THE U.S. ARMY CAMPAIGNS of the MEXICAN WAR



GATEWAY SOUTH

THE CAMPAIGN for MONTERREY

Introduction

The Mexican War (1846–1848) was the U.S. Army's first experience waging an extended conflict in a foreign land. This brief war is often overlooked by casual students of history since it occurred so close to the American Civil War and is overshadowed by the latter's sheer size and scope. Yet, the Mexican War was instrumental in shaping the geographical boundaries of the United States. At the conclusion of this conflict, the U.S. had added some one million square miles of territory, including what today are the states of Texas, Arizona, New Mexico, and California, as well as portions of Colorado, Wyoming, Utah, and Nevada. This newly acquired land also became a battleground between advocates for the expansion of slavery and those who fought to prevent its spread. These sectional and political differences ripped the fabric of the union of states and eventually contributed to the start of the American Civil War, just thirteen years later. In addition, the Mexican War was a proving ground for a generation of U.S. Army leaders who as junior officers in Mexico learned the trade of war and latter applied those lessons to the Civil War.

The Mexican War lasted some twenty-six months from its first engagement through the withdrawal of American troops. Fighting took place over thousands of miles, from northern Mexico to Mexico City, and across New Mexico and California. During the conflict, the U.S. Army won a series of decisive conventional battles, all of which highlighted the value of U.S. Military Academy graduates who time and again paved the way for American victories. The Mexican War still has much to teach us about projecting force, conducting operations in hostile territory with a small force that is dwarfed by the local population, urban combat, the difficulties of occupation, and the courage and perseverance of individual soldiers. The following essay is one of eight planned in this series to provide an accessible and readable account of the U.S. Army's role and achievements in the conflict.

This brochure was prepared in the U.S. Army Center of Military History by Stephen A. Carney. I hope that this absorbing account, with its list of further readings, will stimulate further study and reflection. A complete list of the Center of Military History's available works is included on the Center's online catalog: *http://www.army.mil/cmh-pg/catalog/Brochure.htm.*

JOHN S. BROWN
Chief of Military History

Gateway South
The Campaign for Monterrey

Brig. Gen. Zachary Taylor, commander of the Army of Occupation, won decisive tactical victories against a numerically superior enemy at Palo Alto and Resaca de la Palma, Texas, on 8 and 9 May 1846, respectively, the opening battles of the Mexican War. The U.S. Army's light artillery dominated the action at Palo Alto where it devastated massed Mexican formations on the open field of battle. At Resaca de la Palma, Gen. Mariano Arista, the commander of Mexico's Army of the North, tried to adjust his tactics to minimize the dominance of Taylor's artillery by engaging the Americans in an area dominated by heavy underbrush. His efforts were to no avail. Junior officers and noncommissioned officers led squads of American soldiers against well-entrenched positions and successfully swept the Mexican force from the Texas side of the Rio Grande. In doing so, Taylor appeared to settle the boundary question that had been a source of contention since Texas won its independence in 1836. Additional operations were necessary, however, to pressure Mexico into accepting these results and ultimately into ceding California and other territories to the United States.

Strategic Setting

American Plans and Objectives

While the U.S. Army engaged enemy forces in battle, President James K. Polk and his administration were in the midst of their own struggle. The president had hoped that the American presence along the Rio Grande would be enough to compel Mexico into relinquishing its territorial claims north of the river and in California. Polk was wrong. His success in domestic politics had rested largely upon a propensity to intimidate his opponents and to use brinksmanship tactics, but these techniques produced unintended consequences when employed against Mexico. Instead, heavy-handed diplomacy caused Mexicans to rally in support of their government and to demand that it oppose American expansionism.

John Slidell, Polk's special emissary to Mexico, concluded that the Mexican government would not negotiate and war was the only option. When he returned to Washington on 8 May 1846 for consultations, neither he nor the president knew that the conflict had already started. By the time the two met, Taylor had defeated the Mexicans at Palo Alto. Polk's inner circle, including leading Senate Democrats such as John C. Calhoun and


OREGON TERRITORY
UNORGANIZED TERRITORY
Sonoma
9 Jul
Sutter's Fort
San Francisco
7 Jul
Monterey
Santa Barbara
4 Aug
San Gabriel
Los Angeles
13 Aug
San Pascual
29 Jul
San Diego
Colorado River
Gila River
Tucson
Fronteras
Bent's Fort
Pueblo
28 Jul
Taos
18 Aug–25 Sep
15 Aug
Albuquerque
Las Vegas
Santa Fe
Isleta
Peralta
Socorro
Brazito
El Paso del Norte
Boundary Claimed by Texas
Boundary Claimed by Mexico After 1836
Rio Grande
Chihuahua
Monclova
23 Sep
Parras
Saltillo
Mazatlan
San Luis Potosi
PACIFIC OCEAN
THE MEXICAN WAR
March–25 September 1846
U. S. Advance, Date Indicated
Disputed Territory
0 100 200 300 400
Miles



Thomas Hart Benton as well as his Secretary of War William L. Marcy, opposed declaring war on Mexico. The nation, they feared, was over committed. While the president maneuvered to alter the southern border, he was also at odds with England over the boundary between the Oregon Territory and British Canada. Great Britain and the United States had agreed in 1819 to share the region that later encompassed the states of Oregon and Washington and the Canadian province of British Columbia. By the early 1840s, however, more than five thousand Americans called the Willamette Valley home while the number of British subjects remained minuscule. Typically combative, Polk campaigned in 1844 on a policy of negotiating the northern divide between the two nations at 54 degrees 40 minutes of latitude. He wanted the entire Oregon territory for the United States and promised war if it could not be obtained peacefully. Calhoun and Benton feared that if talks with England also broke down, the small U.S. Army could not face a two-front war against both Mexico and the overwhelmingly powerful British Empire. Fortunately for Polk, Great Britain agreed to comprise at the 49th parallel without forcing a conflict.

Armed with Slidell's report, Polk went to his cabinet on 9 May to seek its recommendations

on whether to ask Congress for a declaration of war. All agreed except Secretary of Navy George Bancroft, who cited possible congressional opposition. That evening, Secretary of State James Buchanan worked with the president to draft a message to Congress. Before they adjourned for the night, however, a courier arrived with a dispatch from Taylor dated 26 April, which announced that the Mexicans had attacked and killed American soldiers. Polk immediately recalled the cabinet and all its members opted for war. Polk, Buchanan, and Bancroft then finished the president's declaration of war, which called upon Congress to raise fifty thousand volunteer troops and to appropriate $10 million for the conduct of hostilities. The House quickly approved an authorization bill and sent it to the Senate, which passed it on 13 May by a margin of forty to two with three abstentions. Polk signed it into law later that afternoon.

To reach the fifty thousand men authorized by Congress, the new law gave each state a quota of units to recruit. Volunteers had to provide their own uniforms and, if they joined a cavalry unit, their horses as well, but the government promised to reimburse them later for the cost of their mounts. Once a unit assembled, its men elected their own leaders. The state governors, who could appoint company and field grade officers, almost always allowed such informal methods to prevail. The president, however, appointed all generals and staff officers, subject to Senate approval. Once officially mustered into federal service, the units moved by sea to New Orleans and then by land to the Rio Grande.

At the same time, the legislation increased the authorized strength of the Regular Army by raising the number of privates in each company from forty-two to one hundred. In theory, the measure would have increased the Army to 15,540 men from its authorized size of 8,613, but the War Department never managed to obtain those manpower numbers for the ensuing campaign in Mexico.

While allowing an increase in manpower, the bill complicated matters considerably by permitting volunteers to sign-up at their discretion either for twelve months or for the duration of the war. Most chose to serve only one year. As a result, the U.S. forces in Mexico were constantly in a state of flux, with soldiers coming and going and volunteer regiments chronically undermanned. In addition, the $10 million in appropriations failed to ensure that each newly raised unit received the logistical support necessary for it to conduct operations inside enemy territory. This put a huge strain on the Quartermaster, the Subsistence, and the Ordnance Departments to provide basic necessities such as transportation, food, and ammunition.

