

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

that a party of dragoons under Colonel May had been surprised at Encarnacion, in the early part of February, and that Cassius M. Clay and Majors Borland and Gaines were taken prisoners by General Minon, at the head of fifteen hundred men. These circumstances induced General Taylor to believe that Santa Anna intended advancing with his whole army, and he determined to proceed at once to Saltillo and give him battle.

Leaving a force of fifteen hundred men, he departed from Monterey on the 31st of January, and reached Saltillo on the 2d of February. Having, in the mean time, been reinforced by five hundred men, his effective force was about five thousand. On the 4th of February he advanced to Agua Nueva, a strong position on the road leading from Saltillo to San Luis. Here he remained until the 21st, when he received intelligence that Santa Anna was advancing with his whole army. Having carefully examined the strong mountain-passes, he decided that Buena Vista, a strong mountain-pass eleven miles nearer Saltillo, was the most favorable point to make a stand against a force so overwhelming. He therefore fell back to that place; and having formed his army in order of battle, calmly awaited the approach of the enemy.

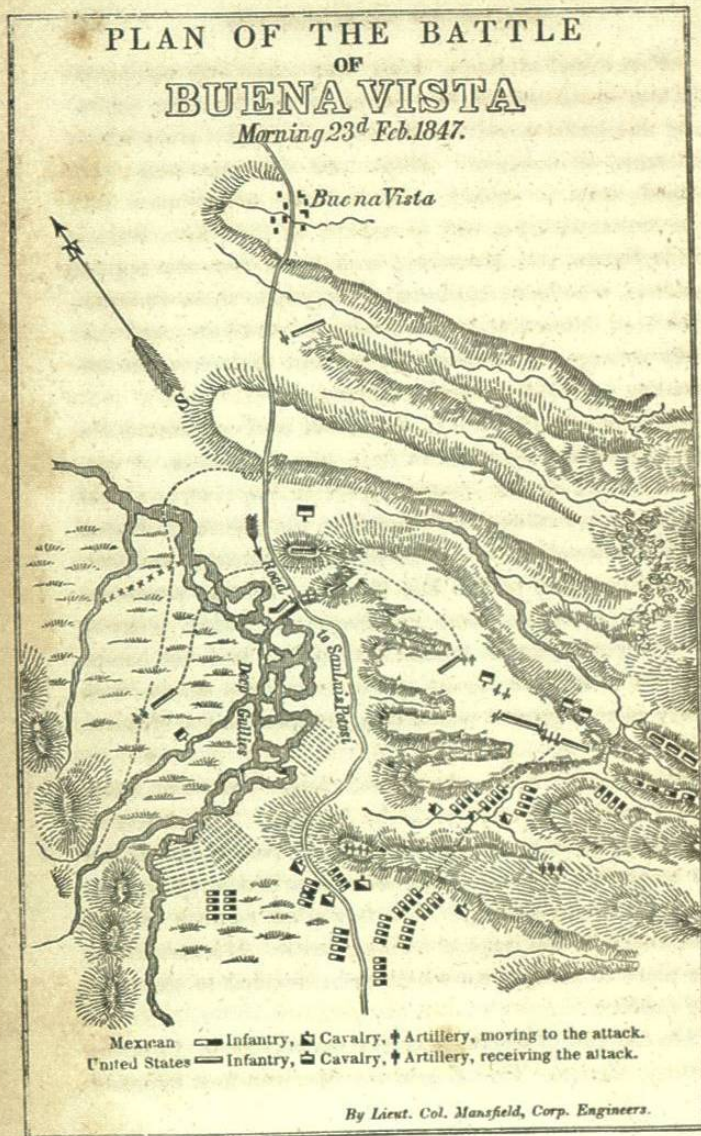
The position of the American army at this moment was most critical. The regular troops had been withdrawn, with the exception of four companies of artillery, and even these had been filled up by new levies. The volunteers, of which the army was mainly composed, had received some instruction in the regular duties of the camp, but had not attained that perfection in discipline which gives confidence in military operations.

