

CHAPTER VII.

General Scott ordered to Mexico.—Letter of the Secretary of War to General Taylor.—Letter of the Secretary of War to General Scott.—General Scott leaves Washington.—His Letter to General Taylor.—Plan of appointing a Lieutenant-General.—Scott reaches the Rio Grande.—Condition of things there.—Withdraws a part of Taylor's Troops in compliance with the Orders of the War Department.

ON the 18th of November, General Scott was directed by the Secretary of War to hold himself in readiness to assume the command of the army destined to make a descent on Vera Cruz. The purpose of organizing a force for this object was communicated to General Taylor in a letter from the Secretary of War, dated Washington, Oct. 22, 1846:

"I informed you in my last despatch, that in connection with an invasion of Tamaulipas and attack on Tampico, an expedition against Vera Cruz was then under advisement. Upon a more full consideration of the subject, it is believed that Vera Cruz may be taken, and having possession of that city, the castle of San Juan de Ulloa might possibly be reduced or compelled to surrender. If the expedition could go forth without the object being known to the enemy, it is supposed that four thousand troops would be sufficient for the enterprise, receiving as they would the co-operation of our naval force in the gulf; but *at least fifteen hundred or two thousand of them should be of the regular army, and under the command*

of officers best calculated for such an undertaking. In looking at the disposition of the troops, it appears to be scarcely possible to get the requisite number of regulars without drawing some of those now with you at Monterey, or on the way to that place. Should you decide against holding military possession of any place in Coahuila or Chihuahua, and order the troops under General Wool to join you, it is presumed that the requisite force for the expedition to Vera Cruz could be detached without interfering with your plans of operation.

"You will therefore, unless it materially interferes with your own plan of operations, or weakens you too much in your present position, make the necessary arrangements for having four thousand men, of whom fifteen hundred or two thousand should be regular troops, ready to embark for Vera Cruz, or such other destination as may be given them, at the earliest practicable period. The place of embarkation will probably be the Brazos Santiago, or in that vicinity."

On the 23d of November General Scott received the following order from the Secretary of War:—

WAR DEPARTMENT, WASHINGTON, }
November 23d, 1846.

SIR—The President, several days since, communicated in person to you his orders to repair to Mexico, to take the command of the forces there assembled, and particularly to organize and set on foot an expedition to operate on the Gulf coast, if, on arriving at the theatre of action, you shall deem it to be practicable. It is not proposed to control your operations by definite and positive instructions, but you are left to prosecute them as your judgment, under a full view of all the circumstances, shall dictate. The work is before you, and the

means provided, or to be provided, for accomplishing it, are committed to you, in the full confidence that you will use them to the best advantage.

The objects which it is desirable to obtain have been indicated, and it is hoped that you will have the requisite force to accomplish them.

Of this you must be the judge, when preparations are made, and the time for action arrived.

Very respectfully,

Your obedient servant,

W. L. MARCY,

Secretary of War.

GENERAL WINFIELD SCOTT.

General Scott immediately made all the arrangements to carry the plan into full effect. The requisite number of transports were to be provided, surf-boats for the landing of the troops constructed, a train of siege ordnance was to be collected and sent forward, and ten new regiments were to be added to the line of the army, at the earliest possible moment after the meeting of Congress. In a very few days all the preliminary arrangements were completed, and General Scott left Washington on the 24th November, in the full belief that he enjoyed the confidence of the government, and that the conduct of the war, under general instructions, had been entirely confided to his discretion and judgment.

The only reluctance which he felt in accepting the high trusts confided to him by the President, arose from an unwillingness to interfere, in the slightest degree, with the command of an old friend and brother soldier; and this feeling was strongly expressed to General Taylor in a letter written from New York, November 25th, 1846.

"I left Washington late in the day yesterday, and expect to embark for New Orleans the 30th inst. By the 12th of December I may be in that city, at Point Isabel the 17th, and Camargo, say the 23d—in order to be within easy corresponding distance from you. It is not probable that I may be able to visit Monterey, and circumstances may prevent your coming to me. I shall much regret not having an early opportunity of felicitating you in person upon your many brilliant achievements; but we may meet somewhere in the interior of Mexico.

