

INTRODUCTION.

Immediately after the breaking out of hostilities with the republic of Mexico, the government of the United States, for the purpose of bringing the war to a speedy conclusion by "conquering a peace" from the enemy, determined to invade her adjacent territories in several directions; and, simultaneously with the movement of General Taylor into Tamaulipas and New Leon from the lower Rio Grande, and of General Kearny into New Mexico and California, General Wool was directed to organize an expedition against the State of Chihuahua.

These conjoined movements were well devised, if it were the intention simply to reduce and to occupy the northern portion of Mexico from the Rio Grande to the Sierra Madre until a peace, on reasonable terms, could be secured; but if the ultimate object was to penetrate to the enemy's capital by the divisions of Taylor and Wool, it was extremely ill-advised; as, first, the forces were too widely separated for mutual support, and too weak for each to advance far as an independent corps. Second, the bases were too remote from the supplies, and the lines of operation much too long. The distance from San Antonio to the city of Mexico, by the way of Chihuahua, over any known route practicable for an army carrying with it artillery and munitions of war, cannot be less than two thousand miles, and from Camargo, on the Rio Grande, about eight hundred miles, being considerably longer than Napoleon's line of operation from his depots to Moscow. Beside this, the country to be traversed presented difficulties of no ordinary nature to an invading army, being for long distances destitute of water and subsistence—in fact, mere desert wastes. In both cases the communications must have been abandoned, thus violating one of the first principles of war, unless forced to it by a stern necessity.

It is fair, however, to presume that it was not the policy of government to attack the city of Mexico from the Rio Grande, although, at the time, it seemed to be contemplated in public opinion. Be this as it may, the occupation of the northern provinces was most fortunate, and exercised an important influence, in every respect, upon the glorious campaign which, commencing with the reduction of Vera Cruz, terminated with the capture of the Mexican capital and the restoration of peace.

The division under General Wool was concentrated at San Antonio de Bexar, in Texas, and consisted of one battery of field artillery of six guns, to which were added two small pieces captured from the Mexicans by the Texans, and manned with volunteers;* one squadron of first and one squadron of second dragoons; one regiment of Arkansas horse; three companies of sixth infantry, with which was incorporated one independent company of Kentucky foot and two regiments of Illinois infantry; making in all about three thousand four hundred men. To this corps was also attached the usual allowance of officers of the general staff and of the staff corps. The battery had marched from Carlisle barracks, Pennsylvania, nearly the whole distance by land; the first dragoons, Arkansas mounted men, and sixth infantry, from posts in Arkansas; and the Illinois volunteers from Lavaca, Texas, by land. These different commands reached

* Those guns were lost at Buena Vista and retaken at Contreras.

Directions for the insertion of the engravings and maps.

Plate No. 1, frontispiece, to precede the introduction.

- " " 2, page 9.
- " " 3, " 9.
- " " 4, " 10.
- " " 5, " 11.
- " " 6, " 12.
- " " 7, " 26.
- " " 8, " 27.
- Map " 1, " 59.
- " " 2, at the end of the memoir. This is the large general map, showing the march of the division.

San Antonio in excellent condition in the month of August, 1846. The squadron of second dragoons had been stationed for some months in the vicinity of the town.

It is due to General Wool to say, that with great industry, and that administrative capacity for which he is justly distinguished, he soon organized this almost chaotic mass into an efficient and well-drilled army, and had made preparations, within a few months, for supplying it with all the necessities for a long campaign, in a country but little understood. The efforts to effect this were almost herculean, (requiring infinite labor and knowledge of a peculiar character, not always attendant upon eminent military or tactical ability,) and can be fully appreciated only by those familiar with the subject, and with the difficulties encountered; especially when a long interval of peace had left us nearly destitute of many of the essential materials of war. It is true that in these exertions the commanding general was ably seconded by intelligent, energetic, and experienced officers of the general staff, and of the quartermaster's and subsistence departments, and great credit was reflected upon all for the sagacity with which our wants were anticipated, and the promptitude with which they were supplied; and probably no better appointed army ever took the field.

As has been already intimated, the region of country to be traversed was almost entirely unknown. The jealousy of the Spaniards, and indolence of the Mexicans, had prevented the publication of maps based upon reliable authority, and, owing to the excursions of the savage tribes, the present race of Mexicans were but imperfectly acquainted with it, and therefore but little information could be procured from them, except in relation to the ordinary routes between their villages; in consequence of which, we were almost literally compelled to grope our way, and, like a ship at sea, to determine our positions by astronomical observations, and topographical parties were usually kept in advance to ascertain the lengths of the daily marches, the most advantageous places for encampments and supplies of water, fuel and forage. In this way we have been able to collect a vast amount of geographical information, which may prove useful and interesting.