The army of Santa Anna was admirably equipped. It was composed of the flower of the Mexican nation, and numbered more than four to one of the army which it came to conquer. Hope and dire necessity both urged them to victory. Those who remembered that the American arms had triumphed at Palo Alto, Resaca de la Palma, and Monterey, well knew that the regular soldiers, who had contributed so largely to those victories, had been ordered to distant fields of operations; and that even courage and enthusiasm, without discipline, are unavailing against multiplied numbers.

The commander, Santa Anna, had well considered the advantages he would derive from this movement, if successful, and all the chances were in his favor. Could he have driven General Taylor from his position at Buena Vista, he would have swept down to Comargo, and over the whole valley of the Rio Grande. All the munitions of war, provisions, camp equipage, and public property of every description would have fallen into his hands, and the American troops would have been driven from every inch of ground which they occupied in the Mexican territory.

If defeated, Santa Anna well knew that his moral power over his army would be broken. The desert in his rear, and over which he had just passed, could not be traversed by a retreating and dispirited army without great loss and suffering. The fate of his country seemed suspended on the issue of a single battle. His own fame, his place in history, were both to be decided in the coming conflict.

On the 22d of February, a day memorable in American history, General Taylor saw the Mexican host approach



the narrow mountain-pass which he had selected as the Thermopylæ of his army.

The position of the two armies at, and soon after the commencement of the battle, is shown by the map. The enemy's right, opposite to our left, is concentrated in columns of attack behind a spur of the mountain, and his riflemen are on the side of the inaccessible mountain firing across a deep gully at our riflemen on the same mountain. A small eminence and spur of the mountain between them is unoccupied by either party. On our extreme left is the 2d Indiana regiment, supported by three pieces of artillery, one of which was lost in the onset of the morning; next, is the 2d Illinois regiment, with a piece of artillery on either flank; next, two pieces of artillery and a squadron of dragoons; next, two pieces of artillery and the 2d Kentucky foot; next, four companies of the 1st Illinois regiment on a spur of the plateau, at the foot of which is a parapet across the road, behind which are four pieces of artillery and two companies of the 1st Illinois regiment. A little to the rear is the 3d Indiana regiment on an eminence, behind which is a squadron of dragoons; and still further to the rear, near the rancho of Buena Vista, is the 1st Mississippi regiment, and one piece of artillery just arrived from Saltillo under General Taylor. In rear of our extreme left, on the edge of the plateau, are the Kentucky and Arkansas cavalry.

General Taylor, in reviewing his army, could not but recollect that the troops which formed his first encampment at Corpus Christi, and had shared with him the toils and triumphs of the campaign of 1846, were not in his line of battle. New men had come to replace them. Would these, as those, stand firm amid sheets of

flame, the roar of artillery, and the impetuous rush of the charge? Were they worthy successors of the old guards, who would die at their posts, facing the enemy? These are questions which must have agitated the mind of the commander on the eve of that great battle. Fortunately for the country they have been all rightly answered. His own great example appears to have supplied the want of discipline, and inspired the troops with heroic enthusiasm. The volunteer is changed into the regular soldier; the citizen of yesterday becomes the veteran of to-day; and the American arms are everywhere triumphant.

The solid Mexican phalanx of twenty-two thousand men, armed and equipped for victory, have melted away before the steady fire of the artillery, and the deadly aim of the American rifle. When the last struggle for victory is made, and Santa Anna rallies his broken columns for a final charge; when the American regiments occupying the advance yield to superior numbers and fall back in confusion on the reserves, and the day seems lost; the commanding general hurries to the point where the battle is to be decided, orders the artillery to face about and unlimber, and gives the emphatic order, "A little more grape, Captain Bragg!" This saves the day. The Mexican columns now waver and halt. The curtains of night close down over the battle-field; the wounded and the dying rest in their gory bed; and the wearied officer and exhausted soldier sink together to repose.

