ought not to hand over the command to Stockton, the next officer in rank; but he could not bring himself to act. Stockton, with that robust self-confidence which he never failed to exhibit in any relation in life, was ready and anxious to undertake the duty. On July 23, 1846, he sent a letter to Sloat pointing out what ought to be done, and, in the tone one might adopt toward a sick child, he asked: "Had you not better send me an order to take command at once, and make my own arrangements? It will facilitate operations, and relieve you from a great deal of trouble."[1] Under the influence of Stockton's stronger will Sloat presently yielded, and on June 29 sailed in the *Levant* for Panama, reaching home in November, where he received a very sharp reprimand for his delay in seizing California.

How Stockton and Frémont blustered and swaggered, how they got possession of all Upper California, how Governor Pio Pico and General José Castro fled to Mexico, how Gillespie, left in command at Los Angeles, exhibited himself to the natives as a petty tyrant, how they rose and fought the Americans with unexpected energy and temporary success, how Colonel Kearny with a hundred dragoons came overland in time to have a share in the fighting, and how the Americans finally succeeded, are details of local California history which do not fall within the scope of this book. It is enough to say that by what was called the treaty of Cahuenga the entire native force surrendered on January 13, 1847, and that not long afterward American reinforcements arrived, whereby American control of the country was so fast riveted that no possible native rising and no conceivable expedition from Mexico could have shaken it. Thenceforth, all through the war, California remained securely in the undisputed possession of the United States.

[1] Stockton to Sloat, July 23, 1846; *ibid.*, 544.

CHAPTER XXXV

PLANNING A CAMPAIGN—THE OCCUPATION OF NEW MEXICO

WHEN Congress had placed at the disposal of the administration ten million dollars and fifty thousand men the real task of preparing for a foreign war was only just begun. How great that task was nobody in the cabinet had any idea. In the seventy years of national existence only two wars had been fought—both against Great Britain and both on American soil—and the men at the head of affairs were innocent of any knowledge of what was involved in conducting such an enterprise as that on which they were now embarked.

Not a single step had been taken toward planning a campaign. There was no intelligence department for either the army or the navy. The government—as the President noted later with vexation—was without reliable information of the topography of Mexico, the character of the roads, the supplies which could be drawn from the country, or the facilities or obstructions which might exist in carrying on a campaign.[1] Nobody seems to have known anything of even the seasons. Scott announced, with the air of disclosing an important secret, that there was rain in northern Mexico from May to the end of September, and that there was therefore no advantage in undertaking military operations before October.[2] Even the immediate surroundings of a

[1] Polk's *Diary*, II, 139 (Sept. 15, 1846).

[2] Scott to Marcy, May 21, 1846; Sen. Doc. 378, 29 Cong., 1 sess., 6. Scott said he had received this information from "Col. A. Butler, a distinguished officer of the War of 1812, since minister in Mexico, &c. &c., and from General J. T. Mason, who has travelled much in Mexico with Col. Butler. It is clear to my mind that the two know more of northern and middle Mexico than all other persons, taken together, in the District of Columbia." See

place so important as Vera Cruz were unknown, and the discussion of a plan to attack it was suspended for a whole week, until a former consul could be summoned from Rhode Island to "draw a rough diagram" for the benefit of the military and naval officers whose advice was asked.[1]

The obvious line of advance along the Rio Grande had never been examined. Nobody in Washington knew what was the depth of that river, or its volume of water at different seasons of the year, or how far it was navigable by river steam-boats.

"Had we foreseen," wrote the quartermaster-general six months after war was declared, "the nature of the navigation of the Mexican coasts and harbors, and of the Rio del Norte, and built suitable steamboats several months ago, a million dollars might have been saved."[2]

The navy, so far as sea-going ships were concerned, was in excellent condition and quite capable of maintaining a blockade or capturing such places as could be approached by vessels of deep draught; but it proved to be deficient in light-draught steamers, which were essential if the capture of the towns near the Gulf was to be attempted.[3] The number of muskets issued to the navy was too small to arm landing parties of any size, and light field-pieces for use in such expeditions had never been supplied to cruising ships, although that practice existed in foreign navies. The nearest navy-yard was at Pensacola, which was quite inadequate for the demands upon it. And finally, the requirements of steam-vessels being as yet hardly understood, little or no provision for coaling had been made.[4]

The regular army was hopelessly inadequate in numbers, however excellent in the quality of its personnel. The total force on paper was 8,616; but the total number "present for

Chapter IX, above, as to the travels of Butler and Mason in the year 1832. One wonders what had brought these two worthies together again after fourteen years.—(Scott to Marcy, May 25, 1846; *ibid.*, 11.)

