

panies of 2d Dragoons, Pike's squadron, and two\* pieces of artillery, under Lieutenant Reynolds, was ordered by General Taylor to proceed rapidly to the rear to support that point. This force had hardly started, before it was discovered that the two companies of the 1st Dragoons, which had proceeded toward the mountains on the left, had come under a most withering fire of grape and canister from the 18 and 24-pounder battery <sup>(L)</sup> at the head of the plateau, which effectually covered the retreat of the corps they went to disperse. General Taylor, therefore, caused them to be recalled. In coming down the plateau to the position the General occupied, they moved directly in front of the whole battery, and besides had a cross-fire of infantry on their left flank. Many of their men and horses

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the whole army defeated, and in full retreat. They, therefore, started for the city, as fast as their mules could run. It was with the utmost exertion that Captain W. W. Chapman, Assistant Quarter-Master and Aide to General Wool, could stop them. He succeeded, however, in doing so, and in parking the wagons about half a mile below Buena Vista.

\* Both belonging to Sherman's Battery; the howitzer which French had, and which Lieutenant Garnett afterwards commanded temporarily, being one. This left only three upon the plateau; — two under O'Brien, and one under Thomas.

were cut up, and their guidon was shot away; fortunately, however, it was soon afterwards recovered. Running the gantlet of such an immense force, the wonder was how these two little companies escaped annihilation. They were immediately ordered to join Colonel May again, to resist the attack threatened on the dépôt at Buena Vista, and on the train; and they proceeded at a gallop for that point, overtaking Lieutenant Reynolds, with his two pieces, on the way. But, before any of this force could reach the extreme left, the brigade of the enemy's cavalry, in column of squadrons, <sup>(17)</sup> charged furiously into the Arkansas and Kentucky Mounted Volunteers, <sup>(18)</sup> who had formed a line near the spring in front of the hacienda. The latter had waited until the enemy came within sixty yards, when they fired with their carbines, but with very trifling effect. By the time their pieces were dropped and their sabres drawn, the enemy was amongst them with his lances. The *mêlée* was then general; the Americans and Mexicans were mixed up in utter confusion, the whole being enveloped in a cloud of dust, and driving on toward the hacienda. Fortunately, the very men who had run off from the field, and had gone to

Buena Vista for shelter, had been gathered up by Major Monroe, assisted by some volunteer officers (Major Trail and Major Gorman among the number), and had been placed on the tops of the buildings, and in a large yard surrounded by a thick adobe wall. They opened a fire upon the Mexican brigade, the moment it had got within range of their muskets and rifles, which killed and wounded a great number. The brigade then divided; one half, mixed up with Arkansas and Kentucky men, went pouring through the narrow street which separates the buildings of the hacienda, while the other commenced falling rapidly back toward the mountains on our left. Lieutenant Reynolds, being now near enough to reach the men of this latter half, came into action; and, having thrown a few spherical-case shot directly into the midst of them, he soon drove them beyond range. He limbered up, and pushed on to the hacienda. The Dragoons under May, and the 1st Dragoons, had arrived there a few minutes before him, but too late to strike the enemy. Those who had fallen back toward the mountains on the left of the Pass were beyond reach, and those who had gone through the hacienda had

by this time got separated from the Arkansas and Kentucky men, and had gained the lower level across the stream. Although distant, they were not out of reach of Lieutenant Reynolds's guns. He had brought his section into battery just below the hacienda; and, until they had crossed the whole lower level, and had succeeded in climbing the opposite mountain, and finally in escaping through a small notch near its summit, he continued to play upon them with astonishing accuracy and great execution.

In this affair, our mounted volunteers behaved as well as could have been expected, and suffered much less, considering all the circumstances, than could have been imagined possible. The brigade that charged them, one of the best in the Mexican army, was commanded by General Torrejon, and led on by him in person. It numbered about one thousand; while all that were left, at this time, of the Arkansas and Kentucky regiments could not have been over four hundred and fifty. It was in this charge that the gallant and distinguished Colonel Yell lost his life. He fell like a hero, far in advance of his men, and pierced with many wounds.

Captain Porter, of his regiment, a brave man and most amiable gentleman, died by his side; and Adjutant Vaughn, one of the most promising of the young men of Kentucky and the favorite of his regiment, also fell, fighting to the last. He received twenty-four wounds. Besides these, there were many of the best men of the two regiments killed or wounded. General Torrejon was wounded in this charge, and left thirty-five of his men dead upon the field. The number of his wounded was not known, as their comrades bore them away.

