Departamento de Cartas e Instrumentos de Navegación en Washington, urgió que el congreso diera autorización para la construcción de un canal que conectaría el sistema fluvial del Misisipí con los Grandes Lagos. También recomendó el establecimiento de un arsenal naval en Chicago, un astillero en Mackinaw, así como un muelle para la reparación de barcos, junto con un depósito de carbón y pertrechos de guerra, en Búffalo u otro sitio a orillas del Lago Erie. Tales preparativos ayudarían a convencer a los británicos que no sería conveniente recurrir a las armas como una manera de resolver la disputa en torno a Oregón, y, en caso de que ocurriera una lucha, las mejoras en las obras de defensa estadounidenses dejaría a sus fuerzas en control de cuatro de los Grandes Lagos (Erie, Hurón, Michigan y Superior). En particular, Maury creía que era esencial, en caso de una guerra, que el ejército estadounidense ocupara inmediatamente la región suroeste de Alto Canadá, que, de todos modos, opinaba, debería constituir parte del territorio estadounidense.²⁹ Sin embargo, el congreso pronto descartó la propuesta de Maury para la construcción del canal Illinois-Michigan, debido a sospechas surgidas por parte de intereses regionales, sobre todo en el sur de Estados Unidos, de que tal proyecto constituía una

²⁶ Richard A. Preston, *The Defence of the Undefended Border: Planning for War in North America, 1867-1939* (Montreal and London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1977), 10-11.

²⁷ Hitsman, *The Incredible War of 1812*, 240-241; Kenneth Bourne, *Britain and the Balance of Power in North America, 1815-1908* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 3-32.

²⁸ Correspondencia intercambiada entre el primer ministro británico, Sir Robert Peel, y el secretario para las Colonias, Lord Stanley, reproducida en Paul Knaplund, "The Armaments on the Great Lakes, 1844," *American Historical Review* 40:3 (April 1935): 473-476; Jones y Vinson, "British Preparedness," 356; Hitsman, *Safeguarding Canada*, 144-145; Preston, *Defence of the Undefended Border*, 15.

²⁹ *National Intelligencer*, 14, 21 March; 20 May 1845.

estratagema para conseguir fondos federales para el desarrollo del noroeste.³⁰

El ejército estadounidense, por su parte, no se encontraba en condiciones adecuadas para combatir en contra de las fuerzas armadas de una potencia europea. Desde el final de la guerra de 1812-1814, sus unidades en el noroeste contaban con pocos hombres y estaban dispersadas por toda la extensión de la frontera norte. Estos grupos no estaban suficientemente entrenados para emprender operaciones de tipo ofensivo o defensivo. Aunque la milicia contaba con unidades más o menos bien entrenadas en algunos estados, tampoco podría ser utilizada como parte de operaciones ofensivas. La frontera con Canadá también estaba desprovista de un número suficiente de guarniciones para afrontar una posible invasión británica. El verdadero talón de Aquiles fue el hecho de que, desde su base naval en Halifax, la armada británica podría lanzar asaltos en contra del comercio marítimo y las ciudades estadounidenses a lo largo de la costa, contra los cuales los defensores tendrían que luchar con obras de defensa y armamento algo atrasados.³¹

Al comprender que su insistencia en que la frontera en el noroeste fuera el paralelo 54° 40' no podría ser mantenida sin recurrir a la guerra, el gobierno estadounidense ofreció, el 12 de julio de 1845, aceptar que el paralelo 49° constituyera la línea de demarcación, al mismo tiempo en que se permitió que los ingleses usaran los puertos de aquella parte de la isla de Vancouver situada al sur de esta línea. La oferta fue retirada a finales de agosto, empero, al ser rechazada por Richard Pakenham, el representante inglés en Washington.³² El gobierno inglés mantuvo su posición de que el asunto debería ser sometido al arbitraje, no porque creía que el gobierno estadounidense aceptaría esta opción, sino porque proporcionaría a los negociadores más tiempo para arreglar una resolución definitiva del problema. Para diciembre de 1846, Aberdeen había persuadido a Peel que el gobierno británico ya no podía mantener su propuesta de que la frontera siguiera el curso del Río Columbia.³³ No obstante, a principios de enero de 1846, después de que el gobierno estadounidense había rechazado definitivamente la opción de una solución por medio

³⁰ Merk, *Manifest Destiny and Mission*, 71. Referente a la actitud de los expansionistas del sur de Estados Unidos referente a la anexión de Texas y Oregón, así como con respecto a otras cuestiones, véase John Hope Franklin, "The Southern Expansionists of 1846," *Journal of Southern History* 25:3 (August 1959): 323-338.

³¹ Edgar Bruce Wesley, *Guarding the Frontier: A Study of Frontier Defense from 1815 to 1825* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1935), 118-132; Bourne, *Britain and the Balance of Power*, 49-52; Preston, *Defence of the Undefended Border*, 17-18, 20.

³² James Buchanan a Richard Pakenham, 12 July 1845; James Buchanan a Louis McLane, 12 July 1845; Memorandum de una reunión entre James Buchanan y Richard Pakenham, 16 July 1845; Pakenham a Buchanan, 29 July 1845; todos en William R. Manning, ed., *Diplomatic Correspondence of the United States: Canadian Relations, 1784-1860* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1943), 273-288, 966-975.

³³ Aberdeen a Pakenham, 3 December 1845, en Hunter Miller, ed., *Treaties and Other International Acts of the United States of America* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1931-1948), 5:48; Aberdeen a Peel, 28 December 1845, y Aberdeen a Hudson Gurney, 20 January 1846, en Clark, ed., *History of the Willamette Valley*, 848-849, 851.

del arbitraje, Aberdeen dio un viraje al informar a Louis McLane, el ministro estadounidense en Londres, que ya no se pondrían objeciones en contra de medidas militares de tipo ofensivo o defensivo "basadas en la posibilidad de una guerra con los Estados Unidos."³⁴

Aunque Lord Aberdeen, el secretario de Estado para Asuntos Externos de Gran Bretaña, había protestado en contra del aumento del número de buques de guerra estadounidenses en los Grandes Lagos al aseverar que tal medida constituía una violación del acuerdo de Rush-Bagot de 1817, debido a que no sabía con certeza si el tratado incluía mención de buques de vapor, no insistió en el asunto. Por lo tanto, al gobierno británico no le quedaba otra alternativa más que enviar sus propios refuerzos militares a la región.³⁵

A lo largo de 1845 y durante los primeros meses del año siguiente, el gobierno británico se empeñó en aumentar sus defensas en la América del Norte en preparación para una posible guerra. En marzo de 1845, se ordenó al comandante de la escuadra británica del Pacífico a dirigirse a la costa de Oregon. Durante los meses de verano del mismo año, tanto los ingleses como los estadounidenses enviaron cada vez más naves a esta zona. Los británicos, en particular, comenzaron a efectuar un reconocimiento militar de la región estratégicamente importante entre la Sonda de Puget y la desembocadura del Río Columbia. Los tenientes Henry J. Warre y Mervin Vavasour del Cuerpo Real de Ingenieros fueron enviados a la región con motivo de seleccionar sitios estratégicos para la colocación de cañones que podrían dominar la entrada al Río Columbia desde el océano.³⁶ En una misiva enviada a la Oficina

³⁴ Carta de Sir Robert Peel a la Reina Victoria, 8 December 1845, reproducida en parte en G.L. Rives, *The United States and Mexico, 1821-1848* (New York, s.e., 1913), 2:112-113; Aberdeen a Everett, 3 January 1846, en Clark, *History of the Willamette Valley*, 849; McLane a Buchanan, 3 January 1846, en *Congressional Globe*, 29th Congress, 1st Session, 333; McLane a Buchanan, 3 February; 3 March 1846, en Miller, ed., *Treaties and Other International Acts*, 5: 58, 62-65; Peel a Egerton, 6 January 1846, en Jones, *Lord Aberdeen and the Americas*, 78, 80-81; Julius W. Pratt, "James K. Polk and John Bull," *Canadian Historical Review* 24:4 (December 1943): 341-349; Jones y Vinson, "British Preparedness," 362.

³⁵ Durante los años de 1837 a 1844, el gobierno británico únicamente había agregado un buque de guerra, de tipo convencional --es decir, impulsado por medio de velas-- a su fuerza naval que patrullaba los lagos. Correspondencia intercambiada entre el primer ministro británico, Sir Robert Peel, y el secretario para las Colonias, Lord Stanley, reproducida en Knaplund, "Armaments on the Great Lakes," 473-476; Jones y Vinson, "British Preparedness," 356, 358; Bourne, *Britain and the Balance of Power*, 120-169; Hitsman, *Safeguarding Canada*, 144-150.

³⁶ Referente a las actividades de Warre y Vavasour, véase la correspondencia intercambiada entre estos dos hombres en "Documents Relative to Warre and Vavasour's Military Reconnaissance in Oregon, 1845-1846," *Oregon Historical Society Quarterly* 10:1 (March 1909):1-99; McCabe, "Arbitration and the Oregon Question", 313-314; Sellers, *James K. Polk*, 242; y John S. Galbraith, *The Hudson's Bay Company as an Imperial Factor, 1821-1869* (New York: Octagon Books, 1977), 238-241.

Colonial en Londres, Lord Charles Metcalfe, el gobernador en jefe de Canadá, aconsejó de manera imprudente que los estados de la Unión Americana fueran conquistados individualmente y que la armada británica procediera a destruir el comercio marítimo estadounidense, al mismo tiempo en que se efectuara un bloqueo de los puertos americanos a lo largo de la costa del Atlántico y del Golfo de México. Oregón, Metcalf sugirió, podría ser ocupado por una fuerza militar enviada desde la India.³⁷

Durante los últimos meses de 1845, la administración de Peel autorizó el comienzo de un programa para ampliar el número de naves de la armada, en parte debido a un deterioro en las relaciones entre Gran Bretaña y Francia ³⁸, pero también a raíz de la situación belicosa que estaba produciéndose en América. La armada, que, con aproximadamente 100 naves de línea, era mucho más potente que la de Estados Unidos, se amplió en un ocho por ciento, especialmente respecto a buques de vapor.³⁹

En enero de 1846, el gobierno de Peel consiguió el consentimiento del parlamento para la consignación de fondos para la construcción de importantes obras militares en Canadá. De esta manera, se ampliaron y fortalecieron las defensas de Kingston, un baluarte clave que controlaba la vía fluvial entre los Grandes Lagos y el Río San Lorenzo. También se enviaron unos 200 soldados al Fuerte Garry, el cuartel general de la Compañía de la Bahía Hudson situado en el cruce de los Ríos Rojo y Assiniboine, que constituía la puerta de entrada al noroeste británico.⁴⁰

En cambio, en su mensaje anual al Congreso el 6 de diciembre de 1845, Polk no pidió ningún aumento para las defensas de la nación. El presupuesto que solicitó para la armada correspondiente al año de 1846 constituía una reducción de una tercera parte de la cantidad que había sido pedida por el presidente Tyler durante el último año de su administración. La llegada de noticias de Inglaterra referentes a los considerables preparativos militares y navales británicos, motivó a que Polk y Bancroft elaboraran, junto con los jefes de los comités congresionales correspondientes, legislación referente a la creación de dos regimientos de infantería, la incorporación de la milicia al servicio de la nación o, alternativamente, para el reclutamiento de 50,000 voluntarios, y, por último, la consignación de 6,625,000 dólares (un 22 por ciento de los gastos de defensa del año anterior) para el

³⁷ McCabe, "Arbitration and the Oregon Question," 314.

³⁸ John S. Galbraith, "France As a Factor in the Oregon Negotiations," *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 44 (April 1953): 69-73; Jones, *Lord Aberdeen*, 31, 37; C.J. Bartlett, *Great Britain and Sea Power* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1963), 158-160.

³⁹ Buchanan a McLane, 13 December 1845 y 26 February 1846, en *Senate Document 117*, 29th Congress, 1st Session, 2-4, 40-44; Aberdeen a Pakenham, 3 February 1846, en Jones, *Lord Aberdeen*, 80; McLane a Buchanan, 3 February 1846, en Miller, ed., *Treaties and Other Diplomatic Acts*, 57-59.

⁴⁰ Merk, *Monroe Doctrine and American Expansionism*, 101-102; Stanley B. Ryerson, *Unequal Union: Confederation and the Route of Conflict in the Canadas, 1815-1873* (New York: International Publishers, 1968), 227-228.

fortalecimiento de la armada, principalmente en la forma de la construcción de buques de guerra con cascos de hierro. Todas estas propuestas, sin embargo, terminaron como letras muertas.⁴¹ En contestación a una recomendación por parte del secretario de Estado James Buchanan en febrero de 1846 de que el presidente enviara un mensaje al congreso solicitando que éste otorgara dinero para la defensa del país, Polk le contestó de que prefería esperar hasta la llegada de noticias adicionales de Inglaterra.⁴² Aunque el secretario de la Armada George Bancroft señaló en un informe al gobierno que una grave deficiencia existía respecto a la armada en términos de buques de vapor de alta mar, el presidente declaró que por el momento no había necesidad de pedir consignaciones adicionales.⁴³

A raíz de esta actitud, el ex-presidente John Quincy Adams dedujo que Polk terminaría por aceptar alguna forma de arreglo con los británicos.⁴⁴ El 24 de marzo de 1846, Polk otra vez recomendó al senado que autorizara un aumento en las fuerzas militares de la nación debido a la creciente crisis en las fronteras norte y sur, pero, al igual que en la ocasión anterior, el congreso no hizo nada al respecto.⁴⁵ Además, Edward Everett, quien había reemplazado a McLane como el representante estadounidense en Londres, aseguró a Aberdeen que los "warhawks" políticos (halcones de la guerra), sobre todo con respecto al senado, estaban en estos momentos en una situación de minoría frente a aquéllos quienes deseaban la paz.⁴⁶ Las acciones algo dilatorias mostradas por el gobierno estadounidense referentes a la cuestión de armamento se vuelven comprensibles al considerar que Polk sabía que la propuesta de que se fijara la frontera en el paralelo 54° 40' no era realizable sin recurrir a la guerra y no quería provocar un conflicto con la Gran Bretaña. Al mismo tiempo, sin embargo, creía que únicamente la amenaza de una guerra podría obligar a los ingleses a aceptar un acuerdo que también sería satisfactorio para el gobierno de Estados Unidos.⁴⁷

Al fin de cuentas, Polk sometió al senado para su consideración un borrador de tratado basado en la propuesta que había hecho al gobierno británico en abril de

⁴¹ *Congressional Globe*, 2, 12, 30 January 1846, 29th Congress, 1st Session, 182, 257; Sellers, *James K. Polk*, 377.

⁴² *Diary of James K. Polk*, 1:133-134, 257-258, 270, 294-295, 298-299.

⁴³ Harold and Margaret Sprout, *The Rise of American Naval Power, 1776-1918* (Princeton, N.J.: University of Princeton Press, 1944), 129.

⁴⁴ *Memoirs of John Quincy Adams, Comprising Portions of His Diary from 1776 to 1848*, ed. Charles Francis Adams (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1844-1877), 12:221.

⁴⁵ "James K. Polk to the United States Senate," 4 March 1846, en Richardson, comp., *Compilation of Messages and Papers*, 426-428; *Diary of James K. Polk*, 1:257, 260, 270, 286-289.

⁴⁶ James O. McCabe, "Arbitration and the Oregon Question," 325.

⁴⁷ Correspondencia intercambiada entre Buchanan y McLane, 3, 26 February 1846 en, *Senate Document 117*, 29th Congress, 1st Session, 39-44.

1845, junto con algunas inserciones propuestas por Lord Aberdeen referentes a la inclusión de la porción sureña de la isla de Vancouver como territorio británico y a derechos para el uso del Río Columbia durante un número determinado de años.⁴⁸ Al proceder de esta manera, Polk no sólo cumplió con una formalidad constitucional, dado que compartía con el senado las facultades para hacer la guerra y para la elaboración de tratados, sino que también el uso de esta táctica constituía una manera de poder retroceder de la posición que había adoptada en su discurso inaugural. Después de ser aprobado por la mayoría de votos senatoriales requeridos (dos terceras partes), el Tratado de Washington, como llegó a ser denominado oficialmente, fue firmado por Buchanan y Packenham a mediados de junio de 1846.⁴⁹

Una gran parte de la desilusión expresada por algunos de los más fervientes expansionistas en torno al arreglo pacífico del asunto de Oregon pronto se desvaneció con el comienzo de hostilidades entre Estados Unidos y México en la segunda semana de mayo de 1846, que abrió el camino para la extensión del territorio estadounidense hacia el sur, a expensas de un enemigo mucho más débil que en el caso de Gran Bretaña. Como un senador estadounidense que se oponía a la guerra con México lo expresó, "El balance [de territorio en América del Norte] será tragado, cuando nuestro jugo gástrico demande otro desayuno canibal".⁵⁰

En vista del comienzo de hostilidades entre Estados Unidos y México, al gobierno estadounidense le urgía poner fin a la disputa sobre Oregon debido a que no quería afrontar una guerra en dos frentes. El demócrata John C. Calhoun y otros políticos del partido de los whig, tales como Daniel Webster, Willie Mangum, Henry Clay y Alexander H. Stephens expresaron su miedo de que Gran Bretaña pudiera apoyar a México en la lucha, que resultaría en la ruptura de los lazos de comercio y crédito con el socio económico más importante para Estados Unidos, o, en el peor de los casos, conduciría a un bloqueo de los principales puertos de la nación.⁵¹

En Gran Bretaña, sin embargo, el gobierno de Peel estaba a punto de caerse a causa de la abrogación de las llamadas "Corn Laws" (leyes reglamentarias en torno a la comercialización del maíz), que habían proporcionado protección a productos agrícolas ingleses por medio de aranceles. De hecho, las noticias en torno a la firma

⁴⁸ Buchanan a Louis McLane, 28 April; 6, 13, 22 June 1846, en Manning, ed., *Diplomatic Correspondence*, 329-330, 333-335. Referente a las inserciones propuestas por los británicos al tratado, véase Louis McLane a James Buchanan, 18 May 1846, 1033-1040.

⁴⁹ *Diary of James K. Polk*, 1:155; R.L. Schuyler, "Polk and the Oregon Compromise of 1846," *Political Science Quarterly* 26:3 (September 1911): 453, 458, 460-461. El texto completo del tratado se encuentra en Miller, ed., *Diplomatic Correspondence*, 3-5.

⁵⁰ Citado en Ryerson, *Unequal Union*, 231.

⁵¹ Daniel Webster a P. Harvey, May 17 1846, en *The Writings and Speeches of Daniel Webster*, ed. Fletcher Webster (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1903), 16:453; Robert Selph Henry, *The Story of the Mexican War* (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1961), 384; John H. Schroeder, *Mr. Polk's War: American Opposition and Dissent, 1846-1848* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1973), 23-24, 28. Referente a la preocupación por parte del gobierno estadounidense de la posibilidad de que Gran Bretaña interviniera en la lucha, véase McLane a Buchanan, 3 June 1846, en Manning, ed., *Diplomatic Correspondence*, 7:276-278.

del Tratado de Washington llegaron el mismo día de la caída de la administración de Peel. El gobierno de coalición que surgió después de esta crisis estaba dedicado a un programa de reformas domésticas y no deseaba involucrar a la nación en una guerra extranjera. Aunque la prensa británica en general condenó la agresión estadounidense⁵², los grupos de interés constituidos por los sectores mercantiles y manufactureros ingleses apoyaron esta política, a raíz de que, al igual que sus contrapartes estadounidenses, también habían sufrido a causa de la recesión que comenzó en 1837 y no querían que el lento proceso de recuperación económica fuera perturbado por un conflicto internacional en el cual su país estuviera involucrado.⁵³

Asimismo, desde 1841, cuando Aberdeen había asumido el cargo de Secretario de Relaciones Exteriores, la preocupación fundamental del gobierno inglés había consistido en mantener relaciones cordiales con Francia. Tanto Aberdeen como Peel tenían miedo de que una guerra entre Gran Bretaña y Estados Unidos pudiera conducir a una alianza franco-estadunidense.⁵⁴

En parte, México fue la víctima del expansionismo estadounidense debido a que no contaba con el tipo de cobertura militar que los británicos habían erigido en sus colonias norteamericanas, ni el deseo por parte de éstos de intervenir en un conflicto en una región que no era vital en términos de sus intereses globales. Tampoco intervino el gobierno británico al final de la lucha, cuando los mexicanos comisionados para negociar el tratado de paz con Estados Unidos sugirieron que le fuera solicitado para "dar su garantía hacia el cumplimiento fiel del tratado que sea concluido", petición que fue negada por los estadounidenses.⁵⁵

La desconfianza estadounidense de las políticas y actividades de los británicos en la América del Norte perduró a lo largo de las décadas que siguieron a la lucha. Para los habitantes de las colonias británicas de América del Norte, la amenaza de una invasión extranjera proveniente del sur, junto con la posibilidad de ser anexadas, sea voluntariamente o no, a los Estados Unidos, no se terminó con la resolución de la disputa sobre Oregón.⁵⁶ A consecuencia del deterioro en las relaciones entre Canadá y Estados Unidos durante y después de la Guerra de Secesión --en parte debido al sentimiento antibritánico en los estados nortños de la Unión provocado por las actividades de agentes confederados quienes operaban desde territorio canadiense

⁵² *The London Times*, 9, 11, 18 June; 15 July; 26 August; 28 September 1846.

⁵³ *Diary of James K. Polk*, 384-395; Walter N. Sage, 365-366; Sellers, *James K. Polk*, 406-409; Elie Halévy, *The Age of Peel and Cobden: A History of the English People, 1841-1852* (New York: Peter Smith, 1948), 104-123.

⁵⁴ Galbraith, "France as a Factor, 69-71; David M. Pletcher, *The Diplomacy of Annexation: Texas, Oregon, and the Mexican War* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1973), 20-21, 30, 157-158, 161, 293-295, 593.

⁵⁵ Henry, *Story of the Mexican War*, 350, 384.

⁵⁶ Donald F. Warner, *The Idea of Continental Union: Agitation for the Annexation of Canada to the United States, 1849-1893* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1960), 1-59.

durante el conflicto, así como a otros factores, tales como los ataques lanzados en contra de Canadá en los años 1866, 1870 y 1871 por grupos de patriotas irlandeses conocidos como los fenianos-- otra vez surgió la posibilidad de una guerra entre Estados Unidos y Gran Bretaña.⁵⁷ El movimiento que culminó en la unión o Confederación de cuatro de las colonias británicas de Norteamérica (los Canadés Este y Oeste, Nueva Brunswick y Nueva Escocia) en 1867, y que constituyó la piedra angular de la nación moderna de Canadá, se debió en gran medida a su miedo de ser absorbidas por su poderoso vecino al sur.

⁵⁷ Sobre las actividades de los agentes confederados en Canadá, véase Robin W. Winks, *Canada and the United States: The Civil War Years* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1960), 264-336, y D.P. Crook, *The North, the South, and the Powers, 1861-1865* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1974), 192-193, 290-291, 345-352, 357. Referente a los ataques fenianos y sus repercusiones sobre el desarrollo de Canadá, véase James Morton Callahan, *American Foreign Policy in Canadian Relations* (New York: Macmillan, 1937), 181, 270-294, 299-308, 311-322, 393; Edgar W. McInnis, *The Unguarded Frontier: A History of American-Canadian Relations* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, Doran & Company, 1942), 152-155, 152-155, 220-237; y Hereward Senior, *The Last Invasion of Canada: The Fenian Raids, 1886-1870* (Toronto: Dundern Press, 1991), 37-39, 59-98, 173-186.

THE 1848 OREGON DEBATE:
TEST CASE FOR THE WILMOT PROVISIO AND SOUTHERN
SECTIONAL UNITY

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Perhaps the Mexican-American War's most important impact on American history was its role in bringing the slavery extension controversy to the fore of national politics. We know that the Wilmot Proviso, the measure to prohibit slavery's extension into the territories won in the war, was the genesis of the slavery extension controversy that divided Northerners and Southerners through the Civil War. Additionally, there is a consensus that the slavery extension controversy divided both the Democratic and Whig parties into sectional blocs. Some historians have even suggested that division created a "monolithic," pro-slavery extension Southern voting bloc in the United States Congress.

The question we must therefore ask is when did the "monolithic" South first appear? One possible point of origin for that bloc was the 1848 congressional debate over establishing a territorial government in Oregon. The Oregon debate was perhaps the most politically charged issue of the Thirtieth Congress. For many Southerners, Oregon became the test case to set a precedent refuting the Wilmot Proviso. With that in mind, several historians have suggested that the Oregon debate was, therefore, the monolithic South's genesis.¹ However, research using both the contemporary

¹ There has been little written that directly addresses the anti-slavery issue in Oregon in 1848. However, when studied in the context of the Wilmot Proviso and the Compromise of 1850, there has been a great deal written that claims a Southern voting bloc was present in the Oregon debate. Michael F. Holt, *The Political Crisis of the 1850s* (New York: Wiley, 1978), 53, states that "Certainly no Southerners expected slavery to flourish in the new Oregon territory, but as a unit they bitterly resisted the congressional prohibition of slavery in that territory when it was organized in 1848." Additionally, William J. Cooper, *The South and the Politics of Slavery, 1828-1856* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978), 264, and Stephen E. Mialish and John T. Kushman, eds., *Essays in American Antebellum Politics*,

debates and legislative roll calls shows clearly that the monolithic South had not yet emerged in 1848.² Rather, it is my contention that the South's reaction to the Oregon debate in the Congress divided Southerners in two voting blocs: one committed to the Democratic party and another committed to the Whig Party. The Oregon debate therefore retarded the development of Southern Whig and Democrat unity.

