

MEDIA AND MILITARY RELATIONS DURING THE MEXICAN WAR

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## ABSTRACT

**MEDIA AND MILITARY RELATIONS DURING THE MEXICAN WAR**, by MAJ Matthew N. Metzel, 132 pages.

The relationship that developed between the military and the media during the Mexican War is the primary focus of this thesis. This paper looks at the media's coverage of the war from 1846 to 1848, spotlighting a comparison and contrast of the treatment of General Zachary Taylor and General Winfield Scott. Research supports five direct and two indirect relationships that developed between the military and the media during the course of the Mexican War. These relationships illuminate a cooperative partnership, as military leaders and media members recognized shared interests and goals within the context of war. The five direct relationships included the following: (1) the relational impact on political careers of battlefield commanders, (2) the relational impact on reports from the battlefield to government officials in Washington, (3) the relational impact on moral integrity through open criticism of war crimes, (4) the relational impact on military recruiting efforts, and (5) the relational impact on soldier morale. The two indirect relationships between the military and the media were as follows: (1) the relational impact shaped political views of U.S. voters on the subject of war with Mexico, and (2) may have played a role in reducing the length of the war.

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This thesis began with an interest in the relationships between the media and the military. As I traced the history of embedded war correspondence in U.S. military history, all roads of research led me to the Mexican War as the birthplace of this practice. Researching this conflict opened my eyes to a new and exciting area of in-depth study on the relationship that existed between the military and the media from 1846 to 1848.

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## ACRONYMS

DIME	Diplomatic, Information, Military, and Economic
U.S.	United States



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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### Thesis Introduction

The Mexican War marks a significant moment in our nation's brief history. From the Congressional declaration of war on Mexico in May 1846 to the ratification of a peace treaty in July 1848, the United States (U.S.) dramatically expanded its Diplomatic, Information, Military, and Economic (DIME) elements of national power. Nested within the revolutionary growth of American influence during this conflict are discrete changes in the interaction between the military and the media. These two institutions shared a rapport that at first glance seems ancillary to the larger discussion of warfare. However, a closer review uncovers detailed interactions that would eventually shape foreign policy and the political future of a nation seeking to expand her territorial borders.

The relationship that developed between the military and the media during the Mexican War is the primary focus of this thesis. The goal of this research is to look at the media's coverage of the war from 1846 to 1848, spotlighting a comparison and contrast of its treatment of General Zachary Taylor and General Winfield Scott. These two American battlefield commanders played key roles in the nation's military strategy for what was meant to be a quick and decisive campaign. With character traits touching opposite ends of the personality barometer, each general experienced the media in a manner that would shape the future of their army and their political careers. Furthermore, this thesis will explore some of the benefits and dilemmas the military faced in allowing war correspondents to embed themselves with American forces. Finally, a review of relevant considerations will be made concerning the media's overall relationship with the

military during this time period. Inquiries and facts concerning these topics will be discussed in six chapters as follows: (1) Introduction, (2) Mexican War's Impact on the Media, (3) Media's Impact on the Mexican War, (4) General Winfield Scott, (5) General Zachary Taylor, and (6) Conclusions.

### Elements of National Power

The importance of the Mexican War is best demonstrated by comparing our nation's elements of national power (DIME) before and after the conflict. Diplomatically, 1845 found the U.S. struggling for a position of strength with neighbors along its borders, as well as European nations abroad. On the Niagara frontier, the U.S. had been juggling a delicate situation with the British dating back to the American Revolution. Although the War of 1812 settled many of these matters, the U.S. narrowly escaped British hostilities along its northern border in 1837 and 1838.<sup>1</sup> U.S. foreign relations were not much better to the south. On 31 March 1845, Mexico severed its ties with the U.S. in response to President John Tyler signing a resolution to annex Texas.<sup>2</sup> To make matters worse, as a new President took office (James K. Polk), the issue of the Oregon territory in the West greatly intensified. When the British flatly rejected U.S. offers to negotiate an Oregon settlement, President Polk announced that he was willing to go to war if a diplomatic

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<sup>1</sup>Timothy D. Johnson, *Winfield Scott: The Quest for Military Glory* (Lawrence University Press of Kansas, 1998), 129-132.

<sup>2</sup>Ralph Frasca, *The War of 1812 & The Mexican American War* vol. 2 of *The Greenwood Library of American War Reporting*, ed. David A. Copeland (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2005), 360.

solution could not be reached.<sup>3</sup> Former President Andrew Jackson supported Polk's risky foreign policy position in a letter dated 2 May 1845 by stating, ". . . war is a blessing compared with national degradation. [sic] . . . England with all her boats dare not go to war."<sup>4</sup> The Louisville *Daily Democrat* echoed Jackson's comments by stating, "Why should we fear a conflict with Great Britain. . . . We are fully her equals in national energy and courage . . . her superior in military resources. . . ."<sup>5</sup> On 2 December 1845, Polk made a declaration to Congress that came to be known as the Polk Doctrine. He stated, "[The U.S.] can not in silence permit any European interference on the North American continent, and should any such interference be attempted [we] will be ready to resist it at any and all hazards."<sup>6</sup> This said, the prelude to the Mexican War found a young nation struggling to impose its diplomatic will on neighbors both near and far.

In contrast to the tenuous situation described above, the U.S. victory in Mexico solidified the young nation's diplomatic strength by the summer of 1848 and enhanced its prestige and influence abroad. With his manifest willingness to go to war over territorial disputes, President Polk gambled with both Great Britain and Mexico. Fortunately for the nation, war was only fought with one opponent rather than two. From 1845 to 1848,

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<sup>3</sup>James K. Polk, *Polk; The Diary of a President 1845-1849*, ed. Allan Nevins (Longmans, Green and Company, 1929), 2-4.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>5</sup>David M. Pletcher, *The Diplomacy of Annexation: Texas, Oregon, and the Mexican War* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1973), 240.

<sup>6</sup>Polk, XX.

Polk's steadfast resolve and aggressive foreign policy deposited enormous capital gains in the nation's coffers of diplomatic power and influence.<sup>7</sup>

The information element of national power also saw a significant boost during this time-period. Prior to war with Mexico, news and information generally traveled between states at a relatively slow and cumbersome pace. This caused confusion between interested parties who were often separated by hundreds of miles. The Mexican War, however, witnessed a fusion of technology and resources that quickly transformed the nation's information infrastructure. Creative media entrepreneurs developed ingenious methods for sending news stories to the curious public at home by establishing message routes that linked key cities across the nation. These routes combined horse, ship, rail, and telegraph systems to speed delivery of news from the battlefield to the papers covering the war effort. Their hard work and creativity paid enormous dividends to our nation's ability to transmit information with increased sophistication and speed. In the spring of 1846, it took General Zachary Taylor two weeks to send a message 1,500 miles from Matamoros, Mexico to Washington D.C.<sup>8</sup> Two years later, it took a newspaper company the same amount of time to transmit a message 1,900 miles from Mexico City to Washington D.C.<sup>9</sup>

U.S. military growth and influence during the Mexican War was just as dramatic. In May 1846, the nation's small force was authorized just 8,613 soldiers, and had even

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 4.

<sup>8</sup>Richard Bruce Winders, *Mr. Polk's Army: The American Military Experience in the Mexican War* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1997), 9.

<sup>9</sup>George W. Kendall, *Dispatches from the Mexican War*, ed. Lawrence Cress (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999), 25-26.

fewer (approximately 5,500) capable of fighting in battle.<sup>10</sup> Two years later, the nation would see 100,454 U.S. soldiers serving during the Mexican War, including 26,922 regulars and 73,532 volunteers. Although most of these soldiers did not see action in Mexico, the significance of rapid growth in American military manpower cannot be underestimated.<sup>11</sup> As patriotic fervor ran high, enlistments soared. In fact, the government turned many eager citizens away from military service. Many volunteers wrote home with their aspirations of heroism on the battlefield, but unfortunately, most visions of idealistic grandeur were betrayed by the harsh reality of day-to-day military regimen. Much of the volunteers' frustration, that eventually produced grumbling, was tied to the civilian prism through which they had come to perceive "life-as-it-should-be" within a democratic society. Reality shattered lofty ideals with leaky tents, long foot marches, bad weather and other details of life as a soldier.<sup>12</sup> Nonetheless, the Mexican War served as a catalyst for dramatic growth and funding to build a sizeable, if not respectable, U.S. military machine. Simultaneously, military leadership gained experience and confidence as they repeatedly dominated the battlefield against a numerically superior opponent. Captain Robert E. Lee (later General Lee of the Confederate Army) pointed to the Mexican War as a "glorious event" that provided officers an opportunity to demonstrate their ability as professional soldiers.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>Winders, *Mr. Polk's Army*, 9.

<sup>11</sup>Gregory Hospodor, "The Home Front in the Mexican War" in *Daily Lives of Civilians in Wartime Early America: The American Home Front in the Mexican War*, ed. David Heidler and Jeanne Heidler (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2007), 124.

<sup>12</sup>Winders, *Mr. Polk's Army*, 113.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, 54.

Finally, the nation's victory in Mexico affected our nation's economic standing. Before the conflict, U.S. economic resources stretched halfway across the North American continent. Two years later, the spoils of war added an additional 529,017 square miles of territory, and fulfilled the goal of Manifest Destiny expansion to the Pacific Ocean.<sup>14</sup> The massive expansion, combined with newly acquired resources and valuable trade routes, exponentially enhanced the nation's economic power at the expense of its southern neighbor.

In summary, the Mexican War had a profound impact on U.S. elements of national power. Diplomatically, the U.S. strengthened its influence with North American and European neighbors abroad. Information infrastructure was greatly improved, drawing on entrepreneurial spirits to create a swift and effective method of transmitting news from the battlefield to curious readers at home. The Mexican War spurred growth in U.S. military manpower and equipment, a practice largely neglected since the War of 1812. The Mexican War also had an enormous affect on our nation's economic element of national power. The resources and trade routes gained from the war continue to benefit the nation to this day. Even so, important lessons of this conflict are often overshadowed by the more popular study of the War of 1812 and the American Civil War in the 1860s. An explanation for this trend will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

### The Political Animal

War by its very nature is a political animal, and the Mexican War was no exception. To set the historical stage, one must look at the landscape of early 19th

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<sup>14</sup>Jack K. Bauer, *The Mexican War 1846-1848* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1974), 397-398.

century politics. American political discourse in the 1830s and 1840s found two major parties fighting for political control of a growing nation. On one side of the aisle stood the “Jacksonian Democrats” who took their ideology from President Andrew Jackson. Jackson had served in the White House from 1829-1837 (elected 1828 and 1832), thanks in part to national recognition received after his 1815 victory at the Battle of New Orleans.<sup>15</sup> Once at the helm of leadership, Jackson wasted no time absorbing executive powers considered “unconstitutional” by his political opponents. Un-thwarted, Jackson encouraged public involvement in government, calling for the expansion of suffrage from white, male land owners to a broader base of white, male citizens.<sup>16</sup> Although this may seem a mild concession to a modern-day civil rights proponent, Whigs labeled Jackson’s suffrage expansion as “Mobocracy.”<sup>17</sup> Jackson so polarized the nation that by 1834 political challengers began to identify themselves as the “Whig Party.” The term “Whig” was a mockery of the king-like authority that some believed had taken control within the executive branch of Democrat politics under Jackson.<sup>18</sup>

The Whig party demonstrated a distrust toward Democrat expansion efforts. This is an important element to consider when studying the tension between these two political parties. Generally speaking, Democrats supported the Mexican War and Whigs opposed

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<sup>15</sup>Winders, *Mr. Polk’s Army*, 3.

<sup>16</sup>Encyclopedia Britannica, s.v. “Jacksonian Democracy,” <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/298760/Andrew-Jackson/3617/Jacksonian-Democracy#ref=ref152783> (accessed 8 November 2009).

<sup>17</sup>Winders, *Mr. Polk’s Army*, 4.

<sup>18</sup>Encyclopedia Britannica, s.v. “Whig Party,” <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/641788/Whig-Party> (accessed 16 October 2009).



it. Northern Whigs joined with abolitionists to promote the belief that slave owners conspired to bring about the war with Mexico to secure additional slave territory. Whig allegations were politically successful by 1848, when abolitionists and pro-slavery members split from the Democrat party.<sup>19</sup> A striking example of the distrust between the parties is captured in a statement made by President Ulysses S. Grant, who fought in the Mexican War as a lieutenant under both General Scott and General Taylor. Grant wrote, “The Mexican war was a political war, and the administration conducting it desired to make party capital out of it.”<sup>20</sup>

Although the two parties held different positions on the war, both Democrats and Whigs pressed to gain politically from the conflict unfolding with their southern neighbor. In May 1846, Congress authorized \$10,000,000 for the war, and a call-up of 50,000 volunteers.<sup>21</sup> President Polk seized the opportunity to commission party-loyal officers. Of the 13 volunteer generals authorized by Congress to supplement the war effort, all were party-loyal Democrats. Several prominent figures of the day noticed this political ploy, including General Scott who openly criticized Polk’s appointment of officers based solely on political affiliation.<sup>22</sup> The Democrats hoped that battlefield victories would translate to political victories at the ballot box. Unfortunately for President Polk, it was the Whig party who out-maneuvered its opponent by nominating

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<sup>19</sup>Winders, *Mr. Polk’s Army*, 202.

<sup>20</sup>Ulysses S. Grant, *Personal Memoirs of U.S. Grant* (New York: Charles L. Webster & Company, 1894), 74.

<sup>21</sup>Polk, 85.

<sup>22</sup>Winders, *Mr. Polk’s Army*, 34, 37.

General Taylor, the Mexican War battlefield hero, as the Whig 1848 Presidential nominee. In fact, it was not until 1852, when Brigadier General Franklin Pierce was elected President, that Democrats finally took solace in their Mexican War political strategy.<sup>23</sup>

This being said, the overarching significance of politics to this study is how the Mexican War paved the way for newspapers and the media to seize a more prominent seat of influence at the table of foreign policy and decision-making power. Newspapers became the battleground for political opponents to face-off in a war of ideas. Chapters 2 and 3 explore in detail the impact the war had on the media and the media's impact on the war.

### Manifest Destiny

Even though the Louisiana Purchase doubled the size of the U.S. in 1803, the nation continued to express interest in westward expansion through the 1830s and 1840s. Opportunity for growth presented itself after Texas won its independence from Mexico on 14 May 1836. That same year, the Republic of Texas requested annexation to the U.S. as a slave state, but was rebuffed by Congress and President Martin Van Buren. The topic refused to go away, however, and annexation of Texas became a stumping point for both Democrat and Whig presidential nominees in 1844.<sup>24</sup> Politicians, especially Democrats, sensed the growing number of Americans who believed that the destiny of the U.S. was westward growth reaching from sea to shining sea.

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 49.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 8.

On 1 March 1845, lame duck President John Tyler signed a resolution to annex Texas. This took place three days before James K. Polk (Jacksonian Democrat) was inaugurated as the nation's eleventh President.<sup>25</sup> Unfortunately, the resolution also set in motion a firestorm of events that would quickly escalate into a vicious war with Mexico. On 31 March 1845, Mexico made good on its threat to break diplomatic relations over the U.S. decision to annex Texas. American newspapers fed the drumbeat of war with threatening words. On 2 June 1845, the *Washington Union* wrote, "Let the great measure of annexation be accomplished, and with it the questions of boundary and claims. For who can arrest the torrent that will pour onward to the West?"<sup>26</sup> Four days later, the same paper wrote, "A corps of properly organized volunteers . . . would invade overrun, and occupy Mexico."<sup>27</sup> On 15 June 1845, Polk wrote, "Of course I would . . . not permit an invading army to occupy a foot of the soil East of the Rio Grande."<sup>28</sup> Anticipating hostilities with Mexico, he ordered General Taylor to prepare to defend Texas.<sup>29</sup> Polk's vague order read, ". . . [encamp] on or near the Rio Grande del Norte, such a site as will consist with the health of the troops, and will be best adapted to repel invasion . . ."<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>Frasca, 359-362.

<sup>26</sup>John E. Weems, *To Conquer a Peace: The War Between the United States and Mexico* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1974), 73.

<sup>27</sup>Weems, 73.

<sup>28</sup>Pletcher, 254.

<sup>29</sup>Frasca, 360.

<sup>30</sup>Pletcher, 255.

Taylor moved his forces the following month to Corpus Christi along the Nueces River, as newspapers seized the growing public interest concerning the ensuing conflict.<sup>31</sup> Whig editors recognized the move as an attempt by Polk to start a war with Mexico. The *American Review* wrote, “. . . taunting aggression, calculated to arouse into activity resentments which otherwise might have remained inert, though smouldering.”<sup>32</sup> The National Intelligencer reinforced this warning, writing, “It is offensive war, and not the necessary defense of Texas. And should it prove, as we think it will, that the President has gone this additional length, the President will be MAKING WAR. . . .”<sup>33</sup>

Incidentally, July 1845 was also the month that writer John L. O’Sullivan coined the term “Manifest Destiny” in his July-August 1845 issue of the *United States Magazine and Democratic Review*. This 19th century phrase captured the spirit behind the public’s growing desire to stretch the nation’s borders across the North American continent from the Atlantic to the Pacific.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>Winders, *Mr. Polk’s Army*, 8.

<sup>32</sup>Pletcher, 256.

<sup>33</sup>Weems, 71.

<sup>34</sup>Encyclopedia Britannica, s.v. “Manifest Destiny,” <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/641788/Whig-Party> (accessed 31 October 2009).



Figure 1. U.S. Troops on the Nueces River at Corpus Christi

Source: Lithograph by G&W. Endicott, 1847, after sketch by Capt D. F. Whiting, 7th Inf. “Birds-Eye View of the Camp of the Army of Occupation, Commanded by General Taylor, Near Corpus Christie, Texas.” [http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/?fsaall,brum,detr,swann,look,gottscho,pan,horyd,genthe,var,cai,cd,hh,yan,lomax,ils,prok,brhc,nlc,matpc,iucpub,tgmi,lamb,hec,krb.:1:/temp/~pp\\_f7K3::displayType=1:m856sd=cph:m856sf=3g04557:@@mdb=fsaall,brum,detr,swann,look,gottscho,pan,horyd,genthe,var,cai,cd,hh,yan,lomax,ils,prok,brhc,nlc,matpc,iucpub,tgmi,lamb,hec,krb](http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/?fsaall,brum,detr,swann,look,gottscho,pan,horyd,genthe,var,cai,cd,hh,yan,lomax,ils,prok,brhc,nlc,matpc,iucpub,tgmi,lamb,hec,krb.:1:/temp/~pp_f7K3::displayType=1:m856sd=cph:m856sf=3g04557:@@mdb=fsaall,brum,detr,swann,look,gottscho,pan,horyd,genthe,var,cai,cd,hh,yan,lomax,ils,prok,brhc,nlc,matpc,iucpub,tgmi,lamb,hec,krb) (accessed 21 March 2010).

### The Dominoes of War

In the years leading up to war, the Mexican government was operating in an unstable political environment. In fact, between 1821 and 1848, Mexico averaged new government leadership every 15 months.<sup>35</sup> After adopting a democratic republic in 1824 (modeled after the U.S.), Mexico unsuccessfully struggled for political stability.<sup>36</sup> The

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<sup>35</sup>Hospodor, 117.

<sup>36</sup>Stephen A. Carney, *The Occupation of Mexico: The U.S. Army Campaigns of the Mexican War* (U.S. Army Center of Military History: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2005), 5.

similarities in the two nation's governmental structure could not offset the border tensions that Texas would bring. Another domino tumbled in the direction of war on 29 December 1845, when the U.S. formally annexed Texas as the twenty-eight state of the Union.<sup>37</sup>



Figure 2. U.S. and Mexican Border Tension in 1846

Source: Created by author referencing "U.S. Mexican War," <http://www.latinamericanstudies.org/mex-war-map.htm> (accessed 27 January 2010).

Under the leadership of General Taylor, U.S. forces settled into their new home at Corpus Christi and the harsh environment Texas offered with its high heat and humidity. Soldiers struggled to stay healthy, as illness swept nearly a fifth of Taylor's men from their duties.<sup>38</sup> Writer Samuel Bangs seized an entrepreneurial moment by publishing a

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<sup>37</sup>Frasca, 360.

<sup>38</sup>Pletcher, 256.

newspaper for soldiers to read at the military camp. The Corpus Christi *Gazette* would be the first of many media outlets to open business in an attempt to meet news demands that erupted in and around military establishments in the Texas and Mexico region.<sup>39</sup> Then on 13 January 1846, Secretary of War Marcy sent an order for General Taylor to take his force of 3,500 men and, “Advance and occupy . . . positions on or near the east bank of the Rio del Norte [Rio Grande], as soon as it can conveniently be done . . . .”<sup>40</sup> On 28 March 1846, Taylor garrisoned his forces across the river from Matamoros, allowing his eighteen-pound guns to move within range of the city. Taylor began to receive demands from Mexico to move his men north of the Nueces River. Then, in what has become a point of controversy, General Taylor ordered the Rio Grande closed to Mexican commerce, an order that did not come directly from the President.<sup>41</sup> This dramatic event escalated tensions to an all-time high and set the stage for the final domino of war to fall. On 24 April 1846, General Mariano Arista took command of the Mexican army and sent approximately 1,600 cavalry across the Rio Grande to disrupt U.S. supply routes headed for Point Isabel. On 25 April 1846, Mexican forces ambushed a small group of 80 American dragoons at Rancho de Carricitos (upriver from Matamoros).<sup>42</sup> Eleven U.S. Soldiers were killed and many more captured. General Taylor confirmed the attack the following day, and sent a report to Washington requesting additional forces. He then

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<sup>39</sup>Bauer, 35.

<sup>40</sup>Hamilton, 163, 170.

<sup>41</sup>Kendall, 7.

<sup>42</sup>Steven R. Butler, “Thornton Affair” in *The United States and Mexico at War*, ed. Donald S. Frazier (New York: Simon & Schuster Macmillan, 1998), 429, 430.

reinforced his garrison at Matamoros and withdrew his headquarters to Point Isabel.<sup>43</sup>

When President Polk received Taylor's report on 9 May 1846, he was already working on a draft speech to Congress recommending war.<sup>44</sup> After reading his field commander's message, he quickly amended the speech to incorporate the recent attack on U.S. troops. Then on 11 May 1846, Polk announced to Congress that Mexican forces had invaded and shed American blood on American soil. Congress agreed with the President's recommendation, and on 13 May 1846, President Polk signed a Congressional declaration of war with Mexico.<sup>45</sup>

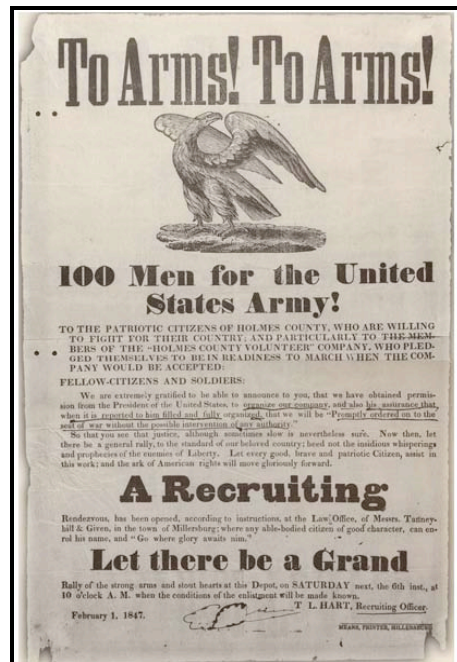


Figure 3. 1847 U.S. Army Recruiting Poster

Source: Public Broadcasting Network, "To Arms! To Arms!" [http://www.pbs.org/kerawar/american\\_army.html](http://www.pbs.org/kerawar/american_army.html) (accessed 16 November 2009).

