

GENERAL PATTERSON'S ROUTE OF MARCH.

LETTER

FROM

THE SECRETARY OF WAR,

TRANSMITTING

A report on the route of General Patterson's division from Matamoras to Victoria.

DECEMBER 19, 1850.

Laid upon the table, and ordered to be printed.

WAR DEPARTMENT,
Washington, December 14, 1850.

SIR: In compliance with a resolution of the House of Representatives of the 10th instant, I have the honor to lay before you a copy of the "report on the route of march of General Patterson's division from Matamoras to Victoria, and of the troops detached from General Taylor's army from Victoria to Tampico;" made by Brevet Captain G. W. Smith, of the engineer corps, to this department on the 30th July, 1850.

With the highest regard, your obedient servant,

C. M. CONRAD,
Secretary of War.

Hon. HOWELL COBB,
Speaker of the House of Representatives.

Report on the route of march of General Patterson's division from Matamoras to Victoria, and of the troops detached from General Taylor's army from Victoria to Tampico.

WEST POINT, N. Y., July 30, 1850.

SIR: In reply to your communication of the 16th, I have to inform the department that, on account of the circumstances in which I was placed, I had but few opportunities for making observations on the "topography, etc., of the country on the route of march of General Patterson's division from Matamoras to Victoria and Tampico." I was in command of a company of engineer soldiers, but recently recruited, and charged with making a temporarily practicable road for the passage of an army train. There was but one officer under me in the company, and the road re-

quired a great deal of work. If my time, or that of the officer with me, had been employed in making a general reconnaissance and topographical observations of the country, the troops would have halted on the route unable to proceed with their train. Charged with making an impassable road practicable, and constantly reminded that it was all-important that there should be no delay, if possible, in the movement of the troops over this route—having to direct the whole work, and held responsible for its proper and prompt execution, in addition to my duties as commander of a company—neither I, nor those under me, could pay that attention to the subjects on which information is asked for, that they would doubtless have received from us in other circumstances.

Both myself and Captain McClellan kept private journals during the march, from which, and my official report of the operations of the engineer company, dated Tampico, February, 1847, addressed to the Chief Engineer, the following account is derived. Though it is devoid of scientific interest, and necessarily meagre and incomplete, I have thought proper, under the call which has been made upon me, to forward this report, leaving for others to decide whether or not the information is "sufficiently valuable to be laid before the country." It is an itinerary of the route; and, in case the government or individuals have occasion to send heavy wagon trains over it, and no later or more definite data are obtained, this may be of service—it will, at least, be another proof, if any can be wanting, to show that in war hard work is sometimes necessary, and that fighting and marching are not all that are required of soldiers in the field.

I would here refer to the accompanying sketch, on which the route of march is traced; it is based upon a copy of Arista's map, taken at Resaca, and is altered in some points to correspond with observations made during the march. My knowledge of the position and form of the mountains is such as would render a delineation of them by me not a very safe guide; they are therefore not represented on the sketch. The eastern slope of the Sierra Madre touches Monterey and Victoria, striking the gulf coast some miles south of Tampico, with occasional spurs and detached ridges between this general line and the coast from Tampico to the Rio Grande. There is a wagon road from Monterey through Victoria to Tampico, in its whole length, near the foot of the mountains. From Matamoras to Tampico the main road passes through Santander and Solo la Marina, near the coast.

On the 23d December, 1846, General Patterson, having in his command the company of engineer soldiers, two pieces of field artillery, the Tennessee regiment of cavalry, and two regiments of volunteer infantry, left Matamoras for Victoria, at which place he was ordered to effect a junction with General Taylor's forces, moving from Monterey about the same time on Victoria. In giving this account, the distances, features of the country, etc., together with the difficulties encountered, will be noted in each day's march; and, afterwards, such general comments will be made as the limited information in my possession will warrant. General Patterson's command left the main road to Tampico at Santander, branching off to the west, to effect the required junction with General Taylor at Victoria.

First day's march of General Patterson's command, from Matamoras to Moquete, 18 miles—where we crossed a stream called the Tigre, which

is from 40 to 50 yards wide, water 18 inches to 2 feet deep, bottom very soft mud, current sluggish, banks clay, not high; fordable with some difficulty when we crossed; in wet weather passage would be very difficult; road was good, country level; but few houses; chaparral most of the way. At Moquete rancho there is fine grass, plenty of wood, water in stream tolerably good. The road in wet weather would be very deep mud, and difficult for wagons.