By 1846, Americans had long held an interest in the Oregon Territory; the United States and Great Britain had shared joint occupation of Oregon since 1818. However, President James K. Polk was elected in 1844 on the platform of "54°40' or fight," and the sole American possession of the entire Oregon Territory. Diplomacy between the United States and Great Britain averted hostilities and, in 1845, the United States agreed to accept the forty-ninth parallel as Oregon's northern boundary. President Polk thereafter focused his attention on the impending war with Mexico.

Almost immediately, the citizens of Oregon adopted an anti-slavery body of "Organic Laws" for their territory's organization. Article 1 of the Organic Laws, based on the Northwest Ordinance of 1787, explicitly stated "There shall be neither slavery nor involuntary servitude. . ."³ in the Oregon Territory.

The Oregonians' legislative branch then petitioned Congress for a territorial government to legalize its actions. On August 6, 1846, the House of Representatives voted 108 to 43 in favor of organizing a territorial government for Oregon and incorporating the anti-slavery Organic Laws. That bill, however, was lost in the Senate because of adjournment. The Senate's failure to vote on the Oregon Bill in 1846 doomed Oregon's chances for a territorial government until 1848; two days after

1840-1860 (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1982), 124-125, claim that by 1848, the slavery extension issue had crystallized sectional divisions in both parties.

A number of historians have stated the different position that there was not a monolithic bloc by 1848. Norman A. Graebner, "1848: Southern Politics at the Crossroads," *The Historian* 25:4 (November 1962): 15, wrote that the slavery extension controversy "created an illusion of extremism in the South which scarcely reflected the fundamental moderation of southern party regulars." Charles G. Sellers, "Who Were the Southern Whigs?," *American Historical Review* 59:4 (1953-54): 335-46, presents the Southern Whigs as the staunch social, economic, and ideological opponents of the Southern Democrats. Joel H. Silbey, "John C. Calhoun and the Limits of Southern Congressional Unity, 1841-1850," *The Historian* 30:4 (November 1967): 60, writes that the earlier debates over Oregon revealed "the continuation of the partisanship, not the growth of sectionalism." Thomas B. Alexander, *Sectional Stress and Party Strength: A Study in Roll-Call Voting Patterns in the United States House of Representatives, 1836-1860* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University, 1967), 69, notes the dominance of party over sectional views in the voting patterns concerning slavery in the Thirtieth House of Representatives.

² For the roll call data pertaining to the Thirtieth House, refer to the *United States Congressional Roll Call Voting Records, 30th House, 1847-1848*, Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research, machine readable records, ICPSR 0004.

³ "Amended Organic Laws of Oregon, as Adopted by the People of that Territory on the Last Day of July, 1845," *Senate Document* 353, 29th Congress, 1st Session.

the House vote on Oregon, David Wilmot, Pennsylvania Democrat, introduced his proviso. Suddenly the issue of a territorial government in Oregon was tied to the more significant and politically charged debate of slavery's future in all the territories.⁴

By the late 1840s, many Northerners expressed a growing opposition toward slavery, particularly its extension into the territories west of the Mississippi River. A dominant theme in the opposition to slavery's extension was the fear that if a territory were open to slavery, it would become a slave state when it entered the Union. Hence, Wilmot's proviso. In the Senate, Daniel Webster eloquently noted that the Old Southwest added five slave states to the Union while offering no free states. On the other hand, only the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 ensured that slavery did not take root north of the Ohio River.⁵

Southerners countered that Northerners, by potentially prohibiting slave owners from carrying their property into the territories, denied them their constitutional rights. They asked: "Upon what grounds, then, either moral, equitable, or constitutional, can the people of the North expect to make claim to the exclusive possession this territory?"⁶ John C. Calhoun, in his "Common Property" Doctrine,

⁴ "Memorial of the Legislative Committee of Oregon, for the Establishment of a Territorial Government under the Protection of the United States," *Senate Document 8*, 29th Congress, 1st Session. For the August 6, 1848 vote on Oregon, see *Journal of the House of Representatives*, 29th Congress, 1st Session, 1245. For the Wilmot Proviso, see *Congressional Globe*, 29th Congress, 1st Session, 15:1217.

⁵ For the Northern position on the slavery extension controversy, see William O. Lynch, "Anti-Slavery Tendencies of the Democratic Party in the Northwest, 1848-1850," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 11:4 (December 1924): 319-331. Lynch noted that while there may have been a spontaneous growth of anti-slavery sentiment in the North, leading Northern Democrats showed remarkable moderation in the face of popular animosity toward slavery. For discussions of the "Slave Power Conspiracy," see Russell B. Nye, "The Slave Power Conspiracy: 1830-1860," in *Slavery as a Cause of the Civil War* (Boston: Heath, 1949), 28-36; Larry Gara, "Slavery and the Slave Power: A Critical Distinction," *Civil War History*, 15 (March 1969): 6, 9. Chauncey S. Boucher, "In Re: That Aggressive Slavocracy," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 8:2 (June 1921): 13-79, claimed that Southerners were continually on the defensive during the slavery extension controversy. Hence, Northern fears concerning the slavocracy were unfounded. Don E. Fehrenbacher, *The South and Three Sectional Crisis* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980), notes that the territories settled by a mixture of slave holders and non-slave holders became "as a matter of legal necessity, a slave holding territory; and until 1861, all slave holding territories became slave holding states." Eric Foner, "The Causes of the American Civil War: Recent Interpretations and New Directions," *Civil War History* 20 (September 1974), 209: states that many Free-Soilers were actually free labor men. Eugene Berwanger, *The Frontier Against Slavery: Western Anti-Black Prejudice and the Slavery Extension Controversy* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1967) notes that, as his title indicates, anti-Black prejudice played a dominate role in Northern opposition to slavery's extension. For Webster's speech, see *The Papers of Daniel Webster: Speeches and Formal Writings*, ed. Charles M. Wilste (Hanover N.H.: Dartmouth College, University Press of New England, 1988), 2:483.

⁶ *Congressional Globe*, 30th Congress, 1st Session, 17:appendix, 954.

answered none. Since the territories were the common property of all the states, it was unconstitutional to prohibit the introduction of slavery into any territory.⁷

Thus, the ideological positions on the slavery extension controversy were well defined when the Thirtieth Congress convened in December 1847 and began debate on a territorial government for Oregon. When, in February 1848, the House Committee on Territories finally introduced a bill, H.R. 201, for Oregon's organization based on the anti-slavery Organic Laws, pro-extension southern Congressmen saw it as an opportunity to establish a precedent invalidating the Wilmot Proviso.⁸ If Congress established a pro-extension, pro-slavery government in Oregon, then the precedent invalidating the Wilmot Proviso would be set.

Pro-extension Southerners therefore began their attacks on H.R. 201. Citing Calhoun's Common Property Doctrine, they claimed H.R. 201 was unconstitutional. Anti-extension Congressmen countered that the Section 3, Article 4 of the Constitution granted Congress the "Power to dispose of and make all needful Rules and regulations respecting the Territory or other Property belonging to the United States. . . ."⁹ The Congress could therefore legally prohibit the introduction of slavery in to the Oregon Territory.

When the Common Property doctrine failed to sway anti-extension Congressmen to the Southern position, pro-extensionists attempted to alter H.R. 201's wording to invalidate it. The bill's twelfth section contained, like the Organic Laws, a copy of the Northwest Ordinance's sixth Article -- the article outlawing slavery. Southerners first attempted to change its wording by adding an amendment that read that nothing in the bill could prevent a US citizen from "taking with him his property of any description."¹⁰ When that amendment failed, they moved to strike out all the

⁷ For a more through discussion of Calhoun's "Common Property" Doctrine, see Robert R. Russell, "Constitutional Doctrine with Regard to Slavery in the Territories," *Journal of Southern History* 32 (November 1966): 466-486; Arthur Bestor, "State Sovereignty and Slavery: A Reinterpretation of Pro-Slavery Constitutional Doctrine, 1846-1860," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 55 (1961): 147, as cited in Fehrenbacher, *Three Sectional Crisis*, 36. Fehrenbacher notes that the Southern belief in "extrajurisdictional power" lead to the claim "that the slaveholder entering federal territory . . . took with him the law of his own state and its protective force."

⁸ The House of Representatives had passed an Oregon bill in January 1847. However, it, like the 1846 bill, was also lost in the Senate. The Senate Judiciary Committee, at Calhoun's urging, had amended the 1847 bill to remove the anti-slavery provisions. On March 3, 1847 the Senate tabled that bill, thereby effectively killing the debate for that session. See *Congressional Globe*, 29th Congress, 2nd Session, 16:198; For the Senate tabling, see *Ibid.*, 29th Congress, 2nd Session, 16:571; For H.R. 201, see *Ibid.*, 30th Congress, 1st Session, 17:322.

⁹ *Congressional Globe*, 30th Congress, 1st Session, 17:542; "Resolutions of Senator Bagby of Alabama," *Senate Documents* 35, 37, 30th Congress, 1st Session; *Congressional Globe*, 30th Congress, 1st Session, 17:1044-45; *Constitution*, Section 3, Article 4.

¹⁰ *Congressional Globe*, 30th Congress, 1st Session, 17:1021.

Ordinances of 1787's provisions in the bill.¹¹ Fortunately for the anti-extension bloc, neither measure passed.

Anti-extension Congressmen then turned to President Polk and the Missouri Compromise of 1820 to seal their victory. Polk was eager to see the Oregon issue settled before the Barnburner faction of the New York Democratic Party could profit from it politically.¹²

After conferring with his cabinet, Polk backed the position that if the provisions of the Missouri Compromise were attached to the Oregon Bill, with hopes that the debate would be settled quickly. George Duncan, Kentucky Whig, then submitted an amendment to the bill that read since Oregon was north of 36°30', slavery would not be prohibited from that territory.¹³

However, if Duncan's amendment had been an attempt at compromise, it was also a political miscalculation. Rather than settling the extension debate vis-à-vis Oregon, both Free-Soil and pro-extension Congressmen immediately moved to oppose it. Free-Soilers claimed that it proposed to extend slavery: while the Oregon territory was closed to slavery, the territory south of 36°30', specifically New Mexico and California, was not.¹⁴ Therefore, Duncan's amendment established the Southern precedent repudiating the Wilmot Proviso.

At the same time, even the most avid proponents of extension opposed Duncan's amendment. Calhoun observed Duncan's amendment, in proposing to extend the Missouri Compromise line to the Pacific Ocean, made no provision for slavery's future protection in either New Mexico or California. Instead, it abandoned the South's right to extend slavery into Oregon without explicitly repudiating the Wilmot Proviso. Undoubtedly more important to Calhoun, Duncan's amendment "might be construed to admit by implication the absolute power over the territories for which the North is so strenuously and obstinately contending."¹⁵

Both sides were at an impasse. Over Calhoun's objections, compromise Senators presented to the House a bill that would create territorial governments for Oregon, New Mexico, and California. However, their bill provided prohibition against neither slavery nor the Wilmot Proviso. Calhoun noted that it therefore conceded Oregon, New Mexico and California territories to the principle of the Wilmot Proviso, while the *New York Tribune* pontificated there was, "no right, or reason, in making Oregon depend in the least on the organization of New Mexico and

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² The President saw the slavery extension issue as "more threatening to the Union than anything which has occurred since the Hartford convention in 1814." *The Diary of James K. Polk During his Presidency, 1845 to 1849*, ed. Milo M. Quaife (Chicago: A.C. McClurg, 1910), 3:501, 502.

¹³ *Congressional Globe*, 30th Congress, 1st Session, 17:1023.

¹⁴ *Congressional Globe*, 30th Congress, 1st Session, 17:appendix, 1072.

¹⁵ *The Works of John C. Calhoun*, ed. Richard K. Cralle (New York: D. Appleton, 1854), 4:515.

California. Slavery extension has no pretense for extending here."¹⁶

The impasse on the anti-slavery government in Oregon continued into July 1848 when Senator John M. Clayton's Compromise Committee proposed to study the issue of slavery extension. Clayton's committee eventually recommended excluding slavery from the Oregon territory through acceptance Oregon's existing provisional laws. Regarding slavery's future in New Mexico and California, the Clayton Committee suggested organizing the two territories without provisions against slavery or the power the legislate upon it -- thereby invalidating the Wilmot Proviso. Instead, the judiciary would make the final determination regarding slavery's legality in those territories.¹⁷ The Clayton compromise, like all other attempts at compromise in this debate, failed.

Unexpectedly, Congress settled the Oregon issue August 13, 1848, when it passed a bill establishing a territorial government in Oregon. The House had passed an anti-slavery H.R. 201 on August 2 by a margin of 129 to 71. The Senate then debated the bill for ten days. Finally, in the early morning of Sunday, August 13, Southern Senators gave up their insistence that the Oregon bill contain pro-extension provisions.¹⁸ Perhaps rather than support an obviously untenable position, Southern Senators abandoned their position and resolved to challenge the Wilmot Proviso in a later Congress.

Even with the final compromise, the Oregon debate had clearly divided national politics between the North and South. Implicit in that division was a unified Southern voting bloc, particularly in the House of Representatives. However, legislative roll-call analysis reveals that Southerners did not vote as a unit to oppose establishing an anti-slavery government in Oregon.

An analysis of the roll-call record shows that Southern Democrats favored allowing slavery in Oregon.¹⁹ Thirty-three of the fifty-two Southern Democrats, or

¹⁶ *New York Tribune*, 4 August 1848.

¹⁷ *Congressional Globe*, 30th Congress, 1st Session, 17:927.

¹⁸ *Congressional Globe*, 30th Congress, 1st Session, 17:1027; *Mercury* (Charleston, S.C.), 7 August 1848. For the Senate's passage of H.R. 201, see *Congressional Globe*, 30th Congress, 1st Session, 17:appendix, 1078; *Mercury* (Charleston, S.C.), 17 August 1848.

¹⁹ For a discussion of the techniques involved in Rice-Byele Cluster Bloc Analysis, the kind of cluster bloc analysis used here, see Lee F. Anderson, Meredith W. Watts, Jr., and Allen R. Wilcox, *Legislative Roll Call Analysis* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1966), 56-74; Richard Beringer, *Historical Analysis: Contemporary Approaches to Clio's Craft* (New York: Wiley, 1978), 287-93; Charles M. Dollar and Richard J. Jensen, *Historian's Guide to Statistics: Quantitative Analysis in Historical Research* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1971), 106-109, 214-23; David B. Truman, *The Congressional Party: A Case Study* (New York: Wiley, 1959), 45-48.

A cluster bloc computer program provides an index of agreement for each possible pair of representatives. This simple measure of agreement is the percentage of times that two representatives voted the same way on the chosen set of roll calls. For example, Richard Beale, Virginia Democrat voted against each measure that could have been considered in favor of establishing an anti-slavery government in Oregon. To fall into the

sixty-three percent, voted in a single bloc and fringe to oppose an anti-slavery government in Oregon. Additionally, there was widespread Democratic opposition throughout the South to an anti-slavery government in Oregon. In the seven Southern states with at least four Democratic representatives, an average of nearly seventy-five percent of them voted against an anti-slavery government in Oregon. Democratic opposition to Oregon also split almost equally between the upper and lower South. Thus, the anti-slavery issue and Oregon did not divide Southern Democrats along intra-sectional lines. They instead voted in "monolithic" fashion on the Oregon issue.

If we accept the contention that a monolithic South was present by 1848, then the Southern Whigs should have voted in much the same fashion as their Southern Democrat colleagues. However, the roll call record reveals that on the Oregon issue most Southern Whigs voted in an anti-slavery bloc. Sixty-two percent of Southern Whigs voted in a unified bloc and fringe *against* the Southern Democrats to favor an anti-slavery government in Oregon. Like the pro-slavery Democrat bloc and fringe, Whig support for the anti-slavery government Oregon was consistent throughout the South. Whigs from both the upper and lower south voted in similar strengths to oppose a pro-slavery government in Oregon. Therefore, the propositions to establish a territorial government in Oregon were not votes that divided Whigs along intra-sectional lines.

I expected a Southern Democrat voting bloc in opposition to slavery's exclusion from Oregon. However, how do we account for the remaining Southern Whigs who voted for the pro-slavery government in Oregon? Thirty-eight percent of Southern Whigs voted against slavery exclusion in Oregon. A comparison of the Democrat and Whig voting blocs and fringes shows that the Whigs who voted against slavery exclusion in Oregon voted almost identically with the Democrats who did the same. When we remove party affiliations, we cannot differentiate Southern Whigs from Southern Democrats. The anti-exclusion Whigs therefore voted the Southern Democrat party line on the slavery extension issue.

Thus, an analysis of the roll call record refutes the contention of a monolithic Southern voting bloc by 1848 -- at least on the Oregon issue. The Southern voting breakdown of fifty-four percent in favor to forty-six percent opposed to an anti-slavery government in Oregon shows that the monolithic Southern voting bloc had not yet emerged by 1848. If the raw figures point to anything regarding Southern unity, they show that in 1848 the Whig Party in the South was beginning to fracture over the slavery extension issue between pro and anti-Democrat blocs.

The implications of the Oregon debate were therefore more important for the

same bloc as Beale, a representative would have to have voted in agreement with him on at least 70 percent of the eight Oregon roll calls. Rarely will all representatives fall into the same bloc; members will argue. Therefore, if a representative agrees with at least 50 percent of the bloc members, but not all of them, that representative is considered a "fringe" member. Those representatives who are neither bloc nor fringe members, but who agree with at least one other representative at least 70 percent of the time are "isolates." The computer program used in this paper is found in Cluster Bloc Analysis, unpublished computer program by Jarvis Ehart and Richard Beringer, University of North Dakota, 1972. The Ehart and Beringer program is a modification of the cluster bloc program found in Anderson, Watts, and Wilcox, *Legislative Roll-Call Analysis*, chapter 4.

country's future than the debate itself. Pro-extension Congressmen, read Southerners, had lost their bid to invalidate the Wilmot Proviso. Throughout the Oregon debate, they acknowledged that slavery would never flourish in Oregon. However, Oregon was to be the test case to establish a precedent in opposition to the Wilmot Proviso. When Congress finally passed H.R. 201, the Wilmot Proviso remained intact.

That brings us to an obvious question. If there had not been a monolithic Southern voting bloc present in 1848, when, if ever, did it first appear? The next logical event that may have seen a solid Southern voting bloc was either the debate over the Compromise of 1850, or perhaps the Kansas-Nebraska Bill in 1854. However, neither of those events were within the scope of this paper.

Additionally, the question of Southern unity in opposition to the Wilmot Proviso is a point of interest. Was the Oregon debate in 1848 just a step in the development of the monolithic pro-slavery bloc? Did the twelve Southern Whigs who opposed Oregon in 1848 also oppose the Wilmot Proviso two years earlier and the later Compromise of 1850? What was the voting record of the twenty "anti-slavery" Whigs on those issues? How did the voting records of both anti- and pro-Oregon Whigs change as the slavery extension controversy entered the 1850s?

However, the most important question regarding this paper is why did only twelve Southern Whigs vote to oppose establishing an anti-slavery government on Oregon? Did the twenty Southern Whigs feel that slavery's fate in Oregon was not worth the political cleavage it would cause with their Northern colleagues? Were the majority of Southern Whigs, in the summer of 1848, sacrificing sectional unity for the election of the Whig candidate, Zachary Taylor, as president in November of that year? In short, why were the Southern Democrats willing to make such a unified stand on Oregon in 1848 while the majority of Southern Whigs were willing to let the issue pass in favor of the North? These are all questions that demand our attention.

VERACRUZ: A GRAND DESIGN D-DAY, 1847

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In his last message to Congress, delivered on December 5, 1848, President James K. Polk described the magnificent efforts which had led to victory in the war with Mexico. He praised the government officials who had directed military forces over "...a vast extent of territory, hundreds, and even thousands of miles apart from each other...." The President took special pride in the cooperative efforts of the Army and Navy in the achievement of great victories: "Both branches of the service performed their whole duty to the country....There was concert between the heads of the two arms of the service....By this means their combined power was brought to bear successfully on the enemy."¹

Behind Polk's idealistic and laudatory statement was a much more complex and somewhat sordid reality. The development of national strategy in the administration often marred by personal and political struggles, by competition between officials with enormous egos, and by a jealous president insecure in his own strategic thinking and overly concerned with small, tactical details better left to subordinates. A prolonged debate relating to the expansion of slavery blocked the major appropriation bill in the fall of 1846, delaying critical supplies to the army in the field. Partisan suspicion and intrigue poisoned the relationship between the Chief Executive and his two senior army commanders, and at times between these two general officers.² Despite these difficulties, and many other cases of petty bickering,

¹ "Message of the President to Congress," 5 December, 1848, *House Document 537*, 30th Congress, 2nd Session, 5-6.

² An excellent account of the relationships among the principal political and military figures during the Mexican War is John S. D. Eisenhower's "Polk and His Generals," in *Essays on the Mexican War*, Douglas W. Richmond, ed., (Arlington, Texas: University of Texas Press. 1986), 34-65.

Polk was justified in his feeling of accomplishment for his administration's historic victories in the war with Mexico. In mentioning the close cooperation between the Army and the Navy, the President touched on a significant factor in the success of United States military efforts in a remarkable war fought on the edge of major technological changes.³ It is one of the most successful of those joint operations, the Veracruz landing, that is the focus of this study.⁴

To place the Veracruz operation in proper context, it is important to note there were numerous incidents of inter-service cooperation during the Mexican War. Cooperation was evident in the far-flung actions in California, where the sailors of Commodore Robert F. Stockton fought bravely on land to rescue the small, ill-equipped Army force of General Stephen Kearny.⁵ General Zachary Taylor's campaign in northern Mexico was highly dependent upon a supply line across the Gulf of Mexico and up the Rio Grande, kept open by the United States Navy. In addition to the difficult mission of blockading thousands of miles of Mexican coast, the Navy landed bluecoats and Marines on numerous occasions to secure lightly-defended ports before Army forces arrived. In May 1846, the Navy landed a force of 500 sailors and Marines to reinforce Taylor's army at Fort Polk on the Brazos Santiago when "Old Rough and Ready" was fighting the first major battle of the war a few miles away at Palo Alto.⁶

Texas Press. 1986), 34-65.

³ The Mexican War was not a modern war, at least not in the sense that most look on the great civil conflict that overshadowed it thirteen years later. The railroad was only coming to America, and had reached neither the West nor Mexico. The telegraph was in its infancy, and communication was still largely by sea. Weaponry and vehicles of war were not modern in the context of a half generation later, there were no iron ships, and while steam ships played a role, wind yet powered most of the fleet; small arms and artillery were mostly Napoleonic, but the rifled barrel had arrived and influenced some batteries. The Mexican War was not fought as a "total war", meaning all of the resources of the nation were not mobilized in its support, nor civilian peoples in its armies' paths subjected to great punishment, although some of this did transpire.

⁴ The most respected study of the Mexican War remains Justin Smith's two-volume classic, *The War with Mexico* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1919). Robert Selph Henry's *The Story of the Mexican War* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Co. 1950) is also a solid general history. Probably the best contemporary interpretation is K. Jack Bauer's thoroughly documented *The Mexican War, 1846-1848* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1974). Also see the recent and credible account of John S. D. Eisenhower, *So Far From God: The U.S. War With Mexico, 1846-1848* (New York: Random House, 1989).

⁵ Despite initial cooperation, relations between Stockton and Kearny ended in a bitter struggle over authority. Bauer, *The Mexican War*, 194-96.

⁶ Two studies of Navy and Marine activities in the Mexican War are K. Jack Bauer's excellent *Surfboats and Horse Marines: U.S. Naval Operations in the Mexican War, 1846-48* (Annapolis: United States Naval Institute, 1969) and a monograph by Gabrielle M. Neufeld Santelli, *Marines in the Mexican War* (Washington: History and Museums Division, HQ, U.S. Marine Corps, 1991).

The single most significant example of meaningful cooperation between the Army and Navy during the war, however, was the landing and siege of Veracruz, a joint operation which took place between the ninth and the twenty-seventh of March, 1847. The Veracruz landing, largely unknown to all but students of the Mexican War, was the first major amphibious operation of the United States Armed Forces, and the largest one in American history until the North African campaign in 1942.

Background to the Veracruz Expedition

In his war message to Congress in April 1846, President Polk charged Mexico with aggression against United States territory. In the first weeks after Congress declared war the President stressed the defensive nature of military operations. In keeping with this objective, naval forces established a blockade from the mouth of the Rio Grande to the Yucatan Peninsula, and along the Pacific coast of Mexico. It soon became clear, however, that Polk had much broader objectives: in answering the call of Manifest Destiny, he was firmly committed to following a strategy that would expand the nation into New Mexico and California. To accomplish this, Polk decided on an aggressive campaign that took American ground forces from the Southwest borderlands deep into the Mexican interior.⁷

From May to September 1846 Zachary Taylor won a series of hard fought battles in Northern Mexico. These included victories along the border at Palo Alto and Resaca de la Palma, and the American forces' successful assault on the fortified city of Monterrey--200 miles across the border. Despite these significant defeats for the Mexican army, it became clear that occupation of its northern provinces would not force Mexico to agree on a settlement acceptable in Washington.