With preparations underway to bolster the size of the American military, Polk, Marcy, and Maj. Gen. Winfield Scott, Commanding General of the United States Army, met on 14 May and began to formulate the

administration's objectives and military strategy. Polk and Marcy disliked Scott because of his Whig sympathies and his widely known ambition to win the presidency. Yet much of the planning fell to Scott, the finest American strategic thinker of the mid-nineteenth century, largely because Marcy was a poor administrator and Polk lacked military experience beyond his several years in the Tennessee militia before being elected to Congress. The president, who often immersed himself in detail, insisted on deciding even minor matters better left to his subordinates. His tendency quickly became apparent when Polk directed the War Department to lay out its plans on an assumption that the United States would win the conflict in less than six months. Scott argued that the president's timeframe was impossible. The Army needed more time to train the volunteers and provide sufficient logistical support to move large forces into Mexico. The judgment chagrined the president, but he eventually agreed.

As a result of these discussions, Polk agreed to the basic concepts outlined by Scott. The primary goals of the military action would be to firmly fix the southern boundary of the United States and to integrate California into the nation. To attain these objectives, Scott planned four simultaneous operations. First, Taylor would retain control of the forces along the Rio Grande and move south of the river as soon as practical. His troops would occupy as many states in northern Mexico as possible. His first target was the city of Monterrey,[1] the capital of Nuevo Leon, about 180 miles south and west of his current position in Matamoros, Mexico. By taking Monterrey, Taylor would open the avenues of advance southward toward Mexico City. Furthermore, pro-expansionists, such as Secretary of the Treasury Robert J. Walker, believed that the provinces of upper Mexico would welcome the U.S. Army as liberators. They argued that the region above Mexico City was only marginally tied to the Mexican government. The residents of northern Mexico would accept the protection of American forces. Walker's concept later developed into the "All Mexico Movement," which called for the United States to conquer and assimilate the entire country.

Second, the War Department ordered a column of thirty-four hundred men under the command of Brig. Gen. John E. Wool to march from San Antonio, Texas, to Chihuahua, in north-central Mexico. His command left the United States on 23 September 1846 on what proved to be a five-month expedition. Scott calculated that Wool's column would increase the American presence in the north of Mexico and support Taylor's operation.

[1] At the time of the battle, the city's name was spelled Monterey, the same as Monterey, California. Therefore, the U.S. Army campaign streamer uses the town's original spelling. Shortly after the battle, the spelling was changed to Monterrey. This brochure will use the current spelling, as do all recent academic works.



General Wool (National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution)

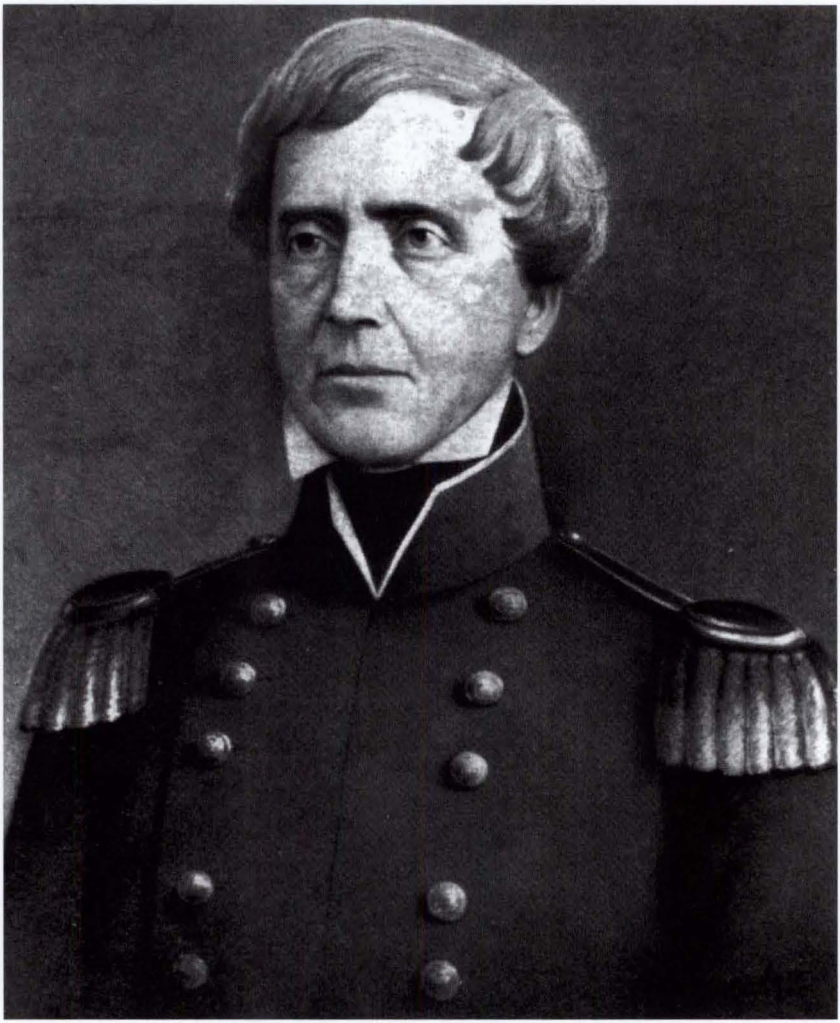
In case Taylor became the target of a Mexican counteroffensive, Wool could rush his men to assist. Wool's column, the Division of the Center, consisted of a small core of Regular Army companies from the 1st and 2d Dragoons, the 4th Artillery, and the 6th Infantry and of volunteer units from the 1st and 2d Illinois Infantry, the Arkansas Mounted Volunteers, the independent Company of Kentucky Mounted Volunteers, and the Independent Texas Rifle Company. Wool, a strict disciplinarian, instituted harsh measures to keep his twenty-nine hundred volunteers under control during their long march through Mexico. These forces provided a friendly if somewhat distant protection to Taylor's right flank and would prove important in the upcoming campaign for Buena Vista.

Third, Scott sent a column from Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, to San Diego, California, through the important commercial center of Santa Fe, in what is today New Mexico. Consisting of about two thousand troops under Col. Stephen W. Kearny, the force left Fort Leavenworth on 5 June 1846. The command included troopers from the 1st Dragoons, as well as several volunteer units – the 1st Missouri Mounted Volunteers, the St. Louis Volunteer Artillery, the Missouri Infantry Battalion, the Laclede Rangers, the 2d Missouri Volunteers, and the Mormon Battalion. The Mormon Battalion had been raised in Iowa after the Polk administration gave church leader Brigham Young authorization to recruit a battalion of volunteers to serve in California. A battle hardened cavalry commander, Kearny led his men on an arduous 1,700-mile march through deserts and snow-capped mountains. His epic journey was the most impressive strategic movement in the entire Mexican War and was crucial in Polk's plan to acquire California. Although Kearny reached the Pacific coast with only three hundred dragoons, having left the rest of his command in Santa Fe to administer what became the Territory of New Mexico, his troops contributed greatly to the conquest of California.

Fourth, Polk ordered the U.S. Navy to blockade ports on Mexico's Gulf and Pacific coasts to prevent arms and ammunition from entering the country from European sources. Although a difficult task, the effort would succeed in stemming most military shipments from abroad to Mexico. In addition, sailors and Marines participated in several ground campaigns, most notably capturing the Pacific ports of San Diego and Los Angeles. While local opposition forced them to relinquish control temporarily, a joint Army-Navy force under Kearny ultimately gained possession of all of California.