After the Mexicans had failed in their attack on Buena Vista, they made a determined effort to force their way to the road at a point nearer the plateau. They brought down, from near the mountains opposite and to the left of the hacienda, a fresh brigade of cavalry, covered by infantry in all its passages of ravines. With this they advanced to engage the Mississippi riflemen, the fragment of the 2d Indiana Volunteers, and the 3d regiment of the same, who were still acting together, and who had near them one howitzer under Captain Sherman. The position<sup>(19)</sup> of these troops was some five hundred yards nearer the road than the point where Colonel Davis's regiment was

first engaged in the morning, but farther down the same ravine. As soon as this new brigade indicated, by the manner of its approach, its determination to charge our riflemen and infantry, they were rapidly formed to receive it. The Mississippi regiment, in line of battle, extended across the little plain upon which they now were, — their right being near the ravine, their front toward the mountains; the Indiana troops were formed so that their left rested on the right of Colonel Davis's regiment, their right upon the ravine higher up, their front being also toward the mountains, but more to the north. In this way, an obtuse reëntering angle was presented towards the approaching cavalry, Sherman's howitzer being on its left. The enemy was formed in close column of squadrons, and came down the slope at an easy hand-gallop. His ranks were well closed, his troopers riding knee to knee, and dressing handsomely on their guides. All the flags and pennons were flying, — some fifteen hundred of them; — the men were in full uniform, and the horses elegantly caparisoned. Every lancer sat erect, and kept his charger well in hand; and the whole brigade, preserving exactly its intervals and the direction of its march, moved

forward with the ease and regularity of the best drilled troops on a field-day. Had the commander of this beautiful brigade desired to win the applause of both armies, he could not have put it in better order, or led his men on with more of professional style. The *tout ensemble* of his column was most admirable. It had a sort of air about it,—an easy, nonchalant manner of going into the work, — which could not but recall to one's mind his ideal pictures of the cavalry of the olden days. Those fine fellows were the chivalry of Mexico, and, with the exception of the President's personal guard, — the regiment of Hussars, — they were the most dashing troops the Republic had ever sent to the field. Opposed to them were our men on foot, — a mere handful in comparison, and having about them none of the "pomp and circumstance," the glitter, and gold, and feathers, and tassels, of their antagonists. They stood calmly and fearlessly still, with their pieces at a carry. But they, too, had an air; one that had mischief in it. Their ranks had been thinned out; some of their best men had fallen. There were even fathers standing there, whose sons had gone down by their sides, — their pet boys, whom they had reared and

brought forth to fight for their country. And there were sons, too, whose clothes had been baptized with their fathers' blood, not yet dry. Brothers, who had stood shoulder to shoulder in the morning, stood so no more; but, while one lay stark and motionless upon the earth, the other was near by to avenge him. There were neighbors, too, and friends, who had grown up together in school-boy days. They were not yet separated. The survivors stood there, while those who had borne all these tender relations to them were strown, dead or dying, on every hand. Yet all in sight they lay; — the familiar forms and faces of those to whom they had been deeply attached, and whom they had called by their first names from infancy. It cannot be wondered, then, that these men stood firm.

It was a sublime, a terrible sight. The troops on both sides were so cool and determined, that all knew the struggle must be sanguinary and desperate in the extreme. Not a word was spoken; the din of the surrounding battle seemed for a moment hushed; the rumbling sound of the earth, as the brigade swept onward like a living thunderbolt, appeared to be the only audible manifestation of the

approaching carnage. As the Mexicans came nearer, they evidently indulged the belief, that they could draw the fire of our men before it could be very destructive; and that then, while the pieces were empty, they could overwhelm the slight barrier before them, and finish their work with the lance. But finding, on the contrary, that not a piece was discharged nor a man moving, the whole brigade began instinctively to diminish its gait. This was a fatal mistake; and, on their side, it seemed a pity it should have been made, it was so out of keeping with the skill indicated by their soldierly appearance and gallant bearing. Finally, instead of dashing forward in a most splendid charge, as they could have done, having the ground upon which to execute it, they had the madness to pull up to a walk, and at length *to halt* in the very net-work of the two lines of fire. The instant they did so, the pieces came down on both faces of the angle, as if swayed by the same hand. For a moment their muzzles moved slowly about, as each man felt for his aim; then they settled steady and firm as bars of steel. Now, like the blast of a trumpet, the dreadful word was shouted, — “FIRE!” Two sheets of flame

converged on that beautiful brigade. It was appalling! The whole head of the column was prostrated, and riderless horses, a multitude, and crimson with blood, scattered from it in every direction.