Some years before, a Mr. Connolly conveyed a wagon train, on a trading expedition, from Red river to Chihuahua, passing considerably to the north of San Antonio, and crossing the Puerco* river not far from the mouth of the Couchas, above the first cañon of the Rio Grande; but no connexion had ever been established with that trail from San Antonio, and it was doubtful whether a pass for that purpose could be found through the mountains.

Captain (afterwards General) Z. M. Pike stated in his narrative that a road formerly existed between Chihuahua and San Antonio *via* Presidio de Rio Grande, and that M. St. Croix, viceroy of Peru, took this road (through the Bolson Mappimi) in 1778, on his way from Chihuahua, Coquilla, Allares and Texas. This route has long since been abandoned on account of the excursions of the Indians, and no one could be found who had ever passed over it, or who even possessed any traditional knowledge of it. Its practicability, therefore, for an army with artillery, infantry and wagons, was extremely problematical. Soon after reaching

* Properly the Pecos river: it is called both on the maps. It has its rise beyond Santa Fe.

San Antonio I proposed (see appendix) to reconnoitre the different routes; but the want of sufficient escorts, and the exigencies of the service, I suppose, prevented it.

On arriving at Presidio Rio Grande it was pretty satisfactorily ascertained, from all that we could learn, that Santa Rosa, at the foot of a range of the Sierra Madre, was necessarily a point in our march, the direct San Fernando route, through the Bolson Mappimi, having been abandoned as surrounded with too many uncertainties. From thence it was said there were three practicable routes, either of which might be selected, viz: by the headwaters of the Sabinas river, through San Carlos and Alamo, by Cuatro Cienegas, Santa Catarina and Santa Rosalia; or by Monclova and Parras. It was discovered, on further investigation, that the first route, being simply a rough mule track, for long distances absolutely destitute of both water and subsistence, would not answer the purpose. Whether the second was more favorable could not be determined, except by information to be obtained at Monclova and by actual reconnaissance, and during the protracted halt at that place (induced by the Monterey armistice) General Wool instructed me to make the examinations necessary to solve the question, which resulted in the strong conviction of its impracticability. (See memoir of a reconnaissance to Cuatro Cienegas.)

These various explorations strengthened the previous impression that to reach Chihuahua it would be necessary to march by Parras, situated on the main road from Saltillo to that city. Parras was a strategic point of some importance, and fortunately, as it regarded future operations, General Wool determined to take it in his route. From that position he would be able easily to reach his original destination—to move on Durango or Zacatecas, or to form a junction with the army under General Taylor, as policy or necessity might dictate.

It was satisfactorily ascertained, on reaching Parras, that no further physical difficulties, except those merely of distance, remained to be surmounted, but that the large portion of the enemy's force, which had assembled for the defence of the threatened province, had been withdrawn for the purpose of strengthening the main army at San Luis, and that, therefore, the necessity of marching the whole division further in that direction no longer existed, leaving it free to act as circumstances might require. In the mean while news was received that Santa Anna, in the hope, by the rapidity of his movement, of overwhelming General Worth, who with a single brigade was occupying Saltillo, before he could be reinforced, had suddenly put his whole army in motion. In consequence of this information General Wool marched for Saltillo, and succeeded in uniting with General Butler (who had hastened up from Monterey) and with General Worth. And thus terminated the expedition destined for Chihuahua—the division being subsequently merged into the main army of occupation.

Santa Anna, finding that he could not deceive the vigilance of General Worth, and that the American troops thus concentrated were too strong for him to attack with any prospect of success, returned to San Luis Potosi to bide his time. On the withdrawal, soon afterwards, of a considerable portion of the "army of occupation" for the expedition to Vera Cruz, he again moved on Saltillo, *but did not reach it.* The fatal pass of

Buena Vista intervened, and in that bloody and glorious battle well did the "army of Chihuahua" perform its duty.*

The following memoir, descriptive of the march of the column under General Wool from San Antonio to Saltillo, was written from time to time as leisure or circumstances would permit, in the midst of arduous duties and the difficulties incident to an active campaign; for even when the army was at a halt, the topographical engineers were busily engaged in reconnoitring the country for considerable distances, sometimes eighty miles from the camp. Very few changes in, or additions to, the original papers, have been made, which as fast as written were laid before the commanding general, and copies transmitted to the Topographical Bureau.

The reconnaissances during the march were principally made by Lieutenant Sitgreaves and myself, and the astronomical observations by Lieutenant Franklin. Lieutenant Bryan was for a short time attached to the personal staff of the commanding general, and was subsequently assigned to the command of a volunteer section of artillery connected with Captain Washington's battery.

