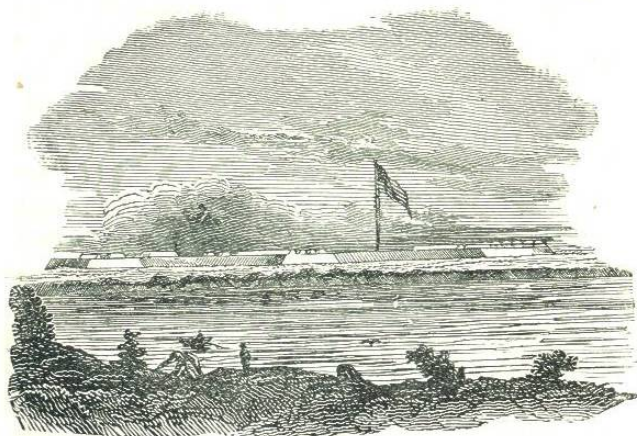


Preparations for assault on Fort Brown.



Fort Brown.

where he had left Captain May, and finding him gone, returned to the fort, stating that the Mexicans had blocked the game on him this time, but that he would give them another turn when it was dark. Starting from the fort at night with his party, his superior knowledge of the country only enabling him to avoid the numerous parties of the enemy who were aware of his mission, and on the alert to capture him.

At the fort, during the 4th, the fire of the enemy was not renewed, and the soldiers laboured with energy to complete the works. On the following day, large parties of the enemy, both horse and foot, were discovered in the rear of the fort. These thousands were supported by a battery that had been erected in the night, and which the garrison named for the sake of distinction, "the Battery in the country." This battery, with those in Mata-

Signal guns fired at Fort Brown.

moras, opened with shot and shell in the afternoon, and kept up a galling cross fire. At nine o'clock, Lieutenant Hanson, after a gallant reconnoissance, reported the erection of a new battery at the cross roads. On Wednesday morning, the 6th, a spirited fire was kept up against the fort, the shot and shells being well directed. The balls falling into the fortress afforded considerable merriment to the soldiers, who were sitting idly about, reserving their ammunition in case of need under an assault. An old soldier, who prided himself on his culinary skill, had made some coffee, and was stooping to pour it into the cups of his mess, when a ball flying over the parapet, struck in the ashes near him and overturned the beverage into the fire. The disciple of Careme and votary of Mars, shocked at the disrespect, gave the ball a kick, while in a dolorous voice he cursed the rascally Mexicans for knocking over his coffee.

In compliance with the directions given by General Taylor to be pursued in case the fort was surrounded, the eighteen-pounders were fired at stated intervals. The enemy, as if conscious that this was a call for relief, reopened their fire upon the fort. The officers of the garrison, however, reserved their ammunition for the expected assault. The bomb proofs were built at points convenient for the soldiers to retreat into, and the sentinel on the look out could name the battery from which a ball or shell was fired, as soon as he saw the smoke of the discharge, and the soldiers would have time to get under cover before the balls reached them. Shells were frequently allowed to explode harmlessly in the air, by the soldiers falling flat on their faces, when one was fired, a measure which a Mexican, elevated to a

considerable height in a tall tree, with a glass in his hand, reported to his comrades as being what it seemed to him, a mark of the destruction produced by their fire.

The lamented death of Major Brown occurred at this time, May 6th.* We give the following graphic account of it, taken from "Our Army on the Rio Grande," by T. B. Thorpe, Esq. He says, "After the cross firing, called forth with so much energy by our signal eighteen pounders, had continued for three hours and a half, the noble-minded Major Brown, commander of the fort, with his adjutant-lieutenant by his side, took his usual round to see that officers and men were at their posts. He stopped for a moment to give directions to some of the soldiers who were busily employed at one of the bomb proofs. Every instant the men were engaged in dodging to avoid the ball and bursting shell. One of the latter, from "the battery in the country," struck in the parapet, burying itself in the sand without exploding; a cloud of dust rose into the air, amid which the gallant commander was seen to fall, mortally wounded. He was immediately taken to the hospital tent, and,

* The death of Major J. Brown was a severe loss to the army. He was a native of Vermont, and at the age of twenty-four years entered the army as a common soldier, in the 7th infantry, at the commencement of the war of 1812. His merit soon raised him to the rank of ensign, lieutenant, and finally major. He did good service in the Florida war; and was selected by General Taylor to command at the fort where he fell, in consequence of the general's high opinion of his courage and ability. General Taylor says of him: "The pleasure (*of victory*) is alloyed with profound regret at the loss of the heroic and indomitable Major Brown. His loss would be a severe one to the service at any time, but to the army under my orders, it is indeed irreparable."