Before the Mexicans could recover from the effects of this blow, Sherman cut them up with grape and canister. Then came the rapid and deadly firing by file, of our riflemen and infantry. No troops in the world could have faced it without the most awful sacrifice of life; and under it the whole brigade gave way, and fled toward the mountains, leaving the ground literally covered with its dead.

In this affair, had it not been for that unaccountable and suicidal pulling up to a halt before a body of the best marksmen in the world, and distant only eighty yards;—had this compact mass of cavalry, in room of doing thus, dashed at speed into the angle before them, they would have lost many men, no doubt; but it is difficult to conceive what could have saved the Mississippi and Indiana troops from total destruction. And, had so large a force broken through our lines, and, at this time, gained the road between Buena Vista and La Angostura, the fortunes of the day would

again have been placed in a jeopardy most painful to contemplate.

All this time the fighting on the plateau was continued with but slight intermissions, yet without any important advantage being gained by either side. The enemy's batteries in front, except at short intervals, kept busily at work; but our men at La Angostura, and in the heads of the gorges, sheltered themselves as much as possible, except when the infantry or cavalry would come within range; then, for a season, the sharp roll of musketry would be mingled with the booming sound of cannon, but would again subside to the frequent dropping shot, as the enemy slowly fell back to cover. It was on such occasions, that loaded wagons came along near those regiments and corps which, for the moment, might not be hotly engaged; and, having supplied the men with ammunition and bread and water, took in all the wounded who could be gathered up, and returned with them to the rear. By causing the men, when opportunity offered, thus to be refreshed, and to have their cartridge-boxes replenished, the General was enabled to keep them in a condition to bear their heavy fatigue, and, at the same time, in a good state of preparation for a protracted

use of their weapons. Besides, in this way the wounded were cared for without taking the combatants from the lines.

But the most sanguinary part of the field was still that which was covered by the forces engaged in rear of the plateau. After the enemy's brigade of cavalry had been repulsed by the artillery, riflemen, and infantry, under Sherman, Davis, and Lane, very soon the companies of the 1st and 2d Dragoons, Lieutenant Reynolds with his two pieces, Pike's and Preston's companies, and a few mounted and foot volunteers who had been rallied at the hacienda, were ordered by General Taylor to move directly up near the base of the mountains on the left, and to drive in the enemy's right by attacking him on that flank. This force was under the direction of Brevet Lieutenant-Colonel May. The Mexicans soon began to give way before its advance, and to keep along the base of the mountain toward the plateau. It was while this was doing, that a violent tempest of hail and rain, with gusts of wind, came suddenly up, accompanied by vivid lightning and the most deafening peals of thunder.\*

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\* There was something remarkable about this sudden and furious tempest. It was in the "dry season"; and,

But the warring of the elements above stayed not the fury of the battle below. The loud thunder and the pattering of hail were answered back by the roar of cannon and the rattling of musketry.

From time to time, as our cavalry force under Lieutenant-Colonel May pressed heavily on the right flank of the enemy, Reynolds's two pieces were brought into action, and played upon him until he gave ground, when they were quickly limbered up, and moved on again to new and closer positions; being supported on each flank by the regular Dragoons, with Pike's squadron to the left of all. Meanwhile Captain Bragg, with three\* pieces of his battery without support, advanced upon the enemy, midway between the Dragoons and the Mississippi and Indiana troops. The latter were also pushing on, and supporting, as they did so, Captain Sherman with his howitzer.

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save the slight shower during the night succeeding the battle of the 22d, we had had no rain before, and we had none for a long time after. Some of our army accounted for it as being the result of the excessive firing during the action. According to Professor Espy's theory of storms, this may have been the cause.

\* By this time Lieutenant Kilburn's piece had joined him.