Polk held preliminary discussion with his cabinet in June 1846 about a new strategy calling for a second front along Mexico's east coast. In anticipation of this, Secretary of the Navy Bancroft directed the commander of the Home Squadron, Commodore David Conner, to furnish information about the defenses at Mexican gulf ports, especially Tampico and Veracruz, including the latter's imposing fortress, San Juan de Ulúa, and to report on routes from the ports inland toward Mexico City. By early July the president began to take pride in a strategic plan which had been developed in cabinet discussions; the plan called for the seizure of Tampico and possibly Veracruz, but did not address a subsequent campaign in the interior. Polk noted in his diary that the most important part of the plan at that stage had been

⁷ "Message of the President," 11 May 1846, in *Senate Document 337*, 29th Congress, 1st Session. The early debates over war policy are in *The Diary of James K. Polk During his Presidency*, ed. Milo Milton Quaife (Chicago: A.C. McClurg & Co., 1910), 1:passim, April to June, 1846. These debates are discussed thoroughly in John Edward Weems, *To Conquer a Peace: The War Between the United States and Mexico* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1974). Although most of the Democrats around Polk favored an aggressive policy, Secretary of State James Buchanan was an exception; it is clear from Polk's notations in his diary that Buchanan argued consistently that the administration should not go beyond the Rio Grande.

prepared by himself.⁸

Commodore Conner believed the smaller port of Tampico would be useful as a staging base for an operation against Veracruz. The latter was the more important location because it was Mexico's principal port and its possession gave access to the main road—called the National Road—to Mexico City. In his reports, Conner outlined a strategy for American naval and ground forces for reducing Veracruz by investing it from the rear. Conner argued that a surprise landing and investment could cut off the garrison's supplies and force a surrender of the city and the fort before reinforcements could arrive from the interior. Besides recommending Tampico as a staging base for both Army and Naval forces en route to Veracruz, Conner recommended Antón Lizardo, an anchorage ten miles below the port, as a safe roadstead on which to rendezvous prior to an amphibious assault. Conner's reports during this time also included his estimates of the numbers and types of naval and ground forces required to take Veracruz. Finally, the commodore cautioned that a direct naval assault against San Juan de Ulúa would be an extremely high-risk operation.⁹

These reports gave Polk and his advisors knowledge of the coast and its defenses and guided their thinking during the summer about a second front. In August Polk first broached to his cabinet the idea of a major operation at Veracruz and for the next three months discussed the notion of an amphibious landing there during numerous sessions with his staff.¹⁰

Polk strangely did not include in these sessions the military's top officers. It became clear that the President had every intention of being his own Chief of Staff; and would use members of his Cabinet, especially Secretary of War William Marcy and Secretary of Navy George Bancroft (replaced by John Mason in September 1846), as a kind of "operational plans" division. The War Department--the larger of the two military departments--had at that time virtually no personnel to support military planning. Marcy's staff consisted of nine clerks, two messengers, and a handyman. The President's decision to take war strategy into his own hands, despite his lack of military experience, was partially motivated by a distrust of his senior army commander, General-in-Chief

Winfield Scott. Polk expressed the opinion that the general's actions and attitude were "recklessly vindictive" toward his administration, and distrusted him because he was an outspoken Whig. In fact, Polk's relationship with his senior regular military officers reflected insecurity about military strategy on his part, an insecurity made worse by personal and political jealousy. He was equally suspicious and contemptuous

⁸ *Diary of James K. Polk*, 2:16; Marcy to Polk, 13 June 1846, *Senate Document 392*, 29th Congress, 1st Session, 18.

⁹ Conner's reports are in Bauer, *Surfboats and Horse Marines*, 9, 15-43.

¹⁰ These discussion by Polk and his cabinet are recorded in his diary entries for June-October 1846. See *Diary of James K. Polk*, 1:passim; 2:passim.

regarding his other top general, Zachary Taylor, another Whig sympathizer.¹¹

Still without a decision on the Veracruz expedition, on October 17 Polk called in the former American Consul in Veracruz, Francis Dimond, to get more details of the port city and the San Juan fortress. Present, besides Buchanan, Marcy, and Mason, were the Army Paymaster, Brigadier General Nathan Towson, and Chief of Ordnance and Hydrography, Commodore Lewis Warrington. Dimond presented Polk with a "map" of Veracruz, a rough, hand-drawn sketch of the city and fort, the off shore islands, and potential landing sites. Based on Dimond's information, the group agreed that Conner's idea to take the city from the rear was "practical," in the President's view. While still not prepared to give final approval for the landing, the meticulous and perpetually involved Commander-in-Chief directed that Commodore Warrington prepare a refined version of Dimond's map and that General Tomson report back with the number of troops that the Army could furnish for the operation. These requirements were submitted to the President within days of the above discussion. On October 20, 1846, Polk decided to order General Taylor to go on the defensive in northern Mexico and made a tentative decision for some type of operation on the Gulf coast. At that point he appeared to be convinced that a second front operation could be carried out with 4,000 men, although it is unclear how he arrived at that figure. Polk was hesitant about the operation because of the monetary and political costs; his statements during this time again reflected that he was unsure of the strategic ideas about the war that he freely expressed in cabinet sessions.¹²

"Vera Cruz and its Castle"

General Scott, then in disfavor with Polk, had not been invited to participate in these deliberations, although Secretary Marcy did keep the General-in-Chief informed. Scott, sensing that a final decision on the expedition was near, began to

¹¹ For Polk's attitude toward Scott, see, *Diary of James K. Polk*, 1:407-418 and Ivor Debenham Spencer, *The Victor and the Spoils: A Life of William L. Marcy* (Providence: Brown University Press, 1959), 141. Polk's opinion of Taylor grew increasingly hostile as the general's national popularity grew after the Battle of Monterrey in September 1846. By November Polk was beside himself with distrust of the new national hero. On the fourteenth he wrote in his diary that Taylor was "unfit for command" of the Veracruz expedition and that he was a "bitter political partisan"; on the twenty-second he noted that Taylor "is a narrow-minded, bigoted partisan, without resources and wholly unqualified for the command he holds,;" "anyone would do better than Taylor," Polk added. By January 1847 Polk was lambasting Taylor as "wholly incompetent." See Paul H Bergeron, *The Presidency of James K. Polk* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1987), 92, 255, 257 and *Diary of James K. Polk*, 2:236, 250, 307.

¹² *Diary of James K. Polk*, 2:193-202. Polk's involvement in practically every detail of his office and his worrisome nature and dour personality are illustrated by his diary entries during the period he was involved in strategic plan for the war. On October 19, a day he conversed with the Secretaries of State and War, he met in his office with a poorly dressed woman who begged money from him. "I gave her a small sum," the president wrote, "though I doubt whether she was worthy of it." *Diary*, 1:197.

maneuver for command of the Veracruz operation.¹³ During the fall he prepared various plans which outlined his views for the seizure of the port and a subsequent march on Mexico City. In late October he forwarded to Marcy a written proposal titled "Vera Cruz and Its Castle." Two weeks later he revised this study and added to the title the words "...New Line of Operations, Thence Upon the Capital," reflecting an expansion dealing with the longer campaign into Mexico's interior."¹⁴

Scott, obviously using information gleaned from the reports of Conner and possibly other sources, outlined an ambitious plan, one difficult yet practical. He was unquestionably a superb strategist—some argue the most notable in American history. His strategy for the seizure of Veracruz and follow-on campaign into the interior was based on Jominian principles of warfare. He realized first that the war was controversial and that public opinion was dangerously divided. War policy would not be an unqualified extension of political will. His resources would be limited; the nation would

only partially mobilize to support his campaign. Scott's strategy included blockades and sieges; it employed deception and diplomacy whenever possible, and substituted maneuver for superior numbers or even combat to defeat the enemy. Following Jomini, Scott recognized the inherent danger of an amphibious invasion of a foreign nation, the imperative to seize a fortified harbor through which to invade—or retreat if necessary—and the need for a secure beachhead where a large force could be disembarked. He also recognized the necessity for the early introduction of artillery for support of the landing force. "Vera Cruz and Its Castle," consistent with the high standards of all of Scott's professional studies, included all of these elements.¹⁵

¹³ Polk had earlier offered Scott command of all theater forces in Mexico, but had withdrawn the offer when Scott wrote a letter critical of the Administration and Polk's leadership. After May 1846 their relationship disintegrated into one of mutual distrust. See *Diary of James K. Polk*, 1:396, 401, 414, 418-21, and 424.

¹⁴ Scott's first paper is in *House Executive Document 60*, 30th Congress, 1st Session, 1268-70; the second paper is in *Ibid.*, 1270-74.

¹⁵ For a discussion of Scott as a disciple of Jomini, see James W. Pohl's "The Influence of Antoine Henri de Jomini on Winfield Scott's Campaign in the Mexican War," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, 77:1 (1973), 74, 85-110. A recent discussion of Scott as a strategist is in James R. Arnold, *Presidents Under Fire: Commanders in Chief in Victory and Defeat* (New York: Orion Books, 1994), 113, 121. Scott's principal biographer, Charles Winslow Elliott, discusses his strategic thinking and the Veracruz plan in *Winfield Scott: The Soldier and the Man* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1937), 90, 436-37, as does T. Harry Williams in *The History of American Wars from 1745 to 1918* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1981). Commenting on Scott's view for making war, Williams observes that "just as his objective was limited, so were his ways of making war. He did not punish or destroy the cities he occupied. Instead, he proclaimed to their inhabitants that he came in a spirit of conciliation and would protect their rights and property. Nor did he attempt to smash Mexican armies in bloody battles. Although he fought when he had to, he avoided battle if he could, achieving victory by turning the enemy out of position by flanking movements. He thus conserved the lives of his own men . . ." See 178.

Scott's plan, coherently developed, never changed once implemented. It emphasized that Veracruz must be the launching point for the invasion into central Mexico: it was the largest port, it commanded the principal road to the interior, and—unlike the approach from the north where Taylor's army faced a long march over hostile terrain if it moved south—the route to Mexico City from the coast was over an established highway and lush countryside.¹⁶ The plan was not to attack the city and its fortress directly. Scott wanted to land his troops out of range of the fort's guns and, following Conner's idea, besiege Veracruz by investing it from the rear, or western side. An important assumption of the plan was that if supplies, especially fresh water, were cut off the city would capitulate before reinforcements could arrive from the north. Scott's concept stressed the imperative of an early date for launching the operation—preferably no later than mid-January 1847. There were three reasons for an early invasion: It had to take place before large Mexican units could gather to oppose the landing; Gulf seas had been generally good to that point, but a delay could mean landing in a period of stormy weather, and a delay past early Spring would mean the operation would take place in the unhealthy season along the coast when the dreaded *vómito negro*, or yellow fever, could strike the troops.¹⁷

Presidential Decision: A Second Front and a New Commander

The President agonized over the final approval for the expedition. He had been briefed on Scott's plans for Veracruz by Marcy, and while he was warming to their author, he remained distrustful of the General-in-Chief's loyalty. Polk had long answered the call of Manifest Destiny, indeed had campaigned on a platform calling for annexation of Texas. But he was also a devout and moral man, cautious, conservative by nature. He did not want the imprint of raw imperialism on his administration. Polk had hoped that a show of force or at most a limited incursion into northern Mexico would make that country bend to American demands. Now, four months after the start of war, Zachary Taylor's victories had not brought terms, and the President was beginning to have doubts about the war. During October he had even written into a draft of his annual message to Congress a passage calling for a policy of "inactive occupation" of the territory already conquered.¹⁸

A great frustration was beginning to set in among officials in the administration and members of the Congress. Daniel Webster remarked that "Mexico is an ugly enemy, she will not fight—and will not treat." Yet Polk knew that Veracruz meant a full-scale invasion of a foreign country; that it would transform the

¹⁶ Scott argued in his memoirs that he was the only player among the senior officials who always supported Veracruz as the entrance point to the heart of Mexico. He contended that Polk, Marcy and Taylor all vacillated on the issue of where to locate a second front. Winfield Scott, *Memoirs of Lieut. General Scott*, (New York: Sheldon & Company, Publisher, 1864), 2:403-04.

¹⁷ Eisenhower, *So Far From God*, 253-54; James M. McCaffrey, *Army of Manifest Destiny* (New York University Press, 1992), 165-66.

¹⁸ Eisenhower, *So Far From God*, 161; *Diary of James K. Polk*, 2:222, 232-33.

conflict into a war of conquest and subjugation, and that many Americans opposed the idea of their army occupying the capital of another nation.¹⁹

At this point of indecision and crisis, the President came under the persuasion of his friend, fellow Democrat, and favorite military advisor--the influential senator from Missouri, Thomas Hart Benton. Benton met with Polk almost daily during this period and frequently discussed the war with him. Although he was initially against the war, the Senator was now a war hawk. Benton opposed Polk's recent inclination to revert to the defensive, contending that such a policy would only "prolong the war and ruin the Democratic party." He argued forcefully for an aggressive strategy, recommending an immediate, bold strike against Veracruz followed by a "rapid crushing movement" against Mexico City. Polk at last convinced, announced his approval of Veracruz to the cabinet.²⁰

With the decision now behind him, Polk faced the problem of a commander for his new theater of operations. Understanding the commanding general could well be a national hero and thus a political challenge, Polk wanted a Democratic ally, and his two senior men in uniform, Taylor and Scott, were both Whigs. He discussed the command issue with Benton, gaining the senator's ready concurrence with his partisan opinion that Taylor was "a brave officer but not a man of capacity enough for such a command."²¹ Polk brought up Scott's name; Benton replied that he had no confidence in him, a position that also must have pleased the President. Benton then recommended that the President ask Congress to create the grade of Lieutenant General of the Army, a rank above that of both Taylor and Scott. The officer holding this rank could then be given command of the new army. The great Missouri Senator, never a man accused of modesty, then suggested that he was willing to accept the command himself.

Polk, revealing a tendency to place politics above military considerations (and again showing his innocence of military affairs), enthusiastically backed the idea and immediately lobbied his congressional allies to support the proposal. After a brief attempt at the political coup (the House of Representative was favorable toward the idea), Polk's friends in the Senate convinced him of its futility. He then dropped the idea and turned again to Scott, the logical choice and Secretary of War Marcy's recommendation for the position. Secretary of State Buchanan, Naval Secretary Mason, and the remainder of the cabinet—and even Senator Benton eventually fell in line to support the General-in-Chief and author of the plan that the administration had already agreed upon for opening a second war front. Winfield Scott could now

¹⁹ *The Writings and Speeches of Daniel Webster*, ed. Fletcher Webster (Boston: National Edition, 1903), 16:465.

²⁰ Bauer, *Surfboats and Horse Marines*, 64; Charles L. Dufour, *The Mexican War* (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1968), 159; Elliot, *Winfield Scott*, 437; *Diary of James K. Polk*, 2:233-38; Otis A. Singletary, *The Mexican War* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1960), 111.

²¹ Henry, *The Story of the Mexican War*, 169; *Diary of James K. Polk*, 2:227.

set out on the grand enterprise.²²

Winfield Scott and Joint Warfare

Scott's mission from his command authorities was only generally defined. Secretary of War Marcy reminded Scott that Polk had ordered him to "repair to Mexico, to take command of the forces there assembled, and particularly to organize and to set foot an expedition to operate on the Gulf Coast...." He ensured Scott that he was going to have full support of the administration and be free of interference from himself and the President on operational questions. "It is not proposed," Marcy stressed, "to control your operations by definite and positive instructions, but you are left to prosecute them as your judgment, under full view of all circumstance, shall dictate." The order clearly gave Scott all the leeway a theater commander could have wanted, and it allowed for Polk to avoid criticism if the operation went awoul. One naval historian has argued that the mission statement was purposely broad to ensure that if "grief came to the expedition the blame would rest on Scott's Whig shoulders."²³

Scott took full advantage of these instructions. Even prior to being formally named by Polk as commander of the second front, he had begun to expand his plan for the Veracruz landing. Before arriving in the Gulf, Scott communicated with Commodore Conner, requesting details about staging areas, anchorages, defenses at Veracruz, Mexican troop strengths, potential landing beaches, and roads into the interior. Conner recommended Tampico, 200 miles north of Veracruz—which his forces under Vice Commodore Matthew C. Perry had captured earlier—as an intermediate staging area for both ground and naval forces. He informed Scott that Antón Lizardo, a safe anchorage 12 miles below Veracruz, would be an ideal final rendezvous point prior to the assault. Much of the information Conner provided during this period was the basis for Scott's final operational plan for the landing.²⁴ At this time Scott also wrote to Taylor at Monterrey, informing him that he would have to stay on the defensive and furnish most of his regulars for the new expedition. Those troops in forward positions around Monterrey would go overland to Tampico; the units still in Taylor's rear area along the border would rendezvous at the Brazos de Santiago (referred to as "the brazos"), a point north of the mouth of the Rio Grande on the off-shore islands of the Gulf coast. Drawing off Taylor's best troops

²² Arnold, *Presidents Under Fire*, 99, 100; *Diary of James K. Polk*, 2:244-46; Singletary, *The Mexican War*, 120. Benton's request to command the new army was quickly recognized in the Senate as patently absurd. He had little military experience, and none since his brief active duty time thirty years earlier in the War of 1812. Elliot, *Winfield Scott*, 438.

²³ The mission statement is in Merrill L. Bartlett, *Assault from the Sea: Essays on the History of Amphibious Warfare* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1983), 75 and is discussed in *Memoirs of Lieut. General Scott*, 2:397-98. The quote by the historian is K. Jack Bauer's, *The Mexican War*, 237.

²⁴ Bauer, *Surfboats and Horse Marines*, 69; Bartlett, *Assault from the Sea*, 76.

embittered the old soldier, causing a permanent rift between him and Scott.²⁵

Scott's demands for sea transport and naval support were both large and unique for that era. For the nation's largest amphibious assault in its history, he requested 50 ships of 500 to 750 tons each to lift approximately 15,000 men and a large siege train to the area of operations.²⁶ These transports would be both sail and steam-powered and would be under army command. Since amphibious operations of this type and scale were something new for the nation's military, landing craft to get the troops on the beach were not in existence. Scott wanted small assault boats to put his troops ashore, and gave the requirement to his resourceful logistician, Army Quartermaster General Thomas S. Jesup. The surfboats Scott requested were the first specially constructed for an American amphibious assault. Scott's specifications called for flat-bottomed, double-ended, broad-beamed rowboats; they were to be constructed in three lengths from 35 feet 9 inches to 40 feet. The different lengths allowed the boats to be nested in transport. Forty-seven sets, or 141 boats, were ordered; the price was \$795 each, and delivery time was to be one month. Each surfboat would carry approximately 40 men (one platoon) plus a crew of eight sailors, with a naval officer in command. While the contract was negotiated with the Philadelphia builder by Jesup's agent, army Captain Robert F. Loper, the boats were designed by a naval officer, Lieutenant George M. Totten.²⁷

Commodore Conner had for months attempted to reinforce his squadron for the forthcoming landing. The immediate problem for Conner was not a lack of frigates and other large ships-of-the-line-- Mexico presented no real naval threat-- but small sea-going steamers with shallow drafts that could be used to enforce the blockade along the coast. Since time was a factor in procurement of craft in the fall of 1846, the Navy Department had to purchase the small steamers, sloops, brigs,

²⁵ Elliot, *Winfield Scott*, 444; McCaffrey, *Army of Manifest Destiny*, 166; Singletary, *The Mexican War*, 72-73. President Polk had earlier ordered (through Marcy) Zachary Taylor to halt his advance at Monterrey and go on the defensive; Scott's order reinforced these directives. Taylor ignored both; even after his forces were drawn off by Scott, he advanced south of Saltillo and engaged Santa Anna's much larger army in the Battle of Buena Vista. His famous victory there in February 1847 greatly enhanced his national stature as a war hero and carried him to the White House the following year.

²⁶ Scott's estimate of the size force he would need for the expedition varied in the months prior to the landing. His figures were influenced by Commodore Conner's estimates, those of Taylor, and political realities regarding the number of volunteer units Polk was willing to call up. Scott's estimates are in the studies he prepared for Marcy - *House Executive Document 30*, 1268-74. Also see Bauer, *Surfboats and Horse Marines*, 64; Eisenhower, *So Far from God*, 254; Samuel Eliot Morrison, *"Old Bruin:" Commodore Matthew C. Perry, 1794-1858* (Boston: Little Brown & Company, 1967), 207; *Diary of James K. Polk*, 2:234-35.

²⁷ The surfboat specifications are recorded in William G. Temple, U.S.N., "Memoir of the Landing of the United States Troops at Vera Cruz in 1847," an addendum to Philip Syng Physick, *The Home Squadron Under Commodore Conner in the War with Mexico, Being a Synopsis of Its Services, 1846-1847* (n.p., 1896), 60-62. See also Bauer, *Surfboats and Horse Marines*, 66 and *The Mexican War*, 236; Morrison, *"Old Bruin,"* 207; and McCaffrey, *Army of Manifest Destiny*, 166.

storeships, and other vessels needed for Conner's blockade operations. The Secretary of the Navy worked diligently to meet the needs of the Home Squadron: He procured everything from engines and boilers down to wooden poles "64 feet long and 10 and 1/2 inches in diameter" at a cost of "99 cents per cubic foot." One contract with Bensal and Brothers called for "36 claw hammers at 50 cents each." The buildup was slow, but Conner's requirements for these ships were mostly met by late fall. His additional requests for some larger ships-of-the-line, however, were late in being met; these ships mostly arriving after the landing took place.²⁸

When General Scott departed Washington for the Brazos on November 26, 1846, he planned to have his entire force afloat in gulf waters by the middle of January or February 1 at the latest. In New York, he employed the diplomat Francis Dimond to go to Havana to recruit two intelligence agents to operate inside Mexico.²⁹ Continuing from New York on the thirtieth, head winds and rough seas in the Gulf delayed his arrival in New Orleans until the nineteenth of December. There he dined with Henry Clay, discussing politics and the war with the venerable old statesman and orator. Clay, who had spoken against an aggressive policy toward Mexico as a candidate for president two years before, would lose his son, Lieutenant Colonel Henry Clay, Jr., at the Battle of Buena Vista within two months of his dinner with Scott. While in the Crescent City Scott also had conversations with shipmasters who advised him that Lobos Island, a sandy coral harbor off the Mexican coast between Tampico and Veracruz, provided safe anchorage and a good rendezvous location. Due to the limited space in the Tampico anchorage, Scott decided to use Lobos and sent a message from New Orleans advising all forces to rendezvous there prior to continuing to Antón Lizardo. Arriving at the Brazos by Christmas, Scott hoped to meet with Taylor along the Rio Grande. Although Taylor had received Scott's letter requesting a rendezvous, the old field general—bitter about perceived slights by the administration and by Scott's order taking most of his regulars—seems to have purposely avoided the meeting by marching with his troops to Ciudad Victoria, capital of the state of Tamaulipas, far from the Rio Grande. Scott later would refer to Taylor's march as the "strange digression."³⁰

Unable to coordinate with Taylor about the exact break out of forces, Scott made independent decisions regarding which units to take with him. These he ordered to gather at the Brazos for movement to Lobos Island. Concerned about undercutting

²⁸ By the time of the assault on Veracruz, Conner had available 2 frigates; 2 sloops of war; 1 brig; 1 steam frigate; 4 steamers; and 5 schooners. Bauer, *Surfboats and Horse Marines*, 264. The biggest problem for the Navy during the war was not ships but the crews to man them. Congress authorized the Navy to increase from 7,500 to 10,000 at the start of the war but difficulty in attracting sufficient enlistments (the merchant marine offered higher pay) kept the Navy's actual strength at 8,000. See Elliot, *Winfield Scott*, 449, and Santelli, *Marines in the Mexican War*, 2. Also see "List of Contracts under the cognizance of the Bureau of Construction, Equipment, and Repairs", 22 November 1846-22 November 1847 in "Report of Secretary of the Navy", 6 December 1847, *Senate Executive Document 1*, 30th Congress, 1st Session, 945-1310.

²⁹ Bauer, *The Mexican War*, 237-38.

³⁰ Elliot, *Winfield Scott*, 444-47; *Memoirs of Lieut. General Scott*, 401-12.

Taylor's command authority, Scott was careful to send copies of all movement orders to the general. He discovered that many of the Taylor's units had not arrived at the Rio Grande, and that General Jesup, who had moved his headquarters to the Brazos, was having trouble getting the required transports and accompanying trains (including the surfboats) from the East Coast. He became increasingly concerned that he would not meet the February 1 launch date for the invasion. In an attempt to summon an army," Scott stayed at the Brazos throughout January 1847. While there he communicated again with Commodore Conner, who confirmed that Lobos Island would be an appropriate rendezvous point. Restless with inactivity and agitated by the laborious process of gathering troops and supplies, Scott—now resigned that his target date would not be met—left Brigadier William Worth to complete the embarkation at the Brazos and departed for Tampico the middle of February.³¹

At Tampico on February 19, Scott found some 6,000 soldiers waiting transportation to Veracruz. Arrival at the port city was a triumph for the commanding general. He was hailed in grand style as he came ashore to the strains of the army band from Governor's Island; many of the senior officers who had been fighting with Taylor came forward to greet him. He refused a "fine gray horse with handsome trappings," and moved on foot through the city, his 6'5" figure rising dramatically above everyone as he moved among the Americans and Mexicans gathered in the streets. A kind of joint operation of revelry took place that night in Tampico. A Maryland volunteer, John R Kenly, was delighted to encounter the sailors in Tampico after a hard march from Monterrey. Kenly reported that "Drunken soldiers and drunken sailors fraternized, and the long bitter oath of the western volunteer and the teamster drowned the *carramba* of the Mexican. After conferring with his officers overnight, Scott steamed south the next day. Arriving at Lobos, the main rendezvous for the army fifty miles below Tampico on 21 February, Scott found that his force was only partially ready for the operation: the troops were still arriving from Tampico, the Brazos Santiago, and New Orleans; a shortage of transports was delaying troops movement as well as the build up of supply trains; only one half of the surfboats had arrived, and Scott did not have all of the heavy guns he had requested for the siege of Veracruz. He used the time at Lobos to drill the troops on the small island, to organize his army for the landing, and to gain further intelligence about Veracruz.³²

After a week there good winds came in, bringing most of the regiments under General Worth, along with units from Tampico and troops directly from the States "coming down before the gale like race horses." The roadstead at Lobos Island became, in the words of one soldier, a wilderness of spars and rigging." Relations between soldiers and sailors continued on a most cordial basis: on March 5, when members of an army unit assisted in freeing a ship from a coral reef, the Captain ordered a barrel of whiskey to be distributed among the soldiers in the rescue detail. The restless Scott, fearing the approach of the yellow fever season, decided to go with forces on hand. On the third of March the commanding general his blue flag flying

³¹ Elliot, *Winfield Scott*, 450-51; *Memoirs of Lieut. General Scott*, 413.