[1] Polk's *Diary*, II, 180, 195.

[2] Jesup to Marcy, Nov. 7, 1846; H. R. Doc. 60, 30 Cong., 1 sess., 564.

[3] *Report of the Secretary of the Navy*, Dec. 5, 1846; H. R. Doc. 4, 29 Cong., 2 sess., 382.

[4] Conner's *Home Squadron*, etc., *passim*.

duty," by the returns at the close of the year 1845, was only 643 commissioned officers (including the staff) and 5,612 non-commissioned officers, musicians, artificers, and privates—a total of a little over six thousand. The regiments had been reduced to skeletons by the act of August 23, 1842,[1] under which the number of enlisted men in a company was fixed at forty-two for the infantry and artillery, and fifty for the dragoons. The result was that the eight regiments of infantry and the two of dragoons averaged only a little over three hundred men each, "present for duty." The artillery were nominally organized to form four regiments, of somewhat greater actual strength.[2]

As soon as war was declared Congress did what it could to provide for increasing the regular army. An increase in the number of privates in existing regiments of the regular army to one hundred men in each company was authorized, which would double the force. A corps of "Sappers, Miners, and Pontoniers" was created—on paper. And an act was passed "to provide for raising a Regiment of mounted Riflemen and for establishing military Stations on the Route to Oregon."[3] A month later, on June 19 and 26, the President was authorized to appoint another major-general and two brigadiers in the regular army; the organization of the volunteers into divisions and brigades with the proper general officers was regulated, and the appointment of additional officers of the quartermaster's, commissary, and medical departments was provided for.[4]

These latter departments were probably adequate, before the war, for their respective duties, but until the end of June nothing had been done toward developing an organization capable of dealing with a force of fifty or sixty thousand men operating in a foreign country. No thought had ever been given to the subject. Taylor at Palo Alto had

[1] U. S. Stat. at Large, V, 512.

[2] *Report of the Commanding General of the Army*, Nov. 20, 1845; Sen. Doc. 1, 29 Cong., 1 sess., 208 *et seq.*

[3] U. S. Stat. at Large, IX, 11, 12, 13. The "mounted rifles" served, in fact, in Mexico.

[4] *Ibid.*, 17, 20.

been encumbered with a train of hundreds of wagons, and it was not until months afterward that the use of pack-mules for army transport seems to have crossed the mind of any one in Washington.[1]

The younger officers were mostly graduates of West Point, and so far as theoretical training in the art of war could make them good soldiers they were excellent, but they had never seen a civilized enemy. The greatest weakness of the army was in its senior officers, most of whom were incapacitated by age or sickness. As there was no retired list, "there was hardly a regiment in service which could take the field with its full number of field officers. . . . The general officers were also advanced in years, and many of them too much so to be useful."[2]

Of these elderly generals, the highest in rank, though by no means in years, was Major-General Winfield Scott, then just a little under sixty years of age.[3] He was a Virginian by birth, like General Taylor; but there the resemblance ended, for no two men were ever more unlike. Scott was a citizen of the world, well read, fond of company and good living, with genial manners. He had spent a year or more at William and Mary College, and had then studied law in Richmond, and when twenty-two years old had obtained a commission in the regular army. His services in the War of 1812, which shortly afterward ensued, were against British troops, and justly attracted the attention and admiration of the country; and they were rewarded by rapid promotion and a gold medal struck by order of Congress.