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<sup>43</sup>Kendall, 7.

<sup>44</sup>Polk 82-83.

<sup>45</sup>Kendall, 7-9.



As the nation focused its war effort to support Taylor's forces, Polk sent Colonel Stephen Kearny with a force of dragoons from Fort Leavenworth to occupy New Mexico and claim California.<sup>46</sup> The President hoped that Kearny's 1,000-mile march would cut off the north region from the central government in Mexico City, thus forcing Mexico to accept the U.S. offer to purchase the desired land.<sup>47</sup> Although Polk initially adopted a movement effort to Mexico's interior from the North, he quickly changed his mind. The President decided to shift his strategy further South, (closer to Mexico City), hoping to shorten the duration of the conflict by capturing Mexico's capitol. On 30 May 1846, the President wrote down his goals for the war with Mexico as follows: acquire California, New Mexico, and some northern provinces of Mexico.<sup>48</sup> Polk also included a goal of drawing troops from every state in the union to maintain a broad range of interest and political support for the war effort.<sup>49</sup>

In Mexico, General Taylor won battlefield victories at almost every turn, including a decisive win in Monterrey from 20-24 September 1846.<sup>50</sup> Polk, however, did not believe the Whig general was winning fast enough. The real reason may lie in Polk's jealousy toward Taylor's increased popularity in the press. By November 1846, the President named General Scott as the commander of forces responsible for taking Mexico City. As Whig criticism increased on the administration's handling of the war, Polk

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<sup>46</sup>Ibid.

<sup>47</sup>Carney, 9.

<sup>48</sup>Polk, 106.

<sup>49</sup>Winders, *Mr. Polk's Army*, 69.

<sup>50</sup>Frasca, 361.

countered with accusations of treason. He claimed that critics of the war were encouraging the Mexicans to continue fighting, giving the enemy, “. . . aid and comfort.”<sup>51</sup> The accusations did little to quell the growing argument in the press. Albany’s Evening Standard wrote that the war’s purpose was, “. . . to conquer a neighboring republic to acquiesce in an attempt to extend the borders of slavery.”<sup>52</sup> The New York Gazette and Times stated, “When the foreign war ends, the domestic war will begin.”<sup>53</sup>

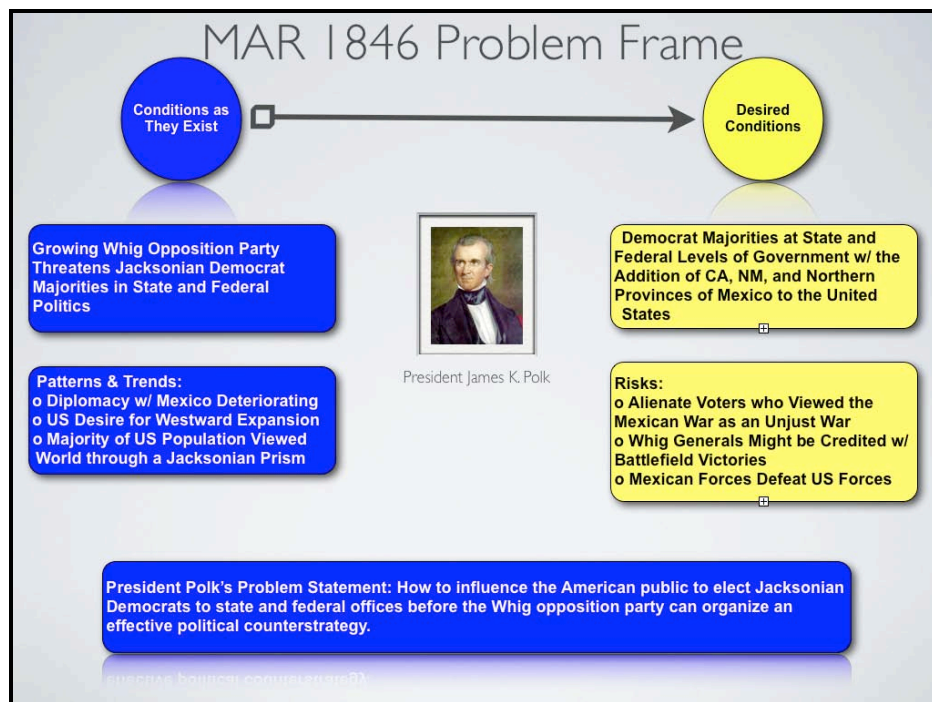


Figure 4. Polk’s Problem Statement

Source: Created by author, Photo of President Polk from [www.latinamericanstudies.org/mexican-war.htm](http://www.latinamericanstudies.org/mexican-war.htm) (accessed 29 January 2010).

<sup>51</sup>Eisenhower, 288.

<sup>52</sup>Pletcher, 581.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid.

General Scott eagerly accepted the appointment and assumed command of a large majority of Taylor's forces in January 1847.<sup>54</sup> Scott conducted a successful amphibious assault at Vera Cruz from February to March of the same year. His skill on the battlefield was apparent, as he lost just 13 men and 55 wounded, while defeating a city whose garrison included considerable defensive forces. Ironically, Scott's army traveled from Vera Cruz to Mexico City along the National Road, which was the same route that Cortez had traveled centuries earlier in his historic engagement with the Aztecs.<sup>55</sup> However, even with battlefield victories at every front, Polk came to realize that military conquests were not achieving victory for the Democratic Party.<sup>56</sup> In April 1847, the President sent Nicholas P. Trist (chief clerk at the State Department) on a secret diplomatic mission to Mexico. Trist was authorized to offer up to \$30,000,000 for Texas, New Mexico, and California. Polk did not trust Scott to handle peace negotiations with Mexico due to the General's political affiliation with the Whig party. He therefore selected Trist, a loyal Democrat who had diplomatic experience in the region (former U.S. consul to Havana).<sup>57</sup> Unfortunately for Polk and the Democrats, the secret diplomatic mission was made public in May 1847, and several highly critical editorials ensued. Newspaper readers were made to believe that the administration was demonstrating weakness by conducting diplomatic talks with Mexico when a military victory was close at hand.<sup>58</sup> As Polk

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<sup>54</sup>Frasca, 361.

<sup>55</sup>Johnson, *Winfield Scott: The Quest for Military Glory*, 178, 181.

<sup>56</sup>Kendall, 8, 22.

<sup>57</sup>Johnson, *Winfield Scott: The Quest for Military Glory*, 188.

<sup>58</sup>Kendall, 22-23.

considered his response to criticism within the media, General Scott's Army neared Mexico City and improved Trist's ability to negotiate a peace with the Mexican government. On 14 September 1847, General Scott's forces marched into Mexico City and the Halls of Montezuma in a dramatic battlefield victory.<sup>59</sup>

Meanwhile, the power of the media was taking a toll on the battlefield of national politics. On 5 October 1847, under the pressure of critical news editorials, President Polk ordered Secretary of State James Buchanan to recall Trist from peace talk efforts. Trist received Buchanan's message on 16 November, but brashly disregarded the order and wrote of his intention to carry on with negotiations. President Polk could only watch as newspapers condemned negotiation efforts. The Boston *Atlas* began calling the conflict, "Mr. Polk's War."<sup>60</sup> Referring to Trist's authorization to offer \$30,000,000 for the desired land, the *Picayune* wrote, "I will say nothing of the bribery—that dark side of the picture is undoubtedly the work of the . . . men at Washington." The article went on to say, "I trust the experience of the past may prove a lesson for the future, and that by this time our rulers must see and feel that in order to bring about a peace with the Mexicans they must use hard blows instead of soft words."<sup>61</sup> The political damage was done, and the Whig party won a majority in the House of Representatives in November 1847. The first official Whig act in Congress came in January 1848, when the legislative body signed a resolution condemning the Mexican War. The Senate also signaled its desire to

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<sup>59</sup>Frasca, 361.

<sup>60</sup>John S.D. Eisenhower, *So Far from God: The U.S. War with Mexico 1846-1848* (University of Oklahoma Press: Norman, 1989), 287.

<sup>61</sup>Kendall, 379.

come to peace with its southern neighbor, dissipating Polk's political capital with each passing day.

Back in Mexico, Trist and the Mexican commissioners formally signed negotiations for the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in February 1848.<sup>62</sup> Although initially outraged at Trist's insubordination, the President reviewed the document and decided to forward the proposed treaty to Congress for ratification. Polk concluded Trist's negotiated agreement was the best solution to end the war, given the harsh circumstances of the political climate in Washington. On 10 March 1848, the Senate approved the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, ". . . 38 ayes to 14 nays, four Senators not voting."<sup>63</sup> The Mexican Congress then ratified the treaty in May. Some hardliners in the press claimed the agreement did not go far enough. The *New York Sun* wrote, "Are we to give Mexico back to her military despots . . .?"<sup>64</sup> Congress closed the deal, however, as President Polk received the officially ratified document on 4 July 1848. The Americans completed their evacuation when the last U.S. unit left Mexico in early August 1848.<sup>65</sup> That fall, the nation selected the Whig presidential nominee to be the 12th President of the United States. His name was Zachary Taylor.

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<sup>62</sup>Bauer, 385.

<sup>63</sup>Polk, 314, 315.

<sup>64</sup>Pletcher, 561.

<sup>65</sup>Kendall, 26-27.

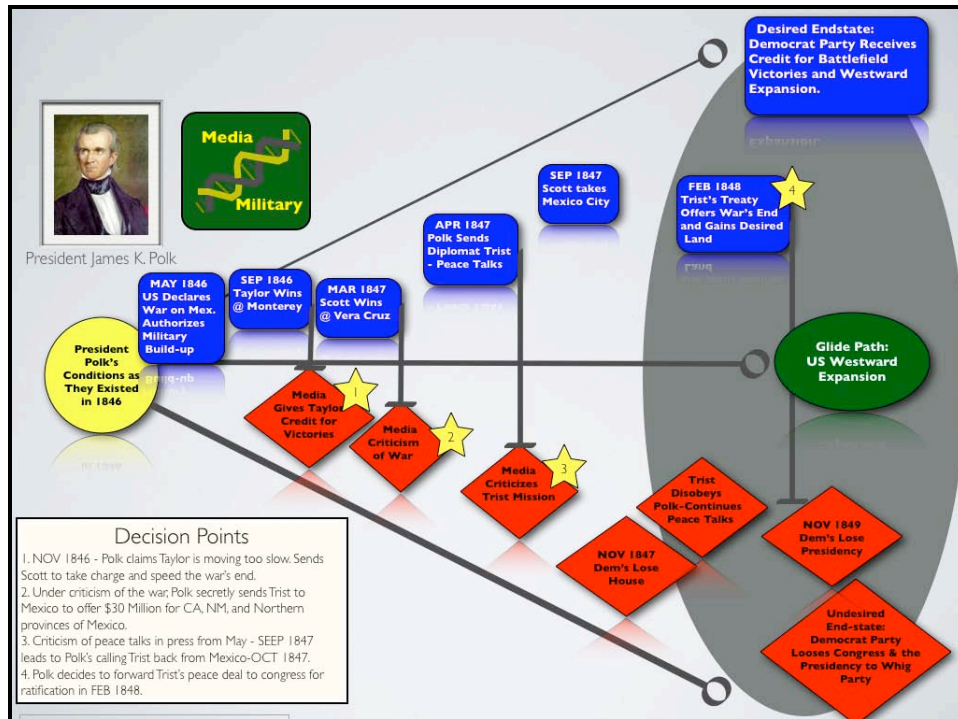


Figure 5. Polk's Problem Frame

Source: Created by author, Photo of President Polk from [www.latinamericanstudies.org/mexican-war.htm](http://www.latinamericanstudies.org/mexican-war.htm) (accessed 29 January 2010).

### Summary

In the decades following the war, politicians continued to wrestle with the morality of the Mexican War and its significance in our nation's history. In 1854, the Republican Party replaced the Whig Party and carried with it members who viewed this conflict through critical hindsight. Abraham Lincoln defiantly challenged President Polk to show him on a map where American blood had been shed on American soil, and President Ulysses S. Grant went so far as to claim that the destruction caused by the Civil War was punishment for the nation's transgressions in Mexico.<sup>66</sup> Perhaps the political

<sup>66</sup>Winders, *Mr. Polk's Army*, 204.

dominance of the Republican Party in the decades following the Civil War accounts for the low profile of the Mexican War in our nation's history. This effect is coupled with the fact that the war's opponents saw first-hand the staggering price of human suffering during the conflict. In the Mexican War, roughly 11 percent of U.S. soldiers died of wounds, accidents, or disease. Contrast this with the Civil War's 6.5 percent as the closest runner-up in our nation's history of battlefield casualties.<sup>67</sup>

Regardless of political parties' views, the U.S. undeniably benefited from the spoils of war. Even with a total cost of approximately \$137,000,000 (military operations; land; pensions and benefits), the 529,017 square miles of land amounted to a bargain price of roughly forty-eight cents per acre.<sup>68</sup> U.S. diplomacy with Mexico was soon reestablished, and her political clout was enhanced with its European neighbors abroad. The nation's information infrastructure was greatly improved by creative media entrepreneurs serving the curious public at home. The war proved a catalyst for dramatic growth in funding that enabled the United States to build a sizeable U.S. military machine. Vast natural resources acquired under the peace treaty provided the nation with an economic surge of opportunity and financial growth. In the words of President Polk, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, ". . . added to the U.S. an immense empire, the value of which twenty years hence it would be difficult to calculate. . . ."<sup>69</sup> Our conflict with Mexico presented the nation an opportunity to fulfill its Manifest Destiny vision by extending its western border to the Pacific Ocean. These benefits came at great cost to

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<sup>67</sup>Ibid., 139.

<sup>68</sup>Bauer, 397-398.

<sup>69</sup>Polk, 313.

Mexico who lost almost half her pre-war territory.<sup>70</sup> Now that the Mexican War's historical framework has been set, the next two chapters will focus on the subject of the media during this time period.

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<sup>70</sup>Winders, *Mr. Polk's Army*, 6.



## CHAPTER 2

### THE MEXICAN WAR'S IMPACT ON THE MEDIA

#### Introduction

The Mexican War affected the U.S. media in four critical ways. First, the growing demand for current news from the warfront enhanced the media's drive to innovate and modernize the nation's information infrastructure. Second, the war gave birth to the American war correspondent, forever changing the way our nation's public would receive news concerning battlefield events. Third, the war forged media alliances in an attempt to reduce the substantial cost of sending timely reports from the field to the print shops scattered across the nation's urban population centers. Fourth, the topic of the Mexican War pressed newspapers to the forefront of political discourse and served as a stage for presenting ideas on the topic of war. The Mexican War's impact on the media reaches beyond systemic change that seeps through most organizations slowly over time. Instead, the war caused a revolution within the business of media, as entrepreneurs seized a prominent seat of influence at the table of foreign policy and decision-making power.

#### Modernization in Information Infrastructure

The advent of the penny press, the introduction of foreign news correspondents, and the innovation of news distribution capabilities transformed newspaper circulation in the 1830s and 1840s.<sup>71</sup> As media organizations matured, demand for a broad range of topics increased among subscribers. News transitioned to a highly competitive business, and reaching the public "first with the story" became an important objective for

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<sup>71</sup>Kendall, 11.

reporters.<sup>72</sup> Media entrepreneurs eagerly searched for creative methods of modernization in communication technology to meet the growing public demand for information. “New news” and “sensationalism” emerged as building blocks for increased circulation.<sup>73</sup>

A significant step toward information modernization took place in 1837 when Samuel Morse received a U.S. patent on the electromagnetic telegraph. Six years later, (1843), the federal government funded Morse to build a telegraph system between Washington D.C. and Baltimore, Maryland. The first successful telegraph transmission on 24 May 1844—“What hath God wrought!”—marked a victory for the construction effort.<sup>74</sup> News organizations saw the enormous potential of the telegraph by fusing technology and innovation, thus playing a pivotal role in transmitting information quickly across vast spans of territory.<sup>75</sup> Telegraph lines broke the barrier of time and space between reporters and the people, as news crossed wide spans almost instantaneously.<sup>76</sup> During the Mexican War, in November 1846, private media businesses joined to finance a telegraph project that would run from Washington D.C. to New Orleans.<sup>77</sup> Whereas

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<sup>72</sup>Lorman A. Ratner and Dwight L. Teeter Jr., *Fanatics and Fire-eaters; Newspapers and the Coming of the Civil War* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 10.

<sup>73</sup>*Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>74</sup>Encyclopedia Britannica, s.v. “Telegraph,” <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/585850/telegraph> (accessed 11 November 2009).

<sup>75</sup>Kendall, 11.

<sup>76</sup>Ratner and Teeter, 8.

<sup>77</sup>Kendall, 12.

telegraph lines were nonexistent in 1840, by the end of the Mexican War, the nation maintained roughly 12,000 miles of serviceable lines.<sup>78</sup>

In the early months of the conflict with Mexico, newspapers took notice of America's growing interest. Media outlets quickly developed strategies for providing fresh reports from the battlefield to an audience hungry for stories of adventure and conquest. Reporters combined the distribution capabilities of courier pigeons, pony express riders, ships, trains, stagecoaches, steamboats, and telegraph lines to rush battlefield news to an impatient populace. Messages sent by embedded war correspondents often reached their reading audience twenty-four to seventy-two hours ahead of the government's postal service. Speed had become the driving force of modernization, and competition between newspapers quickly grew in an effort to satisfy the public's thirst for information.<sup>79</sup> Growing demand pushed other technologies to their limits. For example, steam-driven presses printed approximately 250 sheets per hour in 1833. By the second year of the Mexican War (1847), presses pushed out approximately 10,000 sheets per hour.<sup>80</sup> The *Niles' National Register* spoke of this transformation.

The avidity of all classes for news from the army, places in constant requisition some thousands of printing presses, & mails, expresses, steamboats, locomotives, magnetic telegraphs, are flying in all directions. In order to keep the supply, fairly up to the mark, some thousands of ready writers are required.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>78</sup>Ratner and Teeter, 18.

<sup>79</sup>Kendall, 11, 12.

<sup>80</sup>Ratner and Teeter, 9.

<sup>81</sup>Johannsen, 145.

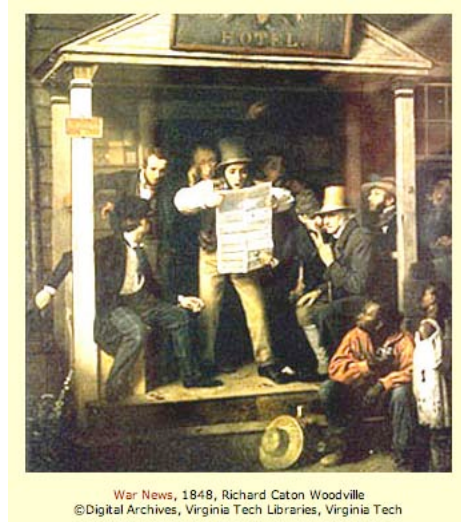
## The Birth of American War Correspondents

The Mexican War revolutionized the media with the birth of the American war correspondent. From 1846 to 1848, more than a dozen journalists from the U.S. provided first-hand reports of General Taylor's activities in northern Mexico and General Scott's actions from Vera Cruz to Mexico City. These stories, combined with letters published from the soldiers themselves, provided American citizens with battlefield situation reports outside official government channels.<sup>82</sup> Although many view William Howard Russell of the *Times* in London as the world's first "real war correspondent," his Crimean War writings actually took place almost ten years after American reporters provided Mexican War stories to U.S. newspapers.<sup>83</sup> American correspondents who led the way include media icons such as George Wilkins Kendall and Christopher Mason Haile of the *New Orleans Picayune*, John Peoples of the *New Orleans Bee*, and James L. Frenner and J.G.H. Tobin of the *New Orleans Delta*. These and other media visionaries captured the imagination of the curious American public.

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<sup>82</sup>Kendall, 8.

<sup>83</sup>*Ibid.*, 11.



War News, 1848, Richard Caton Woodville  
©Digital Archives, Virginia Tech Libraries, Virginia Tech

Figure 6. War News

Source: Richard Caton Woodville, “War News, 1848,” <http://www.history.vt.edu/MxAmWar/INDEX.HTM> (accessed 16 November 2009).

Within the circle of American media legends, Christopher Mason Haile retains the honor of becoming the first U.S. war correspondent. Haile (a West Point dropout) imbedded himself with American forces at the Rio Grande in May 1846. Shortly after his arrival, he provided the New Orleans *Picayune* with detailed news concerning the battles at Palo Alto and Resaca de la Palma. George Wilkins Kendall (also with the New Orleans *Picayune*) arrived at the warfront on 6 June 1846, and quickly became one of the most famous Mexican War correspondents of his time. His writings on Taylor’s battle at Monterrey brought White House recognition.<sup>84</sup> President Polk wrote in his memoirs that Taylor had fallen under the political control of war correspondent Kendall, calling the writer a, “cunning and shrewd” man.<sup>85</sup> In all, Kendall provided his audience with over

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<sup>84</sup>Ibid., 8-10.

<sup>85</sup>Polk 167.

two hundred war dispatches from April 1846 to November 1847. J.G.H. Tobin (from the *Delta* newspaper) is considered the best literary writer from the Mexican War. His published works can be found in *Notes from my Knapsack*. Incidentally, he is also believed to be the only reporter who experienced the battle of Buena Vista firsthand.<sup>86</sup>

A deeper study of war correspondents indicates that events on the battlefield shaped the opinions of the war reporters over time. Some reporters allowed their emotional bond with soldiers to take them beyond the normal role of news reporting. For example, one correspondent actually participated in battle against Mexican forces in-between writing assignments. General Gideon Pillow praised correspondent Kendall for delivering orders on the battlefield at Churubusco. General William J. Worth later commended the same reporter for being one of several civilians who “gallantly” transmitted orders during the battle of Molino del Rey. At Chapultepec, General Worth stated that Kendall had been wounded while carrying military orders during the battle.<sup>87</sup> The bonds between Soldiers and correspondents heightened with each passing difficulty. A story in the New Orleans *Picayune* stated, “One of the sweetest morsels the writer of this recollects ever to have eaten was a small piece of biscuit and a thin slice of cold pork, given him by a regular, an Irishman. . . .”<sup>88</sup>

War correspondents often faced life and death decisions while practicing their profession. After the battle of Cerro Gordo, General Winfield Scott stopped sending regular government messages to the East coast of Mexico, leaving members of the press

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<sup>86</sup>Kendall, 8-10.