Second day.—To Guijana rancho, 16 miles. Road good, country level; chaparral thick first six or seven miles, then commenced small prairies. At Guijana there are two ponds of fine water, good grass, plenty of wood.

Third day.—To Santa Teresa rancho, 27 miles. Road good, country level until near Santa Teresa, then undulating, mostly prairie, occasional chaparral; about halfway passed Salina, where there is a pond of rather bad water; good grass, wood three-fourths of a mile from pond. Water at Santa Teresa bad; two reservoirs—one we used for men, the other for animals; not much grass, plenty of wood.

Fourth day.—We marched to a watering-place on the left of the main road, a small pond of very muddy water, called Piedras; distance 20 miles. Road good to Chiltipine, 13 miles from Santa Teresa. At Chiltipine we struck off from the main road, and took a prairie path to the left. There are said to be ponds of fresh water in this vicinity. We saw near the road in the prairie salt-water marshes not far from Chiltipine. Prairie path good for wagons where we passed, but in wet weather probably impassable; good grass at camp, and plenty of wood; little or no wood during the day.

Fifth day.—To San Fernando, 28 miles. Road level to within five miles of San Fernando, then hilly and rocky, rough but practicable. About two miles from San Fernando there are two wells of good water. On the main road there is said to be no water between the vicinity of Chiltipine and these wells. San Fernando is quite a handsome, well-built town, about 1,000 inhabitants, houses stone; it is on a high limestone bluff—say 150 feet—on the left bank of the stream. The river is from 50 to 100 yards wide, water at ford about 2 feet 6 inches deep, very clear, current rapid, bottom hard gravel and stone; believed to be not fordable in wet weather. The road by which we approached the ford, from below the town, where we encamped, was of gentle descent, rocky, and somewhat out of order. The opposite side was a clay bank, sixty feet high, perfectly impracticable for wagons, and nearly so for mules. Here the working on the road commenced, and continued, more or less, every day to Victoria and Tampico. Two hundred men, in addition to the engineer company, in four hours made a practicable road, and the train commenced crossing. In this vicinity the land is a good deal cultivated, country hilly, calcareous formation, well wooded, some large timber, fine crops of corn, and plenty of cattle.

Sixth day.—To stream called Los Chararos, 22 miles. After the first three miles the road was very hilly, until we reached elevated but very level land, about ten miles from San Fernando; road then level for six or eight miles, the rest hilly; portions of the road very stony. Los Chararos is a stream about 20 yards wide and 18 inches deep, gravelly bottom; plenty of wood, some good grass, water rather brackish; rancho three-fourths of a mile west of ford. The road required repairs occasionally

during the day. For several hundred yards on each side of the stream there were impassable gullies and ravines. One hundred and fifty men, in addition to the company, completed the work in three hours.

Seventh day.—To Encinal, 17 miles. Five miles from camp found a ravine called Los Tres Palos, 25 feet deep, steep banks, barely passable by mules, dry bottom; required the work of 150 men for one hour and a half. We encountered a great many boggy brooks and deep gullies. Country undulating near Encinal; good pond of water, fine grass and wood, some large trees in vicinity.

Eighth day.—To Santander, 18 miles. Road good until we came to a very steep rocky declivity, over 150 feet in height, which the road descended, leading from the level of the plateau on which we had been travelling to a lower level, that of the valley of the Santander. This precipitous fall in the surface is continuous, is several miles from the river Santander, and probably in its general direction parallel to the course of the stream. At the descent the road required some repairs; and to Santander boggy brooks and deep gullies gave much trouble. At the ford the river was 50 yards wide, the water 2 feet 6 inches deep, bottom firm, banks about 40 feet high, and though steep, practicable; in wet weather probably not fordable. The country around Santander very little rolling, well wooded, under good cultivation; the land appeared to be very fertile; corn and cattle in abundance. Santander has about 1,000 inhabitants; is on the left bank of the stream; houses stone. The road to Victoria branched off here from the main road to Tampico from Matamoras.

Ninth day.—To Marque Soto, 13 miles. Rancho on left of road; good water in well; road good, with the exception of boggy brooks, which required several hours' work; no cultivation.