Our three pieces on the plateau likewise directed, for the time being, their fire upon the masses now giving way before this combined attack and advance of our entire strength in rear of that position. Meanwhile the whole fire of the 18 and 24-pounder battery of the enemy was concentrated on our corps moving up toward the mountains, and nearly enfiladed their lines. It was a fine battery, and the havoc it made in our ranks was a melancholy evidence of the skill with which it was served. But neither the effect of its heavy copper-shot, frightful as it was, nor the continuous fire of musketry from those now falling back, could retard the steady advance of our troops. They swept onward toward the mountains like a seine, and gathered this portion of the enemy's force into a sort of *cul-de-sac*, from which it seemed impossible for it to escape. The Mexicans, who were thus hemmed in, were played upon by no less than nine pieces of our light artillery at the same moment; being the centre of a cross fire from Reynolds's pieces to their right, and O'Brien's and Thomas's pieces on their left, while Sherman and Bragg were tearing them up in front. Although at first they answered our troops by a fire of musketry,

as the ground from point to point afforded them cover, yet, as they became more condensed, and the effect of our shot more destructive, they grew panic-stricken. Then horse and foot mingled together, and, without pausing to resist the storm under which they suffered, pressed on closer and closer toward the mountain. These were the men who had killed our wounded, when they drove us in the morning. These were the men who took no prisoners, when they might have taken many. These were the men who left no sign of life in any thing American which had fallen into their hands,—the men who had stripped our poor fellows, and then stood over them and mutilated their remains in the most horrible and revolting manner. They were the men who had received the surrendered sword of the Texan Lieutenant, Campbell, a gallant gentleman, and then plunged it into his bosom. These were the men who in the morning had surrounded that grey-haired man, Lieutenant Price, of Illinois, seventy-two years old,\* and

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\* This old gentleman had been very active in raising a company of the 2d Illinois Volunteers, by urging the young men of his county to go to Mexico and assist General Taylor, who, he had heard, was surrounded. At last

cruelly forced their lances through him, as if for pastime. Now they were going back over the same ground where all this work had been done. We had but little consideration for those who had had no pity for our mangled and bleeding comrades. And every one knew, if the battle finally went against us, what would inevitably be his own fate. All these things inspired our troops with a determination never to despair of victory; and nerved them to press onward to the punishment of an enemy, who, in civilized warfare, had set the first example of murdering wounded men. Faster and faster our troops gathered them into that little cove in the side of the mountain. They were about 5000 or 6000 in all; cavalry and infantry, mingled in confusion; an armed multitude; a mere chaos of men and horses, and dead and dying, with flags, pennons, lances, and muskets, all mixed up. Hundreds of them endeavored to escape by clambering up the steep sides of the mountains; but most of them

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he told them, that, to prove that he would not advise them to go where he dared not go himself, if they would give him a commission, so that he could be "mustered in," he would accompany them. They elected him Second Lieutenant, and he fell as above described. He was much beloved, and his fall was deeply lamented.



stood huddled together, while our shot went crashing through them, and our shells likewise, opening for themselves a bloody circle wherever they exploded.

It was at this time that the President of Mexico sent one of his staff officers, under a white flag, with a message to General Taylor, desiring to know what he wanted. General Wool was immediately directed to bear the commanding General's reply to such a singular request; and, at the same time, orders were sent to our batteries to cease firing. General Wool proceeded directly up to the head of the plateau, where, notwithstanding the interchange of flags, the 18 and 24-pounder battery<sup>(L)</sup> still continued in operation on our troops in rear; but, finding he could not induce the Mexican officers there to cease their fire, he declared the parley at an end, and returned to our lines, without having had an interview with his Excellency. While all this was going on, the whole force which had turned our left succeeded in escaping from its perilous situation. Having recrossed the head of the deep ravine, they passed rapidly along the upper edge of the plateau, and, under cover of their battery there, in

spite of all our exertions, united again with the main army in front.