<sup>87</sup>Ibid., 19.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid., 134.

with a difficult choice. They could slow their reports to their constituents, or they could hire unguarded couriers to risk traversing the dangerous Mexican terrain. The *Picayune* paid a high price for their decision to keep the news flowing. They lost twenty-five couriers (captured or killed) through the summer and fall of 1847. To reduce risk of losing their story to bandits, correspondents would often send the same dispatch by multiple couriers (staggered by time and route) to increase the chance of getting the report through to their readers.<sup>89</sup> These reports were critical not only for interested readers at home, but also for the government in Washington who often relied heavily on news reports from the press to update them on the status of the Army.<sup>90</sup>

The war also affected correspondents and their view of “justice.” Kendall gleefully recounts the actions of a Soldier who spotted a deserter while at Churubusco. “It seems that he deserted from Monterrey last fall, and a comrade who recognized him, to save the trouble of a court martial, at once pitched him into the mill frame and he was crushed to pieces by the wheel!”<sup>91</sup> Reporters also detailed the execution of fifty deserters at the battle of Mexico City. They wrote that thirty were forced to wait on wagons that served as gallows until the U.S. flag flew from Chapultepec, and then all thirty swung to their fate in one moment.<sup>92</sup> Sam Chamberlain captures this event in one of his famous watercolor paintings.

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<sup>89</sup>Ibid., 18.

<sup>90</sup>Tom Reilly, “Thornton Affair” in *The United States and Mexico at War*, ed. Donald S. Frazier (New York: Simon & Schuster Macmillan, 1998), 296.

<sup>91</sup>Kendall, 378.

<sup>92</sup>Ibid., 19-21.

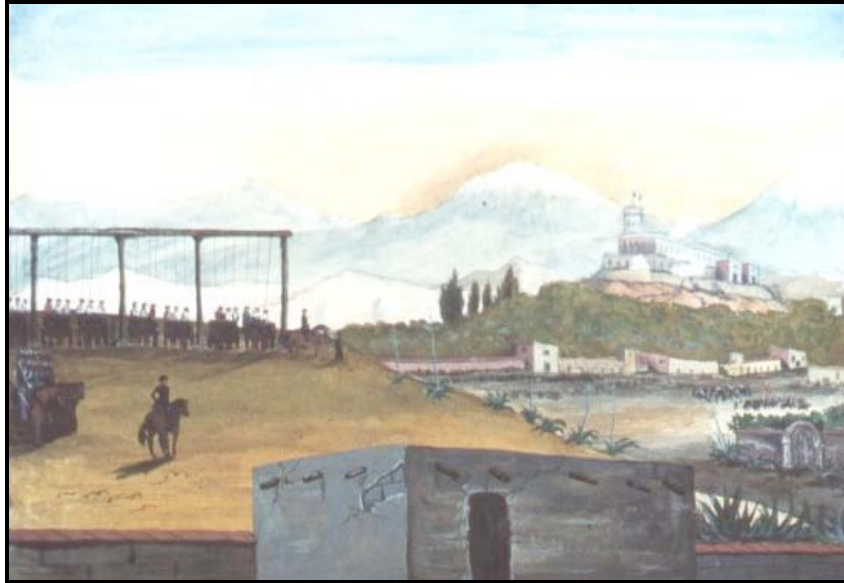


Figure 7. The Gallows

*Source:* Sam Chamberlain, “The Hanging of the San Patricio Battalion Deserters at the Battle of Chapultepec, September 1847,” ca. 1850, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Sanpatricioshang.jpg> (accessed 21 March 2010).

### Media Alliances

If the business of news was growing, so was the cost of media operations. In 1835, a small newspaper could start a business in New York with approximately \$500. In 1840, this price ranged between \$5,000 and \$10,000. By the end of the Mexican War, the cost of running a newspaper in New York was approximately \$100,000.<sup>93</sup> Reporting from the battlefield required creative ways to offset costs. Newspapers turned to business alliances to bring down the high expense of transmitting stories across long distances. In November 1846, private companies began financing a telegraph project from Washington D.C. to New Orleans to reduce the time and expense of war news to reach the northeast.

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<sup>93</sup>Ratner and Teeter, 10.



Although this project only reached as far as Petersburg, VA by the end of the war, it demonstrated the combined financial investment that news agencies were willing to risk in an effort to reduce operational costs.<sup>94</sup>

The Mexican War saw the birth of The Associated Press (AP), a media alliance. In May 1848, six New York newspapers combined financial resources for sending Mexican War-related messages using telegraph lines.<sup>95</sup> The Associated Press media cooperative ultimately made news reporting much more affordable, and the alliance that continues to this day.<sup>96</sup> Business alliances between the New Orleans *Picayune*, the Baltimore *Sun*, and the Charleston *Courier* provided a privatized pony express system that was considered an illegal practice by some officials in Washington. This private express transported news between breaks in government service along trail, telegraph, and shipping lines. Newspaper companies in the South, such as the *Picayune*, *Daily Delta*, and *Crescent*, allied with eastern media outlets to provide news related to the war.<sup>97</sup> Incidentally, when alliances failed to form, editors often turned to plagiarism, borrowing news from other papers and printing the stories as their own.<sup>98</sup> These

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<sup>94</sup>Kendall, 12.

<sup>95</sup>Frasca, 362.

<sup>96</sup>Encyclopedia Britannica, s.v. "Telegraph," <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/585850/telegraph> (accessed 11 November 2009).

<sup>97</sup>Kendall, 8-12.

<sup>98</sup>*Ibid.*, 10.

“borrowed” stories were then used as a catalyst for further discussion within their own reading audience.<sup>99</sup>

### Media and Politics

Newspapers have a long history of making money by reporting political news of interest, and 1846-1848 was no exception. In fact, throughout the 1840s, political parties created many of the nation’s newspapers to promote their respective ideology [This started with Alexander Hamilton and Thomas Jefferson in the 1790s]. Politically motivated editors helped shape public opinion by providing analysis and interpretation of national governance and morality.<sup>100</sup> The battles between the Democrats and Whigs were commonplace in newspapers, as heated arguments filled the pages concerning the legitimacy and conduct of the Mexican War.

Recognizing the power of the press, Jacksonian politicians, who had argued for war, worked closely with editors to promote their political message. Democrat-run newspapers often accused war opponents of giving aid and comfort to the enemy.<sup>101</sup> Other papers called opponents to the war, “Mexican Whigs.”<sup>102</sup> The Democratic-run *Washington Union* declared “. . . make them [Mexico] feel the evils of the war more strongly, in order that they may appeal to their own government for peace.”<sup>103</sup> It is

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<sup>99</sup>Ratner and Teeter, 32.

<sup>100</sup>*Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>101</sup>Winders, *Mr. Polk’s Army*, 4-8.

<sup>102</sup>*Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>103</sup>Pletcher, 468, 469.

noteworthy that the *Union* served as a mouthpiece of the Polk administration in its effort to manage public opinion. In fact, shortly after President Polk took office, he informed Washington *Globe* editor (Francis P. Blair) that his services were no longer needed. Editor Blair had been critical of Polk in several of his articles, and Polk decided to replace the news organ of the administration with Thomas Ritchie. Mr. Ritchie, in turn, started a new journal to promote the administration, naming it the Washington *Union*.<sup>104</sup> On 19 December 1845, a reporter from the New York *Herald* visited the President to ensure that Polk was “pleased” with their articles of support.<sup>105</sup>

Not all newspapers had Democrat leanings, however. The Charleston *Mercury* warned against the nation’s militarist actions with Mexico, stating, “Let us not cast away the precious jewel of our freedom, for the lust of plunder and the pride of conquest.”<sup>106</sup> The Whig-run Philadelphia *Northern American* wrote, “The conquest to us is worthless.”<sup>107</sup> The New Orleans *Picayune* regularly complained of Polk’s foreign policy failure to secure a settlement with Santa Anna.<sup>108</sup> George Prentice wrote in Louisville’s *Daily Journal* that Polk was “untruthful” and “incompetent.”<sup>109</sup> Lexington’s *Observer*

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<sup>104</sup>Polk, 24.

<sup>105</sup>*Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>106</sup>Pletcher, 456.

<sup>107</sup>*Ibid.*, 457.

<sup>108</sup>Kendall, 19.

<sup>109</sup>Damon R. Eubank and Damon Ralph, “Kentucky in the Mexican War: Public Responses, 1846 1848” (Ph.D. dissertation, Mississippi State University, 1989), 128.

*and Reporter* claimed that Polk's war was "unconstitutional."<sup>110</sup> After Scott's forces took Mexico City, the *Washington National Intelligencer* and the *New York Tribune* demanded that Polk resist annexation of Mexican land, reminding the President of his original claim that the war being fought was in response to Mexican aggression.<sup>111</sup> In summary, the war forged a hotly contested spirit of political discourse that fueled profits for newspapers regardless of their political leanings.

Another effect impact was President Polk's use of publisher Moses Y. Beach as an agent for peace talks with Mexico. Beach was an editor with the *New York Sun*, which had expansionist leanings. His influence and association with American Catholics led a small group of Mexican aristocrats and priests to propose a compromise with the U.S. They sent their plan to Beach, who then communicated the Mexican offer to President Polk. After reviewing the matter, Polk sent Beach on a trip to Mexico to validate the offer and assure Catholics in the region that the U.S. harbored no ill will toward their faith. This mission amounted to little as time passed, but it highlights the increased role of news editors during the nation's war with Mexico.<sup>112</sup> Beach's exploits took him to Mexico City, where he would later claim to have played a significant role in a Mexican revolt on 27 February 1847 that distracted enemy forces while General Scott landed his forces at Vera Cruz. The editor sent fellow journalist Jane Storms to make contact with Scott, who became incensed that "a petticoat" had been sent on such a mission. With Santa Anna's arrival, Beach slipped out of the city with his daughter and joined U.S. forces in

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<sup>110</sup>Ibid., 130.

<sup>111</sup>Pletcher, 551.

<sup>112</sup>Ibid., 476-477.

Tampico. In April 1847, he was back to writing at the *Sun*, proclaiming the expansionist message from his office in New York.<sup>113</sup>

### Summary

In summary, the Mexican War pushed media organizations to innovate and change beyond the normal cyclical adjustments associated with new technological advancements. The war served as a catalyst for what might be termed a “revolutionary” transition in the business of media as a whole. News entrepreneurs fastened the future of this booming industry on modernizing information infrastructure, birthing the American war correspondent, developing media alliances, and enhancing influence in political institutions at the local and national levels of government.

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<sup>113</sup>Ibid., 491-493.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE MEDIA'S IMPACT ON THE MEXICAN WAR

#### Introduction

After looking at the war's impact on the media, it is now time to explore the media's impact on the Mexican War. Of primary importance, research indicates an enormous amount of media influence on American politicians throughout the course of the Mexican conflict. Second, the media shaped the nation's public opinion concerning the morality and conduct of the war. Third, the press often provided political leaders with situation reports from the battlefield ahead of their government counterparts. Fourth, the press directly and indirectly influenced the military as an organization. The media's impact on the Mexican War would ultimately shape the outcome of this momentous event in our nation's history.

#### Media's Impact on the Politics of War

The media played a significant role in shaping U.S. politics during the Mexican War. In May 1847, American war correspondents exposed Polk's secret attempt to offer peace to Mexico. Polk sent State Department official Nicholas P. Trist to negotiate a deal that would give the U.S. the disputed territory of Texas, New Mexico, and California for a sum of \$30,000,000.<sup>114</sup> The *Picayune* wrote a scathing article criticizing the peace offer, since U.S. forces were on the verge of a military victory. After reading news criticisms of the secret envoy, President Polk became embarrassed and second-guessed his decision to send Trist to Mexico. Newspaper reports further complicated Polk's

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<sup>114</sup>Kendall, 22-23.

understanding of events on the battlefield, as he erroneously believed General Scott was seeking an armistice with Mexican leaders and that Trist was impotent in his efforts to negotiate a peace. Therefore, on 5 October 1847, Polk ordered Trist back to Washington. Trist received this order on 16 November, but after conferring with *Delta* war correspondent James L. Freaner, the State Department official decided to disobey the Presidential directive and sent word of his decision to Secretary of State James Buchanan. Freaner later hand carried a copy of Trist's negotiated peace treaty to President Polk in February 1848, along with other military dispatches from General Scott. This telling scenario demonstrates the strategic influence that the media enjoyed at the table of national politics by the end of the Mexican War.<sup>115</sup>

#### Media's Impact on Public Support for the Mexican War

The media played a significant role in providing public support for the war effort. In one article, the New York *Herald* wrote, "It is quite time for our government then to send a fleet to the Gulf of Mexico, and . . . for our army of occupation to pass the Rio Grande."<sup>116</sup> On 29 May 1846, the Washington *Union* wrote, "We shall invade her territory; we shall seize her strongholds; we shall even TAKE HER CAPITAL, if there be no other means of bringing her to a sense of justice."<sup>117</sup> By October 1847, many Democrat editors took even more bold positions. The New York *Globe* wrote, "It would almost seem that [Mexico], like the Israelites of old, had brought upon themselves the

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<sup>115</sup>Ibid., 23-26.

<sup>116</sup>Pletcher, 363.

<sup>117</sup>Ibid., 456.

vengeance of the Almighty and we ourselves had been raised up to overthrow and utterly destroy them as a separate and distinct nation.”<sup>118</sup> That same month, the *New York Herald* printed, “Like the Sabine virgins, she [Mexico] will soon learn to love her ravisher.”<sup>119</sup>

From its onset, many newspapers worked with state governors to announce volunteer positions needed to fill military quotas.<sup>120</sup> Once recruiting efforts solidified, papers turned to cheerleading volunteer efforts in the field. In Brooklyn’s *Eagle* newspaper, Walt Whitman wrote, “Let our arms now be carried with a spirit which shall teach the world that, while we are not forward for a quarrel, America knows how to crush, as well as how to expand.”<sup>121</sup> When Taylor’s men scored their victory at Monterrey, the *New York Herald* praised U.S. volunteer soldiers. The paper wrote, “. . . we have great reason to be proud of their prowess in time of danger, and the reliance we can place in our countrymen’s courage . . . whenever endangered by foreign or domestic enemies.”<sup>122</sup> After the battle of Churubusco, the *New Orleans Delta* wrote, “The regulars added new laurels to those already acquired, and the volunteers have given a repetition of the noble bearing of their countrymen on the bloody field of Buena Vista. . . . [Soldiers]

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<sup>118</sup>Ibid., 551.

<sup>119</sup>Ibid.

<sup>120</sup>Winders, *Mr. Polk’s Army*, 72.

<sup>121</sup>Bauer, 69.

<sup>122</sup>Martin Dugard, *The Training Ground: Grant, Lee, Sherman, and Davis in the Mexican War, 1846-1848* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2008), 254.



will return home bright ornaments to the states from whence they came.”<sup>123</sup> On 22 October 1847, *The Baltimore American* wrote, “The army which has done this is composed, too, in part of volunteer soldiers who have seen service for the first time. . . . Noble scholars indeed have they proved themselves to be! The soldiers of one campaign, they are. . . able to cope with the veterans of any service.”<sup>124</sup> The *Southern Quarterly Review* wrote that every soldier fought, “. . . as if he were striving to pluck from the ‘dangerous precipice,’ the glittering flowers of immortality.”<sup>125</sup> This media trend, with its romanticized flavor toward battlefield heroism, was a frequent theme in newspaper stories throughout this time-period.<sup>126</sup>

#### Media’s Impact on Timely Reports to Government Officials

Newspapers aggressively competed for stories to reach their audience ahead of competition. As innovation and technology fused to produce an enhanced information infrastructure, the press found itself delivering reports ahead of its government-run counterpart. In fact, the media was regularly first to report news to government officials and often outperformed the slower moving government postal system. On 6 May 1846, three days before Taylor’s message of hostilities would arrive in Washington, Polk wrote, “Newspaper accounts were also received. . . . No actual collision had taken place, though

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<sup>123</sup>Conrad, *General Scott and His Staff* (1848; repr., Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press: 1970), 46.

<sup>124</sup>*Ibid.*, 75-76.

<sup>125</sup>Robert W. Johannsen, *To the Halls of the Montezumas: The Mexican War in the American Imagination* (Oxford University Press: New York, 1985), 72.

<sup>126</sup>Hospodor, 115.

the probabilities are that hostilities might take place soon.”<sup>127</sup> The President apparently expected that news of Taylor’s forces were just as likely to be found in newspapers as through an official government report. It took two weeks to get the news of hostilities approximately 1,500 miles from General Taylor in Texas to President Polk in Washington D.C. By the summer of 1848, news correspondents could get their reports a distance of approximately 1,900 miles (from Mexico City to Washington D.C.) in about the same time period. In March 1847, the *Baltimore Sun* was first to deliver President Polk’s news of the amphibious landing at Vera Cruz.<sup>128</sup> On 21 March 1847, the *Picayune* printed the first reliable account of the battle of Buena Vista, reaching the public two days before government officials arrived with their report.<sup>129</sup>

These events did not go unnoticed by the U.S. Post Office, as the nation’s postmaster general went so far as arresting the *Crescent City* newspaper owner for moving mail by private means.<sup>130</sup> James Gordon Bennett of the *New York Herald* wrote, “[The news express] is a creature of modern times and is characteristic of the American people.”<sup>131</sup> Private sector innovation dominated the information playing field.

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<sup>127</sup>Polk, 80.

<sup>128</sup>Kendall, 12.

<sup>129</sup>Ibid., 152.

<sup>130</sup>Dugard, 253.

<sup>131</sup>Reilly, 294.

### Media's Impact on the Military

The media affected the military during the war in several ways. First, they enhanced Soldier morale by providing stories of interest to the units in the field. Second, the media provided transparency of military actions by reporting war crimes to the public at home. Third, the press inspired volunteerism by joining the ranks in large numbers. Fourth, the issue of war correspondents embedded with U.S. forces opened up debate concerning operational security issues. Fifth, the media helped the military maintain order in occupied cities by publishing decrees and orders. These impacts greatly shaped military leaders and unit policy during the war.

First, the press generally boosted Soldier morale with their fervent patriotic stories. Newspapers provided regular news on the Mexican War to the public at home, but also to the soldiers on the front lines. Correspondents worked their media talents in the field by using Mexican print shops to distribute camp news to troops fighting the mundane boredom ingrained in day-to-day military life. Editors were often limited to using Spanish printers. They would invert the letter M since the Spanish alphabet does not contain the letter W. Soldiers published the *American Flag* while occupying Matamoros. While occupying Saltillo, Illinois militia named their paper the *Picket Guard*. Soldiers published the *American Star* along General Scott's route from Vera Cruz to Mexico City. Once in Mexico City, the *North American* competed with the *American Star*, leading both papers to print in English and Spanish as they competed for a large audience. The *American Star* went a step further by adding a special edition (*Weekly Star*) section for readers back in the U.S. These publications included a mixture of

patriotic editorials, soldier gossip, military reports, and advertisements.<sup>132</sup> By the end of the war, occupation newspapers serviced the troops with 25 publications in 14 cities under U.S. control.<sup>133</sup>

Soldiers fighting in Mexico wrote home about their interest in news. Lieutenant Trussell asked his family in Mississippi to send him a newspaper from the states to keep him current on civilian affairs. Lieutenant Kirkham wrote his wife a thank you letter for sending him newspapers from home. Sergeant Wunder wrote his relatives that they knew more about events in Mexico by reading the newspaper than the soldiers knew from living on the frontlines.<sup>134</sup>

Second, the media provided transparency to the military by covering war crimes to the American public. The *Niles' National Register* reported on criminal acts that were committed by militia during the war. The paper attributes the unsavory behavior to a lack of discipline and insubordination.<sup>135</sup> It is interesting to note that there was no attempt to malign the military's leadership or create a public scandal concerning the failure of U.S. forces. On 5 April 1847, correspondent Kendall wrote to his readers, "Stragglers of sailors and soldiers have visited Madellin and the mouth of the river, and committed many atrocities. Several of them have been arrested, and I trust may be severely punished."<sup>136</sup> Generally speaking, articles covering war crimes against Mexican civilians

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<sup>132</sup>Winders, *Mr. Polk's Army*, 131-132.

<sup>133</sup>Reilly, 296.

<sup>134</sup>Winders, *Mr. Polk's Army*, 131-132.

<sup>135</sup>*Ibid.*, 84.

<sup>136</sup>Kendall, 166.

portrayed the events as unfortunate events by disgraceful individuals, rather than a reflection of poor military leadership.<sup>137</sup> As for Scott's siege of Vera Cruz in March 1847, outraged Mexican journalists claimed that over 500 civilians were needlessly killed during the barrage of cannon fire.<sup>138</sup> American reporters did not cover this incident as a war crime, but rather as a stroke of military genius that protected the lives of U.S. forces.<sup>139</sup> Close ties between members of the press and military counterparts may have shaped their viewpoint.

Third, the press affected the military by inspiring volunteerism and by joining the ranks in large numbers. This fact is understandable, as many reporters shared the views of the Jacksonian society from which they came. Democrat Solon Borland edited the *Arkansas Banner* and later served as a Major in the conflict. Democrat William A. Bowles edited Indiana's *Panoli Times*, and served as a colonel during the war. The *American Star* stated that no less than ten news editors had left their civilian jobs with the press to command troops in Mexico.<sup>140</sup>

Fourth, actions by reporters in the field opened discussion concerning operational security issues that presented themselves during the conflict. War correspondents often violated operational security while sending messages from their position on the front lines. Although no ill intent was present, the threat of enemy forces intercepting these messages and gaining valuable intelligence was very real. One example of an operational

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<sup>137</sup>Ibid., 65.

<sup>138</sup>Dugard, 307.

<sup>139</sup>Kendall, 177.