³² Scott organized his force into three divisions, two regular under Brigadier Generals William Worth and David Twiggs, and one volunteer under Major General Robert Patterson.

from the maintruck of the Massachusetts, made his departure. Always a man of spectacle and drama, the imposing Scott stood bareheaded on the deck of his flagship; as it moved among the transports he acknowledged the shouts of his men. Moral was high; the troops cheered their general and the sailors sang:

"We are now bound for the shores of Mexico
And there Uncle Sam's soldiers we will land, hi, oh!"

The fleet stood away. Winfield Scott and his army were off to Veracruz.³³

Driven by fair winds the armada arrived off "the city of the True Cross" two days later, March 5. The soldiers were impressed by the truly spectacular view: the eighteen thousand-foot snowcapped Mount Orizaba in the distance to the west, the beautiful Spanish colonial city of Veracruz, and the ominous fortress the ancient San Juan de Ulúa, protruding into the bay. In anticipation of Scott's arrival in the area, Commodore Conner sent a ship under Captain John Aulick to an island off Veracruz, Isla Verde, to meet the fleet and guide it through the shoals to Antón Lizardo. The next day—Sunday, March 6—Conner arranged for a reconnaissance of the landing site by Scott and his principal commanders and staff. They went out at 0900 on the small steamer *Petrita*.³⁴

Abroad were all three of Scott's division commanders and the officers Scott called his "little cabinet." This group acted essentially as his general staff, and was made up solely of army officers. Among those present were Lieutenant Colonel Ethan Allen Hitchcock, the Inspector General; Scott's son-in-law, Captain Henry Lee Scott (who acted as staff coordinator); the chief engineer, Colonel Joseph Totten, and engineer officers Major John L. Smith, Captains Robert E. Lee and Joseph E. Johnston, First Lieutenant P.G.T. Beauregard, and Second Lieutenant Zebulon B. Tower. Conner showed Scott a location on the shore that he had selected as a potential landing site. The location, known as Collado Beach, lay behind Sacrificios Island about two and one half miles below Veracruz. It was a slightly curving stretch of beach with a gentle slope. Behind it lay a parallel line of sand hills about 150 yards inland, which the Mexicans had not fortified. Although concerned that the roadstead between Sacrificios and the shore were limited, Scott liked the location and immediately approved Collado as the landing beach. The site, just beyond the range of the guns of the city and fort, was an excellent choice.³⁵ As the *Petrita* turned in

³³ *To Mexico With Scott: Letters of Captain E. Kirby Smith to his Wife*, ed. Emma Jerome Blackwood (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1917), 108-09; Dufour, *The Mexican War*, 201; Elliot, *Winfield Scott*, 451; Douglas Southall Freeman, *R.E. Lee: A Biography* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934), 1:220-23; John R. Kenly, *Memoirs of a Maryland Volunteer* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1873), 239; J. Jacobson Oswandel, *Notes of the Mexican War: 1846-47-48* (Philadelphia: n.p., 1885), 56-61; Justin Smith, *The War With Mexico*, 2:18.

³⁴ Most reports refer to the steamer as the *Petrita*, but various accounts use *Patricio*, *Secretary*, and *Champion*.

³⁵ The authors, in retracing Scott's campaign in 1993, visited Veracruz and San Juan de Ulúa, and inspected the entire stretch of beach from Antón Lizardo to the city. Parts of the wall around the city can still be identified; the massive San Juan fort is very much intact It

front of the fortress San Juan—at a point about a mile from the fort—the Mexican batteries opened fire and began to bracket the ship. Ten rounds exploded beyond, short of, and over the command group but none struck the little steamer as it returned safely to Antón Lizardo.³⁶

Scott and Conner decided to use Monday, March 7 to organize the forces in loading units. The plan was simple compared to modern amphibious operations. Scott had apparently first thought of the landing as an all-army effort—the troops would simply move from army transports to surfboats and assault the beach.³⁷ Conner argued, however, that the roadstead between Collado Beach and Sacrificios Island was too limited to hold all of the army transports and that it would be more effective to move most of the assault troops from Antón Lizardo in large naval ships. Scott agreed. The Army transports were placed temporarily under Conner's command and the Commodore was given the authority to organize the loading and carry out the ship-to-shore movement. The 64 available surfboats (the remainder had not arrived) were organized into divisions of ten with a naval officer or petty officer in command of each boat. Sailors would man the oars. Salmedina Island, adjacent to Antón Lizardo, would be used for loading the boats. Scott planned to hit the beach in three waves: Worth's division of regulars would go in first; Patterson's volunteers would follow, and Twiggs' regulars would be last. On the evening of the seventh, Scott announced that the landing would go the next day.³⁸

On the eighth the weather broke stormy. Scott, fearing a norther, the dreaded Gulf storm of the winter season, was approaching, postponed the landing until the next day. On the ninth, a day Scott later recalled as "the precise day when I had been thirty years a general officer—the sun dawned propitiously on the expedition." Another officer wrote that "if we had the choice of weather, we could not have selected a more propitious day. The sun shot forth his brilliant rays in a cloudless sky..." The first real "D-Day" in American history had arrived. At Salmedina naval

is now connected to the mainland and is a tourist attraction. The beach is largely unchanged. After this visit the authors agreed with most critics of the war that Scott and Conner's choice for an amphibious landing site was superb.

³⁶ Oddly, Scott does not mention his arrival at Antón Lizardo nor the *Petrita* incident in his memoirs. The events of the fifth and sixth of March are covered in the following participant accounts: Ethan Allen Hitchcock, *Fifty Years in Camp and Field* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1909), 237; *The Life and Letters of George Gordon Meade, Major-General United States Army* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1913), 1:187, and *The Mexican War Diary of George B. McClellan*, ed. William Starr Myers (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1917), 52. See also Elliot, *Winfield Scott*, 455 and Freeman, *R.E. Lee*, 1:223, 226. Freeman makes the point that the *Petrita* was "the first hostile shot Captain Lee had ever heard as a soldier," a remarkable observation in view of Lee's varied assignments in almost 20 years of active service.

³⁷ An order Scott issued in February concerning signals to be used indicated only the Arm would be involved. Bauer, *Surfboats and Horse Marines*, 77-78.

³⁸ Bauer, *Surfboats and Horse Marines*, 78; Henry, *The Story of the Mexican War*, 262-62; Morrison, "Old Bruin," 208.

boat crews under naval Captain French Forrest launched the surfboats from their designated positions on the beach and used them to move the troops from the Army transports to the naval ships—the largest ships, the frigates *Raritan* and *Potomac*, loaded 2,500 men each; the smaller ships (the sloops *Albany* and *St. Mary's* were in this category), loaded about a 1,000 each and other still smaller vessels, lesser numbers proportionately. Used in the move to Sacrificios were ten naval sailing ships, four naval steamers, and five army steamers.³⁹

Discarding the signals which had been prepared for an all-army operation, Scott worked out a new set of signals with Conner for supporting fires, loading the surfboats, and assaulting the beach. The movement took most of the day. At 1530 hours, Scott hoisted a red, a yellow, and a red-and-white flag at the mainmast of the *Massachusetts*, the preparatory signal for Worth's division to again load the surfboats. After some initial confusion. Worth finally pulled them abreast behind the *Princeton*, anchored about 400 yards from shore. As the *Potomac* moved behind Sacrificios its band struck up "Yankee Doodle," "Hail Columbia," and "The Star Spangled Banner." At this time Mexican cavalry were spotted on the hills behind the beach. Although the enemy force disappeared when the schooner *Tampico* fired one volley in its direction, anxiety rose as

the assault troops now expected opposition on landing. At 1730 the troops cheered as Scott fired a gun and raised a fourth flag to his mast. Its signal to the first wave: assault the beach! It was a moment of great tension and excitement since no knew what lay behind the beach. In minutes a gig sped out from the left side of the line of boats. One officer jumped waist-high into the surf, his gold braid reflecting the still-bright sun. The gallant William Worth had led the Sixth Infantry Regiment ashore.⁴⁰

To the surprise of the troops hitting the beach, the Mexicans were nowhere in sight. Worth's division landed essentially unopposed—there was only sporadic fire from San Juan—and the remaining two assault waves came ashore by 2200 hours. By midnight Conner had landed over 10,000 men on the beach without one loss of life. Over the next few days, under intermittent harassing fire from the Mexican batteries and occasional fire from Mexican cavalry patrols behind the sandhills, Scott established his headquarters ashore (naming the encampment Fort Washington) and began the complex task of subduing the city and fort. This required a large supply build up on Collado Beach and troop deployment over difficult terrain to effect an investment of Veracruz, missions delayed by a series of northers that arrived over the

³⁹ Eisenhower, *So Far From God*, 259; Henry, *Story of the Mexican War*, 263; Morrison, "Old Bruin," 210; *Memoirs of Lieut. General Scott*, 419.

⁴⁰ Participant accounts of the landing are in Blackwood, *To Mexico with Scott*, 113-14; *The Mexican War Diary of George B. McClellan*, 53-54, and Richard F. Pourade, ed., *The Sign of the Eagle* (San Diego: Union-Tribune Publishing Co., 1970), 71-74 (the latter being the letters of Lt. John James Peck). Also see Bauer, *Surfboats and Horse Marines*, 81-82 and Elliot, *Winfield Scott*, 455-56. The best general description of the landing - taken from a range of sources - is Justin Smith, *The War with Mexico*, 2:25-27.

next two weeks.⁴¹ The naval operation of unloading supplies continued at Collado, however, during this critical period. To distract Mexican attention during the troop movement on March 10, Commodore Conner sent the *Spitfire* in close to shore to bombard San Juan de Ulúa. The firing did little damage to the fort but the diversion allowed Patterson to pass through Worth's troops and position his division to the west. Within days, Scott had most of his 12,000-man army—which included a Marine company in the assault phase, soon reinforced by 400-man battalion—on Mexican soil.⁴²

The investment formation consisted of Worth's division deployed from Collado Beach southeast of the city, west and northwest to a position at about seven o'clock. Patterson's volunteers occupied roughly the center of the half moon encirclement on the west. Twiggs, passing through Patterson's division, completed the investment on the thirteenth of March when his regulars closed on the village of Vergana at the entrance of the National Road on the coast north of Veracruz. The line of investment ran about seven miles from shore to shore.⁴³

From reconnaissance on horse the first day Scott realized his plan to reduce the city through siege warfare would take patience. Conner's earlier reports had convinced him that Veracruz and San Juan were formidable and strongly defended. He understood there were 3,000 well-supplied troops in the city of 15,000 inhabitants (1,000 of these militia). The city was encircled by a fifteen-foot-high curtain wall with redans and nine forts, the two most prominent being Concepción on the northwest, and Santiago on the southeast. In front of the wall the defenders set thick clusters of prickly pear and dug a line of *trous de loup*, conical holes containing sharpened stakes placed to impale anyone stepping into them. On the seaward side loomed the fortress of San Juan de Ulúa, solidly constructed on the submerged Gallega Reef Mounted along and within its walls were over 100 cannons manned by a 1000 men. The fort had a distinguished history guarding Spain's prized port during the colonial era. It held as Spain's last citadel even after Mexican independence; although the French did take the fort in 1838. Scott had been informed that San Juan had been greatly reinforced since that episode. Scott later wrote that in March 1847 the fort "had the capacity to sink the entire American navy." What Scott did not know as he looked at Veracruz' defenses from his lines was the spirit of the defenders and

⁴¹ The terrain behind Collado Beach was an obstacle in itself. The sandhills were interspersed with flooded marshes, much of the terrain was covered with thorny bushes and prickly pears that formed a chaparral so thick that the troops had to cut their way through with axes. The northers that came in during the first two weeks blew blinding sand everywhere, conditions were made more uncomfortable by voracious breeds of fleas, wood ticks, and rod bugs that covered and bit the men has they tried to sleep on the beach at night. Blackwood, *To Mexico With Scott*, 120-22; Eisenhower, *So Far From God*, 260.

⁴² Bauer, *The Mexican War*, 244-45 and *Surfboats and Horse Marines*, 83-85; Henry, *The Story of the Mexican War*, 264-65; Santelli, *Marines in the Mexican War*, 4; *Memoirs of Lieut. General Scott*, 2:420-21.

⁴³ Smith, *The War With Mexico*, 2:27-29.

their will to withstand the siege."⁴⁴

The first week on shore Scott had a problem with some of his officers who questioned his siege strategy and wanted to take Veracruz by infantry assault. General Worth and other officers who had participated in the storming of Monterrey under General Taylor were growing impatient with the siege. Some had already "solicited the privilege of leading storming parties." To quell this rebellion, Scott called his "little cabinet" and other officers in to gain their support. He knew that the city had to be taken before return of the dreaded *vómito negro*; if that season arrived before the siege worked, Scott was willing to assault. But he argued that an assault would be "an immense slaughter to both sides, including non-combatants—Mexican men, women, and children..." Besides, he continued, an infantry assault could mean the loss of two to three thousand of "our best men...and I have received but half the numbers promised me.. How then, Scott argued, "could we hope to penetrate the interior?" He did admit to his officers that their countrymen would hardly acknowledge a victory "unaccompanied by a long butcher's bill (referring to praise Taylor's bloody victories had earned in the States). But the commanding general told the group that he wanted to stay with his humanitarian policy, foregoing the "loud applause and aves vehement," and "take the city with the least possible loss of life." These arguments carried the day—the siege now continued with the renewed support of commanders and staff.⁴⁵

A critical task of the operation was the construction of the battery positions for the siege guns, a mission Scott gave to his chief engineer, Colonel Totten. The northers that blew in the first week delayed this construction as well as the unloading of the mortars and heavy guns that would go in the positions. Totten used both regular and topographical engineers as supervisors and infantry troops for the spade work.⁴⁶ During the first week after the landing the joint disembarkation effort on Collado Beach had landed six mortars, four 24-pounder guns, and some siege howitzers. Scott, frustrated by a lack of artillery, wrote Secretary of War Marcy a bitter letter complaining that he had received only one-fifth of the guns he had ordered months before. At the same time he informed Marcy how appreciative he was of naval assistance in the operation, remarking that "Commodore Conner's squadron

⁴⁴ A detailed description of the fort in is the 15-page pamphlet by P.S.P. Conner, *The Castle of San Juan de Ullóa and the Topsy Turvyists* (Philadelphia: n.p., 1897). Also see Freeman, R.E. Lee, 1:227; McCaffrey, *Army of Manifest Destiny*, 168; *Memoirs of Lieut. General Scott*, 2:422.

⁴⁵ Elliot, *Winfield Scott*, 458-59; *Memoirs of Lieut. General Scott*, 2:425-25.

⁴⁶ Major John Smith, Captain R.E. Lee, and Lieutenants P.G.T. Beauregard and George McClellan were with Totten as part of the regular engineers (referred to as the Corps of Engineers). Those at Veracruz in the Corps of Topographical Engineers included Major William Turnbull, Scott's chief "topog," Captain Joseph E. Johnston and Lt. George G. Meade. See Adrian George Traas, *From the Golden Gate to Mexico City: The U.S. Army Topographical Engineers in the Mexican War, 1846-1848* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1992), 5, 6, 182-84. See also Gustavus W. Smith, "Company A Engineers in Mexico, 1846-1847," *The Military Engineer*, 56 (September-October, 1964), 336-340.

is indefatigable in assisting us."⁴⁷

Despite stormy weather and problems with the logistical build up on the beach, the operation to choke off Veracruz continued apace. The army tightened its line of investment; all roads were secured, and the water supply for the city and fort was cut off. The Americans were under constant fire from the city during this period, and although the work on the battery positions was accomplished mostly at night, there were a number of casualties around the construction sites. Casualties also resulted from skirmishes with Mexican patrols of irregulars around the perimeter. On the thirteenth Scott sent the Spanish Consul in Veracruz a letter offering safe passage out of the city for all foreign officials, adding ominously that a "bombardment or cannonade, or assault, or all" of these possibilities may occur soon. Scott later recalled that the diplomats "sullenly neglected" his proposition.⁴⁸

Lacking sufficient heavy guns on shore, Scott feared his coming bombardment would not be effective on the Veracruz fortifications. Conner offered to bring naval guns from the fleet to emplace in the land batteries under construction. The commanding general delayed accepting the offer, but did inform Conner on the nineteenth that the army batteries - prepared in Worth's sector less than a mile south of the city - were almost ready and that he would open fire the next day. He requested that Conner join in the bombardment with fire from his ships offshore. Scott delayed the bombardment order, however, and on the twenty-first he decided to accept Conner's offer to bring naval guns on the beach. When the Commodore came ashore Scott was surprised to see him accompanied by Commodore Matthew C. Perry, who had arrived the previous day to take command of the Home Squadron. Although the change of command was clearly inopportune, Scott apparently took it in stride and reiterated that he wanted the naval guns.⁴⁹

He asked for six guns, and told Commodore Perry to send them ashore and that Army artillerymen would operate them. Perry balked. He calmly replied, "Certainly, General, but I must fight them."⁵⁰ While Scott wanted the army to get credit for operating the guns that he thought would probably reduce the city, he recognized Perry's prerogative and agreed. Perry arranged for double naval crews

⁴⁷ Bauer, *Surfboats and Horse Marines*, 86-87; Eisenhower, *So Far From God*, 261-62; Morrison, *"Old Bruin"*, 211; Smith, *The War With Mexico*, 2:28.

⁴⁸ *Memoirs of Lieut. General Scott*, 2:427; Smith, *The War With Mexico*, 2:27.

⁴⁹ Although the timing was not good Conner's health was poor and he was ready to leave the command. He indicated this in a letter to his wife a week before the landing went down: "... the anxiety and vexation that I suffer here is intolerable," he complained. Due to Perry's fine reputation, most naval officers in the squadron were pleased with the change of command, although some of Scott's officers, aware of the cooperation that existed between Scott and Conner, were displeased. Eisenhower notes that "every one of Scott's officers who could be spared from pressing duties paid a call on Conner, and those who could not sent notes." See Eisenhower, *So Far From God*, 262 and Morrison, *"Old Bruin"*, 213. Also see Scott to Marcy, 21 March 1847, *Senate Document 1*, 30th Congress, 1st Session, 222-24. Conner's relief is also thoroughly discussed by his son in P.S.P. Conner, *The Home Squadron*.

⁵⁰ Bauer, *Surfboats and Horse Marines*, 88.

to man the guns, and several hundred Army troops helped to drag them across the sand dunes. Robert E. Lee, who had almost been killed the previous night by a private soldier who was attempting to desert one of the American regiments, was put in charge of preparing the emplacement. Lee immediately had a problem with some of the sailors. Although they were eager and even excited about shore duty and the chance for combat action, they could not see the need for the hard work of reinforcing the naval position when they were a mile from the fort. Later, when the firing began, they were grateful for the sturdy fortifications. On the twenty-second, before the naval battery was ready, Scott decided to begin the bombardment with the three army batteries then ready. He issued a demand for surrender to the Mexican commander; when it was refused, firing began at 1600 hours.⁵¹

The army batteries that opened on March 22 did little damage to the fortification but wrecked havoc and destruction on the civilian structures in the city. More effective fire came from naval guns offshore. At 1800 hours, Commodore Perry gave the order for his fleet to join the bombardment. He sent Commander Josiah Tattall of the small steamer *Spitfire* in close to shore to fire on the fort. The commander took with him another steamer, the *Vixen*, and five schooners, the *Falcon*, *Reefer*, *Petrel*, *Bonita*, and *Tampico*. Tattall moved in and dropped anchor in the lee of Point Hornos, a promontory south of the city less than a mile from San Juan de Ulúa. He opened fire with every gun in his flotilla of light ships, remaining in position for eighty minutes under heavy counterfire from the Mexican cannons. The guns from the *Spitfire* were especially accurate, some rounds reaching Veracruz' central plaza. Although Tattall had to withdraw after expending his ammunition, his brave exploit with the gunboats boosted morale among soldiers and sailors alike.⁵²

On the twenty-third, Scott opened fire with a fourth army battery after three 24-pounders arrived at Collado Beach, and Perry brought in the huge ship-of-the-line *Ohio*, to bring its heavy guns to bear on San Juan de Ulúa.⁵³ And that morning Perry again ordered Tattall to take his guns back in under Mexican fire to engage the fort. The two officers had a strained relationship—Tattall had never cared for Perry, and did not mind expressing his attitude. The gallant commander now had another chance to excel, however, and immediately asked the commodore where he should position his gunboats. Perry replied "Where you can do the most execution, sir!" Tattall went in closer, opened up his batteries and withstood a withering response from San Juan. Finally Perry called him back. Tattall did not see the commodore's signal, or simply decided to ignore it, and stayed on station for another hour. At last Perry sent Captain Issac Mayo in a boat to order the reckless Tattall to retire. He reluctantly did so; his return to the fleet was greeted by the cheers from soldiers on the beach and from sailors of the Home Squadron and of the neutral

⁵¹ Freeman, *R. E. Lee*, 1:229; Henry, *The Story of the Mexican War*, 267; Hitchcock, *Fifty Years in Camp and Field*, 243; *Memoirs of Lieut. General Scott*, 2:426.

⁵² Bauer, *The Mexican War*, 249.

⁵³ The *Ohio*, at 2,757 tons, was Perry's largest ship. It was 197 feet long and carried a crew of 820 men. Its armament included twelve 8-inch shell guns, twenty-eight 42-pounders, and forty-four 32-pounders. See Bauer, *Surfboats and Horse Marines*, Appendices, 256.

British, French, and Spanish warships observing the action. Though Tattall's conduct bordered on insubordination, Perry felt compelled to ask his commanders to "express to the crews his sense of their gallantry."⁵⁴

Lee had the naval battery—which some maps refer to it as "Battery #5" - ready by the twenty-fourth. The six guns that Perry furnished for his battery, according to one historian, were the heaviest guns "ever before mounted in siege." Three were long thirty-two pounders (firing 32-pound solid shot), each weighing 6300 pounds. The other three were Paixhans, a French designed gun which delivered an accurate horizontal fire of 8-inch sixty-eight-pound explosive shells. Lee transferred the battery to its naval commander, Captain John Aulick, and it went into action on the morning of the twenty-fourth. That day joint artillery fire continued to bombard Veracruz until the naval battery expended its ammunition at 1500 hours. Army fire continued. Since the naval battery had attracted much of the counterfire from the Mexican cannons, it had to be repaired and supplied during the night. Before first light on the twenty-fifth Perry sent Captain Mayo to relieve Aulick with a new crew and Mayo resumed firing.⁵⁵

The combined army and navy batteries had a devastating effect on the city and fort. Large gashes appeared in the city's walls (although not in the fort) and at mid-afternoon of the twenty-fifth Captain Mayo observed many of the Mexican gunners leaving their gun positions. Mayo rode back to Scott and told him he thought the Mexicans had quit the fight. This was not quite true, since in a few minutes they briefly opened fire again. But the battle was over. The Mexican's fire ceased, and the foreign consuls in the city sent word out that they now desired safe passage and requested that the women and children also be allowed to leave. Scott quickly refused, reminding them that they had their chance, and stating that he would now only treat with General Morales, and his terms were a complete surrender. Morales feigned sickness, apparently to save face, and appointed General Juan Landero to negotiate a surrender with Scott's representatives.⁵⁶

Negotiations took a day and terms were agreed upon late on the twenty-sixth of March. On the morning of the twenty-eighth the Mexican garrisons from Veracruz city and San Juan de Ulúa marched out with military honors and stacked arms in front of the assembled American army. The enlisted men were paroled on condition they not take up arms again against United States forces. The officers remained prisoners with the exception of some forty who were sent to the capital to encourage the government to seek peace. The security of the people and their property were

⁵⁴ Morrison, "Old Bruin," 218.

⁵⁵ Eisenhower, *So Far From God*, 263; Don E. Houston, "The Superiority of American Artillery," in *The Mexican War: Changing Interpretations*, Odie B. Faulk and Joseph A. Stout, Jr., eds. (Chicago: The Swallow Press, 1973), 106; Elliot, *Winfield Scott*, 458-59.