Mr. Josiah Gregg, the author of "The Commerce of the Prairies," well known for his scientific attainments, accompanied the Arkansas cavalry, and frequently observed in company with Lieutenant Franklin. At my request, he furnished me with an interesting description of the march of the command to which he was attached from its rendezvous, on Red river, to San Antonio, which is appended to the following memoir.

The instructions from the Topographical Bureau, under which I acted, were not only general, but very minute in their character, requiring me, independently of such duties as might be assigned by the commanding general, to collect information in reference to the habits and disposition of the people, the geography, natural history, resources, military strength, statistics, and political history of the countries through which we might march; and I only regret that these important duties have not been more satisfactorily performed.

*This movement has sometimes been sneeringly called "Worth's stampede," and I think it but an act of justice to that distinguished soldier, and to the truth of history, to say that, in a long and free conversation with General Santa Anna, at his hacienda of Encero, near Jalapa, in reply to a question from me, he said that it had not only been his intention to attack Saltillo at that time, but that a large portion of his army had left San Luis Potosi for that purpose, and was only recalled when it was ascertained that General Worth had made himself acquainted with the movement, and by his rapidity of action had procured a concentration of force to an extent beyond his (Santa Anna's) anticipation. He further stated that, knowing his own force was but badly provided, and would be greatly exhausted by the long desert which intervened between him and Saltillo, he did not think it safe to encounter the veteran troops of the United States army; and that he would not subsequently have attacked General Taylor, as he was aware that he fought to great disadvantage, but for the fact that his (Taylor's) division was composed mainly of new levies, who, he supposed, would scarcely stand his first demonstration.

General Santa Anna explained his policy to me, and said that from the fact of a reconnaissance having been made from Parras in the direction of Durango and Zacatecas, by order of General Wool, he was led to suppose that that general would move on Zacatecas as the advance of the American army, and that he had been informed General Wool was actually on his march in that direction; and therefore his calculation was to defeat us in detail—first crushing Worth, then beating Butler, when Wool, with his small column, would be completely cut off. This well-devised scheme, however, was fortunately frustrated by the vigilance of General Worth, who kept himself well informed of the movements of his skilful antagonist.

MEMOIR.

TOPOGRAPHICAL BUREAU,
Washington, January 20, 1849.

To Colonel J. J. ABERT,

Chief of Topographical Engineers:

SIR: In compliance with a resolution of the Senate of the 8th August, 1848, I have the honor to submit the following descriptive memoir of the march of a division of the United States army under the command of Brigadier General John E. Wool, accompanied by the astronomical determinations of latitude and longitude of the most important points on the line of march.

On the 29th of August, 1846, the United States steamer transport John L. Day, on board of which the topographical party under my command were passengers, entered the bay of Matagorda (after a stormy voyage of four days from New Orleans) by the pass Cavallo, in which we found eight feet water,* and the next morning at high tide reached the town of Lavaca, in Texas, which had been selected as the depôt of supplies for General Wool's division, destined for the invasion of Chihuahua.

The next day (the 31st) I left, accompanied by First Lieutenant L. Sitgreaves, topographical engineers, for San Antonio, by the Goliad road, on the San Antonio river, (1) the two other officers of the corps, Lieutenants Franklin and Bryan, having remained behind for the purpose of making astronomical observations, with directions, after that duty was completed, to proceed to San Antonio, *via* the Gonzales road, on the left bank of the Rio Guadalupe, sketching in the topographical features of the country, and determining the position of the most important points on the route. From the want of adequate transportation for the delicate astronomical instruments, a portion of these instructions were not executed.

We reached San Antonio on the 6th September, and there found the headquarters established, and nearly all the troops belonging to the expedition concentrated in the vicinity of that healthy and beautiful town. In a few days afterwards we were joined by Lieutenants Franklin and Bryan.

(For a description of the two roads leading from Port Lavaca to San Antonio de Bexar see appendix, A and B.)

The town of San Antonio is supposed to contain about two thousand inhabitants, mostly Mexicans; the greater part of the males are agriculturists and herdsmen, so far as they have any occupation. It has no manufactures, and but few mechanics—such as carpenters, masons, tailors, shoemakers, and blacksmiths.

The town (see special map) is built on both sides of the river of the same name, and is bounded on the west by the San Pedro: the principal part of the town, however, lies in a horse-shoe bend on the west bank of the river, and its streets are washed by its waters running rapidly through them. It is about five miles from the source of the river, in latitude 29°

*According to a survey since made by Captain Mackay, topographical engineers, there are nine feet water on the bar at extreme low water: the tide rises only six inches.