<sup>140</sup>Winders, *Mr. Polk's Army*, 79.

security violation occurred during General Scott's march to Mexico City. Kendall writes, "A section of the siege train, comprising two 24-pounders and an 8-inch howitzer will be along this afternoon. A subsistence train is also close by, and is very much needed as the army is nearly out of provisions."<sup>141</sup> Another example occurred on 22 September 1846, when the *Daily Picayune* released the following report:

Since writing the above, I learn that 2000 troops of the line arrived at Monterey [sic] on Monday last, the 31st ult., with four pieces of field artillery. It is also said that ten guns had been placed in position, and every effort was being made to mount some old guns previously laid aside. There is no cavalry force at Monterey [sic], but it is thought that at Caldereyta, this side, there is a considerable number of mounted men.<sup>142</sup>

Oddly enough, the only operational security concern that President Polk records involved General Taylor. On 25 January 1847, he wrote a diary entry concerning a letter by General Taylor that General Gaines forwarded to the New York *Express* and *Herald* newspapers. Polk was outraged at his commander, claiming that Taylor was openly criticizing the administration and that a commander of forces violated security by revealing plans that Polk had desired to, ". . . keep concealed from the enemy until they were consummated."<sup>143</sup>

In an interesting twist to the media's tendency to leak sensitive information, General Winfield Scott attempted to protect his force through the use of misinformation. To enhance operational security before the U.S. Army's famous landing at Vera Cruz,

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<sup>141</sup>Kendall, 210.

<sup>142</sup>Ibid., 100.

<sup>143</sup>Polk, 191.

Scott purposely misled newspapers about the military's ultimate destination.<sup>144</sup> This unwitting use of the media to shape the battlefield through deception is an interesting event that demonstrates the creative thinking by the nation's senior general.

Finally, newspapers in occupied cities assisted the U.S. Army in maintaining order and control over the local populace and over U.S. soldiers. In fact, the Army sometimes funded newspaper operations in return for their willingness to print official military decrees and orders. By the end of the conflict, 25 "occupation newspapers" were running in Mexico across 14 cities.<sup>145</sup>

### Summary

In summary, the media affected the military in several critical ways. First, the press enhanced Soldier morale by providing an outlet from the daily struggles of military regimen. Second, the media reported unsavory acts of soldiers, providing public transparency to the military and encouraging leaders to enforce discipline in the field. Third, the press inspired volunteerism by joining the force in significant numbers and through their patriotic stories that reinforced a nationalistic pride. Fourth, the media affected the military by opening discussion concerning operational security issues raised by embedding media with units in battle. Finally, the media helped the military maintain order in occupied cities by publishing decrees and orders. As explained above, these effects shaped the attitudes of military leaders and unit policy during the war.

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<sup>144</sup>Johnson, *Winfield Scott: The Quest for Military Glory*, 161.

<sup>145</sup>Reilly, 296.

Chapters 4 and 5 provide a deeper look at the media's interaction with two of the most prominent battlefield commanders serving in the Mexican War. The personalities of General Zachary Taylor and General Winfield Scott are as large as the battlefield on which they fought, but arguably, they would not be as well known without the work of war correspondents. In fact, the media played a key role in developing each man's image in the mind of the American public. Since both generals possessed his own set of special talents and abilities, research will look for clues in determining how the press portrayed each commander's performance. By comparing and contrasting how the media interacted with these legendary figures, chapter five will examine how the personalities and interaction of these two generals affected news coverage on the battlefield from 1846 to 1848.



## CHAPTER 4

### GENERAL WINFIELD SCOTT

#### Winfield Scott's Biographical Synopsis

Winfield Scott was born near Petersburg, Virginia (VA) on 13 June 1786.<sup>146</sup> His father was a Virginia farmer, and passed away when Winfield was just six years of age. At seventeen, Winfield's mother died, forcing he and his five siblings to an early transition into adulthood. Averse to the subject of mathematics, but gifted in reading and writing, Scott gravitated toward literary studies and boasted of his fluent ability to read French. While attending the College of William and Mary in 1805, he became interested in the study of law. However, his ambition, coupled with a strong sense of adventure, distracted him from the boring details of life as a lawyer. Using political connections in Washington D.C., Scott sought and received a commission in the Army in 1808.<sup>147</sup> The government anticipated war with England, and, thus, appointed the young Winfield Scott as a captain in a regular light artillery unit.<sup>148</sup> In 1817, Scott married Maria Mayo, a well-to-do woman from Virginia. Their marriage produced two boys and five girls, but illness took four of the children while they were still young.<sup>149</sup> This devastated the Scott family and drove the hard working general to escape the sadness at home by engrossing himself in his work.

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<sup>146</sup>Thomas W. Cutrer, *The United States and Mexico at War: Scott, Winfield*, ed. Donald S. Frazier (New York: Simon & Schuster Macmillan, 1998), 380.

<sup>147</sup>Johnson, *Winfield Scott: The Quest for Military Glory*, 8-12.

<sup>148</sup>Cutrer, 380.

<sup>149</sup>Johnson, *Winfield Scott: The Quest for Military Glory*, 72-74.



Figure 8. Winfield Scott

*Source:* Alonzo Chappel, "Portrait of Winfield Scott," 1850, [www.alonzochappel.org](http://www.alonzochappel.org) (accessed 21 March 2010).

### Winfield Scott's Window to the Soul

Scott's propensity for duels throughout his lifetime provides an insightful window to the soul of this American legend. As a young officer in 1810, Scott challenged Dr. William Upshaw (U.S. Army 5th Infantry Regiment surgeon) to a duel for spreading rumors among the soldiers that he was a thief. The two men met on the bank of the Mississippi River, and fired pistols at each other. Although neither received serious injury, Upshaw's bullet grazed Scott's head.<sup>150</sup> Scott declined a challenge to a duel by a fellow officer in 1813, after he insulted the man by accusing him of being a coward. Four

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<sup>150</sup>Ibid., 15-18.

years later, the famed Andrew Jackson received word that Scott had called his stubborn behavior toward the War Department “Mutinous.” A series of hostile letters ensued between these military icons, and, on 3 December 1817, Jackson challenged Scott to a duel. Jackson called Scott an intermeddling “pimp” and “spy” of the War Department. Although Scott declined this challenge for what he described as “patriotic” and “religious” reasons, the event portrays Scott’s propensity for escalating tensions of words into challenges of honor. In 1819, Scott challenged New York governor De Witt Clinton to a duel in response to a perceived insult. In 1820, the General challenged Virginia Congressman John Floyd to a duel, after the legislator accused Scott of forging a military manual. Then in 1824, he challenged General Edmund Gaines to the same. These bold offers came even as Scott’s own military manuals strictly forbade the practice of dueling.<sup>151</sup>

A second window to Scott’s soul was his love of France and the French culture, which would eventually translate to an in-depth study and mastery of European-style war strategies.<sup>152</sup> Scott spoke French fluently, and took several overseas trips for both personal and professional pleasures. An avid student of French military tactics, such as General-in-Chief Antoine de Jomini’s *Art of War*, Scott adopted Napoleon’s methods for warfare, insisting that the American Army mirror the “superior” European system. His discipleship of French Napoleonic principles of war is significant as it shaped Scott’s adoption of maneuver and offensive strategies in a formulaic approach to victory.<sup>153</sup> The

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<sup>151</sup>Ibid., 79-90.

<sup>152</sup>Cutrer, 381.

<sup>153</sup>Johnson, *Winfield Scott: The Quest for Military Glory*, 68, 70, 77, 169.

French officer corps preached a linear doctrine of symmetrical warfare that provided its students with a sense of scientific control of battlefield events. Scott adopted these concepts and integrated detailed planning on a foundation of strict discipline within the ranks. Added to his leadership style was his desire to control his men beyond orders under hostile fire. The famed General directed the details of garrison life, to include when his soldiers would conduct personal hygiene, how they should prepare their food, and how often soldiers should change their clothes.<sup>154</sup> In every sense of the word, Scott was a disciplinarian, dedicated to training his men and dedicated to ensuring their physical wellbeing.<sup>155</sup>

A third window into the soul of Winfield Scott comes from his nickname “Fuss and Feathers.” This term paints a picture that acquaintances had of the great General’s focus on his personal appearance. Scott was an officer who preferred the pomp and circumstance of full-dress battle uniform, regardless of the occasion. On his wedding day in 1817, Scott is said to have out-shone his bride’s dress with his own ornate military uniform that he purchased in Paris. The proud General took his wife on a honeymoon trip to Niagara Falls, which was coincidentally the site of his heroic success in the War of 1812.<sup>156</sup> One can speculate that Scott showed his young bride the battlefield where he heroically fought and was severely wounded on 25 July 1814.<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>154</sup>Ibid., 76-78.

<sup>155</sup>Cutrer, 381.

<sup>156</sup>Johnson, *Winfield Scott: The Quest for Military Glory*, 72-74.

<sup>157</sup>Cutrer, 381.

Tied to the Fuss and Feathers reputation was his propensity for arrogance. He is often described by contemporaries as being a man of enormous confidence to the point of egotistic conceit. These painful accusations were not limited to Scott's enemies. Ulysses S. Grant (who served under Scott's command in Mexico) once quipped that General Scott was, ". . . not averse to speaking of himself, often in the third person, and he could bestow praise upon the person he was talking about without the least embarrassment."<sup>158</sup> According to another close associate, Erasmus Keyes, Old Fuss and Feathers regularly exaggerated the importance of events in which he was involved. In 1816, Scott claimed that the War Department adopted the use of gray as the color for West Point cadet uniforms in honor of his actions at the battle of Chippewa in the War of 1812. In truth, gray was selected because it was inexpensive and in ample supply.<sup>159</sup> Fellow Whig, Horace Greeley, claimed that Scott was both "conceited" and "aristocratic." General James Wilkinson, one of Scott's superior officers in the War of 1812, once quipped that Winfield would sooner rule in Hades than serve in heaven.<sup>160</sup> Scott's perceived arrogance was often linked to his desire and ambition for leadership. Unfortunately, his character flaws often overshadowed the humane side of his personality and the raw talent that made him one of the nation's finest generals.<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>158</sup>Grant, 85.

<sup>159</sup>Johnson, *Winfield Scott: The Quest for Military Glory*, 63, 141.

<sup>160</sup>Ibid., 40, 214. The expletive that went with Greeley's description of Scott's arrogance has been omitted from this paper.

<sup>161</sup>Cutrer, 381.

### Winfield Scott's Political Ideology

The U.S. had fallen under the spell of Jacksonian Democracy, and Winfield Scott's hierarchical code-of-law juxtaposed itself against the fast-moving current of egalitarian involvement in national politics. Therefore, when the Whig party formed in 1834 in opposition to Jacksonian policies, Scott naturally identified himself as one of their number.<sup>162</sup> His elitist views were the antithesis of Andrew Jackson's beliefs. Scott's aristocratic, centrally controlled tendencies ran counter to the Democrat view that the common man should rule in a decentralized government. He believed that Jackson's policies failed to realize the reality of control measures necessary for stability, and that Jackson had inflicted irreparable damage to the U.S. political scene through his expansion of suffrage by including non-land owning Caucasian males. (These views would later hurt Scott in his quest as a Presidential candidate.) As a person, Scott judged Jackson to be a creature of impulse, respecting his military leadership ability and passion, but unimpressed with Jackson's politics, intellect, and over-reliance on the opinions of influential friends. Scott's political attitudes translated to a difficulty in relating to the common man, as he portrayed himself as elite in social circles.<sup>163</sup> This attitude irritated those around him, even as Scott seemed oblivious to his offense. President Polk writes in his diary concerning an apologetic letter he sent the White House after having written harshly concerning his views of the President. Polk states, "In his letter General Scott disavows that he meant to impute to the President the unworthy motives mentioned in his

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<sup>162</sup>Johnson, *Winfield Scott: The Quest for Military Glory*, 110.

<sup>163</sup>*Ibid.*, 91, 108, 109, 146.

letter . . . and even passes a high compliment on me . . . but it is too late to recall what has been done.”<sup>164</sup>

Popular sentiment in the 1830s and 1840s was the idealistic vision of the citizen-soldier, embodied in Andrew Jackson. This prism included the view that West Point was an education center for military nobility and should be shut down. Scott fought not against the perception of himself as a higher citizen, but rather against the growing sentiment that the common man should share in the decision making process of his government. In essence, Scott unabashedly embodied the Jacksonian sentiment that professional officers were aristocratic juggernauts, looking to suppress a democratic society.<sup>165</sup>

Scott displayed an interest in politics in 1839, which offered the General his first taste of the damage that newspapers could have on a person’s reputation. In a letter to Benjamin Watkins, he wrote that he would run for office if nominated by the Whig party. As for politics of the day, Scott opposed slavery, but encouraged a gradual approach to emancipation with compensation for slave owners for their losses. He expounded that his presidential run would have the single objective of defeating the Democrat candidate, Martin Van Buren. Newspaper articles seized Scott’s outspoken political positions and viciously attacked his character, greatly distressing the General and undermining any hopes he had of receiving the Whig nomination.<sup>166</sup> In the end, Scott enjoyed some

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<sup>164</sup>Polk, 104, 105.

<sup>165</sup>Johnson, *Winfield Scott: The Quest for Military Glory*, 67, 109.

<sup>166</sup>*Ibid.*, 135, 136, 145.

consolation for his loss. William Harrison (Whig nominee) defeated Martin Van Buren in the national election, bringing the White House into the control of the Whig Party.

In 1844, Scott once again sought the Whig nomination for President. He chose to write of his political views under the pseudonym “Americus.” On one occasion in the *National Intelligencer*, Scott passionately wrote about the dangers of foreign immigration.<sup>167</sup> The political battlefield, however, included a more experienced Whig opponent, Henry Clay. Clay was a master of tailoring his rhetoric according to the audience to whom he spoke. To the North, he claimed he was against the annexation of Texas, but to southern states, he claimed he was for it. This was an important topic in the media during a time when proponents of slavery were looking to add another slave state to the Union. Clay handily won the Whig party, but ended up losing in the national election to Democrat James K. Polk. Scott considered Polk’s Presidential election to be a “disaster” for the nation.<sup>168</sup>

Scott attempted one more Presidential bid in 1852, but the Whig party was never able to recover the catastrophe that ensued. After finally winning the Whig nomination, Scott fell painfully short of winning the general election, taking just four states with only 43 percent of the popular vote. Most embarrassing was his failure to win his home state of Virginia. One can only imagine how agonizing it must have been for Scott to lose to Franklin Pierce, who just a few years prior was a subordinate officer. Between internal divisions, a weak message to the press, and a politically battered messenger in Winfield

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<sup>167</sup>Ibid., 144, 214.

<sup>168</sup>Ibid., 146, 147.



Scott, the Whig party was doomed to obscurity in 1854, and was replaced by the Republican Party.<sup>169</sup>

### Winfield Scott's Military Exploits

Winfield Scott's military career began in 1807.<sup>170</sup> In July of that year, the British fired on the American frigate *Chesapeake*, and took four sailors prisoner. On 2 July 1807, President Thomas Jefferson ordered all armed British vessels to leave the American coast. The following week, Jefferson directed the governor of Virginia to call up the state militia to patrol the coastline. At age 21, Scott quickly volunteered in the Petersburg militia as part of a cavalry unit. He was given the rank of corporal and put in charge of a detachment. At Lynn Haven Bay, his mission was to guard a portion of the Virginia coastline to prevent re-supply to British ships. By the end of the summer, however, tensions had subsided and Scott returned to his law practice in Petersburg, Virginia.<sup>171</sup>

Using personal connections in the nation's capitol, Winfield Scott understood the political nature of military business. In 1808, he traveled to Washington D.C. to discuss his military goals with a friend, Senator William Giles of Petersburg, Virginia. The Senator agreed that Scott would be a good candidate for a commission and took the eager six-foot, four-inch tall lawyer to meet with President Thomas Jefferson. Jefferson was impressed with Scott's interview and promised that when Congress approved the expansion of the Army, Scott would get his wish. On 3 May 1808, he received his

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<sup>169</sup>Ibid., 216-217.

<sup>170</sup>Conrad, 11.

<sup>171</sup>Johnson, *Winfield Scott: The Quest for Military Glory*, 10-11.

commission as a captain of a light artillery unit.<sup>172</sup> With a new sense of purpose and adventure, Scott eagerly pledged his life, liberty and sacred honor to the nation.<sup>173</sup>

Stumbling out of the gate as a military leader on 22 January 1810, Scott found himself on the losing end of a court-martial for insubordination to a superior officer and withholding pay from his men.<sup>174</sup> However, the imposed punishment of one year's suspension from the Army was not enough to curb Scott from regularly insulting his superior officers. Scott had a knack for speaking his mind with candor, even when doing so violated the honor of high-ranking political and military officials.

On 25 March 1812, Scott was promoted major. On 18 June 1812, Congress declared war on Great Britain and quickly promoted Scott to the rank of lieutenant colonel on 6 July 1812. Scott volunteered to take his artillery companies north to the Niagara in his attempt to engage in battle with British forces. On 4 October 1812, he arrived at Buffalo, New York to prepare for an invasion into Canada.<sup>175</sup> Then on 13 October 1812, an event occurred that would dramatically shape Scott's opinion of militia forces. After crossing the Niagara and establishing a defensive line with 300 soldiers against a British and Indian force of 1,300, Scott received grave news from General Stephen van Rensselaer that the reinforcing state militia would not arrive.<sup>176</sup> They refused to cross the river, claiming that the militia's constitutional requirement was to

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<sup>172</sup>Cutrer, 380.

<sup>173</sup>Johnson, *Winfield Scott: The Quest for Military Glory*, 11-12.

<sup>174</sup>*Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>175</sup>*Ibid.*, 22, 92.

<sup>176</sup>Conrad, 11.

defend, not attack the enemy, and therefore would not cross the nation's border into Canada. The result was an eventual surrender and imprisonment of Scott and many of his men under British arrest. Although, he was later paroled, Scott appears to have held a grudge against militia forces for the remainder of his career, viewing them as unreliable and undisciplined.<sup>177</sup>

On 12 March 1813, Scott was promoted to colonel and then to brigadier general on 9 March 1814.<sup>178</sup> Then in recognition of his brave actions at Lundy's Lane, Scott was brevetted major general on 25 July 1814. Unfortunately, his bravery came at enormous cost to the lives of his men. Scott's refusal to wait for reinforcements during the battle against a formidable British opponent resulted in his brigade suffering 60 percent casualties.<sup>179</sup> Winfield himself was a casualty that day, as a bullet shattered his left shoulder, taking him out of the fight.<sup>180</sup> His victory, however, made him a media darling in newspapers in New York. The articles describing Scott's heroism matched his own view of his abilities demonstrated at Chippewa and Lundy's Lane. He openly welcomed these public displays of appreciation that reinforced his strength of character and honor.<sup>181</sup> On 3 November 1814, Congress awarded Scott a gold medal for his heroism.<sup>182</sup>

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<sup>177</sup>Johnson, *Winfield Scott: The Quest for Military Glory*, 26, 77, 78.

<sup>178</sup>Cutrer, 380.

<sup>179</sup>Johnson, *Winfield Scott: The Quest for Military Glory*, 59, 60, 92.

<sup>180</sup>Conrad, 15.

<sup>181</sup>Johnson, *Winfield Scott: The Quest for Military Glory*, 64.

<sup>182</sup>Cutrer, 381.

As the war progressed, so did Scott's reputation as a disciplinarian in both training and war. Morning drill commenced at 4:30 a.m. and proceeded for the next ten hours of the day. He insisted that soldiers salute their officers, maintain their uniforms, and emphasized preventive medicine through sanitation and cleanliness. Scott's stern rules were especially harsh toward men considered cowards. Scott court-martialed six deserters while he commanded forces during the War of 1812. He ordered one Soldier to have his ears cropped and the letter "D" branded on his face. Then, as Scott's soldiers looked on, the other five deserters were placed in front of open graves. The firing squads opened fire on the men, and all but one fell to his death. The lone standing survivor was a teenager that Scott wanted to teach a lesson and have a second chance at life.<sup>183</sup>

With the ratification of the Treaty of Ghent on 16 February 1816, the War of 1812 ended. Scott turned his attention to writing military manuals and developing doctrine based on the French military model. He also found himself fighting politicians to justify the need for a professional Army, for no sooner had the war ended, than Congress began dramatically to reduce the size of the nation's military. Scott was fearful that Andrew Jackson's famous militia victory at the Battle of New Orleans in the War of 1812 would cause the American public to disregard professional officers and regulars. Scott believed that a Republic had numerous advantages over other forms of government, but that its one weakness was its resistance to maintaining a strong national defense.<sup>184</sup> Scott also displayed an increased interest in newspapers after the war. He wrote several articles under pseudonyms, which helped sharpen his writing skills and allowed him to express

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<sup>183</sup>Johnson, *Winfield Scott: The Quest for Military Glory*, 44-46.

<sup>184</sup>*Ibid.*, 69, 213.

deeply held political views. Scott's pseudonyms included the names Americus, Pendleton, and Whythe. His interest in news and politics led him to invest \$600 in 1823 to start the *Patriot*, (a pro-Calhoun newspaper). Its objective was to influence voters in New York to vote against the Democrat candidate, Martin Van Buren.<sup>185</sup>

Scott's conventional, linear approach to battlefield tactics did not bode well in his experience with the Florida Seminole Indians in 1836.<sup>186</sup> Having been sent by President Jackson to deal with the Indian violence against settlers and soldiers in the region, Scott struggled against the Seminole's use of unconventional tactics. The Indians avoided decisive engagements between themselves and their U.S. counterparts.<sup>187</sup> Nonetheless, his experiences in Florida would help him design a successful campaign against guerrillas and insurgents during the Mexican War. He also learned an important lesson on the power of the media during his time in Florida. The General had written a scathing letter that indirectly accused the local populace of cowardice for failing to stand up against the Indians. This letter found its way into the state's newspapers, which resulted in public outrage including an effigy burning in Tallahassee and protest letters to President Jackson. Jackson acted quickly and relieved Scott of command, ordering a court martial inquiry that would eventually exonerate him.<sup>188</sup> In fact, the convening court found that Scott's Seminole campaign plan was "well devised . . . prosecuted with energy,

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<sup>185</sup>Ibid., 72, 84.

<sup>186</sup>Cutrer, 381.

<sup>187</sup>Johnson, *Winfield Scott: The Quest for Military Glory*, 119.

<sup>188</sup>Ibid., 121, 125.

steadiness, and ability.”<sup>189</sup> Nonetheless, Scott witnessed firsthand the influence that newspapers had on Presidential decisions concerning the military and also that he had much to learn regarding unconventional warfare.<sup>190</sup>

Taking a shot at his fellow general in 1838, General Edmund Gaines wrote to the War Department that the Army failed to address the nation’s issue with the Indians because of its focus on European-style tactics. He stated that most officers were not qualified to deal effectively with unconventional methods necessary to defeat the Indians, since Army manuals focused on French and English conventional tactics. In part, Gains appears to be accurate in his assessment. During this era, the Army did not train on guerrilla tactics, nor did it provide doctrine on how to deal with Indian threats. Since Scott was responsible for writing the military’s doctrinal manuals during this time period, his failure to address these matters is significant. Scott’s dislike for unconventional tactics during this point in his career possibly led to his avoidance of these topics, but ultimately, he was able to deliver a sophisticated method to deal with guerrilla warfare a decade later during the Mexican War.<sup>191</sup>

#### Winfield Scott and the Mexican War

In 1845, Scott personally objected to war with Mexico and felt that hostilities were unlikely. He also believed that if war did occur, 2,000 Americans were more than a match for the Mexican military. Scott’s belief that conflict was not on the horizon is

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<sup>189</sup>Conrad, 21.