"I am not coming, my dear general, to supersede you in the immediate command on the line of operations rendered illustrious by you and your gallant army. My proposed theatre is different. You may imagine it; and I wish very much that it were prudent, at this distance, to tell you all that I expect to attempt or hope to execute. I have been admonished that despatches have been lost, and I have no special messenger at hand. Your imagination will be aided by the letters of the Secretary of War, conveyed by Mr. Armistead, Major Graham, and Mr. M'Lane.

"But, my dear general, I shall be obliged to take from you most of the gallant officers and men, (regulars and volunteers,) whom you have so long and so nobly commanded. I am afraid that I shall, by imperious necessity—the approach of yellow fever on the Gulf coast—reduce you, for a time, to stand on the defensive. This will be infinitely painful to you, and, for that reason, distressing to me. But I rely upon your patriotism to submit to the temporary sacrifice with cheerfulness. No man can better afford to do so. Recent victories place you on the high eminence; and I even flatter myself that

any benefit that may result to me, personally, from the unequal division of troops alluded to, will lessen the pain of your consequent inactivity.

"You will be aware of the recent call for nine regiments of new volunteers, including one of Texas horse. The President may soon ask for many more; and we are not without hope that Congress may add ten or twelve to the regular establishment. These, by the spring, say April, may, by the aid of large bounties, be in the field—should Mexico not earlier propose terms of accommodation; and, long before the spring, (March,) it is probable you will be again in force to resume offensive operations.

"It was not possible for me to find time to write from Washington, as I much desired. I only received an intimation to hold myself in preparation for Mexico, on the 18th instant. Much has been done towards that end, and more remains to be executed.

"Your detailed report of the operations at Monterey, and reply to the Secretary's despatch, by Lieutenant Armistead, were both received two days after I was instructed to proceed south."

Before ordering General Scott to Mexico, as subsequently appeared by the statements of Senator Benton, the President had decided to create the office of lieutenant-general, and thus supersede, not only the scar-marked hero of Chippewa and Niagara, but also to tear the fresh laurels of Palo Alto and Resaca de la Palma from the brow of the gallant Taylor. After this plan had been finally arranged, the President sent for General Scott, and confided to him the command of the army in Mexico, and gave to him the most solemn assurance of his confidence and support.

Immediately on the opening of Congress the project of creating a higher military grade was brought forward, and the friends of generals Scott and Taylor saw with alarm, that a plan was maturing by which they were both to be degraded to subordinate stations, and the entire direction of affairs in Mexico confided to other and untried hands. The friends of General Scott now saw that his apprehensions of an attack "from the rear," and which had been frankly expressed in his former letters, were indeed but too well founded; and that notwithstanding the assurance given on his departure from Washington for the army, of the full and cordial support of the government, the plan of wresting from him the command, at the earliest possible day, was then matured, and ready for speedy execution. In view of all the circumstances, it is, perhaps, not uncharitable to suppose that he was selected for that command, for the purpose of stirring up a spirit of rivalry between his friends and those of General Taylor, and thus affording a plausible pretext for superseding them both.

On the 30th of November General Scott sailed from New York, in the fullest confidence that the government was acting in good faith, and that every means would be furnished him for the prosecution of the war. Little did he then suppose, that before he could reach the theatre of active operations the government which had selected and sent him, would attempt to degrade him in the eyes of the world, by declaring, in effect, that he was unfit for the very place to which he had been so recently appointed.

With the generous confidence of a brave soldier, who had often met the enemy in deadly conflict, he received through the President the plighted faith of the nation that

all was right. The President saw him depart in the fullness of this confidence, and yet before he reached the army, the proposition to supersede him was already there. Yes, the very army into which he was to breathe the inspiration of hope—which he was to train and prepare for the deadly conflicts that awaited them—was informed, in advance, that the President had no confidence in their commander-in-chief.

General Scott reached the Rio Grande about the first of January. Early in the month it became evident that some of the principal arrangements for the attack on Vera Cruz were not likely to be carried out by the government. The bill for raising the ten additional regiments was lost sight of by the administration, in the desire to carry their favorite project of placing a political partisan at the head of the army; and this bill, which ought to have been passed in the first week of the session, was not finally disposed of till a day or two before the adjournment.