The Mexican Context

While the Americans prepared their plans, major changes were occurring in Mexico. The Ministry of War ordered General Arista before



Colonel Kearny (Library of Congress)

a court-martial following his defeats at Palo Alto and Resaca de la Palma. Lt. Gen. Pedro de Ampudia replaced him as commander of Mexico's Army of the North. Born in Havana, Cuba, in 1805, Ampudia joined the Spanish army on his native island. Serving in the Spanish military forces opposing Mexican independence in 1821, he quickly abandoned the losing side to fight with the victorious Mexicans. Subsequently making a career in the



General Ampudia (University of Texas at Austin)

Mexican army, Ampudia gained a reputation for cunning and cruelty. After suppressing a local uprising in the town of Oaxaca in 1844, he ordered the heads of several of the leaders boiled in oil and placed in the public square. Such tactics made him generally unpopular with many Mexicans, and he inspired more fear than confidence among his troops. Nevertheless, he was prepared to defend Monterrey with tenacity and vigor.

The return of Gen. Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna, however, constituted the most significant change. Ousted by a revolution in 1844, the enigmatic Mexican strongman had been an exile in Cuba when Polk became president in 1845. Santa Anna initiated secret negotiations with the United States in February 1846, hinting that if allowed safe passage back to Mexico, he would resume power and sell California and other territories Polk coveted to the United States. Polk agreed to the proposition and Santa Anna returned to the port town of Vera Cruz through the American blockade on 16 August 1846. Once there, he arranged a mass demonstration by his supporters, which forced the Mexican administration to reinstate him as General of the Army. With his official standing secure, he then reneged on his bargain with Polk and began rapid preparations for all-out war against the United States.

Preparations and Preliminary Operations

Concurrent with these events in Washington and Mexico City, Zachary Taylor prepared to follow up his early victories in Texas. Delayed for more than a week after Resaca de la Palma by insufficient transportation, he finally crossed the Rio Grande on 18 May 1846 upriver from Matamoros, which is located on the right bank of that river, opposite present-day Brownsville, Texas. His advance guard discovered that Arista's army had abandoned most of its wounded and had retreated southwest toward Monterrey. Taylor sent surgeons to care for the Mexican casualties, directed his men to pitch camp outside Matamoros, and promised the inhabitants that the U.S. Army would preserve their property and personal safety.

Shortly after the Army of Occupation completed its crossing, Col. William J. Worth (later Brig. Gen.), one of the vainest yet capable officers in the U.S. Army, took command of one of Taylor's divisions. Worth had served with Taylor's forces at Corpus Christi and at Fort Texas before the battle at Palo Alto, but had indulged in an angry dispute with his commander over his status. While at Corpus Christi, Taylor scheduled a review of the army and ordered Col. David E. Twiggs (later Brig. Gen.) to lead the formation because seniority made him the second ranking officer on the scene. The egotistical Worth, who held a brevet to the rank of brigadier general won during the Second Seminole War, had taken this as a personal insult. He



General Worth (Library of Congress)

insisted that he outranked Twiggs. Taylor canceled the parade, but when an appeal through the chain of command returned with an unfavorable ruling to Worth, the colonel resigned and prepared to return home, missing the opening battles as a result. Although displeased with Worth's conduct, Taylor recognized his military ability and reinstated him as a commander.

The largest adjustment to Taylor's force, however, came with the arrival of thousands of state militiamen and volunteers. Within days of arriving at

Matamoros, militia from Louisiana raced into Taylor's camp without even the most rudimentary supplies. The veteran commander of the Western Division, Brig. Gen. Edmund P. Gaines, also rushed troops to support the Army of Occupation, illegally usurping the authority of the president by mustering state militia into federal service on his own initiative. The War Department eventually sent the troops home and censured Gaines; but in the interim, Taylor had to feed, house, and arm some eleven thousand eager volunteers when he could barely support his four thousand Regular Army soldiers. The days of an all-Regular Army in Mexico had ended.

Problems stemming from this influx began almost immediately. The presence of the new troops shattered the Regular Army's basic routines. As more volunteers arrived, necessities such as food and fuel ran short. This lack of supplies—combined with the dullness of camp life, a dislike of the strict regime followed by the regulars, and a high incidence of illness—resulted in considerable friction between the citizen soldiers and the professionals. Volunteers died by the dozens from fevers and other ailments. Drunkenness flourished because alcohol provided an escape for volunteers who had signed up to fight, not to suffer from insufficient provisions in the sweltering heat of a Mexican summer. Brawls fueled by gambling, disputes over slavery between northern and southern soldiers, and general boredom broke out, as did violent confrontations between rough-hewn frontier Americans such as the Texas Rangers and the Mexican inhabitants of the area. Assault, theft, rape, and murder were common charges leveled against the volunteers.

While Taylor maintained unwavering discipline among his regulars, he was unable or unwilling to impose a similar control on the volunteers. In fact, he did little more than issue stern reminders that Mexican property and lives should be preserved and tried to keep volunteer units away from populated areas. The fact that volunteer officers frequently lacked the competence and temperament to train or control their men exacerbated the problem.

When regulars did attempt to instill order, it only led to increased resentment between the volunteers and the professionals. On at least two occasions, for example, unknown parties made attempts on the life of Capt. Braxton Bragg, an artillery battery commander whom the volunteers particularly disliked because of his abrasive and authoritarian style. In one incident, someone placed an 8-inch artillery shell under Bragg's cot with a trail of gun power leading out of his tent. The shell detonated while he slept. Although rattled, he escaped serious injury.

Polk's decision to exercise his prerogative to appoint the senior officers to the volunteer army directly from civilian life rather than move Regular Army officers to command positions in Mexico only aggravated the already volatile situation. Regular Army officers who had toiled at the same rank

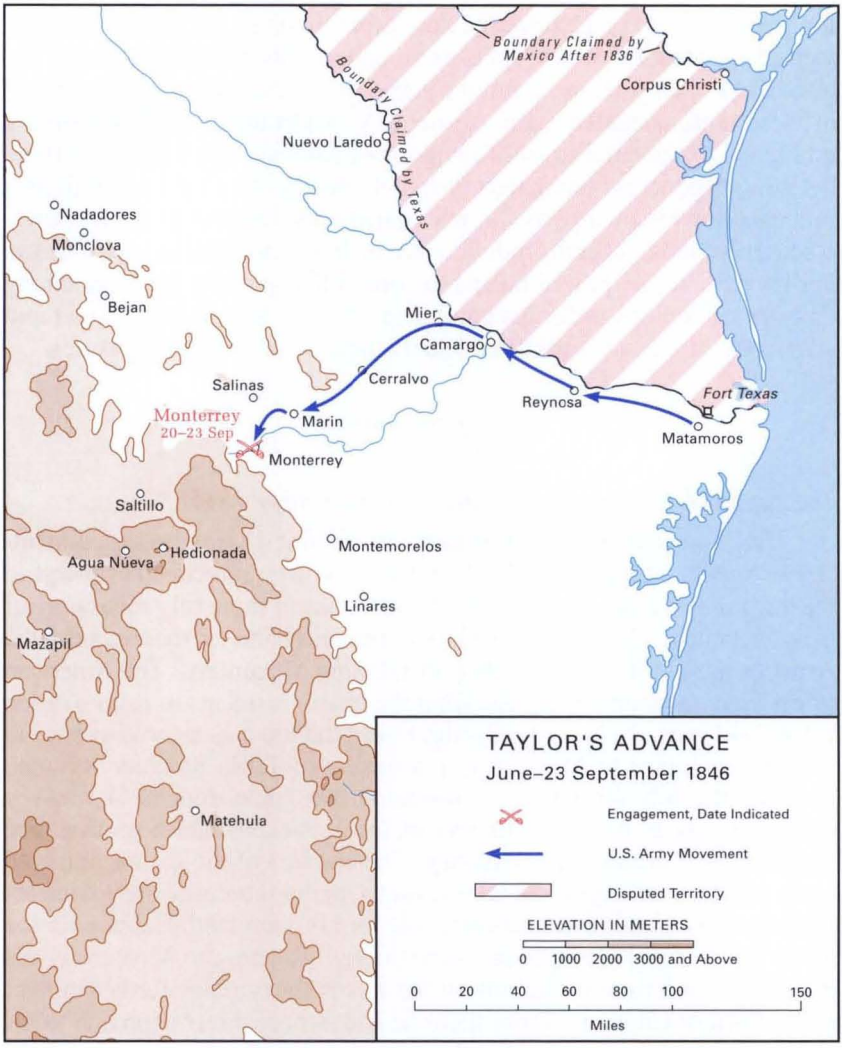
for years because of notoriously slow promotions in the peacetime force viewed the creation of new units as an opportunity for advancement. The president's open partisanship in the subsequent selection of senior officers in these units alienated many of them. As a Democrat, Polk harbored a traditional American distrust of a large, professional army. More important, his Whig opponents dominated much of the senior army leadership. To gain influence for his own party, he nominated only Democrats to the newly created positions, generally individuals with little actual military experience. For his part, Taylor proved unable to control the spiraling tensions among the various factions under his command. He may have hoped that a rapid start to the Monterrey operation would relieve some of these pressures.