<sup>190</sup>Cutrer, 381.

<sup>191</sup>Johnson, *Winfield Scott: The Quest for Military Glory*, 120, 125, 126.

further supported by the fact that before May 1846 the consummate planner made no effort to develop a strategic plan for war with Mexico. Scott's adverse attitude toward hostilities with Mexico stemmed from his view that war was an honorable action that required proper provocation. In 1844, Scott wrote in his memoirs that war was not to be used as a means to satisfy a quest for land. From his perspective, Polk's underlying objective was to gain territory. In September 1846, Scott confided in Richard Pakenham, British minister to the U.S, that he was "ashamed" of the nation's attempt to use the war as a means to take territory from Mexico.<sup>192</sup>

On 14 May 1846, Polk summoned the Secretary of War and General Scott to discuss a strategy for the Mexican War.<sup>193</sup> Scott upped his initial analysis for required forces by recommending 20,000 volunteers with a three-month training program to deliver the military machine necessary for victory. Scott envisioned a campaign in the fall of 1846, while Polk had envisioned an earlier summer campaign.<sup>194</sup> Although Scott's training timeline was aggressive from a military point of view, Polk believed that three months was too long, and he began to wonder if his commanding general was the right man for the job. In the following weeks, Polk expressed a general displeasure with Scott and wrote of his disappointment in his memoirs, "General Scott did not impress me favourably as a military man."<sup>195</sup> Secretly, Polk planned to replace Scott before the end of the war with a Democratic General—Thomas Benton, Missouri Senator and Chairman

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<sup>192</sup>Ibid., 149-151.

<sup>193</sup>Polk, 93.

<sup>194</sup>Johnson, *Winfield Scott: The Quest for Military Glory*, 151, 154.

<sup>195</sup>Polk, 93.

of the Senate Military Affairs Committee who had not seen military service for 30 years.<sup>196</sup> When Scott learned of the plot from political friends in D.C., he wrote Secretary of War William L. Marcy on 21 May 1846,<sup>197</sup> “. . . I do not desire to place myself in the most perilous of all positions: a fire upon my rear, from Washington, and the fire, in front, from the Mexicans.”<sup>198</sup>

On 21 May 1846, the President was shown a letter written by Scott complaining that Democrats were standing up a mounted rifle regiment only to commission Democrat officers.<sup>199</sup> Polk was outraged, writing, “It proved to me that General Scott was not only hostile, but recklessly vindictive in his feelings towards my administration.”<sup>200</sup> On 23 May 1846, Polk read a second letter from Scott addressed to the Secretary of War concerning, “. . . a fire upon my rear.” This so outraged the President that he called his cabinet together and read Scott’s remarks. Polk declared, “. . . [Scott’s] partisan feelings are such that he is unfit to be entrusted with . . . command.”<sup>201</sup> The President had Marcy inform the proud general that he would not command in the theater of war. This action greatly distressed Scott, and he attempted to mend relations with the Commander in Chief through a letter of apology. Once again, newspapers would play a role in attacking

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<sup>196</sup>Eisenhower, 93.

<sup>197</sup>Polk, 100, 101.

<sup>198</sup>Johnson, *Winfield Scott: The Quest for Military Glory*, 154, 159.

<sup>199</sup>Bauer, 74.

<sup>200</sup>Polk, 99.

<sup>201</sup>*Ibid.*, 100.



Scott's character, as Polk sent the General's letter of apology to the *Union* newspaper to further embarrass him and cause a political mockery of the former Whig candidate.<sup>202</sup>

By October 1846, Polk's emotions had cooled, and he decided to return to Scott for advice on a change in the war's strategy. The President had grown tired of Zachary Taylor receiving accolades in the press for his efforts in Mexico, and was frustrated at the Army's slow rate of advance as it traveled inland from the Rio Grande. Polk knew that Scott's legal training, coupled with the General's belief in strict military discipline, made him the ideal candidate to lead the campaign in Mexico. Scott's reply to the President contained two central themes: (1) retain the advantage by staying on the offensive, and (2) protect the force as part of a movement to strike at Mexico's capitol. Scott's reply impressed Polk, and he accepted the proposed plan.<sup>203</sup> Politically, Polk hoped to take the spotlight off Taylor's growing popularity in the nation's newspapers, and simultaneously speed an end to the war by hitting the political heart of Mexico, her capitol.

In the fall of 1846, as Scott prepared for an assault on Vera Cruz, the General showed a gesture of peace to the President by offering to take any volunteer Democrat generals that Polk wanted to send.<sup>204</sup> This outward gesture concealed Scott's inner feelings, for privately, the General confided that the President had become, ". . . an enemy more to be dreaded than Santa Anna."<sup>205</sup> As for Polk, on 21 November 1846, he wrote, "General Scott informed me that he would leave for Mexico . . . and was

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<sup>202</sup>Johnson, *Winfield Scott: The Quest for Military Glory*, 155.

<sup>203</sup>*Ibid.*, 157, 158, 208.

<sup>204</sup>Polk, 171.

<sup>205</sup>Johnson, *Winfield Scott: The Quest for Military Glory*, 159, 161.

exceedingly grateful to me for having assigned him to the command. In truth it was the only alternative.”<sup>206</sup>

Trying to focus on the enormous task that lay before him, General Scott saw an opportunity to keep his landing at Vera Cruz a secret by misleading newspapers about the military’s ultimate destination.<sup>207</sup> His use of the media to misinform the public in order to protect his forces demonstrates the concern Scott had for the safety of his men. Scott departed New York in December 1846 and arrived at the mouth of the Rio Grande on 1 January 1847.<sup>208</sup>

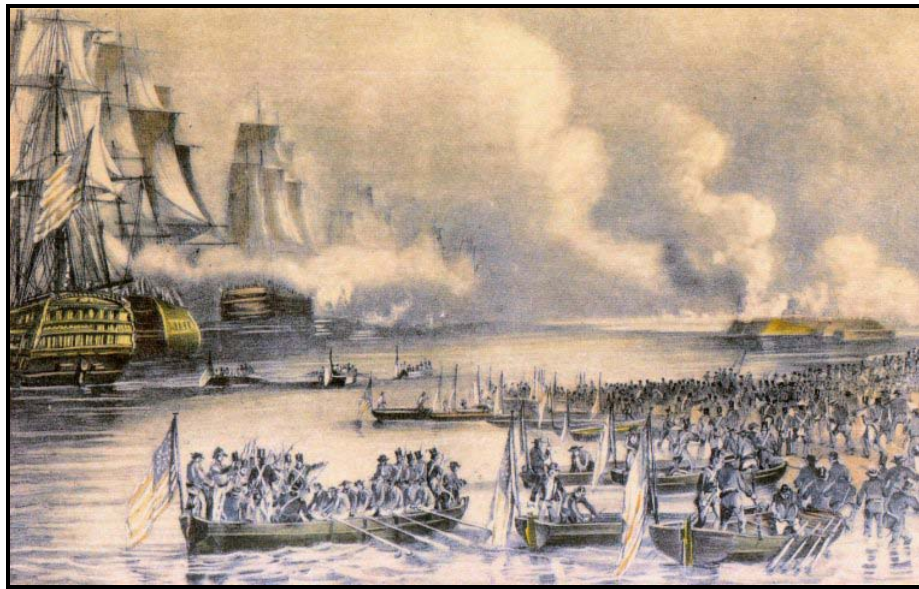


Figure 9. Battle of Vera Cruz - 1

Source: Nathaniel Currier, “Landing of American Forces Under General Scott at Vera Cruz, 9 March 1847,” <http://www.dmwv.org/mexwar/mwart/prints.htm> (accessed 21 March 2010).

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<sup>206</sup>Polk, 174.

<sup>207</sup>Johnson, *Winfield Scott: The Quest for Military Glory*, 161.

<sup>208</sup>Conrad, 24.

Scott's landing at Vera Cruz on 10 March 1847 was the largest amphibious assault in American history until World War II.<sup>209</sup> General Worth led the first wave without incident. This force consisted of 5,500 men in small troop carrying vessels known as "surfboats." By the end of the day, the number of U.S. forces on shore increased to 8,600. Another 12,600 soldiers landed over the next 14 days.<sup>210</sup> One eyewitness account claimed that the eastern horizon looked like a wall of white canvass, with boats lining up a mile long to off-load men and supplies.<sup>211</sup> The landing was a romanticized moment, as Cortes had landed at the same location (also on a Good Friday) three and a half centuries before them.<sup>212</sup>

Scott's superb planning and attention to detail overcame logistical shortages imposed by the mammoth undertaking for an invasion force of this size. On 18 March 1847, Scott sent an angry letter to the War Department complaining of the shortage of ordnance. He had but ten mortars and four howitzers at his disposal, less than a fourth of the guns he had requested. The *Picayune* wrote, "A heavy responsibility rests upon the War Department in not having the ordnance here in due season, for here are some 12 to 15,000 men completely paralyzed as it were for their essential arm in the attack upon Vera Cruz."<sup>213</sup>

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<sup>209</sup>Johnson, *Winfield Scott: The Quest for Military Glory*, 174.

<sup>210</sup>Kendall, 159.

<sup>211</sup>Conrad, 24-25.

<sup>212</sup>Kendall, 159.

<sup>213</sup>*Ibid.*, 167.

Assessing this shortage of firepower for the siege, Scott called on Commodore Matthew Perry of the Navy to provide six heavy navy guns. The Navy's sixty-eight-pound guns each weighed over three tons and provided significant firepower to the potential shortage of artillery. On 22 March, after the city of Vera Cruz refused to surrender, Scott's bombardment commenced. Two days later, consuls from Great Britain, Prussia, France, and Spain requested a truce so that they could leave the city under the safety of diplomatic immunity. In a bold move, Scott refused their request with the hope that they would pressure the leadership of Vera Cruz to surrender. His gamble paid off, as Mexican General Juan Morales surrendered the city to American forces the following week. Lieutenant George McClellan (later General McClellan in the Union Army) described Scott's bombardment of Vera Cruz as "superb."<sup>214</sup>

Scott's tactical prowess changed effects on the battlefield by keeping his Soldiers from unnecessary risk.<sup>215</sup> Whereas Taylor was a brave man whose frontal attacks led to heavy battlefield losses, Scott believed in finesse, and led a less bloody campaign, capturing enormous numbers of Mexican prisoners and supplies.<sup>216</sup> In the press, the *Picayune* praised Scott's decision to lay siege at Vera Cruz to save U.S. forces from unnecessary harm.<sup>217</sup> Kendall's editorials compared Scott and Taylor, stating, ". . . for hand-to-hand combat, Monterrey was far ahead of this; but for grandeur and sublimity

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<sup>214</sup>Johnson, *Winfield Scott: The Quest for Military Glory*, 177, 178.

<sup>215</sup>Cutrer, 381.

<sup>216</sup>Johnson, *Winfield Scott: The Quest for Military Glory*, 186.

<sup>217</sup>Kendall, 19.

this far exceeds any attempt that has ever yet been made by the American arms.”<sup>218</sup> The *Baltimore Sun* was first to get the victorious news to President Polk. A fast ship brought the unofficial report to the Baltimore harbor on 10 April 1847, and the newspaper quickly forwarded the information to Washington D.C. via telegraph.<sup>219</sup>

However, not everyone appreciated Scott’s cautious actions on the battlefield. Division Commander William Worth was critical that Scott chose to siege Vera Cruz. He claimed that under Taylor, Monterrey had fallen in just three days, and he felt that Scott was being overly cautious.<sup>220</sup> Worth’s criticism of Scott was much less severe than that of news editor William Lloyd Garrison, who wrote in the *Liberator*, “We only hope that, if blood has had to flow, that it has been that of the American, and that the next news we shall hear will be that General Scott and his army are in the hands of the Mexicans.”<sup>221</sup>

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<sup>218</sup>Ibid., 177.

<sup>219</sup>Eisenhower, 290.

<sup>220</sup>Johnson, *Winfield Scott: The Quest for Military Glory*, 176.

<sup>221</sup>Joseph Wheelan, *Invading Mexico: America’s Continental Dream and the Mexican War* (New York: Carroll and Graf Publishers, 2007), 261.

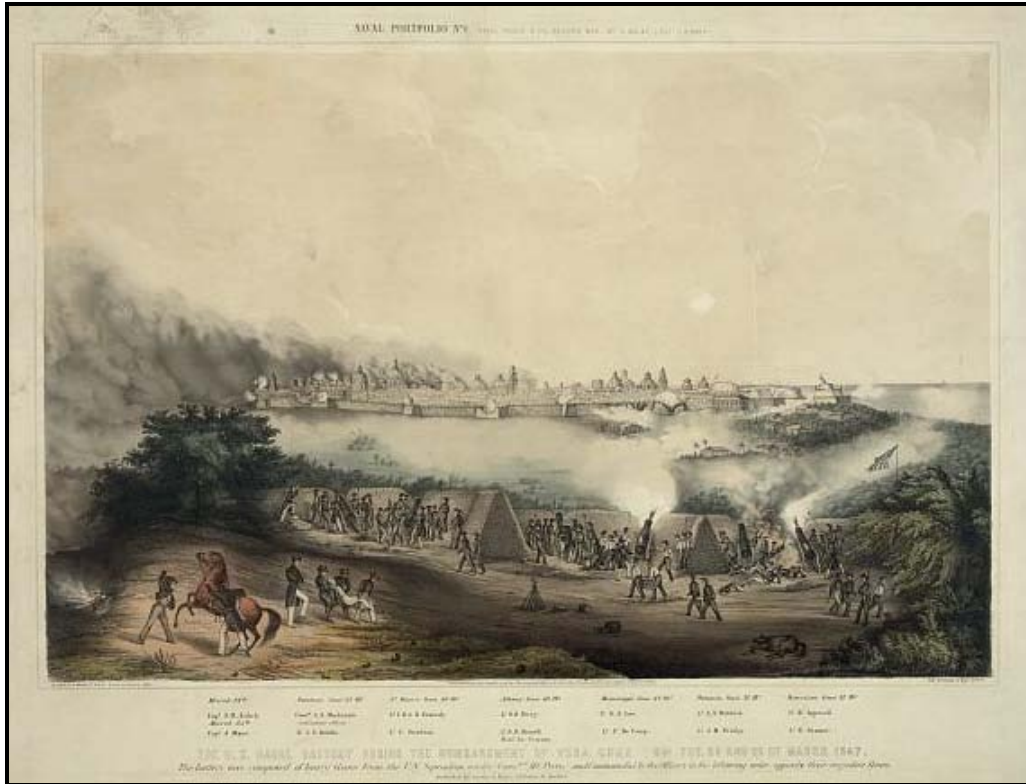


Figure 10. Battle of Vera Cruz - 2

Source: Lithograph by Sarony & Major, 1848, after sketch by H. Walke, Lt. U.S.N., “The U.S. Naval Battery During the Bombardment of Vera Cruz on the 24 and 25 of March 1847,” [http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/I?fsaall,brum,detr,swann,look,gottscho,pan,horyd,genthe,var,cai,cd,hh,yan,lomax,ils,prok,brhc,nclc,matpc,iucpub,tgmi,lamb,hec,krb,:1:/temp/~pp\\_hitZ::displayType=1:m856sd=pga:m856sf=04100:@@mdb=fsaall,brum,detr,swann,look,gottscho,pan,horyd,genthe,var,cai,cd,hh,yan,lomax,ils,prok,brhc,nclc,matpc,iucpub,tgmi,lamb,hec,krb](http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/I?fsaall,brum,detr,swann,look,gottscho,pan,horyd,genthe,var,cai,cd,hh,yan,lomax,ils,prok,brhc,nclc,matpc,iucpub,tgmi,lamb,hec,krb,:1:/temp/~pp_hitZ::displayType=1:m856sd=pga:m856sf=04100:@@mdb=fsaall,brum,detr,swann,look,gottscho,pan,horyd,genthe,var,cai,cd,hh,yan,lomax,ils,prok,brhc,nclc,matpc,iucpub,tgmi,lamb,hec,krb) (accessed 21 March 2010)

Having studied the hard lessons of France during its occupation of Spain in 1808, Scott immediately ordered martial law as he accepted the surrender of Vera Cruz. His strict rules would apply to both U.S. soldiers and Mexican citizens. He outlawed destruction of private property, murder, rape, assault, desecration of cultural facilities, and disruption of religious services.<sup>222</sup> These legal parameters set the tone for avoiding

<sup>222</sup>Johnson, *Winfield Scott: The Quest for Military Glory*, 165.

conflict with the civilian population, who could easily turn into insurgents, as he moved his forces deep into Mexico's interior toward the capitol city. Interestingly, Scott courted Mexico's Catholic clergy in an attempt to win the hearts and minds of the civilian population. Although he was not Catholic, Scott attended mass to win the respect of the religious community.<sup>223</sup> His strategy was largely successful, as he witnessed his own reputation spread among the citizens that he was a kind and noble leader. Scott's direction to order supplies from Mexican citizens spurred the local economy and gained the trust of the populace. Although there were incidents of robbers and bandits that harassed U.S. forces, Scott was able to mitigate the effects of insurgency in Mexico.<sup>224</sup>

In Vera Cruz, Scott declared martial law under General Order No. 20.<sup>225</sup> Once law and order was established, General Scott paroled Mexican prisoners of war, distributed food to the citizens, and made public announcements that U.S. forces were there to stop the Mexican government's abuse of power. Scott went so far as to pay Mexican cleaning crews to bring order back to the city. He earned a reputation for providing swift justice to Mexican citizens who were wronged by American soldiers, and was equally harsh on Mexican abuses against the U.S. military.<sup>226</sup>

Scott's strategy for his campaign toward Mexico City would emphasize the art of maneuver.<sup>227</sup> On 8 April 1847, he began to make his way West toward Jalapa (60 miles

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<sup>223</sup>Eisenhower, 267.

<sup>224</sup>Johnson, *Winfield Scott: The Quest for Military Glory*, 188, 193.

<sup>225</sup>Eisenhower, 266.

<sup>226</sup>Johnson, *Winfield Scott: The Quest for Military Glory*, 179.

<sup>227</sup>Cutrer, 381.

inland from Vera Cruz). Santa Anna attempted to block the U.S. advance with about 12,000 Mexican troops at Cerro Gordo, but he was out-flanked when CPT Robert E. Lee discovered a path to the extreme left of Santa Anna's line.<sup>228</sup> Mexican casualties included 1,000 killed and wounded and 3,000 prisoners of war. The General wrote of his decision to parole the prisoners stating, ". . . I have not the means of feeding them here, beyond today, and cannot afford to detach a heavy body of horse and foot, with wagons, to accompany them to Vera Cruz." He went on to say, "One of the principal motives for paroling the prisoners of war is, to diminish the resistances of other garrisons in our march."<sup>229</sup> Scott also boasted in his report of capturing 43 bronze cannons. In contrast to Mexico's heavy losses, U.S. casualties were light. Of 8,500 Soldiers engaged, there were only 63 killed and 368 wounded (less than five percent). In a letter to his wife, artillery officer Robert Anderson credited Scott's flanking movement with saving American lives. Another artillery officer, Lieutenant Thomas Jackson, stated that he was impressed with Scott's "mighty mind."<sup>230</sup> Even Santa Anna praised the artful general by stating that the greatest American victory during the war was Scott's maneuvering at Cerro Gordo.<sup>231</sup> *The Hartford Times* wrote, "The victory over Santa Anna at Sierra Gordo, in the manner as well as in the magnitude of the achievement, was a daring and masterly exploit."<sup>232</sup>

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<sup>228</sup>Johnson, *Winfield Scott: The Quest for Military Glory*, 174, 181, 183.

<sup>229</sup>Conrad, 34-35.

<sup>230</sup>Johnson, *Winfield Scott: The Quest for Military Glory*, 184, 185.

<sup>231</sup>*Ibid.*, 186, 213.

<sup>232</sup>Conrad, 75.



Ten days after Scott's victory at Cerro Gordo, Pedro Anaya (the new president of Mexico) ordered the creation of a volunteer Light Corps to attack lines of supply and communication. The units were called the "Guerrillas of Vengeance," and set out to attack and disrupt Scott's long logistical tail as they made their way inland from Vera Cruz.<sup>233</sup> These groups would influence Scott to make the risky decision to cut off communication with the east coast until he took Mexico City.

General Scott took pride in his ability to out-think his opponent through his military skill and prowess, and his efforts of preparation often consumed him. This tendency may have stemmed from the hard lesson learned at the battle of Lundy's Lane, where Scott failed to wait on additional forces, throwing his men into a superior line of defense. Whatever the reason, he was cautious to avoid unnecessary risk as he made his way toward Mexico City. Scott maintained a small trusted group of confidants he named his "little cabinet." Members included COL James Bankhead, LTC Ethan Allen Hitchcock, and Scott's favorite officer, CPT Robert E. Lee. Of his engineer officers, Scott once stated, ". . . if West Point had only produced the Corps of Engineers, the Country ought to be proud of that institution."<sup>234</sup>

On 15 May 1847, the city of Puebla fell with little resistance.<sup>235</sup> Scott then waited until reinforcements arrived from the United States, continuing his strategy of pacifying the populace. His operational pause drew sharp criticism from the *New York Sun*. The story ran that General Scott should have advanced at once rather than wait in Puebla to

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<sup>233</sup>Carney, 14-15.

<sup>234</sup>Johnson, *Winfield Scott: The Quest for Military Glory*, 117, 126, 175, 200, 224.

<sup>235</sup>*Ibid.*, 190.

“suck oranges.”<sup>236</sup> The *Picayune* also became critical in their assessment, but directed blame toward politicians in Washington. Kendall frequently criticized the administration’s inability adequately to supply the soldiers.<sup>237</sup>

Scott’s efforts to win the hearts and minds of the Mexican people drew an interesting counterstrategy from his military rival. Santa Anna issued a message through a Mexico City newspaper warning the citizens that U.S. forces may be acting pious with respect to the Catholic faith while in Puebla, but that they were not Christian in their actions toward Mexican women in Jalapa.<sup>238</sup> The fact that the supreme commander of Mexican forces chose to address the public concerning the American’s attempt to respect the local faith speaks volumes to the effectiveness of Scott’s information campaign.

Once reinforcements arrived from the states in August 1847, Scott continued his westward movement toward Mexico City with a force of about 11,000 men. When Scott left Puebla, he made a significant decision that affected embedded news correspondents who were embedded within his units. By breaking contact with Vera Cruz, messages from correspondents would be without the protection of military escorts for a distance of 176 miles.<sup>239</sup> This action drew sharp criticism from the *London Morning Chronicle* who compared his decision to sever contact to Napoleon’s decision to march to Moscow in

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<sup>236</sup>Kendall, 411.