The importance of this victory to the American arms cannot be exaggerated. It secured the whole frontier of the Rio Grande, and struck terror and dismay into the hearts of the Mexican nation. It was, in fact, the first great turning point of the war.



American Army 4,000 men.
Mexican Army 20,000 men.

BATTLE OF BUENA VISTA.

Fought February 22d, 1847.

The American Army under Gen. Taylor Completely Victorious.

American Loss, 504 Killed,
450 Wounded,
50 Missing.
Mexican Loss, estimated to be Killed
and Wounded, 2000 men.

To the commander, General Taylor, the thanks of the country have been tendered in many ways for his signal ability, courage, and steadiness under circumstances so critical and trying. The general himself, with a magnanimity and modesty equalled only by his merits, has expressed his obligations to those who acted under him, of all grades of service. To them he has said that the country owes much. Their patient endurance of fatigue and privation; their cheerful submission to the rigorous discipline of the camp; their noble bearing in the hour of danger; their gallant conduct on the battle-field, gave to the army its efficiency and ensured its final triumph.

The following is General Taylor's official Report:

"HEADQUARTERS, ARMY OF OCCUPATION, }
"Agua Nueva, March 6th, 1847. }

"TO THE HON. SECRETARY OF WAR:

"SIR:—I have the honor to submit a detailed report of the operations of the forces under my command, which resulted in the engagement of Buena Vista, the repulse of the Mexican army, and the reoccupation of this position.

"The information which reached me of the advance and concentration of a heavy Mexican force in my front, had assumed such a probable form as to induce a special examination far beyond the reach of our pickets to ascertain its correctness. A small party of Texan spies, under Major McCullough, despatched to the hacienda of Encarnacion, thirty miles from this, on the route to San Luis Potosi, had reported a cavalry force of unknown strength

at that place. On the 20th of February, a strong reconnoissance, under Lieutenant-colonel May, was despatched to the hacienda of Hecliondo, while Major McCullough made another examination of Encarnacion. The result of these expeditions left no doubt that the enemy was in large force at Encarnacion, under the orders of General Santa Anna, and that he meditated a forward movement and attack upon our position.

"As the camp of Agua Nueva could be turned on either flank, and as the enemy's force was greatly superior to our own, particularly in the arm of cavalry, I determined, after much consideration, to take up a position about eleven miles in rear, and there await the attack. The army broke up its camp and marched at noon on the 21st, encamping at the new position a little in front of the hacienda of Buena Vista. With a small force I proceeded to Saltillo, to make some necessary arrangements for the defence of the town, leaving Brigadier-General Wool in the immediate command of the troops.

"Before these arrangements were completed, on the morning of the 22d, I was advised that the enemy was in sight, advancing. Upon reaching the ground it was found that his cavalry advance was in our front, having marched from Encarnacion, as we have since learned, at eleven o'clock the day previous, and driving in a mounted force left at Agua Nueva to cover the removal of public stores. Our troops were in position, occupying a line of remarkable strength. The road at this point becomes a narrow defile, the valley on its right being rendered quite impracticable for artillery by a succession of deep and impassable gullies, while on the left a succession of rugged ridges and precipitous ravines extends far back towards the moun-

tain which bounds the valley. The features of the ground were such as nearly to paralyze the artillery and cavalry of the enemy, while his infantry could not derive all the advantage of its numerical superiority. In this position we prepared to receive him. Captain Washington's battery (Fourth artillery) was posted to command the road, while the First and Second Illinois regiments, under Colonels Hardin and Bissell, each eight companies, (to the latter of which was attached Captain Conner's company of Texas volunteers,) and the Second Kentucky, under Colonel McKee, occupied the crests of the ridges on the left and in rear. The Arkansas and Kentucky regiments of cavalry, commanded by Colonels Yell and H. Marshall, occupied the extreme left near the base of the mountain, while the Indiana brigade, under Brigadier-General Lane, (composed of the Second and Third regiments, under Colonels Bowles and Lane,) the Mississippi riflemen, under Colonel Davis, the squadrons of the First and Second dragoons, under Captain Steene and Lieutenant-colonel May, and the light batteries of Captains Sherman and Bragg, Third artillery, were held in reserve.