⁵⁶ The Mexican negotiating team consisted of Colonels Jose Gutierrez de Villanueva and Pedro Manuel Herrera and Lt. Colonel Manuel Robles; the American team was General Worth, Brigadier Gideon Pillow, Colonel Totten, Captain Aulick, and Commander Alexander Slidell Mackenzie, Perry's brother-in-law who was fluent in Spanish. Bauer, *Surfboats and Horse Marines*, 96; Dufour, *The Mexican War*, 209; Hitchcock, *Fifty Years in Camp and Field*, 246-247; *Memoirs of Lieut. General Scott*, 2:427-28.

guaranteed. Scott issued a proclamation guaranteeing freedom of religion, promising the people that they would be compensated for all damage, and informing them that, "Americans are not your enemies, but only the enemies of those who misgoverned you, and brought about this unnatural war."⁵⁷

The capitulation marked the end of a remarkable operation in American military annals. Although the largest amphibious operation of the United States prior to World War II it was completed with relatively few casualties on both sides. This was due partly to the Mexican military's baffling decision not to oppose the assault at the beach, where even a modest opposing force could have brought high casualties, and partly due to Winfield Scott's strategy of siege warfare instead of infantry assault. He would later comment that it was an "economy of life, by means of head-work." Mexican casualty figures vary by accounts from 200 to 1,000 killed, but most claims are in the lower range. Scott lost 13 killed in action and 55 wounded. The landing of over 10,000 troops ashore in wooden boats over five hours without one loss was remarkable in itself. The operation surely suffered in its planning phase, adversely affected by the indecision and partisan politics President Polk. Even selecting a commander was done in an unprofessional and roundabout manner. But in the end the best man got the job, and solid strategic planning was done by him, much of it joint in nature. Scott consulted Conner's reports—both the intelligence he provided and his concrete recommendations for the landing, siege, and subsequent campaign to the interior—throughout his strategic and operational planning for Veracruz. The landing and siege operation were clearly joint undertakings, from the initial positioning of the army and navy ships, to the reconnaissance of Veracruz, to the landing, and finally to the Army-Navy bombardment itself.⁵⁸

Scott was not reluctant to credit the Navy's role. On March 30, he issued General Order Number 80. It read: "Thanks higher than those of the general-in-chief have also been earned by the entire Home Squadron, under the successive orders of Commodores Conner and Perry, for prompt, cheerful, and able assistance from the arrival of the army off this coast."

Years after the war he would praise the Navy and inter-service cooperation in his memoirs. His views were reinforced by his erstwhile ally and chief, President Polk, as cited at the beginning of this study, and by Secretary of the Navy John Mason, who remarked in the December after Veracruz that the "combined operations were conducted with the highest skill and courage." Mason, in his report to Congress, stated that the "entire operation, from the landing of the troops...to the surrender...brought the army and navy into the closest contact." The "courage and skill displayed," the Secretary stated, "were not more honorable to both, than the perfect harmony which prevailed."⁵⁹

Veracruz was the Normandy of the nineteenth century. It opened the way for a

⁵⁷ Eisenhower, *So Far From God*, 460-61; Elliot, *Winfield Scott*, 265.

⁵⁸ Dufour, *The Mexican War*, 210; Henry, *The Story of the Mexican War*, 270; McCaffrey, *Army of Manifest Destiny*, 170; *Memoirs of Lieut. General Scott*, 2:428.

⁵⁹ *Memoirs of Lieut. General Scott*, 2:429; "Report of the Secretary of the Navy" (J.Y. Mason), 6 December 1847. *Senate Document No. 1*, 30th Congress, 1st Session., 945-58.

historic campaign that led to great victories from Cerro Gordo to Mexico City. These battles "conquered a peace" that brought vast new territories into the nation and forever changed her relations with the Mexican republic.

SIX SILVER BANDS: COMPANY A, CORPS OF ENGINEERS IN THE MEXICAN WAR

Stephen R. Riese
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

The War between Mexico and the United States was a baptism by fire for the first permanent engineer unit in the U.S. Army. Officered by young, eager West Point graduates, Company A, Corps of Engineers, contributed greatly to America's successes in its first foreign war. After building a combat trail from Matamoros to Tampico, the engineer company saw action at Veracruz, Cerro Gordo, Contreras, Churubusco, Molino del Rey, Chapultepec and Mexico City. For its participation in these battles, the company was awarded six silver campaign bands to place on its guidon staff. The engineers performed a variety of missions in Mexico, not all of which are considered traditional engineer missions by today's standards. Five tasks in particular were common in Mexico: building or repairing roads; constructing fortifications; positioning artillery; conducting reconnaissance; and leading line units on the battlefield. While the first two, roadwork and fortifications, are typical engineer missions, the others are not. After briefly describing the formation of this new company, I will present four operations which demonstrate these five missions and conclude with some general observations.

WEST POINT: GENESIS

The United States established its military academy at West Point, New York, in 1802 as the nation's first engineering school. The academy was initially superintended by the Corps of Engineers, whose officers provided the majority of the instructors. These officers repeatedly called for a unit to assist in the practical instruction of engineering subjects; calls that went unanswered until the war with Mexico provided the impetus to form such a unit. At last, on May 15, 1846, two days after the formal declaration of war, Congress authorized "a company of sappers, miners, and pontoniers" to be formed at West Point.

By September 1846, officers had recruited seventy-one soldiers and Company

A, Corps of Engineers, set sail for Mexico. All but two of the enlisted men were native-born and all but four were raw recruits. The company's officers at this time were the commander, Captain Alexander J. Swift, Lieutenant Gustavus W. Smith, and a recently graduated cadet who Smith thought had potential, Brevet Second Lieutenant George B. McClellan. Captain Swift fell ill shortly after the company deployed and Lieutenant Smith commanded the company for the majority of the war. Lieutenant John G. Foster, a West Point classmate of McClellan, joined the company just prior to landing at Veracruz.¹

MATAMOROS: ROADWORK

The company's first engineer mission was also their most common: road construction. The existing roads in Mexico were often nothing more than mule trails, and engineers were called upon time and again to turn these trails into hasty roads which the wagons and artillery could negotiate. When the engineers first arrived in Mexico, line soldiers called them "the pick and shovel brigade." Engineer officers, however, advised the men of Company A that, much to the surprise of the infantry, when the time came for heavy work, details would be formed from line units under the control of engineer officers and soldiers. These details would be the real "pick and shovel brigades." The officers also "assured" the troops that when the time came for close fighting, the engineer company would be at the front

The most colorful example of this type of road work happened on January 2, 1847, while the company was marching and repairing the route from Matamoros to Tampico.² About noon, Lieutenant Smith rode ahead of General Robert Patterson's column to examine a difficult river crossing that had been reported. In Smith's words, "It looked ugly." The banks of the stream were over one hundred feet high and steep. The water was two to three feet deep and about a hundred yards wide. The bottom of the stream was solid, except for a few yards of soft mud near the far shore. Smith estimated it would take several hundred men, working for two or three days, to cut the banks down and prepare an ordinary road. He could not take that much time, however, as the column needed to pass before nightfall. Patterson provided Smith with eight hundred men, which Smith divided into two groups. McClellan supervised 300 men on the near shore and Smith took the other 500 to the far shore. Engineer soldiers distributed tools and supervised the work.

On each side, the work detail was further divided into three shifts. Smith told the first group to work as if "at a 'corn-shucking match', or as if the house was on fire." -- this was a race against time. If they gave it their all, Smith would release them in an hour. The second and third shifts took to the side of the road and waited their turn. The soldiers dug furiously in the hopes of being released within their hour. The bank preparation was completed by the third shift, less than three hours

¹ Gustavus W. Smith, *Company "A" Corps of Engineers, U.S.A., 1846-1848, in the Mexican War* (Willets Point, New York: The Battalion Press, 1896), 7-10.

² The story of the stream crossing is from Smith, *Company "A" Corps of Engineers*, 13-15, and *The Mexican War Diary of George B. McClellan*, ed. William Starr Meyers (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1917), 41.

after work began. Patterson was able to cross before dark.

Although successful, not everyone appreciated this technique. Volunteer officers complained afterwards that the wild activity had so stirred up their soldiers that it was several days before they got them all back in their proper places. A typical day's work was more regular and continuous.

The engineers later built hasty roads at Veracruz, Cerro Gordo, and Contreras. The usual work party was formed of about 200 soldiers of the line -- the limit was the number of tools in the engineer's train. Thus, the officer's prediction about who would form the "pick and shovel brigade" certainly came true.

VERACRUZ: FORTIFICATIONS AND ARTILLERY

General Winfield Scott's operations at Veracruz gave the engineers a chance to practice siege techniques learned at West Point. Scott's army surrounded the city along a line of investment. Between this line and the city, artillery batteries were placed to pound the city walls. As the situation permitted, these batteries were moved closer to the city. Other siegeworks were built to give the troops unrestricted movement and protection from the enemy. Two missions are of particular interest here: positioning artillery and constructing fortifications.³

Scott wanted to pound the garrison into submission with artillery fire, and he turned to his engineers to find the best locations for the batteries. The engineers, both in Company A and on the general's staff, explored the grounds inside the line of investment, chose the locations for the artillery, supervised the construction of the firing positions and connecting trenchworks, and saw to their repair after the works became damaged.

The engineers looked for several characteristics in potential battery locations. The site should be on a prolongation of a city street so that shots would cause damage throughout the length of the street. The site should be out of the range of effective fire from the heavily fortified Castillo de San Juan de Ullúa. Finally, the site should have a protected route to the rear. To further assist the company, Scott offered Smith the assistance of the engineer officer who had laid out the fortifications at Tampico, Lieutenant P.G.T. Beauregard. Other engineers on Scott's staff had been looking for positions as well, often assisted by enlisted soldiers from the engineer company. For example, engineer it was Captain Robert E. Lee who had found the location for the battery of six heavy naval guns.

Construction included not only the batteries but parallels--trenches that ran parallel to the walls of the city and often joined batteries--and saps--trenches extended between parallels. As with the other labor-intensive chores, preparing the batteries and digging trenches called for large work details from infantry and artillery units. Every engineer officer in Scott's army, except for the Chief Engineer, was detailed to oversee a part of the construction. Enlisted soldiers of the engineer company assisted each officer.

³ The story of siege operations at Veracruz is from Smith, *Company "A" Corp of Engineers*, 22-26, Meyers, *Mexican War Diary of George B. McClellan*, 58-67, and *With Beauregard in Mexico: The Mexican War Reminiscences of P.G.T. Beauregard*, ed., T. Harry Williams (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1956) 27-29.

The engineers, with large work parties from the line, also built fortifications at Puebla and dug-in batteries at Cerro Gordo and Chapultepec. In at least one other case, Contreras, engineer officers determined the firing positions for the artillery. This activity is notable since the construction of fortifications is classic engineer work but positioning artillery is not.

CERRO GORDO: RECONNAISSANCE

Reconnaissance is the mission that gave the engineers the most visibility among the senior commanders. Scott's glowing referrals to his "West Point engineers" are usually in the context of reconnaissance. The story of the engineers at Cerro Gordo is but one example.

Engineer activities at Cerro Gordo encountered some early challenges. The company of engineers fought their mules all the way from Veracruz to Cerro Gordo.⁴ Though the engineers eventually won, at the cost of two mule-handlers injured and three mules dead, they arrived on April 17, just before the battle began, and did not participate in any early reconnaissance missions. Nevertheless, Lee and Beauregard had been in the area for several days and discovered a path to the north of Cerro Gordo which they were able to make trafficable. This allowed General David E. Twiggs' division to attack unsuspecting Mexican defenders from the north.

When the main company finally arrived, Smith divided the company into two groups. McClellan took ten men and reported to Brigadier General Gideon J. Pillow for action in his brigade's fixing assault against the Mexican batteries. Smith and the remainder of the engineers went to work for Twiggs. That night, Smith's engineers and a large labor force from Twiggs' infantry constructed a battery atop La Atalaya. Because of the hard soil the position was not as elaborate as the fortifications at Veracruz.

With the battery finished and the guns emplaced, Smith further split his company. Ten men under Lee and eight men under Foster worked to open a road around the northern foot of La Atalaya. Smith took the remainder of the company and joined Colonel William S. Harney as part of the attacking force. Since Cerro Gordo has a relatively flat top and the Mexicans were defending some distance back from the crest, the Americans could not clearly see the enemy's lines. This situation forced Harney to stop short of the crest where his troops could not be seen. From this point, Smith went forward to reconnoiter the enemy's defenses. Smith reported that the Mexicans were not more than fifty yards from the friendly troops and that the fortifications were not well constructed. This reconnaissance was completed just in time. As Smith made his report to Harney, some Mexicans spotted the waiting Americans and opened fire.

The engineers then put away their shovels and pulled out their muskets -- they were now part of the attacking line. Harney had Smith take his men down the

⁴ The story of the engineers at Cerro Gordo is from Smith, *Company "A" Corps of Engineers*, 30-32, Williams, *With Beauregard in Mexico*, 32-39, and John S.D. Eisenhower, *So Far From God, The U.S. War with Mexico, 1846-1848* (New York: Random House, 1989), 277-8.

line to the left, in the direction of the fire. Here Smith directed two of the left-flank infantry companies to turn and, on Harney's order, charge. Soon the engineers and two infantry companies were engaged in a brief, but vigorous, struggle. The Americans routed the Mexicans from their cover and chased them back to their own main defensive line which gave way shortly thereafter.

CONTRERAS: LEADING THE WAY

As was the case at Cerro Gordo, engineer officers were called upon to direct the movement of line units at Contreras. This is the most curious of the engineers' missions. Were the engineers actually "leading" the infantry with some sort of command responsibility, or were they merely acting as battlefield guides? In most of these cases the exact relationship between engineer lieutenant and infantry commander is not clear. The following examples indicate both possibilities and leave the question open.

On August 19, Smith divided his company into five detachments and gave each a section of the road leading toward Padierna to repair. With most of the roadwork finished early in the afternoon, Twiggs moved toward Padierna, and came under artillery fire from that village. Twiggs responded to the Mexican guns with artillery of his own. Two engineers, Foster and McClellan, conducted the battery forward and placed it in position. Three of Twiggs' brigades moved to envelop the enemy battery, but instead became trapped at San Gerónimo between two Mexican forces, with little chance of escape over the broken terrain. One of these brigades, under Colonel George W. Morgan, lost its way. Morgan's brigade came upon Beaugard who was able to "pilot it to its destination." General Persifor F. Smith had been held in reserve and now moved his brigade into a defensive position near the rear of the trapped and disorganized brigades. He planned to attack the Mexican post at Padierna at 3:00 A.M. on the twentieth.⁵

While this maneuvering was going on, G.W. Smith gathered the engineer company and prepared them for the upcoming battle. Smith moved forward to reconnoiter the road to Padierna, while Lee examined the road to San Gerónimo. Smith had moved about four hundred yards forward when he heard firing to his front, and came upon McClellan, who just had his horse shot out from under him. The officers then rejoined the company and moved them to shelter. At this took place, G.W. Smith encountered Persifor Smith and asked the general to allow the engineer company to join his brigade. The senior Smith agreed and the engineers took up the lead of his column. At San Gerónimo, Smith took the engineer company to reconnoiter the village where they were able to see Santa Anna's forces advancing from the north. McClellan, who had been left with the firing battery, came forward to the company's location and the engineers joined the rifles for the following morning's attack.

Early on the morning of the twentieth, part of Brigadier General George Cadwalader's brigade became lost, causing confusion among the other units. Cadwalader asked Smith to temporarily turn command of his company over to McClellan, move forward, and take charge of the troops that had lost their way. He

⁵ Smith, *Company "A" Corp of Engineers*, 36-40; and Williams, *With Beaugard*, 41-59.

found the lost troops and soon had them sheltered and waiting for the attack. The engineer company then led the Rifle Regiment up a steep slope to the rear of the Mexican position. The enemy's attention was completely held by the brigade advancing to their front. Engineers and infantry rose, fired into the rear of the enemy, and rushed their position. The entire assault lasted seventeen minutes.

Many of the Mexicans retreated, and were pursued to the north. Beauregard had been placed in general charge of the movements of Smith's brigade for the battle, and directed a short pause to regroup. Twiggs arrived shortly thereafter and the pursuit was resumed. Meanwhile, Foster, with his detachment of engineers, "led the Ninth and Twelfth Regiments of Infantry in their attack on the flank of the retreating column at Contreras."⁶ After observing the engineers' work at Contreras Scott proclaimed: "if West Point had only produced the Corps of Engineers, the country ought to be proud of that institution."⁷

While these events leave questions as to whether the engineers were truly leading or merely guiding the troops, it became clear that, with the exception of the march from Veracruz to Cerro Gordo, the company always headed the lead division. This position was primarily a practical one, allowing the engineers to repair roads and build bridges ahead of the main column. Nevertheless, at least one conversion revealed that the engineer company had earned a greater reputation. While moving from General William J. Worth's division to Twiggs' division just before Contreras, Smith and McClellan overheard two of Worth's soldiers discussing the upcoming clash. Just after dawn, Smith heard one soldier say "We are not going to fight today: Twiggs' division is going to fight." The other soldier asked how he knew this. The first then pointed to Smith's company and told the second that the engineers were being sent back to take a different route with Twiggs' division -- thus Worth's division would not be fighting that day. McClellan thought the soldier's remark a terrific compliment and said: "The private soldiers of this army understand that we are sent where the hardest work and hardest fighting are to be done -- and always at the head of the leading division."⁸

OBSERVATIONS

As may be seen from the preceding examples, there were several common missions performed by the engineers during the War with Mexico: improving roads, constructing fortifications, positioning artillery, reconnoitering, and conducting the movement of line units. The first two of these, building fortifications and roadwork, are traditional engineer missions and do not require further explanation. The third, positioning artillery, initially struck me as odd. By today's standard, determining the firing locations for the artillery is an artilleryman's job. However, the Veracruz operation was a siege in the classic Vauban style, and that meant it was engineer

⁶ Smith, *Company "A" Corps of Engineers*, 40.

⁷ Williams, *With Beauregard*, 56.

⁸ Smith, *Company "A" Corps of Engineers*, 35.

business. The engineers were the experts on fortifications and terrain, and the location of the artillery was tied to both. Thus, it is reasonable that the engineers would position the batteries in some circumstances. The last two missions, reconnaissance and leading the infantry, require a closer look.

The reconnaissance that the engineers did was not always limited to what the army today calls engineer reconnaissance. Reconnoitering routes to assess trafficability and locate alternate routes is an expected engineer mission. At times however, such as at Cerro Gordo, Contreras, and Churubusco, the engineers gathered information about the disposition of enemy troops and made maneuver recommendations to line commanders. I initially expected this type of reconnaissance to be performed by scouts, not engineers. The infantry, however, employed their skirmishers in a security role rather than in an intelligence gathering role. Moreover, engineers had performed similar reconnaissance missions during the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812 and, in this light, it is reasonable to expect that the engineer company would conduct non-engineer reconnaissance.

The last of these missions, conducting the movement of line units, is the most difficult. Why were engineer officers given the tasks of maneuvering the infantry? Did their actions have command implications, or were the engineers merely battlefield guides? Here I have no definitive answers, only ideas. The words "led" and "directed" certainly do not imply "command," yet the engineers seemed to act as more than simple road guides. In some cases the engineer officers appear to have actually led the infantry into the close fight. In other cases they clearly provided directions and nothing more.

I suspect the true role of the engineers fell somewhere in between the two extremes. The engineer officers were all regulars, almost all West Point graduates, and each had the necessary training to lead such maneuvers. Because they were a special organization, the engineers enjoyed unusually direct access to the senior commanders. Additionally, the engineers were eager, reliable, and versatile. All of these attributes enabled the engineers to gain the trust of senior officers. Thus, when units became disorganized, such as Cadwalader's brigade at Contreras, an engineer officer might seem a natural choice to look to for help. In other cases, such as Cerro Gordo where Smith had just completed a reconnaissance, the engineers knew the terrain. It is somewhat reasonable in those cases to ask the engineer officer to lead the line unit. In any case, engineer officers leading line units is one area which deserves further study.

This short overview of engineer missions in the Mexican War shows some of the contributions made by the new company of sappers, miners and pontoniers. Their work was exciting, varied, and sometimes non-traditional. There is certainly room for more research in these areas, especially in the engineers' reconnaissance and battlefield leadership roles.

POSTSCRIPT

Company A, Corps of Engineers, has been on continuous active duty since 1846, and is the oldest and most decorated engineer company in the Army. The company saw action in the Civil War, the Philippine Insurrection, World War I, World War II, the Viet-Nam War and Desert Storm. Today the engineer company is stationed at Fort Riley, Kansas, as A Company, 1st Engineer Battalion.

SOLDIERS IN BLACK:
FATHER JOHN MCELROY AND FATHER ANTHONY REY
IN THE MEXICAN-AMERICAN WAR

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Despite Congress' overwhelming approval of Mr. Polk's war against Mexico in May 1846, all was not well among the American electorate and many of their representatives. Some people felt that Polk's bellicosity had less to do with assuaging national honor than in simply snatching Mexican territory for profit. Others saw an even more insidious motive in the president's aggressive moves. Given the predominant Anglo-Saxon Protestant character of the northern republic, there were those who believed that an American "Protestant Crusade" was to be inflicted on Catholic Mexico. Indeed, Mexicans themselves were convinced that this was one of the primary objectives of the invading armies.

President Polk no doubt shared many of the standard prejudices of his Protestant brethren; yet he was neither without political acumen, nor did he show any signs of being an anti-Catholic zealot. He was well aware that Mexican newspapers were already depicting the war as one of rapine and plunder by northern Anglo-Protestants against the people and the property the Roman Catholic Church. Such anti-American propaganda possibly could have been ignored if conditions in the United States had been different. The fact was, however, that soldiering was one of those onerous tasks that Yankees now preferred "Paddy" to do. Catholics in general, but Irishmen in particular, were by this time over-represented in the ranks of the United States Army. It has been estimated that approximately half of the regular army force that served in Mexico was not native born, and that Irishmen composed twenty-four percent of the enlisted ranks. Nearly all of these men were Roman Catholics.¹

¹ Robert Ryal Miller, *Shamrock and Sword: The Saint Patrick's Battalion in the U.S.-Mexican War* (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1989), 156. Also for the Irish and Catholic dimension of the war, see Sister Blanche Marie McEniry, *American*

The question of religion, therefore, was a consideration of President Polk, whether in terms of the hostile Mexicans or in terms of a growing number of his own American troops.

In May 1846, three Roman Catholic bishops went to Washington to confer with President Polk. Archbishop John Hughes of New York, Bishop Michael Potier of Mobile, and Archbishop Peter Kenrick of St. Louis had all been attending the Sixth Provincial Council of Baltimore. Upon the termination of the council, the three prelates made the short trip to Washington, and found themselves in the unusual situation of being welcome at the executive mansion.² Although it is widely believed that the president received all three of the bishops, Polk's diary entry of May 19, 1846, indicates a more intimate meeting that evening at 7:00 p.m. with just Archbishop Hughes and Secretary of State James Buchanan, who had actually issued the invitation. After Buchanan retired, Hughes and Polk spent the next hour together discussing the possibility of sending Catholic priests to accompany the army in Mexico.³ "I said to him," wrote Polk, "that the great object of my desiring to have this interview with him, was to ask whether some of the priests of the U.S. who spoke the Spanish language could be induced to accompany our army as chaplains...." Polk told Hughes that he wanted these priests to go to Mexico in advance of the army to give "assurance to the Catholic clergy in Mexico that under our constitution their religion and church property would be secure, and that so far from being violated, both would be protected by our army, and in this way to avoid their active hostility about the impending war."⁴

Although conspicuously absent from this conversation was the notion that the main purpose of chaplains was to provide spiritual succor to the soldiers, Archbishop Hughes was not a man to miss a golden opportunity because of theoretical technicalities. A canny Irishman from County Cavan, the Archbishop clearly understood the import of Polk's words. The chief executive of a Protestant country was asking an official of a persecuted church for assistance in time of war. Furthermore, the form of assistance, priestly service, was a request that the Church

Catholics in the War with Mexico (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America, 1937).

² McEniry, *American Catholics*, 47-49; David R. Dunigan, S.J., *A History of Boston College* (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1947), 12, 13; *The Woodstock Letters: A Record of Current Events and Historical Notes Connected with the Colleges and Missions of the Society of Jesus* (Woodstock, Maryland: Woodstock College, 1872-1969), 15:198-199. For a slightly different interpretation of the prelates' visit to Washington, see Richard Shaw, *Dagger John: The Unquiet Life and Times of Archbishop John Hughes of New York* (New York: Paulist Press, 1977), 213-220.

³ McEniry, *American Catholics*, 47-49; David R. Dunigan, S.J., *A History of Boston College*, 12, 13; *Woodstock Letters*, 15:198-199; Richard Shaw, *Dagger John: The Unquiet Life and Times of Archbishop John Hughes of New York*, 213-220.

⁴ *The Diary of James K. Polk During His Presidency, 1845-1849*, ed. Milo Milton Quaife (Chicago: A.C. McClurg & Co., 1910), 1:408-409.

could accept in good conscience as appropriate to its religious mission.⁵

Archbishop Hughes not only told the president that it was a good idea, but also promised that, since he was an acquaintance of the Archbishop of Mexico, he himself would visit Mexico if the president desired.⁶ Polk was suitably impressed by Hughes, finding him to be "a highly intelligent and agreeable man," and concluding that his interview with the prelate was one of "the most satisfying character."⁷ Hughes even accompanied Polk to a reception later that evening at which both dignitaries were mobbed and feted.