<sup>237</sup>*Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>238</sup>Johnson, *Winfield Scott: The Quest for Military Glory*, 194.

<sup>239</sup>Timothy D. Johnson, *A Gallant Little Army: The Mexico City Campaign* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2007), 273.

1812.<sup>240</sup> The *Picayune* paid a high price for their determination to keep news flowing back to the states. In all, they lost twenty-five couriers (captured or killed) through the summer and fall of 1847. To reduce risk of losing their stories, news correspondents would send the same dispatch by multiple couriers (staggered by time and route) to increase the chance of getting the report through hostile terrain.<sup>241</sup>

Meanwhile, Santa Anna maintained a force of about 20,000 troops to defend Mexico City. By 20 August 1847, Scott had engaged the Mexicans at Contreras and Churubusco, reducing Santa Anna's force to about 10,000.<sup>242</sup> In contrast, of 8,497 U.S. forces engaged, Scott lost about 12 percent wounded or killed (approximately 1,000). The citizens in Mexico City were amazed that such a small force could inflict such heavy losses on their own military. One citizen stated, "In war the Yankees know no rest—no fear."<sup>243</sup> One correspondent from the New Orleans *Delta* was amazed that General Scott had been wounded in the leg by grapeshot during the engagement, but kept the news of his injury secret until after the battle had ended.<sup>244</sup> The paper later wrote:

A great deal has been said and written in reference to the ability of General Scott as a military man, but those who have not seen him in command and under fire, cannot form any just conception of his abilities. His cool consideration of everything around him—his quick perception—his firm resolves and immediate

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<sup>240</sup>Johnson, *Winfield Scott: The Quest for Military Glory*, 196.

<sup>241</sup>Kendall, 18.

<sup>242</sup>Johnson, *Winfield Scott: The Quest for Military Glory*, 199, 200.

<sup>243</sup>*Ibid.*, 201.

<sup>244</sup>Kendall, 343.

execution—equal if they do not surpass those of any of the great generals whose deeds have been made so conspicuous in history.<sup>245</sup>

The *Delta's* love affair with Fuss and Feathers was short-lived, however. On 20 August 1847, Scott offered a cessation of hostilities in order to give Trist an opportunity to negotiate peace and stop the bloodshed. Santa Anna violated the terms of the armistice, and hostilities resumed. The *Delta* proceeded to denounce Scott's actions by writing, "It is needless to say that in the opinion of these sages the general [Scott] was totally in the wrong; his conduct was not only foolish, but, in view of the consequences which they ascribe to it, criminal."<sup>246</sup> The correspondent went on to blame Scott for delaying the capture of Mexico City and for the subsequent loss of life associated with Santa Anna's ability to strengthen Mexican positions during the tactical pause. The *Picayune* quickly came to Scott's defense. They wrote, ". . . our people even up to this time have but an imperfect idea of the immense superiority of force General Scott's little army had to contend with in the valley of Mexico . . . with the immense numerical superiority of the Mexicans, the achievements of the invaders will appear almost incredible."<sup>247</sup> The *Picayune* then attempted to shift blame for Scott's decision to the Polk administration by writing, "[Scott] doubtless has instructions in his pocket from his Government, and has obeyed them; and if any disadvantage should now grow out of his not pursuing a panic-stricken enemy to their utter discomfiture, the fault must not lie at his door."<sup>248</sup> *The*

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<sup>245</sup>Conrad, 46-47.

<sup>246</sup>Ibid., 47-53.

<sup>247</sup>Ibid., 71-72.

<sup>248</sup>Kendall, 339.

*Hartford Times* reinforced the *Picayune* by writing; “It seems to us that the merit of General Scott, in gaining the late astounding victories before Mexico, has not as yet received its fitting tribute from the public press.” This Democratic newspaper went on to say that although Scott’s political beliefs would keep him from their support of his Presidential consideration, the battles of Contreras and Churubusco were among the most “brilliant” military accomplishments in military history. Of Scott, the *Hartford Times* wrote, “. . . this great soldier has deserved exceeding well of the Republic, and acquired a very strong title to the fervent gratitude of his countrymen.”<sup>249</sup>

Fighting was tense at Molino Del Rey on 8 September 1847. In the initial assault by U.S. troops under a 500-man force, more than 75 percent of the officers became casualties under the relentless Mexican cannon and musket fire.<sup>250</sup> It was here that war correspondent Kendall took part in the battle. General William J. Worth commended the reporter for being one of several civilians who “gallantly” transmitted orders during the battle of Molino del Rey.<sup>251</sup> Just outside of Mexico City, Scott’s men captured 72 American deserters who had joined the Mexican forces with the San Patricios at Churubusco. A military court tried, convicted, and sentenced 70 to death. Scott pardoned five and reduced sentences of fifteen others. Of the fifty Soldiers still scheduled for execution, thirty were selected to stand on wagons that would serve as gallows. With nooses strung around their necks, the prisoners faced Chapultepec with the knowledge that when the American flag was raised in triumph over the castle, the executioner would

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<sup>249</sup>Conrad, 73-74.

<sup>250</sup>Johnson, *A Gallant Little Army: The Mexico City Campaign*, 205.

<sup>251</sup>Kendall, 19.

have the wagons pulled out from underneath them.<sup>252</sup> Incidentally, General Worth noted that war correspondent Kendall was wounded while transmitting official military orders during the Battle of Chapultepec.<sup>253</sup>

Finally, on 14 September 1847, Scott rode with pride into the Mexico City plaza as a military band played “Yankee Doodle.”<sup>254</sup> During his march from Vera Cruz to Mexico City, U.S. forces were outnumbered by Mexican soldiers at a rate of 3:1, with the Americans suffering roughly 3,200 casualties. In contrast, Mexican forces received four to five times this number of casualties and the ultimate humiliating loss of their nation’s capitol.<sup>255</sup> Kendall with the *Picayune* and Frenner with the *Delta* were the first to report Scott’s victory at Mexico City. Their stories arrived in New Orleans on 13 October 1847.<sup>256</sup> *The Hartford Times* wrote, “[Scott] has at the same time been careful never wantonly to waste the lives of his troops in unnecessary stormings or reckless assaults . . . has always abstained from any indiscriminate slaughter even of a sanguinary and merciless foe.”<sup>257</sup> In the occupation that followed, Scott continued his obsession with force protection. He directed all long-distance convoys to travel with not less than 1,300

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<sup>252</sup>Johnson, *Winfield Scott: The Quest for Military Glory*, 204.

<sup>253</sup>Kendall, 19.

<sup>254</sup>Johnson, *Winfield Scott: The Quest for Military Glory*, 7.

<sup>255</sup>*Ibid.*, 206.

<sup>256</sup>Kendall, 18, 382.

<sup>257</sup>Conrad, 75.

soldiers as an escort. Of his 24,500-man force, 4,000 were dedicated to escort missions by December 1847.<sup>258</sup>

The Mexican War was a defining moment for many of the officers who would later fight in the nation's Civil War. McClellan said of Fuss and Feathers, "All that I know of war I have learned from you [Scott], & in all that I have done I have endeavored to conform to your manner of conducting a campaign."<sup>259</sup> Lieutenant Ulysses S. Grant wrote in his memoirs that Scott's tactics and strategy for the campaign were flawless. P.G.T. Beauregard stated that he was capable of leading an army in the Civil War because of his experience serving on General Scott's staff during the Mexico City campaign. James Longstreet called Scott, ". . . that consummate strategist, tactician, and organizer."<sup>260</sup> The words of these Civil War icons speak volumes to the influence that Winfield Scott had upon the professional development of Army officers. Scott hoped to raise and build a professional Army, and his greatest contribution was the influence he had in shaping the tactics and strategies of the next generation of Army officers.<sup>261</sup>

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<sup>258</sup>Carney, 35-40.

<sup>259</sup>Johnson, *Winfield Scott: The Quest for Military Glory*, 230.

<sup>260</sup>Johnson, *A Gallant Little Army: The Mexico City Campaign*, 268.

<sup>261</sup>Johnson, *Winfield Scott: The Quest for Military Glory*, 206, 237.



Figure 11. Scott's Mexican War Battles

Source: Created by author, referencing Stephen A. Carney, *The Occupation of Mexico: The U.S. Army Campaigns of the Mexican War* (U.S. Army Center of Military History, U.S. Government Printing Office, 2005), 6-7.

If desertion percentages are a measurement of effective leadership, Scott also fared well. Roughly seven percent of all U.S. forces deserted during the Mexican War. This rate was less than the Revolutionary War, the Civil War, and the peacetime desertion percentage rates during that era.<sup>262</sup> This fact may be related to the caution and care Scott made to preserve the lives of his men, avoiding needless casualties.<sup>263</sup>

<sup>262</sup>Carney, 206.

<sup>263</sup>Cutrer, 381.



After the fall of Mexico City, Mexican forces once again attempted to organize an insurgency against the U.S. occupation. Their efforts continued to falter because of Scott's ability to gain the trust of the Mexican populace by stabilizing their economy and providing law and order to inhabitants who had faced the hardship and instability of harsh Mexican governance. CPT Kirby Smith, brother of Civil War General Edmund Kirby Smith, noted that Mexican citizens were becoming reconciled to the American military because they were more secure with U.S. forces than with their own government.<sup>264</sup>

As Scott worked to stabilize Mexico City, he once again ran into trouble involving the media and newspapers. One of his subordinate commanders, Gideon Pillow, was a close friend of Polk and a staunch Jacksonian Democrat. Pillow published his account of the Mexico City campaign on 10 September 1847.<sup>265</sup> His memory embellished his own actions and marginalized Scott's role in achieving victory over the Mexican army. Several other officers followed suit by publishing their own biased accounts of battle with the hope of elevating their importance in the victory. Finally having had enough, Scott issued General Order 349 on 12 November 1847 that reiterated an Army prohibition against publishing private correspondence that dealt with military issues. Scott then preferred charges against three officers, including Pillow, for violating his directive. Although Fuss and Feathers dropped the charges against two of the perpetrators, he pursued Pillow's case, which ended in acquittal. Scott took the full political effect of standing up to a friend of the President. With all the turmoil surrounding Scott's personal battle with the White House, the Whig party turned to

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<sup>264</sup>Johnson, *Winfield Scott: The Quest for Military Glory*, 186, 194.

<sup>265</sup>Kendall, 424.

Zachary Taylor as their presidential candidate in 1848.<sup>266</sup> As for Polk, he finally found his excuse to relieve Scott after Pillow accused the general of attempting to bribe Santa Anna to end the war. Scott was relieved of command on 19 February 1848. He remained in Mexico to face charges of insubordination and bribery. Eventually, he was cleared of both charges.<sup>267</sup>

### Winfield Scott's Relationship with the Media

Winfield Scott's relationship with the media was an assorted mixture of praise and humiliation. The press generally favorably evaluated Scott's battlefield performance. The praise showered on him for his actions during the Mexican War eclipsed the positive news stories about him after Lundy's Lane. After Scott's victory at Mexico City, *The Hartford Times* (a Democrat newspaper) wrote, "If modern warfare has any parallel for this great feat of arms, we know not where to look for it." The writer went on to say, "The fame of a victorious general cannot justly be held to belong to any party [Democrat or Whig]. It is the property of the whole nation."<sup>268</sup> The *Baltimore American* wrote on 22 October 1847, "The country has reason to be proud indeed of this brave little army, of its eminent general, of its noble and accomplished officers."<sup>269</sup>

The media was not as friendly, however, when Scott ventured into politics or shared his personal views on foreign policy. It was then that the media savaged him,

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<sup>266</sup>Johnson, *Winfield Scott: The Quest for Military Glory*, 210-212.

<sup>267</sup>Kendall, 424.

<sup>268</sup>Conrad, 75.

<sup>269</sup>*Ibid.*, 76.

ending any real hope that he would one day receive the title, Commander in Chief. Although there were many newspaper thrashings that stung Scott's political career, three were monumental. First came the embarrassment from Andrew Jackson, who cleverly sent copies of Scott's private letters to the press from 1817 to 1819. These personal notes portrayed Scott as a coward for his failure to accept Jackson's challenge to a duel. Scott took his complaint up the chain of command to the War Department. He claimed that his reputation had been severely damaged through the poisoning of the public through misleading newspaper articles, but there was no redress to come from Washington. According to Erasmus D. Keyes, Scott's personal secretary, this humiliation haunted the proud general until the day of his death.<sup>270</sup>

Second was Scott's embarrassment from Tallahassee newspapers in 1836. Once again, the General's candid letter writing habit landed him in trouble with the press. His scathing remarks concerning the cowardice of the Floridian public found its way into vengeful newspapers. The President relieved him of command and ordered a court martial inquiry.<sup>271</sup> Scott witnessed firsthand the influence that newspapers had on public sentiment and politics in general.

The third and final blow to Scott's political reputation came during the Polk Administration. Just after the Mexican War began, Polk developed plans to replace Scott with a Democrat General. Scott never recovered from his decision to write his true feelings to Secretary of War Marcy. Once Marcy showed the letter to Polk, the President soured on Scott. The General's attempt to humble himself before the Commander in

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<sup>270</sup>Johnson, *Winfield Scott: The Quest for Military Glory*, 90-91.

<sup>271</sup>*Ibid.*, 121.

Chief only worsened his condition when Polk sent the letter of apology for publication in the *Washington Union*.<sup>272</sup> General Scott became a laughing stock in the nation's capitol, which shattered the image he worked so hard to create over the course of his life. Even after this firestorm subsided, the President continued to harbor a grudge against his senior commander. Polk wrote in his diary, "[Scott] now sees his error no doubt, but it is too late to recall what has been done."<sup>273</sup> The mockery in Washington nearly ended Scott's chance of redeeming himself on the field of battle. Only Polk's desperation to take the spotlight off the growing heroism of General Taylor provided Fuss and Feathers an opportunity to salvage his waning reputation in a dramatic march to Mexico City. On three separate occasions, Scott found himself humiliated and beaten by newspapers publishing personal correspondence that was never meant for public consumption. In essence, Scott failed to recognize the danger of frankness in writing.

### Summary

In summary, Scott's natural abilities included confidence, bravery, adaptability, organization, and command. He was an academic, a planner, ever seeking to control chaos, and eager to teach the art and science of war to a professionalizing officer corps. His personality flaws included elitism, arrogance, stubbornness, and blind ambition. At the heart of Scott's weaknesses lay his inability to be anything but himself, which meant that the arrogance and egotism that was so deeply rooted in his personality could not be

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<sup>272</sup>Ibid., 155.

<sup>273</sup>Polk, 105.

hidden from the public eye.<sup>274</sup> Secretary of War Marcy, for example, spoke for many when he complained of the General's constant talking.<sup>275</sup> These flaws had the adverse effect of insulting close associates, supervisors, and potential political allies, and eventually made impossible any real hope of winning the Presidency.<sup>276</sup>

Many believe that Scott failed to understand the politics of his time. However, one must remember Scott's ability to climb the ladder of military promotion to its highest rung. In February 1855, Fuss and Feathers became the nation's second three-star general, the first being General George Washington.<sup>277</sup> In all, Winfield Scott served his military career under 14 U.S. Presidents (two of which served as officers under Scott's military command before they assumed office: Zachary Taylor and Franklin Pierce).<sup>278</sup> On 29 May 1866, Old Fuss and Feathers joined the battlefield heroes before him and was laid to rest in a cemetery at West Point.<sup>279</sup> This is a fitting location, as it serves to remind the nation of Winfield Scott's influence on the development of our nation's Army officer corps.

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<sup>274</sup>Johnson, *Winfield Scott: The Quest for Military Glory*, 213.

<sup>275</sup>Polk, 96.

<sup>276</sup>Johnson, *Winfield Scott: The Quest for Military Glory*, 64-65.

<sup>277</sup>*Ibid.*, 218.

<sup>278</sup>Kelly K. Howes, *Mexican American War* (Farmington Hills: The Gale Group, Inc., 2003), 213-214.

<sup>279</sup>Johnson, *Winfield Scott: The Quest for Military Glory*, 241.

## CHAPTER 5

### GENERAL ZACHARY TAYLOR

#### Zachary Taylor's Biographical Synopsis

Zachary Taylor was born on 24 November 1784 in Orange County, Virginia. Soon after his birth, the Taylor family moved to Jefferson County, Kentucky, six miles east of Louisville.<sup>280</sup> Young Zachary enjoyed farming, and learned the rewards that accompany hard work and a determined spirit. Often clad in leather moccasins, blue pants, and a coonskin cap, Taylor was a child of the frontier, keeping a vigilant eye for imminent Indian attacks.<sup>281</sup> He admired his older brother's choice to join the Army. On the domestic front, Zachary Taylor happily married a young girl named Margaret Smith on 21 June 1810. Unlike Winfield Scott's spouse, who spent much of her time away in Europe, the Taylors often lived near each other. This said, the life of a frontier army officer mean that they could not always live together.<sup>282</sup> Taylor was no high brow conversationalist, but well known for his plain speech.<sup>283</sup>

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<sup>280</sup>Silas Bent McKinley and Silas Bent, *Old Rough and Ready: The Life and Times of Zachary Taylor* (New York: Vanguard Press, 1946), 4, 25.

<sup>281</sup>*Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>282</sup>Holman Hamilton, *Zachary Taylor: Soldier of the Republic*. (1941: rep., Hamden, CT: Archon, 1966), xv.

<sup>283</sup>Grant, 85.

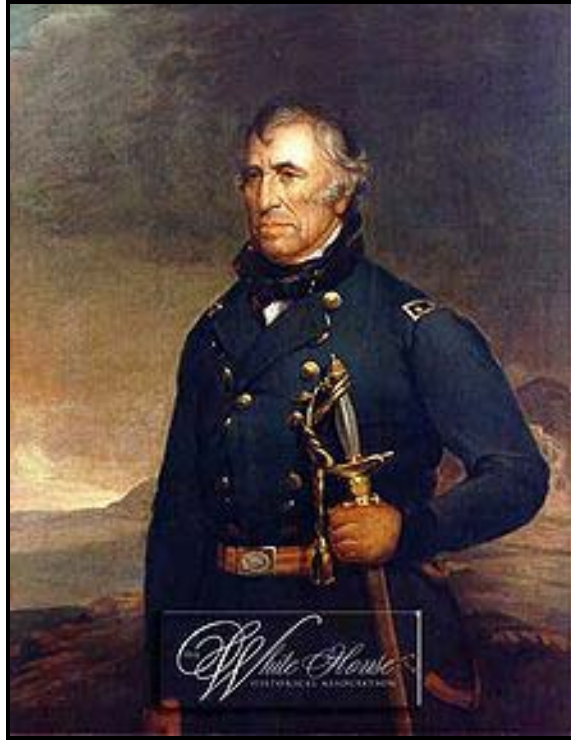


Figure 12. Zachary Taylor

Source: Joseph H, Bush, *Portrait of Zachary Taylor*, 1849, Collection of The White House Historical Society, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zachary\\_taylor](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zachary_taylor) (accessed 21 March 2010).

### Zachary Taylor's Window to the Soul

Taylor's manner and dress was the polar opposite of Winfield Scott's flamboyant elitism and penchant for fine clothing, Taylor almost never dressed in uniform and spoke in the dialect of a common citizen.<sup>284</sup> The General often mistaken for a common soldier or teamster; new recruits often reported to find a leader who wore baggy blue jeans, a straw hat, and kept a mouth full of chewing tobacco.<sup>285</sup> Although he, too, was a member

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<sup>284</sup>Ibid., 84-85.

<sup>285</sup>Weems, 29.

of the Whig party, his average looks and simple dress appealed to the public during the age of Jacksonian egalitarianism. His experience on the frontier, and hard work ethic earned him the nickname, “Rough and Ready.” As for the difficult living conditions that often accompany military life, Taylor stated, “. . . but a soldier ought not to repine at the circumstance for when he enters the army he ought to give up society entirely.”<sup>286</sup> Taylor embodied simplicity in almost every facet of his life, choosing a straw hat and plain clothes on the battlefield over the ornamental dress of his proud contemporaries in the officer corps.<sup>287</sup>

Taylor was a man of deep compassion. After taking leave to comfort his wife over the loss of their three-year-old daughter, he nearly lost his bride to a sudden illness. Fearing that he would lose her at any moment, Taylor wrote, “I am confident the feminine virtues never did concentrate in a higher degree in the bosom of any woman than in hers.”<sup>288</sup> Fortunately, Margaret was able to rebound from the fever, allowing Taylor to return to his military duties. Taylor demonstrated his tender side after his famous victory at Buena Vista. The General took time to write Henry Clay, informing him of his son’s death during the fighting. Taylor wrote, “To your son I felt bound by the strongest ties of private regard; and when I miss his familiar face, and those of McKee and Hardin, I can say with truth that I feel no exultation in our success.”<sup>289</sup>

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<sup>286</sup>Hamilton, 35.

<sup>287</sup>Ibid., 179.

<sup>288</sup>Ibid., 69.

<sup>289</sup>McKinley and Bent, 6.



General Taylor was not a highly educated or intellectual man. As a young frontier boy, his education consisted primarily of home schooling with his father. The elder Taylor admitted his own difficulty with the three R's. Later, Zachary would be taught by a tutor, Elisha Ayres, who wrote of the future leader, "Quick in learning and still patient in study," while noting his appetite for anything concerning the military.<sup>290</sup> Ethan Allen Hitchcock, one of Taylor's cerebral West Point lieutenants during the Mexican War, accused the General of only reading one book in his lifetime. This insult, however, did little to diminish Taylor's self-confidence. On the subject of a West Point education, which Taylor did not have, he stated that the Academy had military application, but warned, ". . . unless practice can be blended with theory, the latter will be but of little service. . . ." <sup>291</sup>

#### Zachary Taylor's Political Ideology

Unlike General Scott, Zachary Taylor was less prone to public proclamations of his own political views. When measured against General Scott's brash, arrogant frankness, Taylor was reserved. Contemporaries describe Rough and Ready as a man whose politics could be judged easily. His rugged hands and disheveled appearance fit his personal conviction that hard work and a simple lifestyle were the measure of a man. Taylor used an unconventional approach when answering political questions during his Presidential campaign in 1848. A letter 22 April 1848 to J.S. Allison on quickly became a centerpiece of his Presidential platform. "I have no private purpose to accomplish, no

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<sup>290</sup>Ibid., 33-34.

<sup>291</sup>Hamilton, 66-67.

party projects to build up, no enemies to punish, nothing to serve but my country . . . I am a Whig. If elected, I would not be the mere president of a party . . . I shall engage in no schemes, no combinations, no intrigues.”<sup>292</sup>

On the hot topic of slavery, one Mississippi planter asked if Taylor’s election would help or hurt the value of slave property. Taylor’s simple reply was that he owned three hundred slaves.<sup>293</sup> The voting public listened to these apparently candid yet ambiguous answers and identified with his down-to-earth approach. Without long speeches and pomp, the American workingman looked in the mirror in 1848 saw Zachary Taylor staring back at them.