"At eleven o'clock I received from General Santa Anna a summons to surrender at discretion, which, with a copy of my reply, I have already transmitted. The enemy still forebore his attack, evidently waiting for the arrival of his rear columns, which could be distinctly seen by our look-outs as they approached the field. A demonstration made on his left caused me to detach the Second Kentucky regiment and a section of artillery to our right, in which position they bivouacked for the night. In the mean time the Mexican light troops had engaged ours on

the extreme left, (composed of parts of the Kentucky and Arkansas cavalry dismounted, and a rifle battalion from the Indiana brigade under Major Gorman, the whole commanded by Colonel Marshall,) and kept up a sharp fire, climbing the mountain side, and apparently endeavoring to gain our flank. Three pieces of Captain Washington's battery had been detached to the left, and were supported by the Second Indiana regiment. An occasional shell was thrown by the enemy into this part of our line, but without effect. The skirmishing of the light troops was kept up with trifling loss on our part until dark, when I became convinced that no serious attack would be made before the morning, and returned, with the Mississippi regiment and squadron of Second dragoons, to Saltillo. The troops bivouacked without fires, and laid upon their arms. A body of cavalry, some fifteen hundred strong, had been visible all day in rear of the town, having entered the valley through a narrow pass, east of the city. This cavalry, commanded by General Minon, had evidently been thrown in our rear to break up and harass our retreat, and perhaps make some attempt against the town, if practicable. The city was occupied by four excellent companies of Illinois volunteers, under Major Warren, of the First regiment. A field-work, which commanded most of the approaches, was garrisoned by Captain Webster's company, First artillery, and armed with two twenty-four pound howitzers, while the train and head-quarter camp was guarded by two companies of Mississippi riflemen, under Captain Rogers, and a field-piece, commanded by Captain Shover, Third artillery. Having made these dispositions for the protection of the rear, I proceeded on the morning of the 23d to Buena Vista, ordering forward all the other avail-

able troops. The action had commenced before my arrival on the field.

"During the evening and night of the 22d, the enemy had thrown a body of light troops on the mountain side, with the purpose of outflanking our left; and it was here that the action of the 23d commenced at an early hour. Our riflemen, under Colonel Marshall, who had been reinforced by three companies under Major Trail, Second Illinois volunteers, maintained their ground handsomely against a greatly superior force, holding themselves under cover, and using their weapons with deadly effect. About eight o'clock, a strong demonstration was made against the centre of our position, a heavy column moving along the road. This force was soon dispersed by a few rapid and well-directed shots from Captain Washington's battery. In the mean time the enemy was concentrating a large force of infantry and cavalry under cover of the ridges, with the obvious intention of forcing our left, which was posted on an extensive plateau. The Second Indiana and Second Illinois regiments formed this part of our line, the former covering three pieces of light artillery, under the orders of Captain O'Brien—Brigadier-General Lane being in the immediate command. In order to bring his men within effective range, General Lane ordered the artillery and Second Indiana regiment forward. The artillery advanced within musket-range of a heavy body of Mexican infantry, and was served against it with great effect, but without being able to check its advance. The infantry ordered to its support had fallen back in disorder, being exposed, as well as the battery, not only to a severe fire of small-arms from the front, but also to a murderous cross-fire of grape and canister, from

a Mexican battery on the left. Captain O'Brien found it impossible to retain his position without support, but was only able to withdraw two of his pieces, all the horses and cannoniers of the third piece being killed or disabled. The Second Indiana regiment, which had fallen back as stated, could not be rallied, and took no farther part in the action, except a handful of men, who, under its gallant colonel, Bowles, joined the Mississippi regiment, and did good service, and those fugitives who, at a later period in the day, assisted in defending the train and depot at Buena Vista. This portion of our line having given way, and the enemy appearing in overwhelming force against our left flank, the light troops which had rendered such good service on the mountain were compelled to withdraw, which they did, for the most part, in good order. Many, however, were not rallied until they reached the depot at Buena Vista, to the defence of which they afterwards contributed.