After the interview with President Polk, Archbishops Hughes and Kenrick, accompanied by Bishop Potier, traveled to nearby Georgetown College. There the prelates met with the Jesuit Provincial Rev. Peter Verhaegen, and broached the subject of sending some of his Jesuits to Mexico. In consultation with other priests, Verhaegen chose two men of considerable stature for the unenviable task: Father Anthony Rey, S.J., and Father John McElroy, S.J.⁸

Father Rey's list of accomplishments was already impressive. He was born in Lyons, France, in 1807, entered the Jesuit Novitiate in November 1827, and emigrated to the United States in 1840. He taught metaphysics and ethics in Georgetown for three years and then did five years of pastoral work before returning to Georgetown as secretary to the Provincial, vice-president of the college, and superior of the scholastics.⁹

Father McElroy's career was quite different. He was born in Ireland in 1782 and emigrated to America in 1803. He would not be ordained as a Jesuit until 1817, after a period of yeomanry work as cook, gardener and handyman for the Order. For over twenty years, McElroy was engaged in pastoral work in Frederick, Maryland. He had a special concern for, and ministry to, children and the oppressed railroad and canal workers of the area. In this capacity he once put down a riot with a stern and reasonable voice, and at another time he tended to the workers' physical and spiritual needs during a dreadful cholera epidemic. He was serving as pastor of Trinity Church in Georgetown when, in May 1846, he was notified by the Provincial of his new assignment with the United States Army.¹⁰ In essence, McElroy was a hard-working priest of the common man.

The two priests, so different in background and temperament, had just been informed of their new assignments when Secretary of War William Marcy contacted McElroy on behalf of the president, seeking his acceptance of the job. In a letter of

⁵ See Shaw, *Dagger John*, 213-220

⁶ *The Diary of James K Polk*, I:409.

⁷ *Diary of James K. Polk*, 410.

⁸ *Woodstock Letters*, 15:198.

⁹ McEniry, *American Catholics*, 55, 56.

¹⁰ *Woodstock letters*, 44:9; Esmerelda Boyle, *Father John McElroy: The Irish Priest* (Boston: Thomas McGill & Co., 1878), 9-20.

May 21, 1846, Marcy was honest about the quasi-official and somewhat delicate nature of the appointment.

It is proper that I should apprise you that the existing laws do not authorize the President to appoint and commission chaplains, but he has the authority to employ persons, to perform such duties as appertain to chaplains. Should you consent, as the President hopes you will, to visit the army and remain some time with it you will be allowed a reasonable compensation for expenses and services.¹¹

Within a few days, McElroy and Rey reported to Marcy and the president to accept their assignments and receive instructions on how to proceed. While the secretary and president were delighted, Marcy threw the question back to McElroy, asking what the priest planned for the army; it was a novel situation for all concerned. McElroy's one request was that a Spanish-speaking priest be found to accompany them, since neither he nor Rey were familiar with the language. The president agreed and told the secretary to facilitate it. Marcy also assured the men that they would be accepted by the proper military authorities.¹²

With that, an important aspect of both American church history and American military history came into being, half inspiration, half improvisation. Strictly speaking, McElroy and Rey were not the first Catholic chaplains to minister to American soldiers. During the Revolutionary War, a few priests had unofficially tended to specific units of Catholic soldiers and seamen.¹³ It would also be incorrect to designate McElroy and Rey the first "officially commissioned" Catholic chaplains in the U.S. Army, since they were not "commissioned" in the military sense of the word. Official commissions with officers' rank came only during the Civil War.¹⁴

¹¹ *Woodstock Letters*, 15:200.

¹² *Woodstock Letters*, 15:199-202.

¹³ John Tracy Ellis, ed., *Documents of American Catholic History 1493-1865, Vol 1* (Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier, 1987),376; *Woodstock Letters*, 70:466; Office of the Chief of Chaplains, *American Army Chaplaincy* (Washington, D.C.: The Chaplains Association, 1946),7,8; Roy J. Honeywell, *Chaplains of the United States Army* (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Chief of Chaplains, 1958),10-53. Jesuits have a long history in the US Navy as well as Army. This tradition culminated in the awarding of the Congressional Medal of Honor to Father Joseph T. O' Callahan, S. J., by President Harry Truman for heroic action aboard the *U.S.S. Franklin*, March 19, 1945. see Gerard F. Gihlin, *Jesuits as Chaplains in the Armed Forces 1917-1960* (Woodstock, Maryland: Woodstock College Press, 1961), and U.S. Department of the Navy, *Medal of Honor: the Navy 1861-1949*, (Washington D.C.: n.p., n.d.).

¹⁴ For a brief synopsis of the situation of Civil War chaplains, see Bell Irvin Wiley, " 'Holy Joes' of the Sixties: A Study of Civil War Chaplains " *Huntington Library Quarterly* 16 (1953); Rollin W. Quimby, "Congress and the Civil War Chaplaincy" *Civil War History* 10 (1964); Honeywell, *Chaplains*, 75-151. For an essential account of a Catholic chaplain's experiences during the war, see Very Rev. William Corby, C.S.C., *Memoirs of Chaplain Life: Three Years with the Irish Brigade in the Army of the Potomac* (Chicago: La Monte, O'Donnell, Printers, 1893).

What is significant about their chaplaincy is that they were given both secular and non-secular endorsement and that the president was willing to acknowledge and accept the fact of Catholicism in the United States Army. Polk need not have been a Catholic sympathizer to come around to this position. He was merely a pragmatic politician who recognized the considerable Catholic element in the rank and file, the burgeoning Catholic population at large, and the usefulness of chaplains to deflect Catholic criticism.

Whatever degree of importance he would have ascribed to the actual duties of chaplains, Polk did direct Marcy to order the military commanders to respect the priests' position and to allow Catholic soldiers to attend services. This in itself was a great step forward, since Catholic soldiers were often forced to attend Protestant services of whatever denomination their commanding officers preferred. These services were not uncommonly vicious tirades against the Catholic Church and its adherents. It does appear that such orders were contingent upon the particular prejudices of individual officers, not a mandate of the United States Army.¹⁵ That such clear violations of the federal constitution were commonplace indicates the degree of anti-Catholic bigotry that thoroughly suffused American society at mid-nineteenth century.

Polk's action took some degree of courage because he had no official power to employ chaplains for the army. According to law, the appointment of chaplains was at the behest of brigadier generals with the consent of their staffs and approval of the War Department.¹⁶ In reality, the priests' position lay halfway between unofficial emissaries of the president and civilian "contractors" of the government. Consequently, their success or failure would hinge on their own personal strength and good example, rather than on an exalted official position.

Some major obstacles mitigated against McElroy's and Rey's successful completion of their mission. Foremost were the problems of age and physical condition of the men. At age thirty-nine, Rey was scarcely a beardless youth, yet he was a quarter century younger than McElroy, who had just celebrated his sixty-fourth birthday. Ordinarily, the two priests' ages would have been no barrier to parish or college work, as great physical challenges are rarely encountered in the theological or academic realm. But a military chaplain is at all times a soldier as well as a man of God, and must share the great physical hardships of soldiering. Hospital chaplains may have a comparatively easier time of it, but chaplains who move with combat troops must be nearly as vigorous as the men themselves. This was obviously not the case with McElroy, who was not only too old for the job, but was neither in the best of health, probably owing to his weight. Nineteenth-century accounts of his life noted his "giant form,"¹⁷ a delicate manner of stating that he was considerably overweight.

In addition to McElroy's age and health, the fact that both he and Rey, Jesuits, were chosen over diocesan priests seems inexplicable. Centuries of anti-Catholic propaganda taught Protestants that among all the Catholics to be hated,

¹⁵ McEniry, *American Catholics*, 127-129; Shaw, *Dagger John*. 213.

¹⁶ McEniry, *American Catholics*, 127-129.

¹⁷ Boyle, *McElroy*, 19.

Jesuits topped the list. The men were depicted as secret agents of the pope, relentlessly plotting the overthrow of Protestant "liberal" governments and, more recently, waging a secret war against the patriotic Masons.¹⁸

For this reason, then, McElroy and Rey would have been more suspect than other clergy by the American anti-Catholics. For this reason too, Polk might have backed off of his proposal, but he did not. In fact, he received the two with every courtesy and sincerely wanted the mission to bear fruit. It could be that he was even delighted at the prospect. After all, if one needed a surreptitious job done, who better to get than men who already knew the secret agent business?

The bishops' reasoning is less understandable. The proximity of Georgetown to the White House was the apparent cause of the prelates turning to the Order, yet it is unclear if there was some other meaning to the selections of Jesuits for the task. Ultimately, the choice of McElroy and Rey may have been decided upon prestige alone. Both were exemplary churchmen with experience in varied situations. While Rey had spent much time in academics, McElroy had grappled with plagues, mobs, and pew rent, as well as with the teaching of the catechism to children. Perhaps the bishops felt that no matter what calamities befell the two in Mexico, they would acquit themselves well, and no shame would be reflected on the Church.

It was not until July 5, 1846 that the priests stepped ashore in Mexico. The next day, they found themselves in Matamoros. It was in this Mexican city that Father John McElroy would work for the next ten months. It was hardly a splendid environment. The houses were poor and the one church in town had been started fourteen years before and never finished. This same day, the priests called on the Padre Cura Rodriguez, and were received kindly. It appears that McElroy used this standard gesture of Church etiquette to begin the fulfillment of his secondary mission, which was the president's primary goal; that is, to reconcile with the Mexican clergy and to offer assurances that the Gringos were not out to suppress the Roman Catholic Church. The Cura did direct the two to lodgings, though McElroy and Rey were stunned when they were charged an astronomical ten dollars per week each for one dreadful room.¹⁹

Fathers McElroy and Rey next went to meet the General of the Army, Zachary Taylor. General Taylor was cordial and offered to be of service in any way possible. Leaving Taylor, the priests visited the two large tents on the bank of the Rio Grande which were being used as hospitals for approximately one hundred and fifty sick and wounded troops. McElroy's chaplaincy would revolve around these crude

¹⁸ James Hennesey, S.J. *American Catholics: A History of the Roman Catholic Community in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 55, 92. There are many studies of American anti-Catholicism and nativist thought. Standards include Ray Allen Billington, *The Protestant Crusade, 1800-1860: A Study of the Origins of American Nativism* (New York: Rinehart & Co., 1938) and John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925* (New York: Atheneum, 1975). Particularly interesting is a published dissertation by Sister Marie Leonore Fell, M.A., *The Foundations of Nativism in American Textbooks, 1783-1860* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University Press, 1941), which examines anti-Catholic propaganda that Protestant schoolchildren were exposed to in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

¹⁹ *Woodstock Letters*, 16:35-37.

"hospitals."²⁰

Father Rey's parish was destined to be a mobile one. At the beginning of August, Taylor moved his army south to Camargo, en route to a planned attack on Monterrey. Because Taylor's army included a considerable portion of Catholics, McElroy told Rey to accompany it while he remained behind with the wounded. Taylor and his staff arrived at Camargo on the eighth of August, but the climate was, if possible, even more unhealthy than Matamoros. It was in that atmosphere that Father Rey began his wartime ministry.²¹

After Rey's arrival at Comargo with Taylor's staff, he quickly set up shop at the local church and found both his masses and confessionals well attended by the Catholic soldiers.²² At the same time, back in Matamoros, Father McElroy found himself busy attending to the growing number of sick in the hospitals, though few of them were Catholic. He also set up in a small chapel where he could offer daily mass. On Sundays he found himself sometimes preaching to a less than packed house and had considerable difficulty getting the soldiers to confession and Holy Communion.²³

Fathers McElroy and Rey quickly discovered that their communication would be halting. It took nearly two weeks for them to receive each other's letters, with further correspondence passing before questions were answered from a previous letter. This time lapse made it extremely difficult for the men to confer on decisions that had to be made quickly.

One of the major decisions made under these difficult circumstances was that of Father Rey moving with the troops to Monterrey. Rey considered it the best thing to do, since two companies of dragoons were composed primarily of Germans and Irishmen. McElroy believed that Rey should probably continue to tend the troops and sick at Comargo, but left the decision to Rey's own discretion. McElroy's hospital duties were increasing, since the number of sick men continued to swell. He traveled to Fort Parades to teach the soldiers catechism, and he even convinced a Col. Clarke to order the Catholic troops to go to church. McElroy was delighted when he noted the heavier attendance at mass. He realized that he might have to move along to Monterrey if the hospital was relocated there, but he could not ride a horse himself. Due to his physical state, Father McElroy would have had to be conveyed in a wagon.²⁴

Father Rey did decide to move to Monterrey for various practical reasons, but he also saw the move as a question of honor for the Order. He wrote, "in case of resistance on the part of the Mexicans, my absence from the army would look very

²⁰ *Woodstock Letters*, 16:38.

²¹ *Woodstock Letters*, 16:38; K. Jack Bauer. *The Mexican War 1846-1848* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1974), 87-89.

²² *Woodstock Letters*, 17:4.

²³ *Woodstock Letters*, 16:38-39.

²⁴ *Woodstock Letters*, 17:5-6.

bad, and would certainly be blamed by our Rev. Fr. Superior."²⁵ Rey's decision turned out to be a fortuitous one for Taylor's soldiers. The September battle of Monterrey saw considerable American casualties, including non-Catholic officers whom Rey had befriended. Rey described the battle to McElroy, but still sought his blessing for the move. "You see, dear Father, that I did right in accompanying our army, and that I will be not less well engaged here than your Reverence is at Matamoras [*sic*]."²⁶

Through October 1846, Father McElroy continued with his duties as best he could. When he received permission from the local pastor to conduct marriage ceremonies, he was fully able to administer all of the sacraments. Although most of his time was still spent on hospital duty, he managed to swear a large number of men to the temperance pledge as well. Then, in early November, McElroy became so sick with fever that he missed celebrating mass for a week after the feast of All Saints.²⁷ On November 19, Father Rey visited Saltillo as a goodwill gesture, where he was cordially greeted by the local pastor and allowed to visit wounded soldiers, hearing their confessions and in one case, administering Extreme Unction. At his high mass that Sunday, over two hundred Mexicans attended, mingling freely with American officers and soldiers. Rey noted that the local church was a "mixture of all styles of architecture, without symmetry, but laden with a mass of sculptured ornaments."²⁸

Occasionally, as at Rey's mass, the soldiers and civilians of the two warring nations could celebrate God in a truly catholic sense. But such occasional civil behavior was overshadowed by the many atrocities committed by American soldiers, particularly volunteers, throughout the war. The very crimes that President Polk wished McElroy and Rey to deny were common occurrences. Even worse, offenders often went unpunished. Chapels and churches were robbed, convents were destroyed, and religious buildings were used as stables. Mexicans as a whole were generally despised, but Catholic churches were particular targets for bigots and the very opulence of the Spanish-style churches that Father Rey described only increased the Protestant soldiers' enmity.²⁹

Father Rey did not receive word of Father McElroy's illness until early December. at which time he advised McElroy to consider returning to the United States. Rey himself had been sick, along with a great number of the troops among whom he had been working. Both Rey and McElroy desired another American priest, as they had been promised by Polk, but Rey forged ahead by learning Spanish on his

²⁵ *Woodstock Letters*, 17:7.

²⁶ *Woodstock Letters*, 17:10.

²⁷ *Woodstock Letters*, 17:11-12.

²⁸ *Woodstock Letters*, 17:153.

²⁹ Bauer, *The Mexican War*, 84,85; Miller, *Shamrock and Sword*, 162; James M. McCaffrey, *Army of Manifest Destiny: The American Soldier in the Mexican War, 1846-1848* (New York: New York University Press, 1992), 71-72.

own accord.³⁰

McElroy continued his work with much difficulty. In December 1846, he had come to the conclusion that the two priests' work among the soldiers had done some good, but that Polk's intention for their mission was not to be. He wrote,

As for conciliating the natives by travelling among them, I believe we have done little: they seem

to increase in hostility, day by day, towards all Americans. Our Lord had other views than those of

the President in sending us here; I hope he will give us grace to carry them out for his own

honor.³¹

After six months in Mexico. McElroy saw that the goodwill campaign was an abysmal failure. The two Americans were cordially greeted by the indigenous churchmen, but Mexican priests could hardly have been expected to welcome the invading army.

Father Rey had planned to visit McElroy at the end of January 1847, but by the middle of February he had still not appeared and McElroy was frantic at his friend's unexplained absence.³² Unfortunately, McElroy's worst fears would prove to be true. Father Rey was dead. McElroy pieced together the circumstances of Rey's death only haphazardly and over a period of months. He first sought the assistance of Zachary Taylor in finding the missing priest. Taylor expressed his sorrow at the disappearance but rather ominously noted "it is impossible to determine whether he is a prisoner in the hands of the enemy, or has met a sadder fate."³³ Significantly, Taylor addressed this letter of April 13, 1847 to the Rev. John McElroy, Chaplain U.S.A.. Meanwhile, McElroy had already heard several accounts of Rey's death, which he forwarded to his superiors at Georgetown. What apparently happened is this: Father Rey left Monterrey on the appointed date, January 18. He proceeded on the route to Matamoros with his servant, but approximately twenty-five miles from Monterrey, near Marín, the two were met by a band of highway robbers who shot them both. The local townsfolk found and interred Rey's body, but as McElroy noted cryptically, "Soon after the town was set on fire by our volunteers and reduced to ashes."³⁴ Whether the holocaust at Marín was some sort of twisted "tribute" to Father Rey, or merely a run of the mill war crime, the loss of the hard-working priest was a terrible blow to those who knew him.

On April 12, 1847, Rev. Father Verhaegen ordered McElroy back to Georgetown College. He continued with devotions, masses, and baptisms until Sunday, May 9, when he left Matamoros, having spent ten months and five days in

³⁰ *Woodstock Letters*, 17:150, 154.

³¹ *Woodstock Letters*, 17:156.

³² *Woodstock Letters*, 17:158.

³³ *Woodstock Letters*, 17:162.

³⁴ *Woodstock Letters*, 16:226.

Mexico.³⁵ John McElroy returned to the United States for reassignment. He was almost constantly sick the entire time he was in Mexico and was well into his sixties in 1847, but there would be no sedentary retirement for McElroy. Still ahead was the crowning achievement of his life's work, the founding of Boston College in the early 1860s. He finally retired from active duty in 1864, but continued to hold retreats until his untimely death in 1877 at the tender age of ninety-five.³⁶

In later years, McElroy ruminated on what he and Rey had accomplished in Mexico. The intentions of Mr. Polk were not, and probably could not, be fulfilled. But McElroy viewed their religious mission as a successful one on at least two levels: the soldiers welcomed and appreciated their efforts and non-Catholics got to see the dauntless men in black in action. On this latter point, McElroy observed that many non-Catholics welcomed the priests' aid when sick or wounded and so he concluded,

It is in such functions, our religion becomes in their eyes, what it always was, a religion based upon charity, having for its divine authority the God of charity. Such examples from the

priesthood, dispel at once the calumnies so often reiterated against us and cause our Faith to be

viewed in a different light; and in what more glorious cause can life be sacrificed than in such

as I have described.³⁷

More good came of Father McElroy's and Father Rey's chaplaincy than McElroy could know. The two priests set an exemplary model in the Mexican War which their fellow Catholic chaplains would follow in many later conflicts. They ministered to Catholic and non-Catholic alike, to the enemy as well as their own people, regardless of political or religious differences. This ministry to all peoples had its practical effects, as non-believers would be much more likely to convert after having been assisted by a priest during the horrors of war. Yet there is every reason to believe that McElroy and Rey followed their universal course in accordance with the motto of the Society of Jesus, and as McElroy was often wont to say: *ad majorem Dei gloriam*.³⁸

³⁵ *Woodstock Letters*, 16:227.

³⁶ For a thorough account of McElroy's part in the founding of Boston College, see Dunigan, *A History of Boston College*, and Charles F. Donovan, S.J., David R. Dunigan, S.J. and Paul A. Fitzgerald, S.J., *A History of Boston College From the Beginnings to 1990* (Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts: The University Press of Boston College, 1990).

³⁷ *Woodstock Letters*, 16:228.

³⁸ "For the greater glory of God."

BUCKING AND GAGGING

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After traveling throughout the United States in the mid-1840s, Francis Wyse commented on the "human ingenuity" of American regular army officers in devising punishments for enlisted men. The English visitor asserted that "in the multitudinous means resorted to . . . the Americans certainly excel, beyond any other people."¹ Wyse was not alone in describing the peculiarities of discipline in Uncle Sam's army. For example, Captain Frederick Marryat, another English traveler, had similarly noted with apparent disgust the novel punishments in the U. S. Army a few years earlier.²

We commonly think of American or Yankee ingenuity in other senses, such as entrepreneurial inventiveness in creating useful products or the imagination of our Founding Fathers as reflected in our written Constitution. We do not ordinarily think that the citizens of the United States would apply their minds to figuring out new forms of punishment, particularly since the Eighth Amendment of the Constitution prohibits "cruel and unusual punishment." Still, the evidence suggests that not all punishments in use in the United States were imported from elsewhere. A 10-percent sample of general courts martial of regular army enlisted men during the Mexican-American War offers some evidence to support the notion of American inventiveness in punishment.³ Most of the common punishments -- fining, confining at hard labor,

¹ Francis Wyse, *America, Its Realities and Resources* (London: T.C. Newbry, 1846), 99.

² Frederick Marryat, *A Diary in America* (London: Longman, Orme, Brown, Green, & Longmans, 1839), 2:306.

³ The sample consists of 10 percent of all general courts martial of enlisted men that took place in Texas, New Mexico, California, and Mexico in the years 1846, 1847, and 1848. I drew my sample from the Registers of the Records of the Proceedings of the U. S. Army General Courts-Martial, 1809-1890, U.S. National Archives, Record Group 153, Microfilm M1105, roll 1, noting down the name of every tenth enlisted man and the corresponding court

the ball and chain, drumming out of the service, tattooing, flogging, and reducing in grade -- each had historical origins outside the United States. Leaving aside fines and confinement, the ball and chain cropped up in the largest share of the punishments for convicted regular army soldiers -- roughly 20 percent -- while flogging was at least part of the punishment in 15 percent. Still another 15 percent faced the penalty of carrying some kind of weight in a circle for a fixed period of time. Judging from Captain Marryat's remarks as an English observer, this penalty may have been a peculiarly American punishment.⁴

The focus of this paper is on a form of punishment that appeared in the sentences of only two of the nearly two-hundred general courts martial in the 10-percent sample. A general court martial at Orizaba in the spring of 1848 sentenced a German-born private who required the services of an interpreter during the trial to be "bucked" and "placed on the head of a barrel" for two hours a day for one week.⁵ Also in the spring of 1848 at Vera Cruz, a general court martial sentenced an Irish-born soldier to be "bucked" for six hours a day, two hours at a time, for one week.⁶ Though bucking appeared only in these two cases, some evidence suggests that it was much more common in garrison and regimental courts martial. Unfortunately we have all general courts martial, but the records of lower level courts martial have not been preserved.

Bucking figured prominently in the Mexican-American War, particularly in conjunction with gagging. The term "bucking and gagging" appears to have first come into use during this time frame as two separate punishments were fused together. I will first explain what these punishments were. Second, I will explore the origins of bucking. Third, I will look at its place in the Mexican-American War. Lastly, I will briefly consider the continuation of bucking in the postwar years. Throughout the focus will be principally

martial number. I then discarded from this list all volunteers and those who faced courts martial away from the Mexican-American War theater. I then looked at the actual court martial records at the National Archives. Altogether the sample consisted of 194 general courts martial, included 21 cases resulting in acquittal or dismissal of the case. The ultimate penalty was the fate of 5 men sentenced to be hanged. At least 90 percent of the courts martial took place in Mexico, including 14 at Matamoros. The leading locations were: Tacubaya, 39; Mexico City, 28; and Monterrey, 25. So far as possible, I also located personal information about the soldiers from the U. S. Army Registers of Enlistment, U.S. National Archives, Microfilm M233. Approximately half of the soldiers were of foreign birth.

⁴ Marryat, *Diary in America*, 2: 306.

⁵ Private Michael Klugg, 2d Dragoon Regiment, General Court Martial File FF102, Orizaba, 9 March 1848; U.S. National Archives, Record Group 153.

⁶ Private John Martin, 1st Artillery Regiment, General Court Martial File FF146, Vera Cruz, 22 May 1848; U.S. National Archives, Record Group 153.

on bucking and only secondarily on gagging.

First of all, what was bucking? A dragoon private in the Second Seminole War in the late 1830s provided one description of bucking: "The culprit is setting on his asse, his hands brought down between his knees, a cord used in tying his wrists and a heavy stick run under his hams through his arms."⁷ A sergeant offered an even simpler description early in the 1840s: "The hands are tied close down to the knees, and a piece of wood run under him to hold him in that position."⁸ Private Samuel Chamberlain, a dragoon who served in the Mexican War, drew a sketch of several soldiers lined up in a row and all bucked with a single tent pole, rather than just a stick of wood.⁹ Here we should note that Chamberlain's drawing shows the arms outside the knees rather than between the knees as suggested by the first definition from the Second Seminole War. Regardless of the situation of the arms, the position is uncomfortable particularly if continued any longer than a few minutes.