Although popular with most voters, not everyone believed in Taylor’s abilities. Both Daniel Webster and President Polk thought the backwoodsman was too common, “. . . not fit to be President.”<sup>294</sup> Winfield Scott shared this view, though he did not make his feelings known publicly. Some Democrat newspapers seized the opportunity to belittle the Whig Party’s inability to offer a competitive presidential candidate outside of a military figure. Even Taylor expressed doubt in his own chances at winning the presidency. On 16 February 1848 he wrote, “So far as I am personally concerned there are but few individuals in the Union who take less interest as to who will be the successful candidate for the Presidency at the coming election than myself. . . . I trust I will not be the nominee.”<sup>295</sup>

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<sup>292</sup>McKinley and Bent, 8-9.

<sup>293</sup>Ibid.

<sup>294</sup>Ibid.

<sup>295</sup>Ibid., 5.

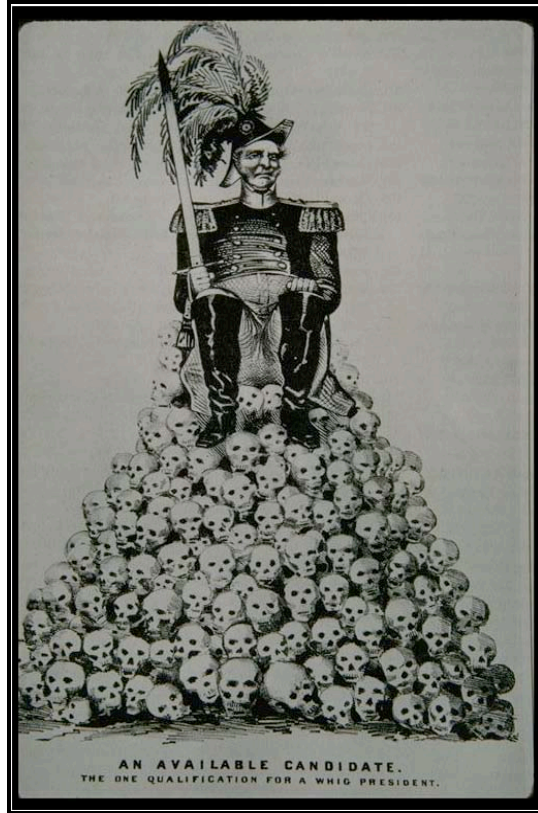


Figure 13. Taylor—"An Available Candidate"

*Source:* Nathaniel Currier, "An Available Candidate: The One Qualification for a Whig President," 1848, California State University at Bakersville, <http://www.csub.edu/~gsantos/img0042.html> (accessed 6 January 2010).

Taylor had to prove himself in the Presidential contest with four other political parties. The Democratic Party was his strongest contender, but there were three others. Former President Martin Van Buren led the Free Soil Party whose platform included excluding slavery from new territories. The Liberty Party ran on a strict abolitionist platform. The American Party argued that only American citizens should govern the

nation. Taylor, on the other hand, sought to preserve a balance between free and slave states.<sup>296</sup>

Taylor clearly stated his views on the Mexican War. While fighting in Mexico, he described the motives for the conflict as “ambitious views of conquest and agrandisement.”<sup>297</sup> He later commented on the war in his Presidential inaugural address, “It is to be hoped that no international questions can now arise which a government, confident in its own strength and resolved to protect its own just rights, may not settle by wise negotiation. . . .”<sup>298</sup> Those who claim that Taylor was not a politically savvy man, need only to note that the U.S. Senate unanimously consented to his Whig Presidential Cabinet appointments at a time when Democrats held the majority.<sup>299</sup>

#### Zachary Taylor’s Military Exploits

In 1808, the U.S. worried that war with Spain and Great Britain was a possibility. Therefore, the government began to look for qualified candidates to fill the ranks of the newly authorized Seventh Infantry Regiment. Kentucky senators and congressmen recommended Zachary Taylor to fill one of these positions. They sent their petition to President Thomas Jefferson’s Secretary of War, who then commissioned him first lieutenant in May 1808.<sup>300</sup> In his first year, Taylor worked to recruit forces for the Army.

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<sup>296</sup>Ibid., 12.

<sup>297</sup>Weems, 161,

<sup>298</sup>McKinley and Bent, 10.

<sup>299</sup>Ibid., 11.

<sup>300</sup>Hamilton, 33.

The following year, he served as the Commandant at Fort Pickering (present-day Memphis, Tennessee). This must have been an emotional assignment for Taylor, since his brother, William Taylor, was killed at the fort one year earlier by Indians. Taylor was promoted captain in 1810.

In September 1812, he found himself fighting Indians at Fort Harrison. With only a handful of men, Taylor wrote of his the defense of the fort, “What from the raging of the fire, the yelling and howling of several hundred Indians, the cries of nine women and children. . . . I can assure you that my feelings were very unpleasant.”<sup>301</sup> This event thrust Taylor before the eyes of the media. *The War* (a New York newspaper) wrote glowingly of the young captain’s “gallant” defense. In Washington D.C., the *National Intelligencer* filled an entire page with the brave actions at Fort Harrison. Then, on 31 October 1812, the *National Intelligencer* published an announcement of the first ever brevet rank awarded by the federal government. The press announcement read, “. . . the President has been pleased to confer the brevet rank of major on Captain Z. Taylor.”<sup>302</sup>

Taylor resigned his commission in 1815, but then rejoined the ranks a year later, when the Army sent him to Michigan Territory (current day Wisconsin). In 1819, he was promoted lieutenant colonel. Then, in 1832, he was promoted colonel and participated in the Black Hawk War. In 1837, Colonel Taylor participated in the Second Seminole War, where he routed the Indians in the battle of Okeechobee.<sup>303</sup> Taylor received the nickname

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<sup>301</sup>Ibid., 35, 42.

<sup>302</sup>Ibid., 43-44.

<sup>303</sup>Ibid., XV-XVII.

“Old Rough and Ready” during the Seminole campaign.<sup>304</sup> The following year, he was brevetted brigadier general and assumed command of all troops in the territory of Florida. Democrats and Whigs alike respected his successful work in the frontier. Andrew Jackson once told President-elect Polk, “If we get into a war with England, Gn. Taylor is the man to lead our armies.”<sup>305</sup> In 1846, General Taylor was promoted major general, followed by the nation’s highest promotion to “Commander in Chief” in 1849.<sup>306</sup>

### Zachary Taylor and the Mexican War

As tensions grew between the U.S. and Mexico after the annexation of Texas, President Polk ordered General Taylor to move his 3,500 men from Corpus Christi to the Rio Grande on 3 February 1846. It took Taylor six weeks to prepare the mammoth logistical movement, which included more than three hundred ox carts and mule wagons. The General sent his artillery by naval transport to speed the maneuver, and on 24 March 1846, the convoy of U.S. soldiers and supplies arrived near the Rio Grande and set up a base camp at Point Isabel.<sup>307</sup> Taylor took measures to notify the Mexican people of the Army’s intentions. He had orders published and translated into Spanish for distribution to Matamoros, Mier, and Camargo in Mexico. The message included the military’s desire for a peaceful move toward the Rio Grande. He stated, “Under no pretext, nor in any

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<sup>304</sup>McKinley and Bent, 5.

<sup>305</sup>Hamilton, 157.

<sup>306</sup>Ibid., XV-XVII.

<sup>307</sup>Kendall, 6.

way, will any interference be allowed with the civil rights or religious privileges of the inhabitants; but the utmost respect for them will be maintained.”<sup>308</sup>

On 28 March 1846, General Taylor established Fort Brown, which allowed his eighteen-pound guns to move within range of the Matamoros town-square and local ferry. General Pedro de Ampudia sent an ultimatum to Taylor, demanding that U.S. forces return to the east bank of the Nueces River within 24 hours. Failure to do so would be considered an act of war.<sup>309</sup> The next day, Taylor ordered the Rio Grande closed to Mexican commerce, believing that hostilities had begun.<sup>310</sup> General Mariano Arista responded by sending approximately 1,600 cavalry across the Rio Grande to disrupt U.S. supply routes headed for Point Isabel. On 25 April 1846, Mexican forces ambushed 80 American dragoons under Taylor’s command at Rancho de Carricitos (roughly 20 miles from Fort Brown). Eleven U.S. Soldiers were killed and many more captured. General Taylor confirmed the attack the following day, and sent a report to Washington requesting additional forces. He then reinforced his garrison at Matamoros and withdrew his headquarters to Point Isabel in an effort to protect his supply line.<sup>311</sup>

On 9 May 1846, President Polk received Taylor’s report with enthusiasm. He was already working on a draft speech to Congress recommending war with Mexico, and this latest development provided him the silver bullet he was looking for. Although Taylor’s report was received about 6 p.m. that evening, the *Washington Union* managed to send

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<sup>308</sup>Hamilton, 173.

<sup>309</sup>Eisenhower, 63-64.

<sup>310</sup>Kendall, 7.

<sup>311</sup>*Ibid.*

out a flash message in its late edition. The paper declared, “American blood has been shed on American soil!” The article then blamed the Whig General for failing to secure his forces against a Mexican attack.<sup>312</sup> On 11 May 1846, Polk announced to Congress his recommendation for war, and an outraged legislative body overwhelmingly agreed. Congress made it official by declaring war on 13 May 1846.<sup>313</sup>

General Taylor demonstrated his military competence by winning battlefield victories. On 8 May 1846, Taylor faced Mexican forces at Palo Alto. Mexican troops outnumbered Taylor’s forces by a ratio of 2:1. Even so, Taylor’s gave an order to his men that their main dependence, “. . . must be in the bayonet.”<sup>314</sup> Identifying a weakness on the Mexican left flank, he reinforced his right flank in preparation for an assault, using artillery to even the odds against the larger enemy force. The firepower proved effective, as American cannonballs created gaps in the Mexican lines. General Arista decided against the planned frontal assault after seeing the deadly accuracy of Taylor’s artillery. The less effective Mexican artillery attempted to inflict its damage with very little success.<sup>315</sup> The battle raged for four hours before darkness caused both sides to retire for the night. The battle’s end found five Americans dead, forty-eight wounded, and two missing from a force of 2,288. Mexican forces counted 102 killed, 129 wounded, and 26 missing from a force of 3,709.<sup>316</sup> More important than the casualties was the loss of

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<sup>312</sup>Eisenhower, 66.

<sup>313</sup>Kendall, 7-9.

<sup>314</sup>Weems, 128.

<sup>315</sup>Hamilton, 181-183.

<sup>316</sup>Bauer, 57.



Mexican confidence in the leadership of General Mariano Arista. The following day as the Mexican Army withdrew to Resaca de la Palma, Taylor sent a force of two hundred and twenty men to follow and harass Arista's rear guard.<sup>317</sup>

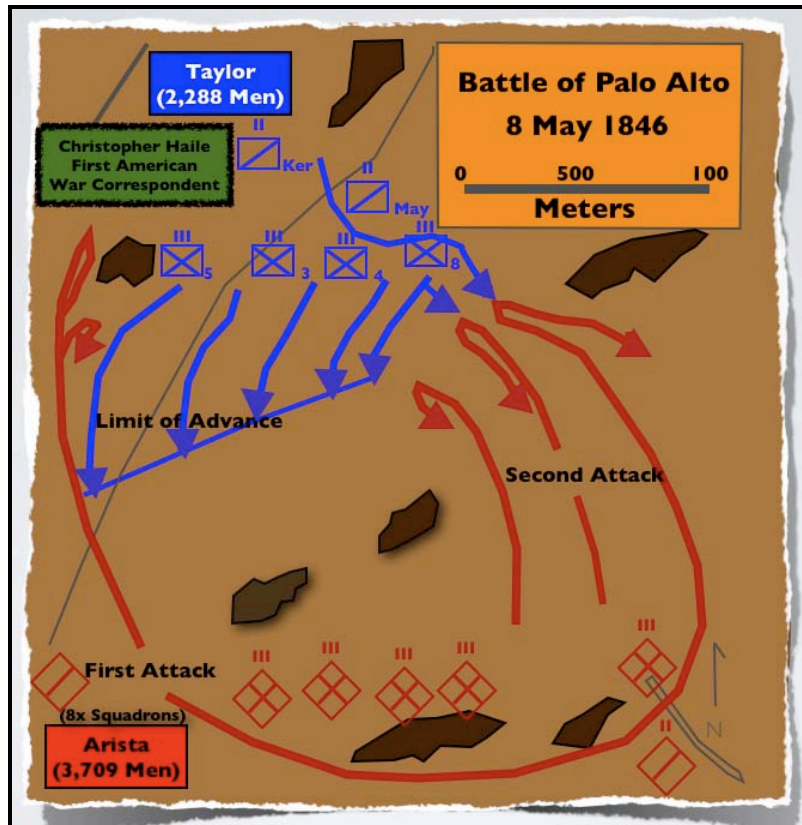


Figure 14. Battle of Palo Alto

Source: Created by author, referencing, "U.S. Mexican War," [http://www.military.com/Resources/HistorySubmittedFileView?file=History\\_Maps.htm](http://www.military.com/Resources/HistorySubmittedFileView?file=History_Maps.htm) (accessed 13 October 2009).

The Mexican forces withdrew five miles to the south, setting up a strong defensive position at Resaca de la Palma. Leaving his artillery battalion behind to protect

<sup>317</sup>Hamilton, 185-186.

the supply train, Taylor pushed a force of less than 2,000 men forward into the Mexican hornets' nest.<sup>318</sup> When one officer recommended that he pull back from the intense firefight, Taylor responded, "Let us ride a little nearer, the balls will fall behind us."<sup>319</sup> In the intense struggle, Taylor's army suffered 33 killed, 89 wounded of a 1,700-man force; Arista's army, 154 killed, 205 wounded, and 156 missing. Mexican General de la Vega, who was captured during the battle, stated, "If I had had with me yesterday \$100,000 in silver, I would have bet the whole of it that no 10,000 men on earth could drive us from our position."<sup>320</sup>

Then there was Taylor's decisive win at Monterrey from 20-24 September 1846.<sup>321</sup> Reinforcements had arrived, which was fortunate because the battle was costly. Out of 6,220 soldiers, 120 men were killed, 368 were wounded, and 43 soldiers were missing. This amounted to 8.5 percent of the American fighting force. The Mexicans counted 367 dead and wounded, or about 5 percent of their 7,303-man force.<sup>322</sup> Even with the high casualties, the press continued generally to support Taylor. War correspondent Kendall disagreed with Taylor on a tactical decision to take less than 7,000 soldiers to Monterrey, but he stated that the General knew best and that victory was inevitable, regardless of the number of soldiers Taylor chose to bring with him.<sup>323</sup> When

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<sup>318</sup>Bauer, 60.

<sup>319</sup>Hamilton, 189.

<sup>320</sup>Bauer, 63.

<sup>321</sup>Frasca, 361.

<sup>322</sup>Bauer, 100.

<sup>323</sup>Kendall, 90, 98.

confronted with Taylor's controversial decision to offer an armistice to the surviving Mexican forces at Monterrey, Kendall refused to blame the commander, publishing an explanation that Taylor was simply carrying out the Polk administration's policy to spare life and property. Kendall wrote, ". . . I believe the whole policy of our Government is, and has been wrong for years. Shower any quantity of magnanimity upon this people [Mexicans] and it is entirely thrown away . . . they neither feel nor appreciate it."<sup>324</sup>

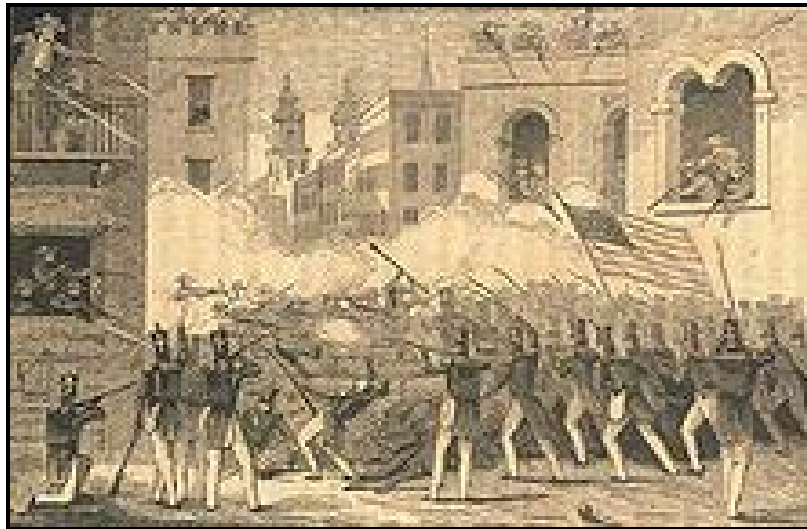


Figure 15. Battle of Monterrey

*Source:* Henry Montgomery, "Battle of Monterrey" from *The Life of Major General Zachary Taylor*, 1847, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle\\_of\\_monterrey](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_monterrey) (accessed 21 March 2010).

On 25 September 1846, General Taylor sent Captain Eaton to Washington with dispatches concerning the battle at Monterrey. On 11 October (17 days later), the courier arrived in Washington D.C. to announce that the events at Monterrey had ended in

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<sup>324</sup>Ibid., 115.

victory, with an eight-week armistice between opponents. Polk was outraged at Taylor's decision to allow the Mexican force to retire, considering this a violation of his expressed orders.<sup>325</sup> Once news of the armistice reached the press, they turned the story into yet another act of Taylor's heroism. Ulysses S. Grant commented, ". . . after the fall of Monterrey, [Taylor's] third battle and third complete victory, the Whig papers at home began to speak of him as the candidate of their party for the Presidency."<sup>326</sup> The *Richmond Enquirer* wrote the headline, "Capitulation of Monterey [sic] after Three Days of Fighting."<sup>327</sup> Walt Whitman declared the General's acts to be brilliant in Brooklyn's *Daily Eagle*. "[Taylor] preferred all the solid reasons of a sure and less bloody triumph, to the more brilliant contingency of storming the citadel, of immense slaughter on both sides, and taking . . . prisoners of war."<sup>328</sup>

Even with Taylor's victories, or maybe because of them, President Polk became impatient with old Rough and Ready. He argued that the military was not winning fast enough, though a deeper study uncovers his true frustration that newspapers were portraying the Whig general as the true hero of the Mexican War.<sup>329</sup> Polk's personal view of Taylor was that he was a brave officer, but did not have the mental capacity to command a large-scale campaign.<sup>330</sup> Four days later, the President unleashed his venom

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<sup>325</sup>Polk, 155.

<sup>326</sup>Grant, 74.

<sup>327</sup>Dugard, 253.

<sup>328</sup>Wheelan, 264.

<sup>329</sup>Johnson, *Winfield Scott: The Quest for Military Glory*, 153.

<sup>330</sup>Polk, 144, 163.

upon his battlefield commander, claiming that among other men, a war correspondent was controlling the Army commander in a partisan effort to gain political influence. Polk wrote of his meeting with the Presidential Cabinet, stating that they were in agreement.

The Cabinet fully discussed the conduct of General Taylor and were agreed that he was unfit for the chief command, that he had not mind enough for the station, that he was a bitter political partisan and had no sympathies with the administration, and that he had been recently controlled, particularly in his expedition to Monterey [sic], by Bailey Peyton, Mr. Kendall, editor of the *Picayune* at New Orleans . . . who are cunning and shrewd men of more talents than himself, and had controlled him for political purposes.<sup>331</sup>

On 21 November 1846, Polk received additional correspondence from Taylor concerning his actions at Monterrey. Convinced of the General's aspirations for the Presidency, Polk viewed the letter to be disrespectful in tone. He wrote, "[Taylor] is evidently a weak man and has been made giddy with the idea of the Presidency . . . I am now satisfied that he is a narrow-minded, bigoted partisan, without resources and wholly unqualified for the command he holds."<sup>332</sup> Therefore, as Taylor's men celebrated their hard-fought battlefield victories in Mexico, the President was making plans to assign command of the Army's main effort to General Winfield Scott. Once Taylor learned of the President's decision, he quickly determined that the action was purely political, and for the rest of his life, he insisted that Scott and Polk had conspired to undermine his success to advance their own political goals and aspirations.<sup>333</sup>

During the Mexican War, Taylor viewed the conflict as a miserable one. He once wrote to Jefferson Davis, his son-in-law, "I would greatly prefer seeing [Congress]

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<sup>331</sup>Ibid., 167.

<sup>332</sup>Ibid., 174.

<sup>333</sup>Johnson, *Winfield Scott: The Quest for Military Glory*, 160.

attending to their appropriate duties in making such appropriations as were calculated to bring this miserable war with Mexico to an end.”<sup>334</sup> Part of his frustration grew from the Congressional failure to establish court martial jurisdiction over volunteers fighting in Mexico. Taylor sought the assistance of General Scott and Secretary of War Marcy, warning that some of the volunteers had committed war crimes, and that these events would continue to go unpunished unless the administration acted quickly.<sup>335</sup>

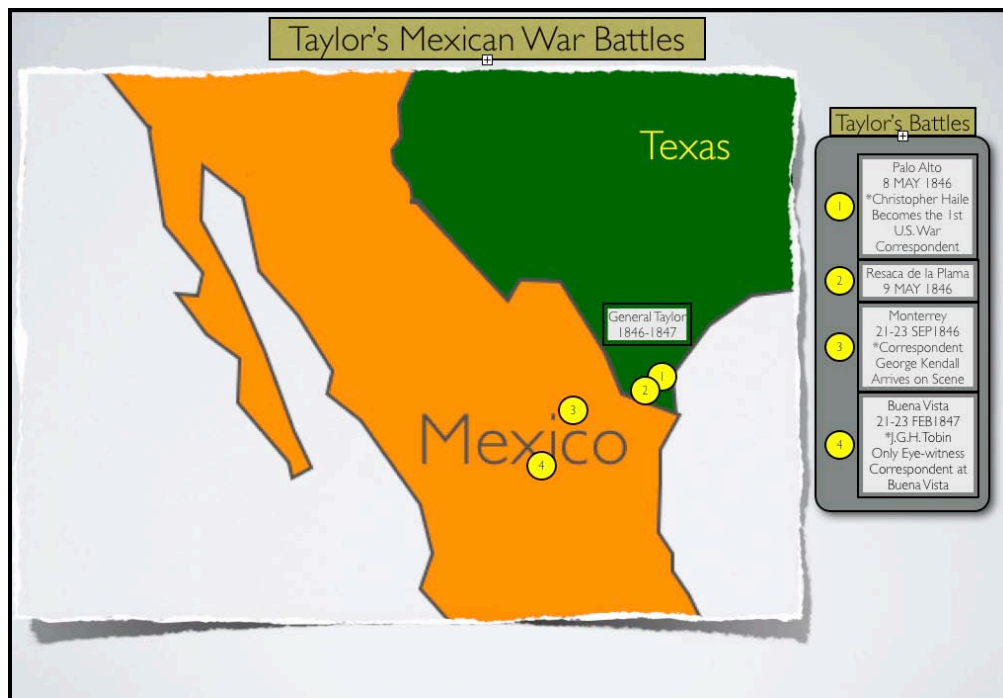


Figure 16. Taylor’s Mexican War Battles

Source: Created by author, referencing, Stephen A. Carney, *The Occupation of Mexico: The U.S. Army Campaigns of the Mexican War* (U.S. Army Center of Military History, U.S. Government Printing Office, 2005), 6-7.

