

A fortnight later Scott submitted a new memorandum on the prosecution of the war, further urging the importance of a descent on Vera Cruz in order "to open a new and better line of operations upon the enemy's capital," for which he considered that an army of more than twenty thousand men might be ultimately necessary. He estimated Taylor's force, including the troops under the immediate command of General Wool, at about sixty-five hundred regulars and thirteen thousand five hundred volunteers; and he suggested leaving with Taylor twenty-five hundred regulars and eight thousand five hundred volunteers, or eleven thousand in all.

"With this force," he wrote, "all necessary garrisons in the rear may be kept up, and a column held at Monterey capable of advancing on the line of Saltillo and San Luis de Potosi, or of detaining in its front a large portion, or twice the number of the Mexican forces. It is certain that a garrison of Americans at Monterey, of four, or even three thousand men, would be able to defend it against a Mexican army of three or four times the number. But the movable column at that point, out of a total of 11,000 might be carried up to at least 8,000. This it may be assumed, would be fully sufficient to threaten and probably take Saltillo, if not San Luis de Potosi, &c. &c., combined with the movement on the new line of operations from Vera Cruz. . . . To meet the double invasion, Mexico must either divide her forces and increase our chance of success on both lines, or double her forces on one, and leave the other comparatively open to our advance."

Scott added that the positive instructions of the American government as to the proper division of forces would be needed, "besides the presence on the theatre of war of the highest in army rank," who would be the proper officer to carry out the instructions of the government and "to direct the principal attacking column on and from Vera Cruz."¹ Four days later Scott submitted a third memorandum, showing that with the volunteers just called for there might be obtained fourteen thousand men for Vera Cruz, leaving thirteen thousand two hundred and fifty for Monterey.²

¹ *Ibid.*, 1270-1273 (memorandum of Nov. 12, 1846).

² *Ibid.*, 1273 (memorandum of Nov. 16, 1846).

Evidently Marcy was much impressed with Scott's suggestions, and again brought up for discussion in the cabinet the question of appointing a general-in-chief to command the army in the field. It was generally agreed that Taylor was unfit and that Patterson had not sufficient experience. Scott, it was feared, would have no sympathy with the administration in carrying out its plans; but at last, after much discussion, Buchanan, Walker, Marcy, and Mason all expressed the opinion that "as he was the highest officer in command in the army he should be intrusted with the conduct of this important expedition." Cave Johnson, the Postmaster-General, and Clifford, the Attorney-General,¹ were more or less opposed to employing Scott. Polk himself said that "nothing but stern necessity and a sense of public duty" could induce him to place Scott at the head of so important an expedition as that contemplated to the Gulf coast of Mexico, but he did not see how it could well be avoided. If he had the power to select the general, he would select Benton. Once more the President talked with Marcy and Benton, and finally was brought to the reluctant decision to put Scott in command of the Vera Cruz expedition. On the day following this conversation—Thursday, November 19—Scott was therefore sent for to the White House and had a long conversation with the President, in the course of which he was offered and accepted the command of an expedition to Vera Cruz.

"I then told him," the President noted, "that I had at the commencement of the War given him my confidence and had tendered him the command, but that circumstances had occurred to change my determination. I was willing that by-gones should be by-gones & that he should take the command. He expressed himself as being deeply grateful to me & said he would show me his gratitude by his conduct when he got to the field. He was so grateful & so much affected that he almost shed tears."²

¹ Nathan Clifford, of Maine, afterward a justice of the Supreme Court, was appointed Attorney-General in October, 1846, after Franklin Pierce, of New Hampshire, had declined the place.

² Polk's *Diary*, II, 241-245.

Scott's own account of this interview, written more than fifteen years afterward, represented the President as much more effusive.

"Every expression of kindness and confidence," he wrote, "was lavished upon me. Such was the warmth and emphasis of his professions, that he fully won my confidence. I gave him a cordial reciprocation of my personal sympathy and regard—being again and again assured that the country would be bankrupted and dishonored unless the war could be made plainly to march toward a successful conclusion, and that I only could give to it the necessary impetus and direction."¹

The following week Scott left Washington, and before the end of November was on his way to the South. A few weeks later he was told that the President had asked Congress to create the grade of lieutenant-general in order to place Benton in command of the army. Scott recorded his opinion that there had never been a grosser abuse of human confidence, and that, instead of being a friend, the President of the United States was "an enemy more to be dreaded than Santa Anna and all his hosts."²