Operations

The Approach to Monterrey (10 June -10 September 1846)

The Monterrey campaign opened on 10 June 1846 when a regiment-sized American force under Lt. Col. Henry Wilson marched northwest to the town of Reynosa, a settlement of one thousand some fifty miles upriver from Matamoros. Mexican irregulars and bandits harassed the area since the Army of the North retreated after abandoning Matamoros. The American forces were responding to pleas from the town's residents to restore order, but the aid proved a mixed blessing. Using the town as a forward base to reconnoiter routes to Monterrey, a company of Texas Rangers occupied it during the July 4th holiday, consuming two horse troughs of whiskey in the process as well as a number of local chickens and hogs that died "accidentally" during the celebration. The conduct of the Texans outraged many regulars, but Taylor did little to stop it, perhaps because the volunteers performed a crucial reconnaissance role for his command. Happily for the town, Taylor concluded that the route through Reynosa to Monterrey was impractical and moved the bulk of his forces thirty miles further upriver to the town of Camargo. From there he had a more direct approach to his objective, which lay some 125 miles to the south and west.

While Camargo offered a better avenue for attack, it posed several problems for Taylor. He could ferry soldiers up from Matamoros to Camargo on shallow draft river steamers or march them overland parallel with the river. Both options had drawbacks. The Rio Grande Valley lacked sufficient timber to fuel steam engines and, in the grip of the rainy season, the river's changing currents, narrow navigation channels, submerged boulders, and fallen trees made this route treacherous. Under the circumstances, the overland path might have seemed preferable, but it was little better. With the Rio Grande at flood stage, many of the well-traveled roads upriver were



under water. The troops, as a result, would be forced to march through muck and mud, soaring temperatures, high humidity, and frequent rain storms. In the end most of the infantry were sent to Camargo via steamers, while the artillery and dragoons traveled overland.

Conditions at Camargo, however, were not much better. Camargo was a river settlement of three thousand. Its location on the bank of the swollen Rio Grande made it a logical site for a supply depot, but scorpions,

tarantulas, ants, and various biting insects, including mosquitos, infested the area. Daytime temperatures often soared above 110 degrees, drying the mud into what soon became with the passage of the men great billows of eye-stinging dust. Fresh drinking water was at a premium. In short, the Camargo region was a poor choice for housing the nearly fifteen thousand American soldiers that Taylor concentrated there.

Under the circumstances, large numbers of Taylor's force became ill within days of their arrival on 8 August. His volunteer units lacked experience in maintaining sanitary conditions and proved particularly vulnerable to dysentery. But everyone, whether regular or volunteer, suffered from various fevers, heat stroke being the most common.

Accepted medical practices of the time did little to ease the troops' suffering. Medical knowledge in 1846 was still primitive despite some recent advances. Although some American physicians knew and made use of an effective vaccine for smallpox, fewer were aware that ether could act as an anesthetic. Whether because of doubts about the efficacy or simple lack of knowledge of these discoveries, U.S. Army doctors used neither on a large scale in Mexico. The germ theory of disease also awaited discovery. As a consequence, many surgeons failed to practice proper sterilization procedures and increased the spread of infection when they operated. Physicians of their generation had no cures for the most deadly diseases of the time, such as yellow fever, malaria, and typhoid. Instead, Army doctors followed general practice by administering massive doses of quinine to allay the symptoms. In addition, they had yet to learn that mosquitoes carried many devastating fevers and took no special precautions to shield their patients from insects. To compound matters, many practitioners, particularly those drawn directly from civil life, had only a tenuous grasp of the connection between poor sanitation and illness.

Surgeon General Thomas Lawson commanded the U.S. Army Medical Department, headquartered in New York City. His organization provided medical supplies to field units and ensured that qualified doctors, referred to as surgeons, filled medical billets, although they initially held no military rank. Overall, the department fulfilled its responsibilities well, although shipping delays sometimes forced field surgeons to purchase items locally. The medical department also administered rigorous exams—that few passed—to ensure that would-be surgeons were competent. The problem was, however, that the number of doctors assigned to each regiment was too few, three for Regular Army units and only two for volunteers. In addition, civilian contract surgeons hired to fill empty billets were untested and often lacked even basic knowledge of elementary sanitary precautions. In Camargo, Taylor's reports indicate that about fifteen hundred men, nearly 10 percent of his total force, died while camped there and another fourteen

hundred became incapacitated. As the number of deaths and men on sick call rose each day, Taylor realized that to preserve the fighting strength of his army he had to move those men able to march out of Camargo as soon as possible.

On 19 August, the vanguard of the American force, some sixteen hundred men under General Worth, set out toward the town of Cerralvo, approximately seventy-five miles south of Camargo and fifty miles northeast of Monterrey. Its route followed a narrow road that rapidly climbed from the coastal plains of Camargo toward the mountains south of Monterrey. Worth's men had to widen the road so that it could support the army's line of communications, but a lack of transportation nevertheless slowed the exodus. In all, Taylor had fifteen hundred pack mules and 180 wagons to move all of his essential supplies. This forced him to limit the number of troops in his expedition to 6,640. The remaining eight thousand—largely the sick and many of the volunteer units—dispersed to garrisons and hospitals along the route between Camargo and Point Isabel on the coast.

Final American Preparations (11-19 September 1846)

Reaching Cerralvo on 25 August, American forces had to wait until sufficient supplies arrived to support an assault on Monterrey. They struck out again for that city on 11 September, the divisions marching at one-day intervals. Four days later, Taylor halted at the hamlet of Marin, some twenty miles northeast of Monterrey to allow his entire force to close up. Resuming the march in a single column on 18 September, the Army of Occupation arrived at the northern outskirts of Monterrey the following morning. Taylor camped his troops some three miles north of the city at a natural spring lined with oak and pecan trees called the Bosque de San Domingo. Misidentifying the trees, the troops named the area Walnut Springs.

Monterrey was an impressive town of ten thousand surrounded by imposing geographical features. Intersected by a large, flat plateau that extended well into its urban center, the city rested in a bend in the Rio Santa Catarina, which flowed south and east of the town. Beyond the river to the south and west, the Sierra Madre rose from the plain to form a nearly impassable wall of jagged peaks. A pass cut by the Santa Catarina was the only break through the barrier. A road to the south toward the city of Saltillo ran along the river and constituted the principal avenue of supply and retreat for the Mexican force guarding Monterrey.