Since the close of that war he had twice visited Europe as a traveller; had had some share in directing the conduct of the Black Hawk and Seminole wars; had been sent by President Jackson to take command in Charleston Harbor when nullification threatened civil war; and had discharged with success quasi-diplomatic missions to the Cherokee Indians and on the Canadian frontier. In 1841, upon the

[1] Polk's *Diary*, II, 118 (Sept. 5, 1846).

[2] Ripley, I, 95. Adjutant-General to Secretary of War, July 30, 1846; H. R. Doc. 4, 29 Cong., 2 sess., 71.

[3] He was born June 13, 1786.

death of General Macomb, he was made a major-general and called to the command of the whole army. His duties had on the whole been performed in pleasant places, and during his nearly fifty years in the army he had lived chiefly in or near New Orleans, New York, and Washington.

His colossal frame and striking features would have attracted attention at any time and in any company, but he also loved to set off his personal advantages by the finest uniforms. But for the tall, fair periwig, he was Esmond's General Webb to the life, and those lines which pleased Webb so highly might well have been written of Scott:

> "Before the front the general sternly rides
> With such an air as Mars to battle strides;
> Propitious heaven must sure a hero save,
> Like Paris handsome, and like Hector brave."

He was his own worst enemy. A love of paradox, extraordinary vanity, and the restless pen of a ready writer were his chief defects. But he was withal a diligent student of military affairs, and knew from books the whole art of war as it was practised thirty years after Waterloo. His personal courage was unquestionable, his health and energy were unimpaired, and he possessed the keen judgment of men that enabled him to select and inspire young and capable subordinates. He had, in a word, most of the essential qualities of a great general. But at the beginning of the Mexican War Scott was suffering from one very serious disability. He was a declared Whig, and had, unfortunately for his usefulness, allowed himself to be "mentioned" for the Presidency on more than one occasion. Indeed, in the convention which nominated General Harrison he had received sixty-two votes on the ballot before the last.[1] In 1844 he had prudently declined to let his name be used as against Clay, but it could hardly be doubted that he had an eager eye on the next nomination.

[1] Scott himself believed that he would have been nominated at that time but for the blundering of his former legal preceptor, Mr. Leigh, who headed the Virginia delegation.—(Scott's *Autobiography*, 355–359.)

It is therefore, perhaps, not very surprising that Polk's administration did not care to consult him before the war with Mexico was declared. What is much more singular is that Scott should not have thought it worth while to trouble himself on the subject. He must have guessed, at least since January, 1846, when the order was sent to Taylor to advance to the Rio Grande, that war was possible; but he never, so far as appears, made the slightest attempt at preparation. A more experienced administration would doubtless have set the staff of the War Department to work from the moment diplomatic negotiations were broken off, so as to have plans ready for any emergency. But, as it was, they did not call for information and Scott did not volunteer advice; and so by the thirteenth of May, when war was declared, everything had still to be planned and provided for.

Next in rank to Scott, although several years older, was Brigadier-General Edmund Pendleton Gaines, a major-general by brevet, who was stationed at New Orleans, in command of what was called the western division.[1] Nearly twenty years before he had had a bitter controversy with Scott, and they had been on bad terms ever since. They had been rivals in Adams's administration for appointment to the head of the army, at the time when General Macomb was appointed. A majority of the cabinet had favored Scott, but Adams would not have him.

> "There was not," he recorded, "one voice for Gaines. He and Scott have both made themselves obnoxious by continual acts of insubordination and contempt of the civil authority. Their controversy for rank and precedency has been carried on by both not only with rancor but indecency."[2]

The only other officer in the army above the rank of colonel was John E. Wool, a native of New York, who had

[1] As to Gaines's earlier record see Vol. I, 372–380, above.

[2] Adams's *Memoirs*, VII, 507. Richard Rush, who was a member of the Adams cabinet, related some further particulars of this controversy to President Polk. See Polk's *Diary*, II, 343; and Curtis's *Life of Buchanan*, I, 605 *et seq.*, where a long letter from Rush gives part of the story.

entered the regular army in 1812 and had served with great credit in his native state and in Canada. For gallant conduct at the battle of Plattsburg he was given the brevet rank of lieutenant-colonel, served subsequently as inspector-general, and was made brigadier-general in 1841. At the outbreak of the Mexican War he was in command of the eastern division, with head-quarters at New York.