Bucking may have been uncomfortable or even painful to the victim, but the associated punishment of gagging was torturous. Samuel H. Walker, who served as an enlisted man in a volunteer unit during the Second Seminole War, described a gag as "a round piece of wood, or iron bolt, which is forced between the teeth and pushed back until the mouth is stretched to an enormous size and fastened with a cord around the back of the head." Though Walker did not explicitly refer to bucking, he did observe that gagged soldiers were ordinarily tied or ironed "so that it is impossible for them to remove the gag."¹⁰ Private Samuel Chamberlain, who was gagged with a large tent pin, wrote that it caused him "intense pain." He added, "I was suffering greatly: the gag spread my mouth to its extent, causing a violent pain in my jaws, while I was afflicted with a throbbing headache. I felt I could not endure it much longer, that I would soon go mad with my horrid sufferings.... When the huge gag was taken out of my mouth my jaws snapped together, giving me such a severe twinge of anguish that I fainted, but I was brought to by the free applicator of stimulants."¹¹ Mayne Reid, a novelist who served in a volunteer unit in the Mexican-American War, described a scene in which one of his characters tells of how a bayonet gag was "jerked . . . roughly from my mouth, almost dislocating my jaw. The power of speech was gone. I could not, if I had wished it, have uttered an intelligible

⁷ Felix P. McGaughey, Jr., "The Squaw Kissing War: Bartholomew M. Lynch's Journal of the Second Seminole War, 1836-1839," (M. A. thesis, Florida State University, 1965), 211.

⁸ Private Barnard Kane, General Court Martial File DD112, Fort Adams, Rhode Island, 11 March 1842; U. S. National Archives, Record Group 153.

⁹ Samuel Chamberlain, *My Confession: Recollections of a Rogue* (New York: Harper, 1956), 195.

¹⁰ S. H. Walker, *Florida and Seminole Wars* (Washington: n.p., 1840), 3.

¹¹ Chamberlain, *My Confession*, 196.

word."¹²

What were the origins of bucking and gagging? Here I would like to focus principally on bucking, since it appears to be the more distinctively American.

In the years following the War of 1812, regular army officers recognized that the peacetime military establishment was in crisis. At the center of the crisis was the enlisted man with his abuse of alcohol and his increasing tendency to desert. From the perspective of many if not most officers, the problem was that the law tied the hands of officers in disciplining the rank and file. One difficulty centered around the requirement that a general court martial panel consist of at least five commissioned officers. Most army forts had only one or two companies, so the division or department commander had to draw on officers from other posts to constitute a panel. The result was that an accused soldier did not enjoy the benefit of a speedy trial. Army officers wanted punishment that followed quickly on the heels of the crime.

A second difficulty was that army officers could not freely use flogging as could their counterparts in the navy. Congress outlawed flogging in the army in 1812, though it eventually reinstated the punishment again in 1833, but only for convicted deserters.¹³ Officers believed that enlisted men responded only to corporal punishment and felt unnecessarily restricted in their use of it.

As a consequence of these two difficulties, officers who desired to stay within the bounds of the law frequently found other means of disciplining their men. Unable to deal promptly and effectively with indiscipline through general or other types of courts martial, officers resorted to what amounted to non-judicial punishment, to use a contemporary term. In this way an officer could quickly punish a soldier for a crime and return him to duty without an extended period in confinement and the bureaucratic hassles of a court martial.

Officers also sought a way of handling soldiers who had become intoxicated, a not uncommon problem in an age when men drank astonishing amounts of hard liquor. Bucking and gagging afforded the ideal means of dealing with a drunken or belligerent soldier. An intoxicated enlisted man frequently resisted arrest and hurled verbal abuse at those restraining him. To simply throw the man into the guardhouse was not enough. But bucking and gagging both immobilized and silenced the unruly soldier. Furthermore, an army in the field did not have the luxury of a convenient guardhouse. Here we should note that both commissioned and noncommissioned officers probably did not regard bucking and gagging as a punishment, but rather simply as a means of restraining a potentially dangerous soldier, just as we might regard handcuffing someone today.

Many army punishments had their origins in Great Britain, but bucking apparently did not. The closest of many definitions of "buck" in *The Oxford English*

¹² Mayne Reid, *The Rifle Rangers: or, Adventures in Southern Mexico* (New York: Robert M. DeWitt, 1850), 247.

¹³ "An act making further provision for the army of the United States," 16 May 1812; *U. S. Statutes at Large* 2, sec. 7, 735, (12th Congress, 1st session). "An act to improve the condition of the non-commissioned officers and privates of the army and marine corps of the United States, and to prevent desertion," 2 March 1833; *U. S. Statutes at Large* 4, sec. 7, 648 (22nd Congress, 2nd session).

Dictionary is "to lay across a log," though this does not match what it meant in the U. S. Army. Still the *OED* provides a clue as to the possible origin of the word "buck." One of the definitions of the similar word "buckled" is "doubled or bent up, wrinkled, crumpled, knitted; bent in a double curve."¹⁴ This aptly describes the body position of the bucked soldier.

Bucking appears to have emerged in the Second Seminole as a non-judicial punishment or simply as a means of restraint. If we consult the standard dictionaries of Americanisms, they offer no uses of the terms "buck" or "bucked and gagged" before 1848, though the term buck dates from at least ten years earlier.¹⁵ Private Charles Gray who served throughout the 1820s in Florida, Georgia, and Louisiana never mentioned bucking, though he described a range of non-judicial punishments that he experienced or witnessed.¹⁶ Still, within a decade after his discharge, bucking had become commonplace. Writing in July 1839, just after his return from Florida, Private Bartholomew Lynch described bucking as "the system of punishment in great vogue in the U. S. Army."¹⁷ Nevertheless, when a sergeant testifying at a court martial at Fort Adams in 1842 used the term bucking, an officer on the panel had to ask what he meant.¹⁸ From these pieces of evidence, I conclude that bucking made its first appearance in the army in the 1830s.

My theory is that volunteer military organizations, such as the one to which Samuel Walker belonged, introduced the regular army to both bucking and gagging during the Second Seminole War. Again it is my belief that bucking was probably a punishment pioneered on southern plantations as a means of disciplining slaves.

Regardless of its origins and development, bucking and gagging was common in the army during the Mexican-American War, though the evidence of the widespread use of the punishment is at best spotty. I have not found a reference in writings by regular army officers to this form of punishment during that time frame. Even the men who served in the ranks do not devote a great deal of attention to the punishment. Two enlisted men -- one a regular and the other a volunteer -- include in their autobiographical works a song that has perpetuated the memory of bucking and gagging.

Come, all Yankee soldiers, give ear to my song.
It is a short ditty, 'twill not keep you long;

¹⁴ *The Oxford English Dictionary* (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), 1:1152.

¹⁵ Milford M. Mathews, ed., *A Dictionary of Americanisms on Historical Principles* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), 1:236; William Craigie and James Hulbert, eds., *A Dictionary of American-English on Historical Principles* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 1:327.

¹⁶ Charles Martin Gray, *The Old Soldier's Story* (Edgefield, SC: Edgefield Advertiser, 1868), *passim*.

¹⁷ McGaughy, "The Squaw Kissing War," 211.

¹⁸ Private Barnard Kane, General Court Martial File DD112.

It's of no use to fret on account of our luck,
We can laugh, drink, and sing yet in spite of the buck.

Derry down, &c.

"Sergeant, buck him, and gag him," our officers cry,
For each trifling offence which they happen to spy;

Till with bucking and gagging of Dick, Tom, and Bill,
Faith, the Mexican ranks they have helped to fill,

Derry down, &c.

The treatment they give us, as all of us know,
Is bucking and gagging for whipping the foe;

They buck us and gag us for malice or spite,
But they're glad to release us when going to fight,

Derry down, &c.

A poor soldier's tied up in the sun or the rain,
With a gag in his mouth till he's tortured with pain;

Why I'm bless'd, if the eagle we wear on our flag,
In its claws shouldn't carry a buck and a gag.

Derry down, &c.

J. Jacob Oswandel, who served in the First Pennsylvania Volunteers, includes the words of the song and refers to bucking and gagging in at least two other places in his personal narrative.¹⁹ George Ballentine of the First Artillery Regiment mentions bucking and gagging only when he includes the words of the song.²⁰ Although he does not include the words of the song, Private Samuel Chamberlain mentions bucking and gagging, but only on the occasion that he endured it as a nonjudicial punishment.²¹ Given the paucity of references to the punishment, we should not be surprised that historians have generally ignored it.

The one common theme through the writings of enlisted men is that officers physically abused the men in the ranks of the regular army. Their writings suggest

¹⁹ Jacob Oswandel, *Notes of the Mexican War. 1846-47-48* (Philadelphia: 1885), 212, 286, 475-476.

²⁰ George Ballentine, *Autobiography of an English Soldier in the United States Army* (New York: Stringer & Townsend, 1853), 246-247.

²¹ Samuel E. Chamberlain, *My Confession*, 194-196.

that officers were not fair and judicious in their treatment of their men, but rather they tended to be arbitrary and capricious. They illegally slapped, struck, or beat their men, sometimes using their swords. Bucking and gagging was simply another way that they attempted to discipline their men and insure subordination. The song suggests the resentment that enlisted men felt towards officers that were all too ready to buck and gag them. Both the song and the writings of enlisted men suggest that ill-treatment was a principal cause of desertion, and of course several of these deserters ended up serving in the Mexican army's San Patricio Brigade. American enlisted men tended to regard the ill-fated members of this brigade with some sympathy because they knew all too well that the desertions were in no small measure the consequence of heavy-handed officers.

Another theme of the "Bucking and Gagging" song relates to how the army motivated men. Armies have always employed fear of punishment in enforcing discipline, but in the 1840s the U. S. Army had simply not learned how to properly reward the men of the ranks. As the song says, men knew that they had won battles for their superiors, but the only thanks that they received was more capricious punishment.

Bucking and gagging continued to thrive after the Mexican-American War, despite the efforts of Major General Winfield Scott to end it. Early in 1853, he issued a general order forbidding bucking as a punishment. He noted that he regarded "such a mode of punishment, as far as he is able to comprehend its nature, as improper and not warranted by law and usage."²²

Did General Scott's fiat end bucking? Clearly it did not. One soldier who served in the Second Dragoons later in the decade wrote of his use of bucking and gagging to restrain a drunken soldier.²³ Another soldier serving about the same time in the First Cavalry included the words of the "Bucking and Gagging" song in his reminiscences, though he did not make it clear whether or not he actually witnessed its use.²⁴ Much evidence suggests that the punishment was commonplace in the Civil War.²⁵

²² General Order 3, dated 27 January 1853.

²³ Harold D. Langely, ed., *To Utah with the Dragoons and Glimpses of Life in Arizona and California, 1858-1859* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1974), 83-84. The dragoon, who wrote under the penname "Utah," went into some detail in describing bucking and gagging. "To "buck" a man, his wrists are first firmly bound together as close as possible. He is then placed in a sitting posture, and his knees are forced between his arms. A stick is then introduced between the bend of his legs and the bend of his arms; and he is unable to move without tumbling over on his back, which, from his helpless condition, is no pleasant feat to perform. "Gagging" is simply introducing a stick between his teeth and fastening it with strings behind his head. I have seen Infantry men "gagged" with a bayonet that was drawn so tight as to cut the corners of their mouths, and cause the blood to flow down on their coat collars."

²⁴ George A. Root, ed., "Extracts from Diary of Captain Lambert Bowman Wolfe," *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 1 (May 1932), 198.

²⁵ See, for example, Bell Irvin Wiley, *The Life of Billy Yank: The Common Soldier of the Union* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1952), 194, 200.

Bucking had obscure beginnings, but it was probably introduced into the U. S. Army during the Second Seminole War. Its spread as a punishment is difficult to trace, though evidence suggests that its use was widespread by the time of the Mexican-American War and continued to be so at least through the Civil War, despite efforts to prevent its use. On the one hand, the fewness of the references to "bucking and gagging" would seem to imply that it has little significance, but, on the other hand, those few references, including the "Bucking and Gagging" song, suggest that we just see the tip of the iceberg of this punishment.

COMPOSED OF A DIFFERENT MATERIAL:
DEMOCRACY, DISCIPLINE, AND THE MEXICAN WAR
VOLUNTEER

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Volunteers comprised the majority of American soldiers in the Mexican War. The fact is, 73% of the American military force raised for the Mexican War were volunteers. Most historians, however, have concentrated on the activities of the regular army during the war with Mexico. Studies of Robert E. Lee, George B. McClellan, Ulysses S. Grant, and others, often glamorize West Point alumni and the role of the United States Military Academy in the American victory. Contemporary letters and diaries of regular officers are filled with comments ridiculing citizen-soldiers. "Mohawks" and "Mustangs" are just two of the irreverent terms used to describe volunteers. This contempt for volunteers has been passed down through the literature, where it still persists. In a recent work on the war by Robert Leckie, the well-known military historian continued the trend by titling one chapter "U.S. Volunteers: Vandals Vomited From Hell!" Citizen soldiers definitely lost the war of words generated by the rivalry between the two different corps.¹

The purpose of my paper is not to reopen debates over the merits of volunteers and regulars. There is little doubt that volunteers were at times a rowdy bunch who lacked the discipline characteristic of regulars. Both Mexican and American witnesses left many accounts that pictured volunteers in a less than flattering light. A murder here, a rape there, and a theft almost everywhere they went marked the advance of America's citizen-soldiers across Mexico. This paper

¹ *Journals of the Late Brevet Major Philip Norbourne Barbour, Captain in the 3rd Regiment, United States Infantry, and his wife, Martha Isabella Hopkins Barbour*, ed. Rhoda Van Bibber Tanner Doubleday (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1936), 90; *The Mexican War Diary of George B. McClellan*, ed. William Starr Myers (Princeton: University of Princeton Press, 1917), 16, 28, 79; Robert Leckie, *From Sea To shining Sea: From the War of 1812 to the Mexican War; The Saga of American Expansion* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1993), 540-547.

examines the ideology prevalent among volunteers that caused them to gain (some might say to earn) a poor reputation as soldiers.

The image of the American fighting man had been well established by the time of the Mexican War. He was the minuteman chasing Gage's Redcoats back to Boston, the frontiersman defending his home against Tecumseh's braves, and the Kentuckian teaching Pakenham's veterans a bloody lesson at New Orleans. The American fighting man was not a soldier by trade. He spent his days in the fields and workshops of his country until called on to fight: only then did he take up arms and become a warrior. With Cincinnatus for their model, Americans exalted the citizen-soldier and relied on him as a major part of the nation's armed forces in time of need.²

Americans early on had developed a distrust of standing armies. The memory of Redcoated soldiers lodged in American homes was still fresh in their minds. Writers of the Constitution had intended for America to maintain a small regular military force. A nationwide militia composed of citizens was created to supplement the regular army during times of national emergency. Although the theory was sound, the plan failed in practice. Governors jealously guarded their roles as the commander-in-chiefs of the states' militias. They sometimes refused to cooperate with federal authorities, dooming combined military operations to failure. Furthermore, militia could only be called out for a period of three months and some states even forbade the use of their militias outside their states' boundaries. Untrained and unreliable, militia could not be counted on in times of war.

Volunteers, a class of troops who occupied a position between regulars and militia, provided one solution. State troops commanded by their own officers, volunteers were sworn into federal service and thereby fulfilled the role originally intended for militia. Volunteers, however, retained an allegiance to their communities and states that sometimes surpassed that pledged to the federal government. Even before the war with Mexico had begun, President James K. Polk had made his position regarding the military clear when he told Congress that "Our reliance for protection and defense of the land must be mainly on our citizen soldiers, who will be ready, as they have ever been ready in the times past, to rush with alacrity, at the call of their country, to her defense."³

Officers of volunteers quickly learned that they could not expect citizen-soldiers to behave like regulars. Volunteers expected to retain the privileges of citizenship and to be treated according to their status as free-born men. Lamented

² For a classic study of the image and reality of citizen-soldiers in the early nineteenth century, see Marcus Cunliffe, *Soldiers and Civilians: The Martial Spirit in America, 1775-1865*, (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1968).

³ John K. Mahon, *The American Militia: Decade of Decision, 1789-1800*, (Gainesville: University of Florida, 1960), 6-9; James D. Richardson, comp., *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1902*, (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of National Literature and Art, 1903), 4:413. For a study of the militia system during the first half of the nineteenth century, see Lyle D. Brundage, *The Organization, Administration, and Training of the United States Ordinary and Volunteer Militia, 1792-1861*. (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1958.)

one volunteer, "it is hard for a free American to accustom himself to the discipline and aristocracy of the army." William B. Campbell, colonel of the 1st Tennessee Infantry, explained that regular soldiers "are but machines and will obey implicitly without murmur. Hence it is an impossible task to drill and discipline an army of volunteers like the Regular Army." One volunteers officers, seen reasoning with instead of commanding his men, was overheard to say, "Freemen must not be insulted." Luther Giddings, major of the 2nd Ohio Infantry, stated, "The American volunteer is a thinking, feeling and often capricious being. He is not and never intends to become a mere moving and musket-holding *machine*."⁴

Most volunteers were intensely proud of their status as citizen-soldiers and believed that they should not be subjected to the same degree of discipline as regulars. Told that no man could leave his quarters to visit Puebla unless he first had written permission, Sergeant Thomas Barclay of the 2nd Pennsylvania Infantry skirted the "villainous order" by writing himself a pass. Barclay set down his philosophy on volunteers in his journal: "The policy of frequent role calling and drill is good when applied to regulars, but the volunteers should be exempt from all duties except such as are absolutely necessary. They are composed of a different material from the regulars and should be differently managed."⁵

Most volunteer officers recognized that their men could not be ruled with tight reigns. Major Giddings listed the qualities he thought a volunteer officer should possess: he should not assert his authority to enforce small issues; he should be as ready to offer encouragement as to find fault; he should be mindful of the comforts of his men; he should be friendly and strive to govern through affection instead of fear; and above all, he must set an example through his own behavior. Lew Wallace, a young lieutenant in the 1st Indiana infantry, noted one officer who evidently had a similar creed. Although "careless as a soldier," Major Henry S. Lane was esteemed by his men because, "No one knew better that he that with volunteers, at least, respect for an officer is more important than fear." Volunteers preferred their own officers to regulars, who they thought were "too strict." Sergeant Barclay admitted that in contests of will, "...We are generally more successful with our own officers."⁶

Commanding volunteers could be a vexing experience. Captain John Reese

⁴ "The Second Illinois in the Mexican War: Mexican War Letters of Adolphus Engelman, 1846-1847." trans. Otto B. Engelman, *Illinois State Historical Journal*, 26:1 (January 1934), 426; "Mexican War Letters of Col. William Bowen Campbell, of Tennessee, Written to Governor David Campbell, of Virginia, 1846-1847," ed. St. George L. Sioussat, *Tennessee Historical Magazine*, 1 (June 1915), 151; *The Mexican War Journal of Captain Franklin Smith*, ed. Joseph E. Chance (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1991), 147; Luther Giddings, *Sketches of the Campaign in Northern Mexico, 1846-7*, (New York: George G. Putnam and Company, 1853), 280.

⁵ *Volunteers: The Mexican War Journals of Private Richard Coulter and Sergeant Thomas Barclay, Company E, Second Pennsylvania Infantry*, ed. Alan Peskin, (Kent, Ohio: Kent State Press, 1991), 94, 100, 101, 226.

⁶ Giddings, *Sketches of the Campaign in Northern Mexico*, 281; Lewis Wallace, *Lew Wallace: An Autobiography*, (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1906), 1:117; *Volunteers*, 101.

Kenly of the 1st Battalion of Maryland Volunteers claimed that his men behaved like children who constantly sought attention: "One wanted a pen, another a sheet of paper, one wanted me to read a letter he had just received, another wanted me to write one for him, another wanted me to send his money home, another wanted me to keep it for him, one wanted a wafer, another ink, one complained that his uniform was too large, another that his was too small, one said that he was sick and wanted me to give him medicine, another that he couldn't find the surgeon." William P. Rogers, a captain in the 1st Mississippi, lamented that, "One who has never commanded a company of volunteers [sic] can form no idea of the unpleasantness of the life." Contemplating his situation as commander of a regiment of volunteers, Colonel Campbell reflected that, "It is too much trouble and responsibility for the honor, He that undertakes to command a volunteer Regt. will have his hands full."⁷

The independent attitude common among volunteers resulted from the democratic ideas they held. Volunteers officers, most often placed in their positions by the ballots of the men they commanded, found themselves in the awkward position of giving orders to relatives, friends, and neighbors. Major Giddings summed up the situation stating, "The position of an officer of volunteers, elected from the ranks, as the majority of us were, is one of peculiar delicacy. While he should not allow himself to forget that he owes his rank and power to the kindness of those he commands, he must yet know how to maintain discipline and exact obedience."⁸

Volunteers felt that they had a right to voice their opinions to the whom they had placed in office. Members of Captain Leander M. Cox's company of the 3rd Kentucky Infantry proposed to him and his lieutenant that "whenever a majority of the men in the com. petitioned either of them to resign [they] would do so." Cox ignored the suggestion. Comparing service in the regular and volunteers armies, Colonel Campbell declared, "In the volunteer service the officers are constantly subjected to a public opinion even in camp, which has an influence on him in spite of all the regulation of the army." He further explained that, "the soldiers are writing home constantly and can annoy an officer very much and then when the short term of service is over he goes back to a society composed in part of his soldiers." The fact that volunteer officers were accountable to their men, he concluded, explained why volunteers could never attain the same degree of discipline as found in the regular army.⁹

Crimes committed against Mexicans and fellow Americans marred the record of the volunteers in the Mexican War. Rowdy behavior occurred before the troops left American soil. One story in Niles' National Register, discussed the criminal acts and

⁷ John Reese Kenly, *Memoirs of a Maryland Volunteer*, (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippencott & Co., 1873), 25; "The Diary and Letters of William P. Rodgers, 1846-1863," ed. Eleanor Pace, *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, 32:4 (April 1929), 265; "Mexican War Letters of Col. William Bowen Campbell," 150, 151.

⁸ Giddings, *Sketches of the Campaign*, 280.

⁹ "Mexican War Journal of Leander M. Cox, Part I," ed. Charles F. Hinds, *Register of the Kentucky Historical Society*, 55:1 (1957), 34, 35; "Mexican War Letters of Col. William Bowen Campbell," 151.

exclaimed, "The public journals from the vicinity of routes taken by volunteers, bring to us, we are sorry to say, innumerable proofs of the lack of discipline and the prevalence not only of insubordination, but also of disgraceful rowdyism amongst the volunteers." The writer blamed the "rowdyism" on "lawless spirits" who had entered the ranks. Company D, 1st Pennsylvania Infantry, took the moniker "The Killers," a name that aptly described their behavior as they made their way to Mexico. Local militia units assembled to protect New Orleans when news spread that angry Mississippi volunteers had mutinied and were planning to sack the city. The story proved to be false, but it demonstrated how seriously people living along the route to war took the threat of rowdyism by volunteers.¹⁰

Many officers pondered the sad state of affairs and attempted to explain the cause of the poor conduct of their men. The adjutant of one regiment of Ohio volunteers was heard to say that although many volunteers were "honorable men at home," the war imbued them with "a strange sort of morality." Others, too, noticed this new morality. Reuben Davis, colonel of the 2nd Mississippi Rifles, concluded that once a recruit had taken the oath of allegiance to the United States and was mustered into the service of his country, a drastic transformation occurred. The volunteer immediately felt absolved of any obligation to God or man and, as a consequence, considered himself free to disregard every law of honesty with the exception of fidelity to the flag and his own personal courage. Captain Rogers considered this unpleasant aspect of volunteer service and concluded that, "Voluntiers [sic] I am satisfied will never do for an invading army--They will do well enough to defend their own firesides, but they can not endure the fatigues incident to an invading army." Rogers also believed volunteers unfit for foreign duty because it was too difficult "to keep them under proper discipline." Anxious to return to Tennessee and escape the burdens of a volunteer command, Colonel Campbell vowed that he would "never enter the service again as a volunteer unless it be to defend [his] native land, and [his] own hearth stone."¹¹

Punishment proved to be a sore spot for the rank and file volunteers who thought military justice too severe for citizen-soldiers. By the advent of the Mexican War, many states had outlawed corporal punishment, except for persons serving in the army, navy, or militia. Volunteers viewed such punishment to be inappropriate for free-born men and worked to subvert their officers. Friends of one man, who an unpopular officer ordered bucked and gagged, released the prisoner as soon as the

¹⁰ *Volunteers*, 242-243; *Niles' National Register*, 25 July 1846, 325-326; J. Jacob Oswaldell, *Notes of the Mexican War 1846-7-8*, (Philadelphia: n.p., 1885), 16, 30-31, 33, 37, 38, 43; *Daily Picayune* (New Orleans), 22, 30, 31 January 1847; *Courier* (New Orleans), 27, 28, 29 January; 1 February 1847.