<sup>334</sup>McKinley and Bent, 5.

<sup>335</sup>Bauer, 101.

President Polk chronicled an interesting event on 25 January 1847. He writes that the New York *Express* and *Herald* newspapers published a letter from General Taylor. This event outraged Polk, who claimed that Taylor openly criticized the administration and violated security by revealing confidential war plans to the enemy. That same day, General Gaines sent a letter to the President stating that he had received the letter from Taylor and decided to forward it to the newspapers for publishing. The President was outraged. Conferring with his cabinet the following day, Polk ordered that the Secretary of War publish a rebuttal in public journals and the Washington *Union*.<sup>336</sup>

On 22 and 23 February 1847, Taylor's forces fought a series of battles against Santa Anna's "Army of the North" at Buena Vista. The Americans sustained 272 killed, 387 wounded, and six missing in action. This was roughly 14 percent of the 4,594-man force. The Mexicans lost 591 killed, 1,048 wounded, and 1,894 missing out of their much larger 21,553-man force.<sup>337</sup> Buena Vista had but one American war correspondent present, J.G.H. Tobin from the *Delta*. The other reporters left General Taylor, seeking a bigger story with General Scott's campaign that was set to move from Vera Cruz to Mexico City.<sup>338</sup> Even though Tobin witnessed the battle and wrote a detailed account of the events, most of his writings did not make it to New Orleans, and Kendall of the *Picayune* ended up getting the scoop to the public first.<sup>339</sup> Though not personally present, Kendall took the liberty of placing the now famous quote in the mouth of General Taylor,

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<sup>336</sup>Polk, 191-193.

<sup>337</sup>Bauer, 206, 217.

<sup>338</sup>Kendall, 19.

<sup>339</sup>*Ibid.*, 152.

“A little more grape, Captain Bragg.” Like a modern-day Hollywood director, the reporter recognized the public’s desire for quotes such as this.<sup>340</sup> This was Taylor’s last major battle of the war. He and the forces with him spent the remainder of their days in Mexico fighting bandits, guerrilla forces, and boredom.<sup>341</sup>



Figure 17. Battle of Buena Vista

Source: Major Eaton, “Battle of Buena Vista by H.R. Robinson” 23 February 1847, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle\\_of\\_buena\\_vista](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_buena_vista) (accessed 21 March 2010).

### Zachary Taylor’s Relationship with the Media

Zachary Taylor’s relationship with the media was a relatively pleasant one. Unlike Scott’s occasionally humiliating experiences, Taylor stuck to the business of war.

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<sup>340</sup>Hospodor, 120.

<sup>341</sup>Kendall, 142.



He was rewarded with heroic accounts at Fort Harrison in 1812, and later for his actions in the Mexican War. Although we do not have a written account of Taylor's personal view on the subject of war correspondents, he allowed reporters to cover the events quite freely throughout his Mexican War command. This approach benefited his political career because the media portrayed Taylor as a frontier hero, an image that seized the imagination of the American public. Herman Melville's weekly magazine, *Yankee Doodle*, regularly reported anecdotes ostensibly from Taylor. With his permission, they adopted a motto of Rough and Ready's famous words to Bragg at Buena Vista, "A little more grape, Bragg."<sup>342</sup> Taylor's reputation fit the image of a "frontier hero" and a "common man" preferred by a growing egalitarian electorate.

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<sup>342</sup>McKinley and Bent, 6.

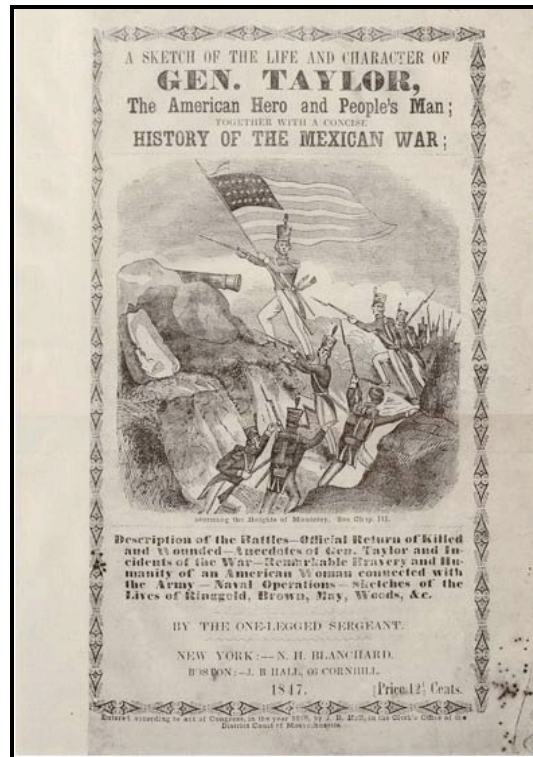


Figure 18. General Zachary Taylor - Hero  
*Source:* Public Broadcast Service, “U.S. Soldiers Storming Monterrey,”  
[http://www.pbs.org/kerawar/usmexicanwar/war/american\\_army.html](http://www.pbs.org/kerawar/usmexicanwar/war/american_army.html) (accessed 16 November 2009).

### Summary

In summary, Taylor’s natural abilities included bravery, common sense, frontier experience, humility, and a calm, methodical thought process. Though not considered an academic, Taylor used simplicity in planning and seized the initiative when facing the enemy in battle. His major flaw was tactical simplicity, a willingness to take large numbers of casualties to achieve victory (i.e. maneuver was not a consistently demonstrated skill). In essence, Taylor’s humility and simplicity, although seen by political elites as a weakness, were the very traits the public wanted in a President in

1848. Later, President Ulysses S. Grant would write, “I believe that [Taylor] sincerely regretted this turn in his fortunes, preferring the peace afforded by a quiet life free from abuse to the honor of filling the [Presidency].”<sup>343</sup>

Future Civil War icons, Ulysses S. Grant, George B. McClellan, Pierre Beauregard, and Braxton Bragg, fought under Taylor’s leadership in the Mexican War. Grant admired Taylor’s great courage and battlefield methodology.<sup>344</sup> He compared Taylor and Scott, stating, “Both were pleasant to serve under—Taylor was pleasant to serve with.”<sup>345</sup> Grant’s affinity for Taylor’s leadership style over that of General Scott may also explain similarities in Grant and Taylor’s disheveled dress and bold, aggressive battlefield techniques.<sup>346</sup> The two Generals also contrasted in their tactics in Mexico. Scott showed patient maneuvering skills, while Taylor looked for a quick decisive engagement, even if it cost a heavy price in the lives of his men.<sup>347</sup> Of Zachary Taylor, Abraham Lincoln stated, “Along the whole Indian frontier, through summer and winter, like a sleepless sentinel, he has watched while we have slept for forty years.”<sup>348</sup> The General finally received his opportunity to sleep in July 1850. Fittingly, a spirited horse

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<sup>343</sup>Grant, 76.

<sup>344</sup>McKinley and Bent, 4.

<sup>345</sup>Grant, 85.

<sup>346</sup>McKinley and Bent, 4.

<sup>347</sup>Johnson, *Winfield Scott: The Quest for Military Glory*, 179.

<sup>348</sup>McKinley and Bent, Prologue.

led the funeral procession. Its rider was none other than General Winfield Scott in all his military panoply.<sup>349</sup>

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<sup>349</sup>Ibid., 288.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSIONS

#### Introduction

The civil-military relationship established by our nation's Constitution requires armed forces to submit to an elected body. This same body is answerable to the voting public, whose ideas are shaped by a free press.<sup>350</sup> Within this political construct, the egalitarianism born in the Jacksonian era, and carried through the Mexican War, exponentially amplified the media's role of influencing public opinion. An increased voting population, coupled with a cultural appetite for sensational news, provided an enormous opportunity for political messages to shape the landscape of a nation at war.

The events studied here are a snapshot in time and do not attempt to provide carte blanche conclusions on the broader topic of military and media relationships. The subject piques the imagination as it reveals the personal interaction of iconic Mexican War legends. Newsmen, such as James Freaner and George Kendall, interacting with the larger-than-life military personalities of Scott and Taylor, bombarded the reader with all the drama of a sixteenth-century Shakespearian play. This thesis is careful in its analysis of past events and takes heed of the words of Carl Von Clausewitz.

Whenever an activity deals primarily with the same things again and again\_ with the same ends and the same means, even though there may be minor variations and infinite diversity of combinations\_ these things are susceptible of rational study. It is precisely that inquiry which is the most essential part of any theory, and which may quite appropriately claim that title. It is an analytic investigation

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<sup>350</sup>National Archives, *United States Constitution*, [http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/constitution\\_transcript.html](http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/constitution_transcript.html) (accessed 4 March 2010).

leading to a close acquaintance with the subject; applied to experience\_in our case to military history\_it leads to thorough familiarity with it.<sup>351</sup>

The media and military relationship was driven by politics during the Mexican War. Newspapers in this era were little more than extensions of the political parties that dominated the mid-nineteenth century. Throughout the Mexican War, the media made no effort at objectivity.<sup>352</sup> Instead, articles drew readers with sensational stories, and shaped the views of local and national news for large blocks of the voting public with openly political analysis. President Polk's aggressive directives regarding the Texas-Mexican border pushed the military to the fore in the public mind. Once hostilities opened, editors seized the political and economic opportunities afforded by the conflict, flourishing on the interest of the public. Polk's most embarrassing problem lay in the fact that achieving his political objectives in Mexico meant relying on two battlefield commanders with Whig Party allegiance.<sup>353</sup> The President wrote of his belief that a Whig war correspondent (Kendall) was controlling his military commander (General Taylor) in the field, and that the Whigs were determined to interfere with Polk's war policy.<sup>354</sup> Within this political problem frame, the media and the military shared a relationship that would end up playing a strategic role in the outcome of the Mexican War. Although private sector media institutions and the U.S. military are distinct organizations with separate goals and objectives, both thrived during the conflict with Mexico. As each organization

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<sup>351</sup>Carl von Clausewitz, *On War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), 141.

<sup>352</sup>Ratner and Teeter, 10.

<sup>353</sup>Grant, 75.

<sup>354</sup>Polk 167.

gained in relative power and influence, several direct and indirect cooperative relationships developed between the military and the media.

### Direct Relationships

The media and the military developed five direct relationships over the course of the Mexican War. In essence, these relationships comprised an informal cooperative partnership, as leaders within these very different institutions identified shared interests and goals within the context of war. The five direct relationships included the following: (1) the relational impact on political careers of battlefield commanders, (2) the relational impact on reports from the battlefield to government officials in Washington, (3) the relational impact on moral integrity through open criticism of war crimes, (4) the relational impact on military recruiting efforts, and (5) the relational impact on soldier morale.

First, the media's relationship with the military directly affected the future political careers of General Zachary Taylor and General Winfield Scott. Taylor would leave Mexico to become the twelfth President of the United States in 1849. Scott would unsuccessfully attempt to follow in Taylor's footsteps as an unsuccessful Presidential candidate in 1852. Interestingly, both generals received relatively favorable media coverage during the Mexican War. Although Democrat-run newspapers were more critical of command decisions than Whig-led papers, both sides generally held each general in high esteem. Arguably, Democratic editors gave more credit to the volunteer force for victories, but both political parties broadly supported the officers and soldiers who fought. Reporters also noted that Taylor and Scott operated in two very different ways during their respective campaigns. Taylor utilized the art of decentralization,

simplicity, aggressiveness, determination, and massed fires, while Scott emphasized centralized planning, maneuver, patience, and manifested a growing concern for winning the hearts and minds of the Mexican people. However, in a paradox to media coverage today, Taylor's high casualty numbers on the battlefield served as a measure of heroism over the more cautious approach of Winfield Scott. The bloody carnage of Taylor's Buena Vista victory received higher praise from the press than Scott's low-cost victory at Vera Cruz. In essence, war correspondents measured the cost in lives on the battlefield as a barometer for bravery within the framework of sensationalized news.

Second, the media's relationship with the military directly affected the federal government because news from the battlefield often arrived ahead of official battlefield reports. In fact, private sector news repeatedly reached the President ahead of postal system deliveries. So embarrassing was this trend that one frustrated postmaster general arrested the *Crescent City* newspaper owner for, ". . . moving mail by private means."<sup>355</sup> To keep the media from reporting Trist's peace agreement ahead of "official government reports," General Scott designated *Delta* reporter James Frenner as the government courier and placed him on the *Iris* to sail ahead with the breaking news. Scott then ordered other ships in Vera Cruz to delay their departure for two days to allow Frenner a head start. His efforts failed, however, when a ship carrying a *Picayune* reporter out-sailed the *Iris* to New Orleans. Continuing on to Washington, the *Picayune's* news arrived in the nation's capitol hours ahead of the government's report on 19 February 1848.<sup>356</sup> Although at first glance their race against time seems ancillary to any real

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<sup>355</sup>Dugard, 253.

<sup>356</sup>Kendall, 25-26.



significant point about the war, it speaks to the private sector's ability to innovate and modernize ahead of the government during this era.

Third, the media's relationship with the military directly affected the moral integrity of soldiers by shedding light on otherwise scandalous war crimes. Although war atrocities were seen through a different prism during this period, the fact that reporters did not completely hide these events from the public eye is a testament to their recognition that these acts had no part in a professional military organization. The atrocities were largely blamed on individual perpetrators whose acts deserved condemnation and punishment. This approach to reporting scandalous behavior on the battlefield appears to be significantly different than modern-day media methods for sharing blame with the commanders on the ground. Regardless, the media provided many instances of honest reporting concerning unprofessional conduct by U.S. soldiers, and therefore served as an honest broker for the military to maintain its honor and professionalism in the public eye.

Fourth, the media's relationship with the military directly influenced troop strength by advertising congressionally authorized enlistments for service in the Mexican War. From the beginning of the war, many newspapers worked with state governors to announce military quotas.<sup>357</sup> This was an important communication conduit because the government was fighting misinformation that led many men to deploy without supporting government appropriations. These same eager volunteers would sometimes travel for

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<sup>357</sup>Winders, *Mr. Polk's Army*, 72.

days, only to be turned back by commanders in the field who did not have money for the unauthorized men.<sup>358</sup>

Finally, the media's relationship with the military directly influenced soldier morale. Many U.S. editors went beyond mere advertisement and recruiting campaigns geared for the general public; some of them chose to join the ranks and serve as volunteers for the cause. Then, they put their writing skills to good use as many of these volunteer journalists created their own newspapers while stationed in Mexico. The papers lifted the morale of the soldiers by running stories of interest that ranged from camp gossip to official orders from higher headquarters. In fact, the Army sometimes funded newspaper operations in exchange for printing official military decrees and orders. By the end of the conflict, 25 occupation newspapers were running in Mexico in 14 cities.<sup>359</sup>

#### Indirect Relationships

The media and military developed two significant indirect relationships over the course of the Mexican War. These indirect relations had strategic influence on public perception in general and on the war as a whole. Oddly enough, the success of these cooperative efforts helped end the war, which in essence had become a cash cow for both organizations. The two indirect relationships between the military and the media: (1) shaped political views of U.S. voters on the subject of war with Mexico, and (2) influenced the length of the war through persuasion of a politically acceptable desired end-state.

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<sup>358</sup>Bauer, 58.

<sup>359</sup>Reilly, 296.

First, the media's indirect relationship with the military shaped the nation's politics on the subject of war. The media seized a more prominent seat of influence at the table of foreign policy decision-making, which led to a patriotic firestorm of support for the troops. Many papers became cheerleaders for the volunteers from their home states. After Taylor's victory at Monterrey, the *New York Herald* wrote, ". . . we have great reason to be proud of their prowess in time of danger, and the reliance we can place in our countrymen's courage . . . whenever endangered by foreign or domestic enemies."<sup>360</sup> After Churubusco, the New Orleans *Delta* stated, ". . . the volunteers have given a repetition of the noble bearing of their countrymen on the bloody field of Buena Vista. . . . [Soldiers] will return home bright ornaments to the states from whence they came."<sup>361</sup> On 22 October 1847, *The Baltimore American* wrote, "Noble scholars indeed have they [volunteers] proved themselves to be! The soldiers of one campaign, they are veterans already, able to cope with the veterans of any service."<sup>362</sup> This trend toward Romanization can be found in many newspapers during this era, especially those written by Democrat supporters of Polk's foreign policy.<sup>363</sup>

Second, the media's indirect relationship with the military influenced the length of the war, an act of strategic importance that cannot be overstated. Freaner's ability to persuade U.S. diplomat Trist to disobey a presidential order to discontinue peace talks with Mexico is a telling point in the story of the Mexican War. This interaction

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<sup>360</sup>Dugard, 254.

<sup>361</sup>Conrad, 46.

<sup>362</sup>Ibid., 75-76.

<sup>363</sup>Hospodor, 115.

eventually led to the end of hostilities, with the ratification of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo.<sup>364</sup>

### Summary

In summary, the media and the military developed a cooperative relationship during the Mexican War, which directly and indirectly shaped the outcome of this momentous event in our nation's history. Both organizations greatly benefited from the war with Mexico by selling their respective services to meet the demands of U.S. westward expansionism. Although the media's relationship with the military may appear ancillary at first glance, it was significant within the context of the problem frame of the conflict. Seizing the opportunities presented by the Mexican War, the media and military leaders built a cooperative relationship whose underlying foundation rested upon common goals and shared interests.

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<sup>364</sup>Kendall, 23-24.

## APPENDIX A

### TIMELINE OF SIGNIFICANT EVENTS

- 1 March 1845—President John Tyler signs a proposal to annex Texas.<sup>365</sup>
- 4 March 1845—President James Polk inaugurated as the eleventh President of U.S.<sup>366</sup>
- 4 July 1845—Texas accepts U.S. proposal for annexation.<sup>367</sup>
- 25 July 1845—Zachary Taylor moves U.S. forces to Corpus Christi.<sup>368</sup>
- 29 December 1845—Texas becomes the twenty-eighth U.S. state.<sup>369</sup>
- 13 January 1846—Polk orders Taylor to advance forces to the Rio Grande.<sup>370</sup>
- 28 March 1846—Taylor’s forces arrive at the Rio Grande.<sup>371</sup>
- 25 April 1846—Mexican cavalry attacks U.S. dragoons North of the Rio Grande.<sup>372</sup>
- 8 May 1846—Taylor scores a military victory over Mexican forces at Palo Alto.<sup>373</sup>  
Christopher Haile becomes the first American war correspondent.<sup>374</sup>

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<sup>365</sup>Eisenhower, 381.

<sup>366</sup>Ibid.

<sup>367</sup>Weems, 459.

<sup>368</sup>Ibid.

<sup>369</sup>Ibid.

<sup>370</sup>Ibid., 460.

<sup>371</sup>Ibid.

<sup>372</sup>Ibid.

<sup>373</sup>Carney, 7.

<sup>374</sup>Kendall, 8-10.

9 May 1846–Taylor’s victory over Mexican forces at Resaca de la Palma.<sup>375</sup>

13 May 1846–Polk signs a bill declaring war with Mexico.<sup>376</sup>

21 to 23 September 1846–Taylor’s victory over Mexican forces at Monterrey.<sup>377</sup>

18 November 1846–Polk appoints Winfield Scott as commander of a Vera Cruz invasion.<sup>378</sup>

22 to 23 February 1847–Taylor’s victory over Santa Anna’s forces at Buena Vista.<sup>379</sup>

9 to 28 March 1847–Scott’s forces conduct siege on Vera Cruz.<sup>380</sup>

18 April 1847–Scott’s victory over Santa Anna’s forces at Cerro Gordo.<sup>381</sup>

3 June 1847–Scott severs ties with Vera Cruz, leaving journalists with the dangerous task of sending unescorted dispatches across enemy territory.<sup>382</sup>

19 to August 1847–Scott’s victory over Santa Anna’s forces at Contreras.<sup>383</sup>

20 August 1847–Scott’s victory over Santa Anna’s forces at Churubusco.<sup>384</sup>

8 September 1847–Scott’s victory over Santa Anna’s forces at Molino del Rey.<sup>385</sup>

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<sup>375</sup>Carney, 7.

<sup>376</sup>Weems, 460.

<sup>377</sup>Carney, 7.

<sup>378</sup>Weems, 461.

<sup>379</sup>Carney, 7.

<sup>380</sup>Ibid.

<sup>381</sup>Ibid.

<sup>382</sup>Eisenhower, 382.

<sup>383</sup>Carney, 7.

<sup>384</sup>Ibid.

<sup>385</sup>Ibid.

13 September 1847–Scott’s victory over Santa Anna’s forces at Chapultepec.<sup>386</sup>  
14 September 1847–Scott’s forces begin occupation of Mexico City.<sup>387</sup>  
16 November 1847–Trist receives Polk’s order to cease peace talks with Mexico.<sup>388</sup>  
25 November 1847–Taylor is relieved as commander of forces in northern Mexico.<sup>389</sup>  
4 December 1847–Trist decides to continue peace talks with Mexico.<sup>390</sup>  
13 January 1848–Polk relieves Scott of command in Mexico.<sup>391</sup>  
May 1848–The Associated Press (AP) is born in a financial alliance between members of the press to reduce the cost of transmitting stories of the Mexican War.<sup>392</sup>  
4 July 1848–Polk received the officially ratified Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo.<sup>393</sup>  
August 1848–Last American unit leaves Mexico.<sup>394</sup>  
November 1848–Zachary Taylor elected 12th U.S. President.<sup>395</sup>  
November 1852–Winfield Scott loses Presidential election bid to Franklin Pierce.<sup>396</sup>

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<sup>386</sup>Ibid.

<sup>387</sup>Weems, 463.

<sup>388</sup>Ibid.

<sup>389</sup>Ibid.

<sup>390</sup>Ibid.

<sup>391</sup>Ibid.

<sup>392</sup>Frasca, 362.

<sup>393</sup>Kendall, 26-27.

<sup>394</sup>Ibid.

<sup>395</sup>Dugard, 378.

<sup>396</sup>Johnson, *Winfield Scott: The Quest for Military Glory*, 216-217.

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