Tenth day.—To San Antonio river, 18 miles. The road was very rough, rocky, and hilly; soil not fertile, uncultivated. Hacienda San Antonio three-fourths of a mile this side stream. The banks of the river were steep and high, the bottom bad, in part boggy; three hundred men were engaged three hours before the passage could be attempted. The river was 40 or 50 feet wide, water $2\frac{1}{2}$ feet deep, clear, and current moderate. Many large cypress trees on the banks; crossed; camped on right bank.

Eleventh day.—To stream called La Corona, 17 miles. The road was good to where we crossed the main branch of the Soto la Marina, five miles from the San Antonio. This branch of the Soto la Marina is 70 yards wide or more at the ford, the water 3 feet deep, perfectly clear, and very cold; current very rapid; bottom firm and gravelly; banks not high or steep where the road crossed; half an hour's work of one hundred men was sufficient. The country between these two streams the best wooded and most fertile we had seen; alluvial in character. On the right bank of this stream is the village La Padilla, about 200 inhabitants; stone houses. The road was good to La Corona, the banks of which required one hour's work. This stream is 30 yards wide, 18 inches deep, banks not high; well wooded country, fertile on banks of stream.

Twelfth day.—To Victoria, 20 miles. Road did not require a great deal of work; middle portion of road very level. Passed town of Escudones, about six miles from camp; several hundred inhabitants, stone houses, church, &c. Victoria is a well built town of 2,000 or more inhabitants, situated on a small stream at the foot of the Sierra Madre. The

mountains here rise very abruptly to a great height; the country is sufficiently elevated to make the temperature pleasant; the water in the streams is pure and cool; the soil fertile; some of the plantations are well cultivated; there are sugar-mills in the vicinity.

From Matamoras to Victoria is 234 miles. We were in actual march twelve days. Arrived at Victoria on the 4th of January, 1847. General Taylor arrived from Monterey on the same day; but General Quitman, commanding the advance of General Taylor, arrived a few days before. At Victoria the engineer company was transferred to General Twiggs's division of regulars.

The movement from Victoria on Tampico was commenced by the pioneer party on the 13th of January. This party was composed of the engineer company and two companies of regular infantry—the whole under the command of Major Henry, of the 3d infantry. General Twiggs left the day after we did, and the others in succession. On the third day out, owing to the immense labor required on the road, the pioneer party was overtaken by General Twiggs, and then moved with his division.

First day, from Victoria to Santa Rosa, 10 miles. Small rancho; stream 15 yards wide, rocky; wood and grass at camp. The road was a mule path, intersected by boggy brooks of such velocity as to require bridging. Making bridges of ebony and mezquite wood—the material short, crooked, hard, and very heavy—was no easy matter. About one-half the distance was through thick brush and wood, where the road had to be widened for wagons, requiring work nearly every foot.

Second day.—Made only six miles, and camped at dark near one of the boggy brooks of which we had many during the day; work very heavy; went but six miles, leaving eight more to the camp we expected to reach.

Third day.—To El Pastor, 8 miles. Road very hilly and rocky, in addition to our troubles of day before. At El Pastor large stone building, deserted; stream 20 yards wide, water one foot deep, banks high and rocky.

Fourth day.—To stream called La Tula, 11 miles. Banks high, water 3 feet deep, 25 feet wide, bottom boggy; had to bridge; timber much better than before for this purpose; road required a great deal of work, but wagons appeared to have passed over it; vegetation was assuming a new character—more tropical than we had seen before. From El Pastor to La Tula great trouble in rolling from the road large quantities of loose stones, some quite large; in places for miles the road was literally covered; mountains rising immediately on the right to a great height; rocks volcanic.

Fifth day.—To Forlon, 11 miles. This is quite a village. Crossed the Persas, which is about 100 yards wide at the ford; current rapid, water clear and $2\frac{1}{2}$ feet deep, bottom firm gravel; banks are high, stony but practicable; crossed and camped on right bank. About six miles from camp our mule path struck the main road, which until this time was east of the path we were on.

Sixth day.—To village called El Petril, 16 miles, where there is a small stream of good water, 20 feet wide, 6 inches deep, rocky bottom; banks high, limestone. The road was good, but requiring in places some repairs. Eight miles from camp crossed the Persas again; rancho at this place called Panucho. To-day we saw directly in front of us, but at a great distance, a large mountain in the shape of a dome, standing entirely

alone in the plain. There were now mountains on both sides of the road, east and west, but several miles distant. From the regularity of their horizontal crests, the great steepness of their slopes, they resembled the palisades on the Hudson, but were much more extensive; trap formation, and volcanic rocks. For the first time we saw the cabbage tree or palmetto. Towards camp, country over which road passed became undulating.