¹¹ *Mexican War Journal of Captain Franklin Smith*, 66, 67; Reuben Davis, *Recollections of Mississippi and Mississippians*, (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin, and Company, 1890), 236; "Letters of William P. Rogers," 265; Campbell, "Mexican War Letters." 166. Davis, Rogers, and Campbell all commanded volunteers again during the Civil War: Davis briefly led state troops before being elected to serve Mississippi in the Confederate Congress; Rogers was killed at Corinth, Mississippi, at the head of the 2nd Texas Infantry; Campbell remained loyal to the Union and accepted a commission as brigadier general in the Federal Army.

officer turned his back. Sergeant Barclay, who witnessed the whipping of three regulars at Jalapa, reported that the sight disgusted the volunteers assembled to watch and actually created sympathy for the criminals. "The men were no doubt scoundrels who deserved punishment," be he thought it incredible that "in the nineteenth century an American citizen is subjected to the dishonor of being publicly whipped." Other forms of punishment also found disfavor among the volunteers. When General Caleb Cushing ordered a pair of stocks and a wooden punishment horse placed in his camp at Mexico City, volunteers carried the devices away under the cover of darkness and destroyed them. Always ready to poke fun at the expense of an unpopular officer, culprits then posted advertisements around the camp offering a reward for a "runaway horse." In a more serious incident involving a punishment horse, this time near Saltillo, volunteers went on a rampage that resulted in the death of one of the mob. The Paine Mutiny, as it came to be known, is an interesting study in volunteer attitudes towards their rights.¹²

Many discipline problems resulted from the fact that volunteers came to Mexico ready to fight and were in no mood to tolerate offense from anyone, Mexican or American. These men longed for battle, but most volunteers who arrived after the initial rush to war were destined to serve out their entire enlistments without partaking in a single engagement. Without Mexicans to battle, some volunteers took to fighting one another. On the night of September 7, 1846, a riot occurred near Camargo aboard the steamboat *Corvette* as two companies of the 1st Georgia Infantry battled each other over a choice spot on the ship's upper deck. Colonel Edward Baker arrived with a detachment of his regiment, the 4th Illinois Infantry, to quell the disturbance. Baker and several Georgians were injured, and at least one volunteer died before the contest ended. In another incident, a catfish became the focus of a dispute between Maryland and Ohio volunteers. Captain Kenly reported angry volunteers from both regiments seized loaded muskets before cooler heads prevailed. One Mississippi lieutenant survived both the battles of Monterey and Buena Vista only to lose a leg in a drunken escapade when he was shot while attempting to break his friends out of jail. Although other incidents occurred where groups of volunteers battled each other en masse, they usually maimed and killed their fellow citizens in private disputes.¹³

As Sergeant Barclay contended, volunteers certainly were composed of a different material than the regulars of the Old Establishment. Reared in Jacksonian

¹² *Volunteers*, 97, 250, 258; *Message from the President of the United States in answer to a Resolution of the Senate, calling for the proceedings of the court of inquiry convened at Saltillo, Mexico, January 12, 1848, for the purpose of obtaining full information relative to an alleged mutiny at Buena Vista, about the 15th August, 1847.* Senate Executive Document 62, 30th Congress, 1st Session.

¹³ Wilbur G. Kurtz, Jr., "The First Regiment of Georgia Volunteers in the Mexican War," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 27:4 (December 1943) 314-317; Kenly, *Memoirs*, 47-50; Report of Colonel Alexander Mitchell, *Compiled Service Record of the Mississippi Volunteers in the Mexican War*, United States National Archives, Microfilm Series M863, Roll No. 3; Although it is impossible to determine the number of volunteers killed or injured by other volunteers, readers frequently encounter such tales in diaries and newspapers of the period.

America, these men clung tightly to the privileges that had known in civilian life. They expected their elected officials, in this case their officers, to listen to their demands. When wronged, they relied on the press to air their grievances. Away from the watchful eye of family and friends, many of these men felt free to commit deplorable acts against both strangers and each other. When held accountable for their actions, volunteers condemned military courts as unjust and clamored for their right to a trial by a jury of their peers. Volunteers encountered a system of discipline that lacked the egalitarian notions that they had been accustomed to at home. The melding of democratic institutions and the army was never complete, as the "citizen" never really transformed into the "soldier." Although hard fighters when called to battle, volunteers adhered to their rights, making them difficult to control. Even with these flaws, however, the citizen-soldier remained the ideal fighting man in the mind of most 19th century Americans, if not to modern historians.

THE FIRST ALABAMA VOLUNTEERS: PORTRAIT OF A REGIMENT

Steven R. Butler,
Descendants of Mexican War Veterans

The origin of the First Alabama Regiment of Volunteers, which served during the war with Mexico, may be traced to a proclamation issued on May 10, 1846 by Alabama Governor Joshua Martin, on the advice of General William P. Gaines, commander of the Army's Western District. As Martin later explained, the proclamation appealed to patriotic citizens across the state, "to raise and organize volunteer companies in anticipation of a call which was expected to be made upon the State by the President." But, the chagrinned governor later reported, "The excitement that prevailed at that time throughout the country was such as to induce a large number of volunteer companies to proceed to Mobile without my order, where they were received and mustered into the service of the United States by the order of General Gaines, to serve for the term of six months." Altogether, these eager volunteers were sufficient to fill sixteen companies - but when the anticipated presidential requisition finally arrived, Alabama was asked to provide only a single regiment of ten companies. In addition, the May 13th Congressional declaration of war set the term of service for volunteers at no less than twelve months. Accordingly, Governor Martin was directed by the War Department to disband the troops who'd enlisted for six months service - but not before a battalion led by Lt. Colonel Phillip Raiford departed for Texas. There, it joined three independent companies raised even earlier - all of which were mustered out of service by General Taylor in August.¹

In the meantime, during June, the disbanded six-months volunteers were reorganized into nine companies and mustered into federal service for the longer term of twelve months. Afterward, on June 27, an election was held in the volunteer camp which resulted in John R. Coffey of Jackson County being chosen Colonel, although it appears he was not universally popular. Private Stephen Nunnalee of Company D, who wrote a brief memoir of his service some sixty years after the fact, described

¹ William Garrett, *Reminiscences of Public Men in Alabama* (Atlanta: Plantation Publishing Company's Press, 1872), 461-463.

Colonel Coffey as "unmilitary like in voice, and general make up." As a consequence, he added, some of the men were openly disrespectful, calling their commander "John," instead of addressing him by his military title.

On June 29, a tenth company reached Mobile and was immediately sworn into service. With the arrival of these new troops, the regiment numbered some 900 men, not including the Field and Staff.²

That same day, eight companies boarded the steamer *Fashion* for the short sea voyage to Texas. Those left behind followed later. Upon departure, only two companies wore any kind of uniform - Moore's Company or Company D, who styled themselves the "Eutaw Rangers," and Pickens' Company or Company A, who took the name "Greensboro Volunteers." According to Private Nunnalee, the latter "wore a green worsted frock suit" while the former sported "cottonade suits made by the ladies, with straw hats." After a journey of five days, during which two men died at sea, the regiment arrived at Brazos Santiago on the Fourth of July.³

Initially, these troops encamped on Brazos Island. This island site, "covered with musquite [*sic*] grass and brackish lagoons," offered the men "fine" surf bathing, but camp life here quickly became unbearable. Not only did the soldiers suffer from the heat, they were constantly pestered by flies and mosquitoes. And when the men began to suffer from dysentery, permission was sought, and granted, to move the regiment to higher ground along the Rio Grande. On July 20, 1846, they marched to the river. There, it appears the regiment was divided into two parts, with five companies remaining on the north bank and the other five crossing over to Mexico.⁴

The new camp on the north bank of the river was named "Camp Belknap," apparently to honor Lt. Colonel W. G. Belknap, an officer of the regular army. Situated about a mile from the river, on a long, narrow, and brushy rise of land, the site became home not only to Alabama regiment but to volunteers from Kentucky, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Maryland, the District of Columbia, Georgia, and Tennessee.

² Muster rolls: Regiment of Alabama Volunteers (Wither's), May-June 1846; First Alabama Regiment of Volunteers (Coffey's), June 1846; Field and Staff of the First Alabama Regiment, 27 June 1846; Company K, First Alabama Regiment, 29 June 1846, U.S. National Archives, Record Group 94, Entry 57; Thomas McAdory Owen, *History of Alabama and Dictionary of Alabama Biography* (Chicago: S. J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1921), Garrett, *Reminiscences of Public Men*, 461-463; Stephen F. Nunnalee, "Letter to Dr. W. S. Wyman from S. F. Nunnalee," *Alabama Historical Quarterly* 19 (1957): 416-433; Willis Brewer, *Alabama: Her History, Resources, War Record and Public Men* (Spartanburg, S.C.: The Reprint Company, 1975), reprint 1872 edition 588.

³ Nunnalee, "Letter to Dr. W.S. Wyman,"; *Niles' National Register*, 11 July 1846; Colonel John R. Coffey to Captain W. W. S. Bliss, 4 July 1846, Mexican War Correspondence, Military Records Division, Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery, Alabama.

⁴ Muster rolls: First Alabama Regiment of Volunteers, Company G, 28 May 1847; Company G; National Archives, First Alabama Regiment of Volunteers, Company H, 29 May 1847; First Alabama Regiment, 31 October 1846; "Coffey to Bliss," 4 July 1846; Nunnalee, "Letter to Dr. W.S Wyman," 419; John R. Kenly, *Memoirs of a Maryland Volunteer* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott and Co., 1873), 45.

Across the nearby Rio Grande, lay the little Mexican village of Burrita. It may have been there that the other five Alabama companies set up their tents at what was termed "Camp Alabama."

Camp Belknap at first offered welcome relief from the miseries of Brazos Island, but soon became equally unhealthful. Although the camp sat on the edge of a beautiful lagoon, the water was shallow and brackish, forcing soldiers to "lug water in camp kettles" from the Rio Grande. Unfortunately, this river water wasn't much better in terms of taste until Nunnalee and his comrades "discovered by putting a few slices of cactus leaf in our water that it soon became clear and palatable."⁵ In time, however, "the water and only hard tack and bacon soon caused...an epidemic of diarrhoea [sic], and many deaths occurred." Additional illnesses resulted from the inattention to sanitary conditions. During July and August 1846, while at Brazos Island and in their camps along the Rio Grande, no less than 31 of the Alabama volunteers died and no fewer than 73 were discharged on account of disability. The losses here were greater than at any other place the regiment would camp.⁶

Fortunately, the Alabama regiment's sojourn in the lower Rio Grande Valley was brief. In late August they were taken upriver to Camargo, where General Taylor was concentrating his forces for an attack on Monterrey. For a time, the Alabama regiment seemed destined to join this assault. The ordnance department was directed by Captain Bliss to "replace the arms of the 1st regiment Alabama volunteers, lately pronounced...as unserviceable." Cartridge boxes and bayonet scabbards, if deemed unserviceable, were replaced as well. After the first detachment of soldiers bound for Monterrey marched south, however, the Alabama regiment learned it was to be among the troops left behind to garrison Camargo. Genuinely disappointed at missing out on a chance to fight the enemy the regiment's officers lodged a protest but failed to change their lot.⁷

Once again, the Alabama troops found themselves battling illness. It is generally conceded that Camargo was possibly the worse place for an encampment that Zachary Taylor could have chosen. Located in a dry, dusty valley rimmed with rocks, the site was unbearably hot. It was also unhealthy, owing to the San Juan River being used by man and beast alike, not only for drinking water, but bathing and other purposes. The regimental report of the Alabama volunteers for September 1846 provides proof of the result of these unhealthful conditions. That month, no less than 15 Alabama men died and 24 were discharged. Another 192 men were reported sick.

⁵ Nunnalee, "Letter to Dr. W.S. Wyman," 419-421; *Niles' National Register*, 12 September 1846, 21. A letter from Camp Belknap mentions volunteers from Alabama, Ohio, Maryland and D. C., Georgia, and Tennessee; Benjamin F. Scribner, *Camp Life of a Volunteer* (Philadelphia: Grigg, Elliott & Co., 1847). Scribner, writing about Camp Belknap, mentions Indiana, Kentucky, Georgia and Illinois Volunteers.

⁶ Muster rolls, First Alabama Regiment of Volunteers, 31 October 1846; Nunnalee, "Letter," 420.

⁷ Captain W. W. S. Bliss, Special Order 126, 22 August 1846 in *House Executive Document 60*, 30th Congress, 1st Session, 524-525; Nunnalee, "Letter," 420-421..

However, despite Camargo's reputation during the Mexican War as being little better than a "yawning graveyard," the Alabamians had fewer losses there than in the camps along the lower Rio Grande.⁸

The stay at Comargo highlighted some of the limitations of Alabama's citizen soldiers. Private Nunnalee recalled, "some attention was given to drill and guard duty," but, "Compared to the military science of the present day, the efforts were farsical [sic] in the extreme." The fault, Nunnalee claimed, lay with the regiment's officers. If Coffey was unmilitary in voice and manner, he contended, few of the other officers were an improvement. "Col. Earle," wrote Private Stephen Nunnalee, "was all 'fire and tow,' and wanted everything done to a niceity [sic], but he lacked military skill and knowledge," while Captain Jones, "often laughed in his sleeve at some of the rare commands and general mixing up in the execution of maneuvers." Major Goode Bryan, a graduate of West Point "knew all about it, but seemed disgusted at the idea of ever seeing this material worked up into shape as 'food for gun powder.'" Regardless, observed Nunnalee, "all improved in the course of time."⁹

This lack of respect also extended to officers of the regular army. Following the departure of the last detachment for Monterrey, Company D - the so-called "Eutaw Rangers," were assigned the task of guarding the Quartermaster's depot at Camargo. Gathered there, according to Private Nunnalee, were a "half million dollar's worth of Army stores," under the charge of Captain Thomas W. Sherman of the 3rd Artillery. One day, some excitement broke out when a company of Texas cavalry started firing off their guns in camp. Believing they were under attack by Mexicans, Colonel Sherman panicked, exhorting his men to stay calm and not be scared. Nunnalee, realizing it was a false alarm, replied sarcastically, "Why, Captain, if I was half as badly frightened as you seem to be, I would take to the woods." Shortly after this incident, wrote the former soldier, "a wagon and pack train arrived and the stores were shipped to General Taylor's army, who had won a glorious victory at Monterey." Afterward, the "Eutaw Rangers" rejoined their regiment.¹⁰

As the Alabamians continued to tend to their sick and bury the dead, with "no prospect of being ordered to the front," morale suffered and the low regard for authority sank to new depths. One day, wrote the former soldier, Generals Pillow and Patterson had the Alabama regiment drawn up in formation, during which Pillow "made a pompous...speech full of vanity and reproaches." Afterward, as the men were being dismissed, one wag, whom Nunnalee identified as the company "pet," shouted out, "Three cheers for Corporal Pillow!" - an act which set off a round of "howling, cat-calls and ass braying." Infuriated by this brazen display of impertinence, Patterson immediately rode to the tent of Colonel Coffey where he gave the poor man, "a very

⁸ Robert Selph Henry, *The Story of the Mexican War* (Indianapolis and New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1950), 139; "Returns of First Regiment of Alabama Volunteers, Commanded by Col. Coffey, for the Month of September 1846," 1 October 1846, Mexican War Correspondence, Military Records Division, Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery, Alabama.

⁹ Nunnalee, "Letter," 420.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 421.

fervid...lecture, which he [the Colonel] took very meekly." Patterson "then dashed off and rejoined Pillow," but, "as they cleared the line of sentinels, the "pet" called...Three cheers for Sergeant Patterson, and the serenade was encored."¹¹

In November 1846, the regiment finally escaped this life of boredom. Following the taking of Tampico by the Navy, General Patterson ordered a battalion of regulars, and the Alabama volunteers, to proceed to Tampico, to garrison the city. At least four companies of the Alabama regiment departed Camargo on November 22. The following day, Company D boarded a steamboat bound for the mouth of the Rio Grande. Following General Patterson's farewell address from the upper deck, Captain Moore was relieved when his men attempted to make up for their previous display of disrespect by giving the General three genuine cheers. The first companies to leave for Tampico embarked aboard a steamer at Brazos Santiago on December 11, arriving on the sixteenth. The last to leave reached Tampico on the twenty-first. There, the Alabama men formed part of Quitman's brigade, with the entire garrison being under command of General Patterson.¹²

With this move, the Alabama regiment finally faced the prospect of military action. During the latter part of 1846, General Winfield Scott was charged by President Polk to head an invasion of central Mexico. Scott's plan was to land troops at Veracruz and from there, to follow the route to Mexico City traced three centuries earlier by Cortez. During February 1847 ships transported troops to Lobos Island, where Scott's forces were being held in readiness for the invasion. Near the end of the month, General Patterson departed for Lobos, leaving General Quitman in charge at Tampico.¹³ Finally, on March 7, 1846 Quitman boarded the steamer *New Orleans*, taking with him 1,000 men - including at least three companies of the First Alabama regiment, and set sail for Veracruz.

At least one soldier had a vivid memory of this opportunity to, at last, approach the war front. Years later, Stephen Nunnalee of Company D, described in detail the arrival at Veracruz on the morning of March 9:

"...Gen. Scott came along side in the Massachusetts...and asked how many troops...were aboard. Being answered he gave orders what position our vessel should take in the line, bearing down upon...the doomed city...in the evening...our troops began to land in large surf boats each holding 100 or 200 men. Gen. Worth's Division was the first to land, then other divisions in order. We landed just as the sun was setting behind the snow capped peaks of the distant Orizaba, the top shining like a sheet of silver.

The parade of the war vessels & transports, the waving of flags, the

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Major-General Zachary Taylor to Roger Jones, Adjutant General of the Army, 26 November 1846, 8 December 1846; Major-General Robert Patterson to William L. Marcy, Secretary of War, 8 December 1846, *House Executive Document 60*, 378-383; Muster rolls, First Alabama Regiment of Volunteers, 31 December 1846; Nunnalee, "Letter," 422; Robert E. May, *John A. Quitman: Old South Crusader* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1985), 172-173.

¹³ May, *John A. Quitman*, 172-173

bands playing, the Surf boats making the shore, was one of the grandest sights I ever witnessed. It was just twilight when our Surf boat scraped the sand, and as Capt. Moore (who had been unwell) was about to jump into the water, the Pet told him to straddle his neck and we landed him high and dry, without getting his feet wet. Our regiment formed a good line a few yards from the water's edge, stacked arms, and lay down for a night's rest. There was no passing through the lines. It was the stillest, most beautiful starlight night I ever beheld. Before midnight the moon, like a ball of fire seemed to come up out of the water..."¹⁴

An opportunity to fight also apparently motivated improvements to soldiering skills. During that first night ashore, someone sounded an alarm, thinking they were about to be attacked. "Every man sprang to his feet," wrote Stephen Nunnalee, "and at the order 'take arms,' there was but one clash. It was the first and best piece of manual work the Regiment ever did, and I believe the last." It proved to be a false alarm. "Everything was soon quiet," recalled the former soldier, "and we stacked arms again and lay down, as before to sleep."¹⁵

The next day, the Alabamians would receive other long-awaited experiences of warfare. ^As the troops marched up a hill to a new campsite, "the musket balls occasionally whizzing over our heads," wrote Private Nunnalee, "we got a full view of the city, forts, and castle, one and a half to two miles to our front." While standing on the crest of the hill, the soldier recalled, "several cannon shots were aimed at us, all falling short." One, said Nunnalee, fell about thirty feet in front of the company, "throwing the dust all over us." After the twenty-four pound ball rolled down a steep sand bank, one of the men went down to retrieve it. Nunnalee recalled that General Quitman, who was standing nearby, complimented them, saying, "You boys can stand cannon balls very well." Afterward, the regiment spotted a Mexican cavalryman on a nearby hill, who took a shot at the Alabamians. When he paused to remove his sombrero and wave it over his head, "a rifle cracked, and we saw him fall from his horse." The soldier thought the fallen man must have been an officer, "for that night there was great weeping and wailing in the city."

Nevertheless, these glimpses of action belied the role of the Alabama volunteers as support personnel. As General Scott surrounded Veracruz, the Alabamians were detailed to "work in the trenches, fill sand bags, and construct forts." Others were put to work hauling provisions from naval supply boats on the shore. Because provisions were low, some of the men went hunting, but rarely brought back anything. When the city capitulated after a three week siege, the Alabama volunteers were not among those who witnessed the March 29 surrender.¹⁶

Another foiled opportunity for action arose the following day. On March 30, the Alabama regiment, along with the Georgia and South Carolina volunteers, all under the command of General Quitman, were ordered to capture Alvarado--a town

¹⁴ Ibid., 424-5; Muster rolls, First Alabama Regiment of Volunteers, 30 April 1847.

¹⁵ Nunnalee, "Letter," 425.

¹⁶ Ibid., 425-426.

in the prosperous ranching region some sixty miles south of Veracruz. There, they hoped to find the cattle, horses, and mules badly needed by Scott's army. Following the coastline, the soldiers trudged for several days through deep sand along the water's edge. It was a hard march made worse by the heat and a scarcity of drinking water. But, before Quitman's force could reach Alvarado, Lt. Hunter of the U.S. steamer *Scourge*, exceeded his orders by sailing up the Madelin river and firing upon a small fort which guarded the city. This act served as an alert of the American approach and gave Mexican defenders time to move their livestock to the interior. Outraged, Commodore Perry had Lt. Hunter arrested, but Quitman appears to have taken the incident in stride. In any case, the expedition was not completely in vain. Quitman reported that after the nearby town of Tlacatalpa surrendered, he and Commodore Perry had negotiated the purchase of 500 horses and Quitman's brigade returned to Veracruz with this bounty on the April 6.¹⁷

This venture, however, would again prevent the Alabama volunteers from seeing the fiercest action. During their absence, the main body of the American army had marched inland, engaging a Mexican force in battle at Cerro Gordo on April 18th. Leaving Veracruz on the April 17, the Alabamians arrived too late to participate. They had to content themselves with bearing witness to the destruction the battle had wrought. At Santa Anna's hacienda, wrote Stephen Nunnalee, "it was sad to view the smashed furniture and magnificent mirrors. Many papers and documents were scattered over the floors." At Cerro Gordo itself the troops, "counted heaps of dead Mexicans, killed by our troops who attacked from the rear." Private Nunnalee reported that he and some others strayed from the column, coming upon some wounded, but armed, Mexican soldiers being tended by women. Their guns being unloaded, however, the young Alabamians were in no position to fight. Instead, "jabbered friendly excuses and let off with a few snarling frowns." Afterward, realizing "we had made a mistake," Nunnalee and his friends "loitered not until we joined our regiment as it emerged at the head of a gorge."¹⁸

The final stop for the Alabama regiment was the city of Jalapa. Arriving on April 23, the Alabamians would spend a brief two weeks in this town of "beautiful residences,.. splendid church, and pretty women." And it was in this setting that, on April 28, a brief skirmish resulted in the death of Private J. M. Joiner of Company F-- the only Alabama volunteer to die at the hands of the enemy. At this point, however, the marvels of Mexico and opportunity for action were overtaken by an awareness that the regiment's term of service had almost expired. Many of the twelve-months volunteers, had "seen the elephant" and began to think of home. All were asked by General Scott to re-enlist for the duration of the war, but declined. They did offer the General a compromise: three months or until Mexico City was

¹⁷ Nunnalee, "Letter," 425-426; May, *John A. Quitman*, 175-176; Brigadier-General John A. Quitman to Lieut. H. L. Scott, Asst. Adjt. General, Report of the Expedition to Alvarado, 7 April 1847, *House Executive Document 56*, 107-108.

¹⁸ Nunnalee, "Letter," 426.

taken. In the end, Scott decided to let them go home.¹⁹

This decision made, the regiment made a quick exit from Mexico. On May 3, 1847 General Scott ordered the departure of the Alabama regiment along with troops from Georgia, Illinois, Tennessee, Louisiana and Kentucky. Leaving Jalapa on May 7, the soldiers reached Veracruz on the May 11. Four days later, the first of the Alabama men to leave Mexico boarded the brig *Messenger* for the voyage to New Orleans. Others, including Nunnalee's company, left later aboard the steamer *Virginia*. "She was a slow coach, even with sail and steampower," recalled Nunnalee, "But we were moving towards home."²⁰

Upon reaching New Orleans on May 27, 1847, Company D was mustered out of service. Afterward, said Nunnalee, the men "took a bath, shaved, cut off our manes and tails, decked ourselves out in new suits, threw our lousy clothes away, and took to the street." There, said the former soldier, their appearance had been so dramatically altered that they had "to be introduced to each other when we met." Some of the regiment's companies, having arrived earlier, were mustered out on May 25. The last companies to reach New Orleans were discharged on May 28. Although the soldiers were paid at New Orleans, the sum was so small that there was little to take home or spend on the delights of the "Crescent City." As a result, not a few veterans were talked into selling their bounty land warrants, a government reward for their service, to unscrupulous speculators. Redeemable for 160 acres of land, these warrants were often disposed of for as little as \$50, an amount considerably less than their true worth.²¹

The newly discharged Alabama volunteers, numbering about 550 out of an original 900, appear not have spent more than a day or two in New Orleans before taking passage back home to Alabama. Stephen Nunnalee recalled that the remnants of his company reached Eutaw, the seat of Greene County on June 2, 1847, exactly "twelve months from the day we left for the army in Mexico." There, they were welcomed by a large crowd of citizens who had turned out to greet the returning soldiers, afterward treating them to "a public reception and dinner." No doubt the homecoming of the other companies of Alabama volunteers was similar.²²

¹⁹ Muster rolls: First Alabama Regiment of Volunteers, Company F, 27 May 1847; First Alabama Regiment of Volunteers, 30 April 1847; Nunnalee, "Letter," 428-429.

²⁰ Major-General Winfield Scott. General Order 135, 3 May 1847, *House Executive Document 60*, 956; Nunnalee, "Letter," 432; Muster rolls, First Alabama Regiment of Volunteers, May 1847.

²¹ *Ibid.*; Niles' *National Register*, 10 July 1847, 298-299.

²² Willis Brewer, *Alabama: Her History, Resources, War Record and Public Men* (Spartanburg, S.C.: The Reprint Company, 1975), 588. Reprint of the original 1872 edition; Nunnalee, "Letter," 432-433.

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