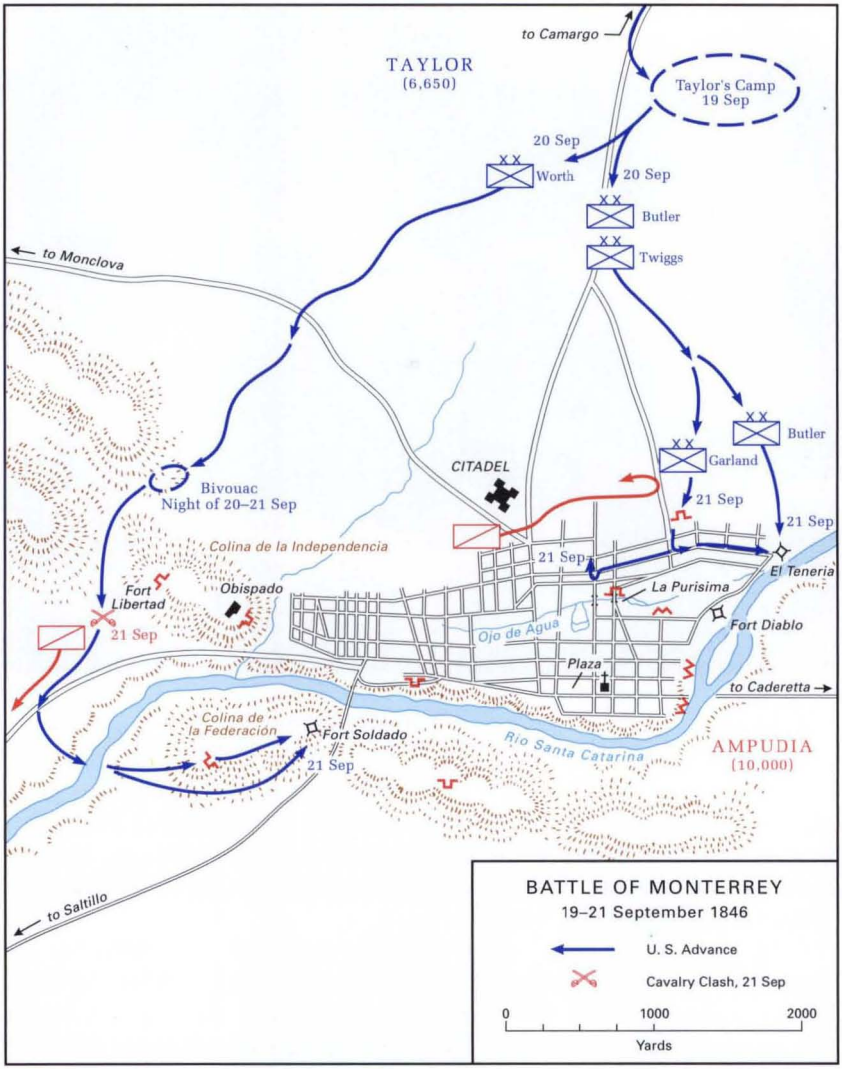
Intelligence reports gleaned from locals showed that General Ampudia reinforced the Monterrey garrison. The city itself was already very defensible, but Ampudia improved on nature by establishing several strong points at the central cathedral and at key intersections. One-story



Taylor and staff at Walnut Springs
(National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution)

stone buildings with flat roofs, the predominant architecture in Monterrey, became havens for snipers. In all, approximately 7,303 Mexicans manned these positions along with the fortifications and redoubts that stood at crucial points around the town.

At first glance, the city's outworks appeared impenetrable. An uncompleted cathedral, known to the Americans as the Citadel or the Black Fort because of its dark, thirty-foot-high stone walls, stood approximately one thousand yards north of the city and housed four hundred Mexican troops and some thirty guns. Also to the north stood a bridge called La Purisima, which spanned a local canal known as Ojo de Agua. More than three hundred infantrymen plus artillery protected it. An earthwork, La Teneria, built in an old tannery building and manned by two hundred troops, defended the northeast approach. A fortification known as El Fortin del Rincon del Diablo or Fort Diablo covered the east side of the town. To the west, the Saltillo road ran between two high hills. The one to the north, Independence Hill (Colina de la Independencia), was eight hundred feet in height and held two defensive structures, a small fortification dubbed Fort



Libertad and an abandoned bishop's palace known as the Obispado. Some 250 soldiers and several artillery pieces held these positions. The 400-foot-high Federation Hill (Colina de la Federación), which had a small redoubt on the west end and Fort Soldado at the other, lay south of the road and the Santa Catarina.

Ampudia organized his mix of regular and reserve forces into four infantry brigades. These he bolstered with several detachments of cavalry

and various units of irregulars. The *1st Brigade* included the *3d* and *4th Light Infantry* regiments, as well as the *Active Militia of Aguascalientes*. The *2d Brigade* contained the *2d Light Infantry*; the *6th, 8th*, and *10th Line Infantry*; and the *Active Militia of Queretaro*. The *3d Brigade* was made up of the *3d* and *4th Line Infantry* and the *1st Active Militia of Mexico*. The *4th Brigade* held the *1st Line Infantry* and the *Active Militias of Morelia* and *San Luis Potosi*. The general stationed most of his regular units in the fortifications outside the city and in the strong points inside its limits. The remaining regulars, and most of the irregulars, took up residence in homes within the city so that they could quickly take positions on rooftops to oppose any American advance. Ampudia kept his cavalry largely on the outskirts of the area as a mobile reserve.

Despite the formidable appearance of the city's defenses, a reconnaissance under Taylor's chief engineer, Maj. Joseph K. F. Mansfield, identified two weaknesses. First, Ampudia concentrated his men inside the various fortifications and strong points. Second, the Mexican infantry reserve was incapable of protecting the area between the defensive constructions or of rushing reinforcements to the forts that were under attack. Although Ampudia had cavalry detachments at his disposal, Mexican horsemen were not trained or equipped to fight on foot. Taylor knew from Palo Alto and Resaca de la Palma that Ampudia's cavalry would be ineffective in the open field against American artillery. Taylor could cut off and eliminate individual positions one by one without fear of strong counterattacks.

Recognizing that Mexican forces would never venture out of Monterrey to fight on the open fields north of the town and that it would be easy to isolate the city by cutting the road south to Saltillo, Taylor and his adjutant, Capt. William Bliss, laid out a bold plan. Military convention dictated a siege, but Taylor's army was unequipped to conduct one because his heavy artillery was left on the Rio Grande. Instead, he reorganized and redeployed his forces to carry out a double envelopment of Monterrey. Under his plan, a small force would hold the center of his position while additional columns were directed against the eastern and western sides of the town.

Taylor organized his forces in four divisions—the 1st, 2d, 3d, and Texas Divisions. Brig. Gen. David E. Twiggs, who was promoted after the battles at Palo Alto and Resaca de la Palma, commanded the 1st Division, with Lt. Col. Charles A. May's squadron of dragoons and the newly promoted Bvt. Capt. Randolph Ridgely's battery attached. They reported directly to division headquarters. Twiggs also had Lt. Col. John Garland's 3d Brigade and Lt. Col. Henry Wilson's 4th Brigade. The 3d Brigade was made up of Capt. Braxton Bragg's battery, Maj. William W. Lear's 3d Infantry, the newly promoted Maj. George W. Allen's 4th Infantry, and Capt. William R. Shivors' Company of Texas and Mississippi Volunteers. The 4th Brigade

consisted of Maj. John J. Abercrombie's 1st Infantry and Lt. Col. William H. Watson's Battalion of Maryland and District of Columbia Volunteers. In total, Twiggs had approximately 1,583 men in his division.

Brig. Gen. William J. Worth directed the 2d Division and its two brigades. Lt. Col. Thomas Staniford's 1st Brigade included Capt. James Duncan's (later Col.) battery, Lt. Col. Thomas Childs' regiment of foot artillery, and Lt. Col. William Belknap's 8th Infantry. Col. Persifor F. Smith's 2nd Brigade was made up of Lt. William W. Mackall's battery, Maj. Martin Scott's 5th Infantry, Capt. Dixon S. Miles' 7th Infantry, and Capt. Albert C. Blanchard's Volunteer Company of Louisiana. The 2d Division was composed of 1,651 men.