“ Col. Bissell's regiment, (Second Illinois,) which had been joined by a section of Captain Sherman's battery, had become completely outflanked, and was compelled to fall back, being entirely unsupported. The enemy was now pouring masses of infantry and cavalry along the base of the mountain on our left, and was gaining our rear in great force. At this moment I arrived upon the field. The Mississippi regiment had been directed to the left before reaching the position, and immediately came into action against the Mexican infantry which had turned our flank. The Second Kentucky regiment, and a section of artillery under Captain Bragg, had previously been ordered from the right to reinforce our left, and arrived at a most opportune moment. That regiment, and a portion

of the First Illinois, under Colonel Hardin, gallantly drove the enemy, and recovered a portion of the ground we had lost. The batteries of Captains Sherman and Bragg were in position on the plateau, and did much execution, not only in front, but particularly upon the masses which had gained our rear. Discovering that the enemy was heavily pressing upon the Mississippi regiment, the Third Indiana regiment, under Colonel Lane, was despatched to strengthen that part of our line which formed a crotchet perpendicular to the first line of battle. At the same time Lieutenant Kilburn, with a piece of Captain Bragg's battery, was directed to support the infantry there engaged. The action was for a long time warmly sustained at that point—the enemy making several efforts both with infantry and cavalry against our line, and being always repulsed with heavy loss. I had placed all the regular cavalry and Captain Pike's squadron of Arkansas horse under the orders of Brevet Lieutenant-colonel May, with directions to hold in check the enemy's column, still advancing to the rear along the base of the mountain, which was done in conjunction with the Kentucky and Arkansas cavalry, under Colonels Marshall and Yell.

“ In the mean time our left, which was still strongly threatened by a superior force, was farther strengthened by the detachment of Captain Bragg's and a portion of Captain Sherman's batteries to that quarter. The concentration of artillery-fire upon the masses of the enemy along the base of the mountain, and the determined resistance offered by the two regiments opposed to them, had created confusion in their ranks, and some of the corps attempted to effect a retreat upon their main line of battle. The squadron of the First dragoons, under Lieutenant

Rucker, was now ordered up the deep ravine which these retreating corps were endeavoring to cross, in order to charge and disperse them. The squadron proceeded to the point indicated, but could not accomplish the object, being exposed to a heavy fire from a battery established to cover the retreat of those corps. While the squadron was detached on this service, a large body of the enemy was observed to concentrate on our extreme left, apparently with the view of making a descent upon the hacienda of Buena Vista, where our train and baggage were deposited. Lieutenant-colonel May was ordered to the support of that point, with two pieces of Captain Sherman's battery under Lieutenant Reynolds. In the mean time, the scattered forces near the hacienda, composed in part of Majors Trail and Gorman's commands, had been to some extent organized under the advice of Major Munroe, chief of artillery, with the assistance of Major Morrison, volunteer staff, and were posted to defend the position. Before our cavalry had reached the hacienda, that of the enemy had made its attack; having been handsomely met by the Kentucky and Arkansas cavalry under Colonels Marshall and Yell. The Mexican column immediately divided, one portion sweeping by the depot, where it received a destructive fire from the force which had collected there, and then gaining the mountain opposite, under a fire from Lieutenant Reynolds' section, the remaining portion regaining the base of the mountain on our left. In the charge at Buena Vista, Colonel Yell fell gallantly at the head of his regiment; we also lost Adjutant Vaughan, of the Kentucky cavalry—a young officer of much promise. Lieutenant-colonel May, who had been rejoined by the squadron of the First dragoons and by portions of the

Arkansas and Indiana troops, under Lieutenant-colonel Roane and Major Gorman, now approached the base of the mountain, holding in check the right flank of the enemy, upon whose masses, crowded in the narrow gorges and ravines, our artillery was doing fearful execution.