But before leaving Washington Scott prepared two more memoranda for Marcy—one a draft of instructions to be sent to himself and the second a discussion of Taylor's despatch of October 15. In the latter he wrote: "I suppose that the war must go forward, and not be allowed to degenerate into a *war like a peace*, which would be as bad, or worse, than a *peace like a war*, involving an indefinite period of time and waste of money." He therefore proposed to take five thousand regulars and six thousand volunteers from Taylor, although the latter might thereby be for a time reduced to a strictly defensive condition at Monterey. To the eleven thousand men thus to be detached from Taylor, he proposed to add four thousand volunteers of the new regiments, making fifteen thousand for the expedition to Vera Cruz; and to send subsequent recruits "to enable Major-General Taylor to resume offensive, or at least *threatening*,

¹ Scott's *Memoirs*, 399.

² *Ibid.*, 403.

movements from Monterey upon Saltillo, San Luis de Potosi, &c., pending the expedition against Vera Cruz."¹

It was on November 24 that Scott went to New York, and on the following day he wrote in high spirits to Taylor explaining that he intended to go south and to be at Camargo by about the twenty-third of December.

"But, my dear general," he wrote, "I shall be obliged to take from you most of the gallant officers and men (regulars and volunteers) whom you have so long and so nobly commanded. I am afraid that I shall, by imperious necessity—the approach of yellow fever on the gulf coast—reduce you, for a time, to stand on the defensive. This will be infinitely painful to you, and for that reason distressing to me. But I rely upon your patriotism to submit to the temporary sacrifice with cheerfulness. No man can better afford to do so."²

On the same day the Secretary of War was also writing to Taylor. The receipt of Taylor's despatch of October 15 was acknowledged, and it was said that the information therein contained confirmed the government in the belief that operations could not be extended as far as San Luis Potosí. If, therefore, no effort was to be made to occupy any place in advance of Monterey or Saltillo, a sufficient force could be detached by Taylor to enable the making of a successful attack upon the most important points on the coast, and it had now become evident that a larger force than the government had at first anticipated would be required for such an expedition. For that reason the President had decided to send General Scott to the seat of war.³

This letter from the War Department was crossed by one from Taylor, written at Monterey, in which he discussed rather more fully and more clearly than before his views as to the proper strategy for the troops under his command. The line which he considered should be held, extended from Parras, through Saltillo and Monterey, to Tampico. Referring to the map Taylor said:

¹ H. R. Doc. 60, 30 Cong., 1 sess., 1274-1277. Italics in original.

² Scott to Taylor, Nov. 25, 1846; H. R. Doc. 60, 30 Cong., 1 sess., 373.

³ Marcy to Taylor, Nov. 25, 1846; *ibid.*, 369 *et seq.*

"It will be seen at once, that San Luis Potosi is a position almost equally distant from the points of this line. This would give a force at San Luis a very great advantage over us, were it not for the nature of the country and the communications—the region between San Luis and the mountains being scantily supplied with water and subsistence, and the road by Saltillo and Monterey being the only practicable route for artillery across the mountains. Without artillery, the Mexican troops are not at all formidable, and, I think, have but little confidence in themselves. I therefore consider the positions of Saltillo and Parras as of prime importance. With an intermediate post at Patos, and the means, by a good road, of rapidly uniting, if necessary, I deem the columns of Brigadiers General Wool and Worth quite equal to hold that flank of the line. I shall, however, reinforce the latter general, particularly in cavalry and shall establish a reserve at this place (Monterey) to support the advanced positions, should the movements of the enemy require it.

"Brigadier General Wool is understood to be now at Parras with his column—say 2,400 strong, with six guns. Brigadier General Worth has his headquarters at Saltillo, his command consisting of some 1,200 regular troops, with eight guns. I propose to reinforce him by two regiments of volunteer foot, and a portion of the Kentucky cavalry. . . .

"At Monterey will be the headquarters of Major General Butler commanding the reserve. . . .