Maj. Gen. William O. Butler led the 3d Division, or Field Division, composed entirely of volunteers also echeloned in two brigades. The 1st Brigade commanded by Brig. Gen. Thomas L. Hamer included Col. Stephen Ormsby's 1st Kentucky Infantry and Col. Alexander M. Mitchel's 1st Ohio Infantry. Brig. Gen. John A. Quitman's 2d Brigade consisted of the 1st Mississippi Rifles, commanded by Col. Jefferson Davis, who later became president of the Confederate States of America, and the 1st Tennessee Infantry led by Col. William B. Campbell. Butler's 3d Division contained nearly 1,929 soldiers.

Maj. Gen. James Pickney Henderson commanded the Texas Division. Henderson was the governor of Texas at the onset of the conflict and received permission from the legislature to take a field command. His division actually maintained only brigade strength. It included the 1st and 2d Texas Mounted Volunteers under Cols. John C. Hays and George T. Wood, respectively. These mounted regiments were armed as infantry and trained to fight on foot. With every member on horseback, they were highly mobile and particularly useful in screening infantry columns and acting as a reserve force. The Texas Division was made up of about eleven hundred men.

With most of his heavy artillery along the Rio Grande, Taylor's force was unbalanced. Worth's 2d Division contained the bulk of the available artillery. Taylor assigned only two batteries to Twigg's 1st division. He attached his only indirect fire weapons, a mortar and two howitzers, to his own headquarters. The other divisions lacked artillery support completely.

Battle of Monterrey (20–21 September 1846)

Taylor directed Worth to take his 2d Division with the Texas Division in support, nearly twenty-seven hundred men, and make a wide sweep around Monterrey's western and southern defenses. He wanted Worth to sever the Saltillo road and then work his way into the city from the west. While Worth began his sweep at 1400 on 20 September, Taylor would lead the rest of the

American troops in a demonstration against the eastern side of Monterrey. This move would allow him to bypass the strong fortifications north of the city and block any attempt by General Ampudia to use his interior lines to reinforce the west. In the end, Taylor's well-coordinated double assault proved impossible. The difficult terrain and well-positioned Mexican forces that confronted Worth prevented him from following any strict timetable. Further, when Taylor's force demonstrated in the east, the strong fortifications and confused city streets made synchronized movements impossible.

The battle for Monterrey began when Mexican forces attacked Worth's column just west of Independence Hill at 0600 on 21 September. The *Jalisco Lancers*, more than two hundred cavalrymen, contested Worth's approach, forming a line and preparing to charge. In response, Texas horseman raced ahead of the American force, dismounted, and took cover behind a wooden fence. The Mexican lancers quickly closed on the American screen, but were unable to break through the Texans' hastily assembled defense. Disengaging and reforming out of musket range, they prepared for another charge, but at that moment Colonel Duncan's battery of 6-pounders wheeled past the American troops toward the front. The gunners unlimbered their pieces and began to target the massed cavalry with highly accurate canister rounds. In the end, the Mexican horsemen retired after losing thirty men.

Having parried this threat, Worth resumed his march. Mexican artillery posted on Federation Hill raked his columns with a heavy fire, but the barrage proved more spectacular than deadly, causing few American casualties. Nevertheless, the sound and fury convinced Worth that the 2d Division would have to take the hills that held the Mexican guns before continuing his sweep. His first target would be Federation Hill, and then the more thoroughly entrenched enemy positions on Independence Hill. To that end, he sent a storming party of three hundred Texas Rangers under Capt. Charles F. Smith, supported by Col. Persifor Smith's 2d Brigade and the 5th and 7th Infantry regiments, a total of 860 men, to secure Federation Hill. Moving out at 1230, the assault team forded the Santa Catarina at three points while staying well to the west of the Mexican batteries on Independence and Federation Hills. It then maneuvered to attack the western side of Federation Hill, just below a small redoubt.

Because the Mexican force positioned on the summit of Federation Hill was more than four hundred feet above the Saltillo Road, the Americans would have to rush up the hillside in the face of enemy artillery and five hundred Mexican soldiers. Complicating matters, the hill was extremely steep and offered little protection.

When the Americans began their assault, Mexican infantry flooded out of the redoubt to stem the advance. The Texas Rangers drew the enemy's attention and heaviest fire, which allowed the 5th and the 7th to make

their ascents with little interference. When the 5th crested the hill on the left, or northern flank of the fortification, the Mexican line crumbled and fell back on Fort Soldado on the opposite side of the hill. In the confusion of the rout, they failed to carry off their artillery pieces. The Americans raced after the retreating troops without pausing to catch their breath. Faced with the spirited charge, the defenders of the eastern fort abandoned their position and rushed toward safety across the Santa Catarina River to nearby Independence Hill. Meanwhile, the rest of Worth's command beat back several attempts by General Anastasio Torrejon's cavalry to flank the American position. The Mexican general posed little significant danger to Worth, however, because Duncan and Mackall's batteries responded quickly and prevented him from massing his force. In all, the day's actions cost Worth only one dead and several wounded.

Taylor's demonstration against the eastern side of Monterrey did not meet with the same success. When the sound of gunfire roared across the town at 0600, signaling that Worth was engaging the enemy, Taylor moved his men into position. He placed the 1st and 3d Divisions on the plain north of Monterrey to fix the Mexicans in their fortifications and to prevent Ampudia from dispatching any reinforcements to the west. When the Mexicans appeared to ignore his presence, Taylor seized the opportunity to launch an actual attack against Monterrey's northeastern corner.

The assault on the eastern defenses of Monterrey posed significant problems. Five hundred yards of flat, open ground stood between the American column and its objective. At least thirty guns based mostly in the Citadel and La Teneria covered the plain. The Americans thus had to cross the entire distance under a constant pounding from Mexican artillery. Initially, Taylor decided to use the 1st Division's 1st and 3d Infantry regiments and the Maryland and District of Columbia Volunteers, about eight hundred men, to enter the town. He ordered Garland, who had assumed temporary command of the entire 1st Division because Twiggs was ill, to lead the assault force personally. Once inside the town, Garland was to coordinate all actions with Major Mansfield and his engineer staff, which included Capt. William G. Williams and Lt. John Pope. Throughout the Mexican War, engineers filled several crucial roles, including directing attacking forces, because they were often the only staff officers who personally reconnoitered the ground. Taylor also recommended to Garland that he secure, if possible, the small fortifications guarding Monterrey's eastern approaches. Taylor's insistence that Garland lead just a fraction of his men into combat reflected the cultural norms of the time. The general expected his subordinates to

lead their men directly in combat, just as he did. This notion caused Taylor to disregard organizational structure on many occasions, and it sometimes created substantial chain-of-command problems.

Garland formed his men just beyond the range of the Mexican artillery. In one concerted effort, the regiments rushed across the level ground toward the city. Exposed to artillery fire the entire time, they broke into smaller groups to avoid taking heavy casualties. The Maryland and District of Columbia Volunteers, however, veered too close to La Teneria, where the Mexican gunners blasted them with a heavy flanking fire. Shocked, many of the survivors ran for the rear, leaving only the battalion commander, Colonel Watson, and seventy men to continue the advance. Once inside the city, the units became further isolated and lost all semblance of cohesion. Monterrey was one of the U.S. Army's few experiences with urban combat since the American Revolution, and the lack of expertise showed in the operations that followed.

Garland attempted to concentrate his troops inside the town and waited for directions from Major Mansfield. After a short reconnaissance, the engineer concluded that no Mexican troops remained in Garland's immediate vicinity. Acting as Taylor's representative, Major Mansfield directed Colonel Garland to lead his force through the town and take the Mexican fortifications guarding the northeastern corner of Monterrey from the rear. The narrow streets, however, proved difficult to negotiate because squat stone houses obscured all views from one street to another. As Garland's men progressed, the streets became virtual mazes. The Americans had no way of knowing what lay just behind each wall. Mansfield also failed to see loopholes that the town's garrison had hastily cut into the edges of many of the flat roofs. These apertures allowed infantrymen to lie on their stomachs out of sight and to fire their weapons downward into the passing American columns.