“The position of that portion of the Mexican army which had gained our rear was now very critical, and it seemed doubtful whether it could regain the main body. At this moment I received from General Santa Anna a message by a staff officer, desiring to know what I wanted. I immediately despatched Brigadier-general Wool to the Mexican general-in-chief, and sent orders to cease firing. Upon reaching the Mexican lines, General Wool could not cause the enemy to cease their fire, and accordingly returned without having an interview. The extreme right of the enemy continued its retreat along the base of the mountain, and finally, in spite of all our efforts, effected a junction with the remainder of the army.

“During the day, the cavalry of General Minon had ascended the elevated plain above Saltillo, and occupied the road from the city to the field of battle, where they intercepted several of our men. Approaching the town, they were fired upon by Captain Webster, from the redoubt occupied by his company, and then moved off towards the eastern side of the valley, and obliquely towards Buena Vista. At this time, Captain Shover moved rapidly forward with his piece, supported by a miscellaneous command of mounted volunteers, and fired several shots at the cavalry with great effect. They were driven into the ravines which lead to the lower valley, closely pursued by Captain Shover, who was farther supported by a piece of Captain Webster's battery, under Lieutenant Donald-

son, which had advanced from the redoubt, supported by Captain Wheeler's company of Illinois volunteers. The enemy made one or two efforts to charge the artillery, but was finally driven back in a confused mass, and did not again appear upon the plain.

"In the mean time, the firing had partially ceased upon the principal field. The enemy seemed to confine his efforts to the protection of his artillery, and I had left the plateau for a moment, when I was recalled thither by a very heavy musketry fire. On regaining that position, I discovered that our infantry (Illinois and Second Kentucky) had engaged a greatly superior force of the enemy—evidently his reserve—and that they had been overwhelmed by numbers. The moment was most critical. Captain O'Brien, with two pieces, had sustained this heavy charge to the last, and was finally obliged to leave his guns on the field—his infantry support being entirely routed. Captain Bragg, who had just arrived from the left, was ordered at once into battery. Without any infantry to support him, and at the imminent risk of losing his guns, this officer came rapidly into action, the Mexican line being but a few yards from the muzzle of his pieces. The first discharge of canister caused the enemy to hesitate; the second and third drove him back in disorder and saved the day. The Second Kentucky regiment, which had advanced beyond supporting distance in this affair, was driven back and closely pressed by the enemy's cavalry. Taking a ravine which led in the direction of Captain Washington's battery, their pursuers became exposed to his fire, which soon checked and drove them back with loss. In the mean time the rest of our artillery had taken position on the plateau, covered by the

Mississippi and Third Indiana regiments, the former of which had reached the ground in time to pour a fire into the right flank of the enemy, and thus contribute to his repulse.

"In this last conflict we had the misfortune to sustain a very heavy loss. Colonel Hardin, First Illinois, and Colonel McKee and Lieutenant-colonel Clay, Second Kentucky regiment, fell at this time, while gallantly leading their commands.

"No farther attempt was made by the enemy to force our position, and the approach of night gave an opportunity to pay proper attention to the wounded, and also to refresh the soldiers, who had been exhausted by incessant watchfulness and combat. Though the night was severely cold, the troops were compelled for the most to bivouac without fires, expecting that morning would renew the conflict. During the night the wounded were removed to Saltillo, and every preparation made to receive the enemy, should he again attack our position. Seven fresh companies were drawn from the town, and Brigadier-general Marshall, with a reinforcement of Kentucky cavalry and four heavy guns, under Captain Prentiss, First artillery, was near at hand, when it was discovered that the enemy had abandoned his position during the night. Our scouts soon ascertained that he had fallen back upon Agua Nueva. The great disparity of numbers, and the exhaustion of our troops, rendered it inexpedient and hazardous to attempt pursuit. A staff officer was despatched to General Santa Anna, to negotiate an exchange of prisoners, which was satisfactorily completed on the following day. Our own dead were collected and buried, and the Mexican wounded, of which a large number had been left upon the field,