"Tampico is now garrisoned by eight strong companies of artillery and the Alabama regiment of volunteers—say 1,000 effectives. I consider this force quite sufficient to hold the place, controlling, as we do, the harbor. Between Tampico and this place, Victoria offers itself at once as an important position to be held by us. It is the capital of the state of Tamaulipas; it is situated at the debouchée of a pass through the mountains, and it has a port, *Soto la Marina*, where we shall probably be able to establish a convenient depot. It also threatens the flank of the Mexican army, should it advance from San Luis. . . . I have, therefore, changed nothing in my original purpose of moving on Victoria, believing it important to occupy that point, and knowing that any surplus force would then be in position for the ulterior views of the government, should any further operations on the gulf coast be ordered. Major General Patterson has accordingly been instructed to march from Matamoras on Victoria with three regiments of volunteers from his division, one being the Tennessee horse. I propose to move from this point, say by the 12th instant, with the regular troops now here under Brigadier General Twiggs (except those to be left in garrisons, as above), and the regiments of General Patterson's division under Brigadier General Quitman. At Montemorelos, 68 miles from this, I shall effect a junction with Riley, who is now there, and incorporate with the column the second Tennessee regiment under

orders for that place. With this augmented force I expect to effect a junction with Major General Patterson before Victoria.

"After establishing a depot, if it be found practicable, at *Soto la Marina*, examining the passes of the mountains, and making such dispositions as may be found necessary for the security of the position, it is my intention, unless otherwise instructed, to return with a portion of the regular force, and establish my head-quarters in advance of Saltillo, which, after all, I consider to be our most important point."¹

What Taylor now proposed was, therefore, the establishment of a defensive line, extending from Parras through Saltillo, Monterey, Victoria, and Tampico—a line nearly five hundred miles in length—which was to be controlled by the possession of four or five isolated posts, none of which were nearer to each other than about seventy miles. The right of this line at Saltillo and Parras was clearly exposed to attack by the full force of the Mexican army, but Taylor expected to hold it with less than four thousand men.

The military weakness of such a position seemed obvious to observers at a distance. When the despatch just quoted was read in Washington the President noted his fears and dissatisfaction.

"It appears that Gen'l Taylor has paid no regard to the views of the Government, but has dispersed the troops in small bodies at different and distant points from each other, so that great apprehensions are entertained that they are so exposed that some portion of them may be cut off by the superior numbers of the enemy. It is manifest that Gen'l Taylor is wholly incompetent for so large a command. He seems to have no mind or powers of combination. . . . Gen'l Taylor, by dispersing his forces into small bodies, has acted directly against the views of the Government and contrary to his own views as communicated to the Government, that he could not advance beyond Monterey with safety."²

Taylor, nevertheless, had no misgivings, and on the twelfth of December started with his troops upon the march to Victoria;³ but he had hardly been gone forty-eight hours

¹ Taylor to Adjutant-General, Dec. 8, 1846; *ibid.*, 379-381.

² Polk's *Diary*, II, 307 (Jan. 5, 1847). Polk seems to have confused Monterey with Saltillo. See also Marcy to Scott, Jan. 4, 1847, directing that Taylor's troops be concentrated at Monterey; H. R. Doc. 60, 30 Cong., 1 sess., 871.

³ See the formal orders for the march, *ibid.*, 513 *et seq.*

from Monterey, when he was overtaken at the village of Montemorelos by a despatch from General Worth. Worth stated that he had received intelligence to the effect that Santa Anna "designed to take advantage of the diversion of force toward Victoria, and by a rapid movement to strike a heavy blow at Saltillo, and, if successful, then at General Wool's force at Parras." Worth's intelligence was incorrect. Santa Anna was not yet in any condition to move from San Luis Potosí, and Worth's belief in the rumored advance was based partly on erroneous reports of the movement of some of the Mexican cavalry at outlying posts, and partly on his soldier-like apprehension of what a vigilant and active enemy might do.

Worth's first impulse was of course to concentrate at Saltillo. Besides writing to Taylor, information was also sent to Wool at Parras and to Butler at Monterey of the exposed position of Worth's small force, and both, immediately on the receipt of Worth's despatches, sent reinforcements to his aid. Butler went forward with two regiments of volunteers, leaving a small force to garrison Monterey. Wool, who held an isolated position at Parras, was, however, unable to march directly to Saltillo—the direct road being impracticable for wagons and artillery. The only means of communication between them was by passing through the hacienda of La Encantada, a point some ten miles from Saltillo on the direct road to San Luis. Saltillo, La Encantada, and Parras were thus situated at the apexes of a triangle, one side of which was impassable for an army. It was apparent, therefore, that if the Mexicans could seize and hold La Encantada at the southern apex of the triangle, Wool and Worth would be effectually isolated and could be dealt with in detail; and Wool accordingly broke up his camp at Parras, and pushing his artillery and cavalry at the rate of forty miles a day, arrived at La Encantada on December 21. By the time he got there, Major-General Butler had arrived at Saltillo and by virtue of his rank took command of the entire combined forces of Worth and Wool.