But though the organization of a general staff was elementary in the extreme, and the President and all his advisers had utterly neglected the most obvious preliminaries to a declaration of war, certain features of the first campaign were evidently indicated in advance by political as well as military considerations. In the first place, it was the fixed and repeatedly expressed purpose of the President to take so much of the Mexican territory as would at least be equivalent to a war indemnity, in addition to compensation to American claimants. It seems, however, that that policy was not then clearly understood, even by Polk's Secretary of State. At a cabinet meeting held on the evening of the day war was declared, a draft was read of a circular to American diplomatic agents announcing the fact, which was intended to be communicated to all foreign powers. Buchanan, according to the President's diary, had stated in this draft that the United States had not gone to war with a view to acquiring either California or New Mexico or any other portion of the Mexican territory.

> "I told him," the President recorded, "that though we had not gone to war for conquest, yet it was clear that in making peace we would if practicable obtain California and such other portion of the Mexican territory as would be sufficient to indemnify our claimants on Mexico, and to defray the expenses of the war which that power by her long-continued wrongs and injuries had forced us to wage. I told him it was well known that the Mexican Government had no other means of indemnifying us."

But Buchanan, with his singular faculty of seeing terrifying obstacles in every imaginable path of conduct, was for a self-denying ordinance.

"Mr. Buchanan said if when Mr. McLane announced to Lord Aberdeen the existence of the War with Mexico the latter should demand of Mr. McLane to know if we intended to acquire California or any other part of the Mexican territory and no satisfactory answer was given, he thought it almost certain that both England and France would join with Mexico in the war against us."

A hot discussion at once sprang up, which lasted more than two hours—"one of the most earnest and interesting," the President thought, which had occurred in his cabinet. The result was that the paragraph objected to was struck out.[1]

It was the conclusion of the cabinet that New Mexico and Upper California ought to be seized at once, and that the coast of the Gulf of Mexico must be blockaded. It was reasonably certain that no great opposition was to be anticipated in any of these attempts, and so far as the navy was concerned it was only necessary to notify the commanding officers of the Gulf and Pacific squadrons that war had been declared. But the military forces had yet to be organized, their numbers determined, their commanders selected, and their line of march definitely fixed.

For invading New Mexico an admirable nucleus of a force already existed in Colonel Stephen W. Kearny's regiment of dragoons, five companies of which had made a practice march of over two thousand miles during the preceding summer. The greater part of the command was at Fort Leavenworth, and the remainder in Iowa and Arkansas; and as they were immediately available, orders were sent to Kearny on the day war was declared to set out on the Santa Fe trail. At the same time a requisition was sent to the Governor of Missouri for a thousand mounted volunteers to follow him.[2]

The blockade of the Mexican ports and the seizure of their frontier settlements were, however, relatively unimportant measures. They would not at all affect the organized military force of Mexico, and it was obvious, even to the unmilitary President and his cabinet, that this latter must be the real objective of a campaign. How that end was to be attained it was for him (in the last resort) to decide. The recent act of Congress had given him wide discretion. It was left to him to decide how many volunteers (not exceeding fifty thousand) should be called for, a decision which necessarily involved a consideration of some consistent plan; but Scott, sent for to the White House, had only an incomplete project to present. It was not until three days after war had been formally declared that the barest outline of a plan of campaign could be laid before the cabinet. It was then tentatively agreed that about two thousand men should march on Santa Fe and about four thousand on Chihuahua (which there was some reason to suppose was hostile to the central government in Mexico), while the remaining available forces were to "occupy the country on the lower Del Norte and in the interior."[1] Twenty thousand volunteers were to be called for in the first instance, which were to be apportioned among the Southern and Western states—Texas, Arkansas, Alabama, Mississippi, and Georgia, and Missouri, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Kentucky, and Tennessee. The President himself thought twenty thousand an excessive number, but was "not willing to take the responsibility of any failure of the campaign by refusing to grant to Gen'l Scott all he asked."[2]

This was all very well as far as it went, and it provided occupation for six thousand volunteers; but it left open the question as to precisely what was to be done with the other fourteen thousand, not to speak of Taylor's regulars, who were intended to operate "on the lower Del Norte and in the interior." Scott's advice was sought, but the President was not favorably impressed with him. "He has had experience in his profession," the President confided to his diary, "but I thought was rather scientific and visionary in his views"; but nevertheless the command of the invading

[1] Polk's *Diary*, I, 397 (May 13, 1846). The circular as finally sent out is printed in Moore's *Buchanan*, VI, 484.