The command quickly became confused, and Mansfield began to have reservations. The troops advanced up each street in column formation. As the lead elements crossed one intersection, a hidden battery opened fire into the Americans. The initial shots mowed through the command group. Major Mansfield and Captain Williams were among the first to fall. Although wounded, Mansfield continued to direct the battle. Williams later died. Other concealed batteries joined the cannonade, raking the streets with grapeshot and cutting down scores of soldiers. The houses, packed closely together, offered no protection. Hemmed in on both sides and taking fire from snipers located on the roofs, the command was at the mercy of the Mexican defenders. Dependent on mounted messengers for communication with the rest of the army, Garland and Mansfield had no way of knowing that several companies of the 1st Infantry had already



Street fighting in Monterrey (University of Texas at Austin)

secured a foothold at the rear of La Teneria but lacked the manpower to carry the position.

The sound of gunfire from deep in the town worried Taylor; something had gone drastically wrong. He ordered reinforcements forward. Bragg's battery plunged into the city streets to counter the enemy artillery. Meanwhile General Quitman's brigade of the 3d Division, including Jefferson Davis's 1st Mississippi Rifles, reinforced by the 4th Infantry and 1st Ohio, moved to engage La Teneria directly.

Taylor hoped that Bragg's mobile guns would be effective inside the town and provide cover for the infantry. As soon as Bragg reached the beleaguered column and fired several rounds, however, he found that his 6-pounders were of little use against the barricaded batteries and stone buildings that shielded the city's defenders. His shells simply bounced off the town's heavy walls and exploded harmlessly. With the Mexican cannons still firing, Garland and the wounded Mansfield ordered a general retreat. The survivors attempted to retrace their path out of the line of fire, but found Bragg's gun carriages blocking the way because the crews could not turn them around in the narrow streets. The bloodied infantrymen had to physically lift the 880-pound guns and rotate them 180 degrees before they could escape the enemy's murderous fire. By this time, almost half of Garland's command lay dead or wounded. Bragg had lost ten artillerymen and twelve horses.

Quitman's 4th Infantry regiment sent to assault La Teneria met with greater success, but their losses were equally serious. The three lead companies of the 4th Infantry lost one-third of their officers and men within several minutes and then retreated. General Butler, the 3d Division commander, was wounded while leading the advance; he was replaced by Brig. Gen. Thomas L. Hamer. Meanwhile, Quitman's own forces, the 1st Tennessee and Mississippi Rifles, were able to avoid much of the Mexican fire and charged La Teneria's perimeter. At noon, after an hour of bloody combat, Jefferson Davis' volunteers carried the fortification. It was the first tangible foothold the Americans had won on the eastern front, but the position became subject almost immediately to constant sniper fire from the nearby rooftops. Although ill, General Twiggs arrived to lead the defense of the newly won building. Artillerymen under Captain Ridgely turned La Teneria's captured guns against the Mexicans defending Fort Diablo and the Citadel.

Under Ridgely's covering fire, Taylor's attacking forces regrouped and set their sights on the other Mexican positions. In the east, the 1st Ohio crossed the Ojo de Agua below La Purisima and attacked Fort Diablo, but the men were unable to breach the defenses and fell back. On its right, Garland's brigade, after reorganizing, also assaulted the fort but likewise stopped short of their objective in the face of heavy Mexican fire. Mexican lancers threatened the 1st Ohio during its advance and appeared on the plains north of city again in the late afternoon, but each time guns from Bragg's battery drove the horsemen off. Although unsuccessful inside Monterrey, the light artillery had again proved its usefulness in the open. By nightfall on 21 September, Worth controlled Federation Hill in the west while Taylor managed to keep his hold on La Teneria.

Battle of Monterrey (22–23 September 1846)

All of the action on 22 September took place on Worth's western front. His men had exchanged artillery fire with the Mexican stronghold on Independence Hill from the captured redoubts on Federation Hill throughout the night. His objective for the day was to carry Independence Hill and its formidable strongholds Fort Libertad and the Obispado. If Worth was successful, he would pave the way for an assault into Monterrey proper from the west, along the Saltillo road. Meanwhile, on the east side, Taylor's men consolidated their foothold around La Teneria and also prepared to renew the attack.

The action began at 0300 on 22 September when Worth dispatched a hand picked detachment of Texas Rangers, artillerymen, and men



from the 8th Infantry to launch a surprise attack against Fort Libertad, located on the western summit of Independence Hill. The troops climbed nearly nine hundred feet and were a mere one hundred yards from the Mexican positions before a sentry spotted them. Caught off guard, the Mexicans could not react in time. After firing a fierce volley into the enemy position, the Americans fixed bayonets and charged. Completely disoriented, the Mexican line collapsed and fled east toward the Obispado on the opposite side of the hill.

The Americans pressed their advantage, following closely behind the retreating Mexicans. Meanwhile, a group of artillerymen pulled a 12-pound howitzer up the hillside, placed it in the captured fort, and began battering the side of the Obispado with solid shot. Soon, the 5th and 7th Infantry rushed the heights and joined the assault. At 1500, twelve hours after the attack began, the Mexicans lost their hold on the Obispado, and the remaining defenders fled toward the town. The Americans hauled down the Mexican tricolor and hoisted the Stars and Stripes above the fort. Throughout the rest of the evening, Worth consolidated his control over the western outskirts of Monterrey.

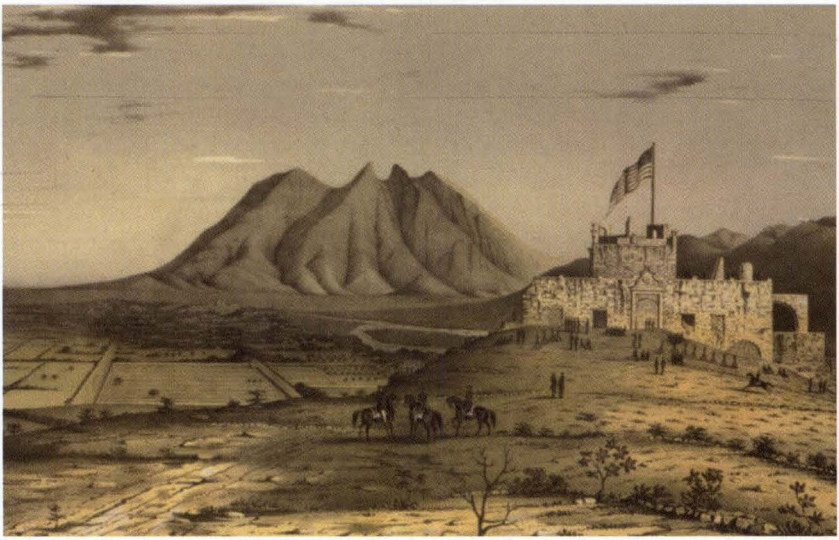
Shortly after midnight, General Ampudia decided to abandon his surviving outer defenses, except for the Citadel, and concentrate his forces within the confines of the city. The Americans would again have to face the perils and chaos of street by street fighting to secure their objective.

The American assault began again early on the morning of the 23d, with General Worth moving in from the west and Taylor's remaining troops advancing from the east. The pincer movement was designed to force Mexican resistance toward the center of the city and into the main plaza. The American infantry, however, had learned a valuable lesson from the experience on 21 September. Instead of advancing up the narrow streets where they were exposed to sniper fire and fortified batteries, they began smashing holes through houses and walls to by-pass enemy defenses. They used battering rams, picks, axes, sledge hammers, and occasionally 8-inch artillery shells. The new tactic worked well and cost fewer casualties, but the process was tedious. It required a significant amount of time to clear each building and roof of enemy combatants.