In the case of Major Brown we see the importance of occasional promotions of common soldiers to the rank of officers.

while being borne in the arms of two of his men, he exhorted those about him never to give up the fort. His right leg had been shot off, exhibiting the torn muscles, and jagged crushed bones to the pained sight of his command. Although suffering the most excruciating tortures, he remained perfectly calm, and said to those who were sympathizingly standing about him, "Men, go to your duties, stand by your posts; I am but one among you." While suffering under the operation of having his leg amputated above the knee, which was most skilfully done, he congratulated his country that the misfortune had befallen him, and not been meted out to a younger man.

Attempts were next made by the enemy to bring musketry into play upon the garrison, but those who approached for the purpose were scattered with some loss by a few rounds of canister. The bombardment then grew still more severe, and continued till noon. In the afternoon, a few shells were thrown. At four P.M., two Mexican officers approached with a white flag, bearing a communication from General Arista, which proved to be a summons to surrender, the humanity of the Mexicans being given as a reason for the demand, although he is asserted to have had a band of men organized and instructed to slaughter the garrison as soon as the surrender was made. Captain Hawkins, who had succeeded Major Brown in the command, summoned a council of the commissioned officers, and stated the purport of the message, (the want of a good Spanish interpreter making it difficult to be fully understood,) adding that though he knew there was but one sentiment upon the point, he thought it proper that all the officers should

be represented in the reply. It was then unanimously voted to defend the fort to the death. The following reply was therefore prepared and despatched to General Arista, within the hour that had been allowed for a reply.

"SIR:—Your humane communication has just been received, and, after the consideration due to its importance, I must respectfully decline to surrender my forces to you.

The exact purport of your despatch I cannot feel confident that I understand, as my interpreter is not skilled in your language; but if I have understood you correctly, you have my reply above," &c., &c.

The reception of this answer was the signal of a general burst of heavy shot upon the fort; but the Americans saved their ammunition and doubled their sentinels during the night, in expectation of an attack. During the 7th, much activity was manifested, a heavy cannonade being maintained all day, and various parties firing with muskets into the fort from every position. The garrison, however, were directed not to return the fire unless they advanced within eighty yards, and they therefore preserved silence. In the evening, the gallant Major Mansfield advanced with a small party into the plain, and leveled the traverse formerly occupied by the Americans, and which now served to shelter the enemy while firing on the fort. A large quantity of chaparral, used in a similar manner, was also cut down. At midnight the garrison were roused by a terrible discharge of musketry, and the sound of bugles, but the anticipated assault did not follow. On the 8th, the cannonade was recommenced at daybreak, and continued till the afternoon. The bombardment had hardly ceased when a severe cannon-

ading was heard in the direction of Point Isabel, so sudden and so rapidly that it seemed to be one continuous volley of field-pieces. The soldiers in the fort answered it by hearty cheering; the men of Matamoras, by a renewal of the firing from four mortar batteries at once. Yet the gallant defenders knew that General Taylor was on his way to succour them, and they stood upon the parapet to listen to the far distant firing, while the terrific rain from the enemy's batteries poured unheeded around them. Towards night, they learned from a Mexican the events of the field of Palo Alto, and the knowledge that the victory rested with their friends made the quiet night, their nearer enemies permitted them to enjoy, the more refreshing. On the morning of the 9th, an officer of the 7th regiment went outside of the fort to the flagstaff, for the purpose of arranging the halyards, which had become unrigged on the previous day. He succeeded in lowering the topmast of the staff and rigging the halyards, the enemy playing upon him with round shot and shell from all their batteries. He was not strong enough to raise the flagstaff to its proper place, he therefore coolly lashed it in its position, and gave the flag to the breeze.

On this day Major Brown expired. At the time of his death every thing in the fort was perfectly still, and the silence was unbroken until the report of Ridgely's batteries on the field of the Resaca de la Palma were heard. "No language," says Mr. Thorpe, "can describe the intense interest with which the raging battle was listened to: each man was at his post, and every booming gun called forth an almost agonizing interest to learn its nationality and effects. Meanwhile the bom-

bardment opened simultaneously with the firing on the field, and continued to increase with unprecedented severity; but it was not to the batteries of the Mexicans that attention was directed. Our eighteen-pounders were occasionally fired, to let General Taylor know that all was still well in the fort. The firing on the battlefield was now growing less and less powerful, and the discharges were becoming irregular. 'They have charged on the guns!' shouted one of the officers! Another and another was silenced. 'They have carried them!' shouted another, in uncontrollable ecstasy; all cannonading ceased; volleys of musketry were next heard, then all was still. How eloquently the silence spoke of the hand-to-hand conflict, and how the blood in the hearts of these brave men went and came from excitement to be engaged in it! The victorious result of our arms was now almost certain. General Taylor and his brave men would either conquer or die. No bells were now ringing in Matamoras, and the noisy music that was wont to belabour the air had been silenced since the evening of the 8th. This, to the heroes of the fort, was full of meaning, and the tale was soon told. At a little before six a confused rush of cavalry and straggling infantry towards the Rio Grande, announced the victory of the Americans, at sight of which, an officer of the 7th regiment jumped upon the parapet, beside the regimental flagstaff, and gave three cheers, which were responded to so loudly and heartily by all in the fort, that they silenced the enemy's batteries, for from that moment they ceased firing. The news had reached Matamoras, that to Mexico the day was lost." Besides Major Brown, one non-commissioned officer killed, and ten

men wounded was the amount of loss that the garrison sustained during one hundred and sixty hours severe bombardment.