What was the condition of things in Mexico at this critical period?

Santa Anna, with a force of twenty-two thousand men, was at San Luis Potosi, a fortified city containing sixty thousand inhabitants, and about equally distant from Monterey, Vera Cruz, and Mexico.

General Taylor was in the vicinity of Monterey, in the command of a force of about eighteen thousand men, occupying the long line from Saltillo to Camargo, and thence to the mouth of the Rio Grande, where General Scott had just arrived with a small force, for the purpose of attacking Vera Cruz as soon as possible. He well knew that the *vomito* makes its appearance there in the early spring, and that delay would be fatal. The transports,

stores, and munitions, were beginning to arrive. What was to be done? Was the expedition against Vera Cruz to be abandoned, or was General Scott to go forward and do the best he could under circumstances so discouraging? He adopted the latter alternative. He reviewed all the disposable forces within his command, and carefully weighed chances and probabilities. He forwarded to General Taylor a full plan of his proposed operations. By the capture and assassination of Lieutenant Ritchie, the bearer of these despatches, the plans were fully disclosed to Santa Anna, and he became apprized that Vera Cruz was to be the main point of attack. At Vera Cruz, and its immediate vicinity, there were six or seven thousand men, and a much larger number could be collected from the adjoining country on a short notice. Would Santa Anna break up his camp at San Luis Potosi, and march on Vera Cruz—fill the city and castle with his best troops, and oppose the landing of General Scott with a selected army of forty thousand men? Or, was he likely to abandon the town and castle to their fate, thus leaving open the road to Mexico, and march with his whole force against General Taylor, over a desert of one hundred and fifty miles, with a certainty of having to encounter his enemy either in the defiles of the mountains or from behind the impregnable battlements of Monterey?

Under such circumstances it became the duty of General Scott so to divide the forces of the Rio Grande as would be most likely to meet any contingency that might arise. He collected the regular infantry—for these might be necessary to carry with the bayonet the fortified city and castle of Vera Cruz. He left within the limits of General Taylor's command, about ten thousand volun-

teers and several companies of the best artillery of the regular army. These General Taylor might have concentrated at Monterey, and General Scott suggested to him, in his instructions, to do so, if it became necessary. With this comparatively small force, General Taylor not only maintained all the posts within his command, but with the one half of it achieved the memorable victory of Buena Vista.

General Scott assigned twelve thousand men to the expedition against Vera Cruz, and had Santa Anna concentrated his forces at that point, the disparity of numbers would have been much greater than at Buena Vista. These remarks are not made for the purpose of comparing the skill, or the conduct, or the claims to public gratitude of the two distinguished generals who have so well fulfilled every trust reposed in them by their country; but simply to show that in the disposition of the forces made by General Scott, he did not take a larger portion for his own command than the interests of the service imperatively demanded.

CHAPTER VIII.

General Taylor's Movements.—Taylor's Position.—Santa Anna's Advance.—Importance of the event.—Battle of Buena Vista.—Retreat of the Mexicans.—Taylor's Official Account.—Santa Anna's Report.

IN pursuance of orders from the War Department, General Taylor, in the month of November, ordered the divisions of Generals Twiggs, Quitman, and Pillow from Monterey to Victoria, for the purpose of joining at Tampico the expedition against Vera Cruz. In the latter part of December, General Patterson's division left Matamoras for the same destination, by the route through Victoria; while General Worth's division proceeded from Saltillo to Comargo, thence to Matamoras, and joined General Scott at the Brazos.

At Victoria, on the 30th of December, 1846, General Taylor received information of Scott's departure for Mexico. Santa Anna, in the mean time, was at San Luis Potosi, with an army of twenty-two thousand men.

In the latter part of January, 1847, General Taylor left Victoria and established his headquarters at Monterey, and early in February his whole force at this point, including the volunteers who had recently joined him, amounted to between six and seven thousand men.

Soon after reaching Monterey, he received intelligence