[2] Polk's *Diary*, I, 396.

[1] *Ibid.*, 403 (May 16, 1846).

[2] *Ibid.*, 401 (May 14, 1846).

army was verbally offered to General Scott and accepted by him.

Within a week the President began to doubt whether Scott was the man for the place, after all. A story reached him that Scott had said he would probably not go to the seat of war until about the first of September; and the President, who was still under the customary delusion of American public men, that a few thousand recruits with weapons in their hands constituted an army, sent word to Scott that no such delay would be permitted and he must proceed to his post or be superseded.[1] Again, two days later, on Thursday, May 21, there was brought to the White House a private letter written by Scott to Senator Archer, of Virginia, in which very strong language was used in reference to the appointment of officers to the new regiment of "mounted rifles," intended for service in Oregon.

> "The proposed Riflemen," ran the letter, "are intended by western men to give commissions or rather pay to western democrats. Not an eastern man, not a graduate of the Military Academy and certainly not a whig would obtain a place. . . . You may be certain I shall not dishonor myself by recommending any individual whatever."

A letter of this kind, addressed by the general in command of the army to one of the leaders of the opposition in the Senate, was enough to rouse the meekest of Presidents, and it made Polk furious.

> "The letter," he noted, "was of a partisan character; wholly unbecoming the commander-in-chief of the army, and highly exceptionable in its tenor and language toward the President. It proved to me that Gen'l Scott was not only hostile, but recklessly vindictive in his feeling towards my administration. . . . After seeing this letter I can

[1] *Ibid.*, 408 (May 19, 1846). The story in General Taylor's camp was that Scott had declined to go to the front because it would interfere with his preparations for the next presidential election; but in Taylor's own opinion, Scott's refusal was sure to "blight his prospects most effectually for the presidency, which he has been looking forward to with a longing eye for many years."—(Taylor to Wood, June 2: and 24, 1846; *Taylor's Letters from the Battlefields*, 11–18.)

> have no confidence in Gen'l Scott's disposition to carry out the views of the administration as commander-in-chief of the army on the Del Norte."[1]

But worse remained behind. Marcy, in conversation with Scott on Wednesday evening, May 20, had told him, *apropos* of his announced intention not to go to the Rio Grande until September, that there was a good deal of impatience at his delay. Marcy, it seems, had not thought it best to give Scott the President's message, but had spoken in general terms of the excited feelings of the country, the "patriotic ardor" of the volunteers, and the disappointment they and the country would feel if an army of eight or ten thousand men were idle for months on the Rio Grande. Scott slept on this conversation, and, instead of going to Marcy and talking it out face to face, committed the almost inconceivable folly of writing him a long letter.

After stating clearly and forcibly the amount and variety of preliminary work necessary to be done in Washington, Scott went on to say that, as he learned that "much impatience is already felt, perhaps in high quarters," at his delay, he must now stop work in order to guard himself "against, perhaps, utter condemnation, in the quarters alluded to." He was, he said, too old a soldier not to feel the infinite importance of securing himself against danger in the rear before advancing against the public enemy. If he could not have the active, candid, and steady support of the government, it would be infinitely better for all concerned that some other commander of the army in Mexico should be selected.

> "My explicit meaning is," he added, "that 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.*"[2]

Marcy, of course, sent this silly letter to the President at once. Polk considered that it conclusively proved Scott's

[1] Polk's *Diary*, I, 414 (May 21, 1846).

[2] Scott to Marcy, May 21, 1846; Sen. Doc. 378, 29 Cong., 1 sess., 5. Italics in original.