General Taylor had left Point Isabel on the evening of the 7th of May, and moved with the main body of the army towards the Rio Grande. After marching seven miles, they bivouacked on their arms, and resumed the march on the following morning. At noon they discovered the enemy, prepared to oppose their progress, stretched out on the flat prairie more than a mile.

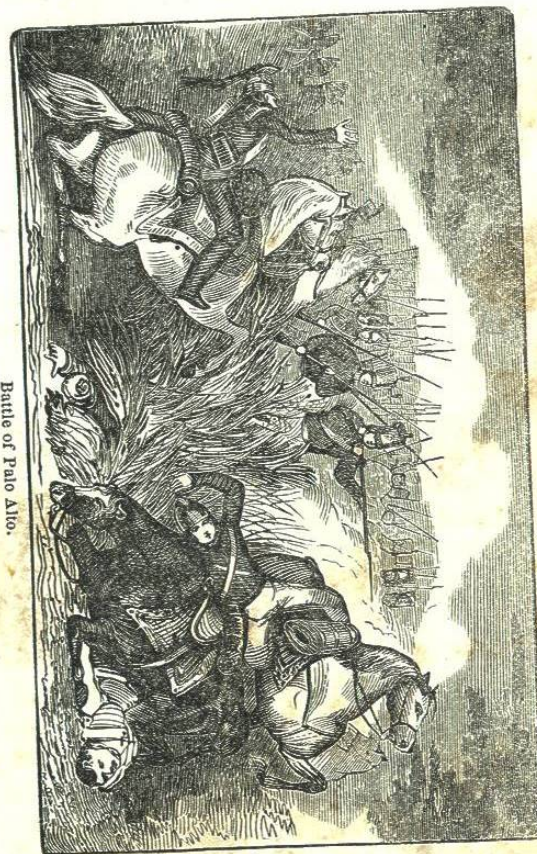
We give here the clear and concise account of this battle, given by General Taylor in his official despatches, reserving for another portion of the work more minute details and personal anecdotes.

"About noon, when our advance of cavalry had reached the water hole of 'Palo Alto,' the Mexican troops were reported in our front, and were soon discovered occupying the road in force. I ordered a halt upon reaching the water, with the view to rest and refresh the men, and to form deliberately our line of battle. The Mexican line was now plainly visible across the prairie, and about three-quarters of a mile distant. Their left, which was composed of a heavy force of cavalry, occupied the road, resting upon a thicket of chaparral, while masses of infantry were discovered in succession on the right, greatly outnumbering our own force.

Our line of battle was now formed in the following order, commencing on the extreme right:—5th infantry, commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel McIntosh; Major Ringgold's artillery; 3d infantry, commanded by Captain L. N. Morris; two eighteen-pounders, commanded

by Lieutenant Churchill, 3d artillery; 4th infantry, commanded by Major G. W. Allen; the 3d and 4th regiments composed the third brigade, under command of Lieutenant-Colonel Garland; and all the above corps, together with two squadrons of dragoons under Captains Ker and May, composed the right wing under the orders of Colonel Twiggs. The left was formed by the battalion of artillery commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel Childs. Captain Duncan's light artillery, and the 8th infantry, under Captain Montgomery—all forming the first brigade, under command of Lieutenant-Colonel Belknap. The train was packed near the water, under direction of Captains Crossman and Myers, and protected by Captain Ker's squadron.

At two o'clock we took up the march by heads of columns, in the direction of the enemy—the eighteen-pounder battery following the road. While the columns were advancing, Lieutenant Blake, topographical engineer, volunteered a reconnoissance of the enemy's line, which was handsomely performed, and resulted in the discovery of at least two batteries of artillery in the intervals of their cavalry and infantry. These batteries were soon opened upon us, when I ordered the columns halted and deployed into line, and the fire to be returned by all our artillery. The 8th infantry on our extreme left, was thrown back to secure that flank. The first fires of the enemy did little execution, while our eighteen-pounders and Major Ringgold's artillery soon dispersed the cavalry which formed his left.—Captain Duncan's battery, thrown forward in advance of the line, was doing good execution at this time. Captain May's squadron was now detached to support that battery, and



Battle of Palo Alto.