Slowly the Mexican troops abandoned their positions and retreated into the city's large central cathedral as U.S. forces began flanking their positions. The Americans advanced to within two blocks of Monterrey's central plaza before Taylor ordered a withdrawal. It is likely that Taylor was concerned about the safety of large groups of civilians who sought refuge near the cathedral, which also housed a large store of ammunition. He transferred his lone 10-inch mortar to Worth and directed him to lob a shell toward the plaza every twenty minutes. The threat of civilian casualties compelled the governor of Nuevo Leon to request permission for noncombatants to evacuate the city.

Surrender Negotiations and Aftermath

Encircled with no avenue of escape, General Ampudia hoisted a white flag and proposed terms for surrender toward midnight on the 23d. The Mexican commander requested that his men be allowed to vacate the city



Monterrey from Independence Hill (Library of Congress)

with all of their arms and ammunition. Taylor countered at 0700 the next day by stating that all arms had to be forfeited. Ampudia responded by requesting that Taylor convene an armistice commission. Generals Worth and Henderson, along with Colonel Davis, represented the United States. The commissioners reached a compromise after hours of negotiation. The resulting convention gave General Ampudia one week to abandon the city and allowed his troops to retain all of their personal weapons and one 6-gun battery. It also imposed an eight-week cease-fire during which Taylor promised not to advance beyond the town of Linares, fifty miles to the south.

The American commissioners agreed to these terms because their forces were severely bruised. Two divisions, Twiggs' and Butler's, had been mauled, and both Worth's division and the Texans were exhausted. It seemed obvious to Taylor that if further operations were required to capture the city, the U.S. force would suffer even greater casualties. Short on supplies and manpower, he decided that he needed time to repair and refit. Although Ampudia lived up to his end of the agreement and surrendered the town before the expiration of the seven-day deadline, the terms that Taylor accepted had unexpected consequences: President Polk decided that Taylor was unfit to pursue the war to its conclusion and would give Winfield Scott a field command.

The battle for Monterrey was over. It had been a costly fight for both sides. The Americans lost 120 killed, 368 wounded, and 43 missing. Officially, the Mexicans recorded their losses as 367 men killed and wounded, while civilian casualties went unrecorded.

Once again, American surgeons cared for the wounded of both sides. During the battle for Monterrey, they performed amputations and other procedures near the front line on blankets or in small tents. After Ampudia evacuated the town, Jarvis established hospitals for each American division inside confiscated buildings, including a large estate that once belonged to a high-ranking Mexican general. Although a large improvement over field blankets, conditions were still poor and wounded men were still vulnerable to outbreaks of malaria and other diseases and infections that quickly spread among the wounded. Gangrene posed an ever-present threat as well. When the vanguard of Taylor's force pushed to the south of Monterrey a few weeks later, Jarvis disbanded the divisional hospitals and consolidated them into two general hospitals, one for regulars and the other for volunteers.

Analysis

The campaign for Monterrey represented a remarkable success for the U.S. Army. For the third time in four months, it had faced a numerically superior enemy fighting from well-established defensive positions, only to emerge victorious. Human loss from a combination of disease and actual combat were, however, much greater than at both Palo Alto and Resaca de la Palma, and the legacy of the operation was mixed.

Overall, the Monterrey campaign was not executed as efficiently as it could have been. Some of the blame lies with Taylor. His failure to institute rigorous control over his volunteers led to tension, violence, and a long sick list. Taylor also blundered by leaving his siege artillery on the Rio Grande instead of making it available for the pending assault against Monterrey. While he should be credited for endorsing and implementing the bold tactical envelopment of the town, his operations on the east side of Monterrey were poorly planned, coordinated, and executed. In contrast, Worth's attack in the west was carried out much more effectively, and the American force there suffered far fewer casualties.

The campaign also highlighted the fact that disease was going to be a far more potent enemy in Mexico than the Mexican army. After just a few weeks at Camargo, the American force lost fifteen hundred men dead to disease with another fourteen hundred hospitalized or unfit for duty. Volunteers bore the brunt of these losses. Most regulars were well-accustomed to the harshness of camp life with only rudimentary necessities and exposure to the elements. They also generally practiced good sanitation. The volunteer

soldiers fresh from civilian life, however, were both unaccustomed to life in the field and unschooled on the proper disposal of human waste.

While American field artillery came into its own at the battle of Palo Alto, Monterrey provided an example of its limitations. In the open against massed targets, the force's 6-pound guns were dominant. On several occasions, they dashed across the battlefield to disperse concentrated cavalry formations. When called into action against fortified positions and stone targets within the confines of Monterrey, however, the light ordnance lacked the power to inflict significant damage and proved more of a liability than an asset. On the based of his experience at Palo Alto, Taylor assumed the 6-pounders would provide all the firepower needed, and left his heavier guns on the Rio Grande. These heavier pieces could have made a significant contribution if they had been present at Monterrey. It was clear that American forces would require a mix of field and siege artillery in future campaigns to meet all contingencies.

The battle at Monterrey also provided practical experience in urban combat. As the war progressed, more operations would occur in heavily populated areas. The need to avoid street by street advances and instead to burrow through the walls of buildings would become principles that U.S. forces would resort to again later in this and future conflicts.

Junior officers also learned that volunteers required discipline to be effective. If trained properly, they could be a valuable asset. Lt. Ulysses S. Grant, then a junior officer in the 4th Infantry, was one of the many Regular Army officers who embraced this idea. He would use it to dramatic effect during the coming American Civil War.

Many West Point trained officers, however, also drew lessons from the battle that would prove dangerous in the future. Looking at the battle, they noted that time and again Worth's troops had successfully assailed commanding heights, carrying strong fortifications, with only minor losses. In the same way, after a rough start, Taylor's command had succeeded in carrying well-fortified positions. In that light, many future leaders—such as Grant, George G. Meade, Braxton Bragg, George H. Thomas, and John F. Reynolds—came to believe that the offensive always held primacy over the defensive. During the Civil War, they would conduct many disastrous frontal assaults against well-entrenched defenders. In so doing, they ignored advances wrought by rifling, the minie ball, and other technological improvements, as well as the morale and discipline of defending troops, which made this type of attack problematic at best. The approach would cost the lives of many good soldiers a decade later.

For Zachary Taylor, the victory at Monterrey further secured his reputation as a leader and continued him on the path toward the presidency in 1848. Well aware of what was happening, the Democrats in Polk's

administration feared the popularity of the Whig general and looked for a reason to remove him. Taylor gave them the opportunity when he granted generous armistice terms to Ampudia. His decision allowed Polk to cast doubt on his dedication to prosecuting the war vigorously and to use the allegation to sidetrack the popular general. Polk subsequently decided to send a fourth column to attack Mexico City, commanded by General Winfield Scott, also a Whig with known political ambitions. Ever the partisan, the president hoped that Taylor and Scott would so divide the Whigs that their party could not mount an effective campaign for the presidency in 1848. President Polk, however, unknowingly set the stage for Taylor's greatest victory, one that would ensure his election, on a field known as Buena Vista.

As for General Ampudia, although he lost Monterrey, he had managed to inflict significant casualties on Taylor's force and secured generous surrender terms. In the eyes of his contemporaries, he maintained intact the honor of the Mexican army. As a result, he retained a divisional command. The defeat was also significant for Santa Anna. After suffering another loss, the Mexican people turned to him to restore the nation's honor with a quick victory over their northern enemy. Henceforth, Santa Anna would personally lead all major military operations until the end of the conflict. The charismatic and audacious general was determined to sweep the American army from his homeland. Because of his rank and prestige he could call upon greater resources than either of his predecessors had enjoyed. The war was far from over.

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COVER

Fighting on the third day of the siege of Monterrey, September 23, 1846
(Library of Congress)



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