Just before they did so, however, and about the time the white flag came in to General Taylor, Santa Anna caused his 8-pounder battery to be moved down to a point nearer the plateau; and his reserves, under General Ortega, were ordered forward, and formed in the same ravine which had been occupied by General Pacheco in the morning. This large body of fresh troops was strengthened by those of the first column of attack, by the Battalion of León, and by the Eleventh Regiment of Infantry.\* The whole force was then placed under the command of General Perez, and directed to move forward; the cavalry being ordered to its left, to remain under cover until our lines should give way. The approach, concentration, and disposition

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\* "I had ordered the battery of 8-pounders to advance and take the enemy in flank; [?] and that the column of attack, then posted on our left flank, where it had no object of operation, should be transferred to our right, and there be joined by the remains of the Eleventh Regiment, the Battalion of León, and the Reserves, and all under the command of Brevet General Don Francisco Perez. I executed this in person, and afterwards sent for General Mora y Villamil, and made him acquainted with my final dispositions." — *Santa Anna's Report of the Battle.*

of this force, could not be seen from any part of the ground we then occupied; therefore its strength, proximity, and the point it menaced, were, for the present, equally unknown. But, to be prepared for any emergency, General Taylor sent orders to the left, the moment the Mexican right had effected its escape from that quarter, for all our troops there to come forward, as quickly as possible, to the plateau. They were now already in motion; our cavalry and artillery being obliged to go nearly down to the road to avoid the ravines, whilst the Mississippi and Indiana troops were moving directly across them.

While the enemy's cavalry and infantry, which our left had thus signally defeated, was moving in retreat along the head of the plateau, O'Brien's and Thomas's pieces were advanced well to the front, and then came into action, and opened a heavy fire on them; and Colonels Hardin, Bissell, and McKee, with their Illinois and Kentucky troops, dashed gallantly forward in hot pursuit. The powerful reserve of the Mexican army was just then emerging from the ravine where it had been organized, and coming forward on the plateau, opposite the head of the third gorge.<sup>(a)</sup>

Those who were giving way rallied quickly upon it; when the whole force, thus increased to over 12,000 men, came forward in a perfect blaze of fire. It was a single column, composed of the best soldiers of the Republic, and having for its advanced battalions the veteran regiments. The Kentucky and Illinois troops were soon obliged to give ground before it, and to seek the shelter of the second gorge.<sup>(P)</sup> As the Mexicans pressed on, O'Brien and Thomas opened upon them with canister, instead of round and hollow shot. Being very close, the destruction of life, caused by their three pieces, was immense. The advance of this column, however, was not retarded; for they were troops of the old line, and were accustomed to blood. Arriving opposite the head of the second gorge, one half of this column suddenly enveloped it, while the other half pressed on across the plateau, having for the moment nothing to resist them but the three guns in their front. The portion, that was immediately opposed to the Kentucky and Illinois troops, ran down along each side of the gorge in which they had sought shelter, and also circled around its head; and then there was no possible way of escape for them

except by its mouth, which opened upon the road. Its sides were steep, — at least, at an angle of forty degrees, — were covered with loose pebbles and stones, and went to a point at the bottom. Down there were our poor fellows, — nearly three regiments of them, — with but little opportunity to load or fire a gun, being hardly able even to keep their feet. Above, the whole edge of the gorge, all the way around, was darkened by the serried masses of the enemy, and was bristling with muskets directed upon the crowd beneath. It was no time to pause; those who were not immediately shot down, rushed on toward the road, their numbers growing less and less as they went; Kentuckians and Illinoisians, officers and men, all mixed up in confusion, and all pressing on over the loose pebbles and rolling stones of those shelving, precipitous banks, and having lines and lines of the enemy firing down from each side and in rear, as they went. Just then, the enemy's cavalry, which had gone to the left of the reserve, had come over the spur that divides the mouth of the second gorge <sup>(P)</sup> from that of the third, <sup>(Q)</sup> and were now closing up the only door through which there was the least

shadow of a chance for their lives. Many of those ahead endeavored to force their way out; but few succeeded; the lancers were fully six to one, and their long weapons were already reeking with blood. It was at this time that those, who were still back in that dreadful gorge, heard, above the din of the musketry and the shouts of the enemy around them, the roar of Washington's Battery. No music could have been more grateful to their ears. A moment only, and the whole opening, where the lancers were busy, rang with the repeated explosions of spherical-case shot. They gave way. The gate, as it were, was clear, and out upon the road a stream of our poor fellows issued. They ran panting down towards the battery, and directly under the flight of iron then passing over their heads into the retreating cavalry. Hardin, McKee, Clay, Willis, Zabriskie, Houghton, — but why go on? It would be a sad task indeed to name over all who fell during this twenty minutes' slaughter. The whole gorge, from the plateau to its mouth, was strewn with our dead; *all* dead; no wounded there, not a man; for the infantry had rushed down the sides, and completed the work with the bayonet.