Seventh day.—To Alamitos, 9 miles. Crossed a stream about five miles from last camp, water good, 20 yards wide, 6 inches deep, gravelly bottom, current moderate. Crossed another stream, a little larger, at Alamitos, where there is a large hacienda, church, and 60 or 70 ranchos. Road from Tula by Santa Barbara strikes main road five miles from Alamitos.

Eighth day.—To Chocoi, 23 miles. Water in large reservoir; good road; country changing from thick, heavy wood to rolling prairie; fine herds of cattle and droves of horses; good grass; passed stream and rancho about half-way from camp.

Ninth day.—To Los Estaros, 10 miles. A rancho on the bank of a lake; wood large; ground towards Los Estaros very swampy, in wet weather impassable.

Tenth day.—To Altimira, 12 miles. Road required a great deal of work. On this, as on many other occasions, the road was partly worked the day before. When the army would encamp, the pioneer party would go on until dark; then return to camp, and by daylight again be at the place where they had left off. Altimira is a large town; fine old cathedral, &c.; lakes in the vicinity; country undulating, cultivated, and fertile.

Eleventh day.—To camp at Tampico, 14 miles. The road between these places had already been put in order by a pioneer party from General Shields's command at Tampico. Part of the road is level, and very deep with sand; towards Tampico it becomes hilly. We passed through dense forests containing live oak and wild lemon groves. Near Tampico the wood is cut away; country cultivated. Three or four miles from Altimira the road is for several hundred yards cut through solid rock, not deep, but just wide enough for the passage of one wagon.

From Victoria to Tampico is 130 miles; whole distance from Matamoras to Tampico, by way of Victoria, is 364 miles.

The following itinerary of the route from Santander to Tampico, by the coast road, which passes through Soto la Marina, is from information collected at Matamoras by the late Captain A. J. Swift, of the corps of engineers, in the month of November, 1846:

"From Santander to Santillana, 7 leagues, (Mexican;) to Soto la Marina, 12 leagues; wood and water at convenient distances; width of river from 60 to 100 yards, fordable; depth at low water 2 feet; tide rises one foot; 2,000 inhabitants in the town. To Realito rancho, 14 leagues; plenty of wood and water; road very rough. To Legato rancho, 8 leagues; road still very rough: there is a mountain on this part of the road; the ascent is $1\frac{1}{2}$ mile in length, and quite steep. To Los Prasces village, 3 leagues; road for $1\frac{1}{2}$ league very rough, and then becomes open and prairie. Eight leagues from Los Prasces you come to an arm of the sea, called the Esterita; you cross by large canoes; water 6 feet deep, bottom soft mud, width 70 yards, no current; probably heads about 20 miles above, and can go around it. To Altimira, 12 leagues. Soto Marina bar is best between Rio Grande and Tampico; five or six feet can be taken

over bar and carried to within two or three miles of the town, which is about thirty miles from the mouth."

From Matamoras to San Fernando the country is low level coast land, prairie and chaparral intermixed; few inhabitants; not favorable for cultivation; badly watered; road good in dry weather, probably impassable in rainy seasons.

From San Fernando to Victoria and Tampico there are occasional streams of good water; land apparently fertile in vicinity of streams, well wooded, and under more or less cultivation; cattle on nearly the whole route, and grain, particularly corn; wherever the country is settled, grass is generally plenty; there is a good deal of fine timber and valuable wood.

I have consulted with Captain McClellan, in reference to the facts stated; they are believed to be as accurate as circumstances would allow. Distances were estimated, not measured. We had no instruments or facilities of any kind other than what were absolutely necessary in opening the road. Names are given as they were understood at the time.

In accordance with your request, the above report, such as it is, is cheerfully furnished. I cannot flatter myself that it is of sufficient importance to attract criticism. Should it do so, impartial readers will recollect that it is now nearly four years since this march was made; the stirring scenes in which we were soon called to take a part tended to obliterate all recollections of an uninteresting march over a country the soldier's reminiscence of which is summed up in the expression "bad roads and hard work."

I have the honor to be, sir, your obedient servant,

G. W. SMITH,

Lieut. Engineers, Brevet Captain U. S. A.

General JOSEPH G. TOTTEN, *Chief Engineer.*