Taylor himself had reached Monterey and was actually

on his way thence to Saltillo, when he was met, on the twentieth of December, by a despatch announcing the concentration of Butler's entire force, and that the movement of the Mexicans had not taken place. It was indeed reported that their advanced posts had rather been withdrawn, and Taylor, therefore, at once retraced his steps toward Victoria with General Twiggs's brigade of regulars, who had accompanied him in his marching backward and forward. Quitman's brigade of volunteers had meanwhile occupied Victoria on December 29 without resistance. Taylor, with Twiggs and his brigade, arrived there on January 4, and Patterson with the volunteers from Matamoros also came up on the same day. The force thus collected was over five thousand strong and, as Taylor reported, in excellent health and in good condition for service.¹

But within ten days from the date of the concentration at Victoria Taylor found that the state of his supplies would make it necessary for him to move his command. The place was practically not tenable, and therefore on January 14 the regulars, under Twiggs, started upon their march toward Tampico. They were followed on the succeeding days by Patterson's volunteers, it being expected that the whole force, numbering four thousand seven hundred and thirty-three men, would reach their destination by the twenty-fifth. Taylor himself retained May's squadron of cavalry and the Mississippi regiment of volunteers, "partly as escort to headquarters, and partly to guard a train of supplies just arrived from Matamoros, and which I deem it unnecessary to send forward to Tampico. No troops will be left in garrison here," *i. e.*, at Victoria.²

Taylor's "defensive line" along the Sierra Madre was thus given up. Tampico, at one end of the line, was occupied. North and west of that there were no American garrisons, except at Saltillo and Monterey, with their depots at Camargo and the lower course of the Rio Grande; but though Taylor still held Saltillo, General Scott and the

¹ Taylor to Adjutant-General, Jan. 7, 1847; *ibid.*, 388.

² Taylor to Scott, Jan. 15, 1847; *ibid.*, 861.

administration had some time before decided that it should be abandoned and that Taylor should only occupy a strictly defensive position at Monterey.

Nearly a month before Taylor gave up the idea of holding Victoria, Scott had written from New Orleans explaining in some detail his plans for the expedition to Vera Cruz, which was to open "a new and shorter line of operations on the capital." The first great difficulty was to get together, in time and afloat, off the Brazos de Santiago, a sufficient force to give a reasonable prospect of success before the yellow-fever season. Fifteen thousand men were desirable, if not necessary; but he would go forward if he could assemble five thousand regulars and three thousand volunteers.

"To make up the force for the new expedition," he continued, "I foresee that I shall . . . be obliged to reduce you to the defensive at the moment when it would be of the greatest importance to the success of my expedition that you should be in strength to manoeuvre offensively upon San Luis de Potosi, &c. . . . Including the regulars and volunteers at Tampico, or on their way thither, I may now say that I shall want from you, say Worth's division of regulars, made up to 4000 men; two field batteries, say Duncan's and Taylor's, and 500 regular cavalry; besides 500 volunteer cavalry, and as many volunteer foot as you can possibly spare—leaving you a sufficient force to defend Monterey and maintain your communications with Camargo."¹

Scott reached the mouth of the Rio Grande about the end of December and tried in vain to arrange an interview with Taylor; but the latter was so briskly moving backward and forward between Saltillo, Monterey, and Victoria that no meeting was had. Scott therefore wrote from Camargo, giving further details as to the movements of troops, expressing a hope that toward April such reinforcements might be received as would enable Taylor to advance and effect a junction with the troops from Vera Cruz, and saying that till then "the strict defensive" was the only course. At the same time Scott sent definite orders direct to General Butler for the movements of Worth's division and the rest of the troops which were to be withdrawn.²

¹ Scott to Taylor, Dec. 20, 1846; *ibid.*, 839.

² Same to same, and Scott to Butler, Jan. 3, 1847; *ibid.*, 848, 851-853.

While Scott on the Rio Grande was making these arrangements, the Secretary of War, in Washington, was writing to him expressing anxiety in regard to Taylor's position. There were too many posts in the long line occupied by his army which might be separately attacked.

"While engaged in an expedition on the seacoast, it is not proposed to penetrate the country beyond Monterey, with a view to its permanent occupation, though it is desirable to maintain a threatening attitude at that point. Monterey must be held with a sufficient force."¹

Scott concurred in the Secretary's suggestion as to Saltillo, and immediately on receiving the despatch just quoted he wrote to Taylor ordering him to fall back to Monterey.

"I hope," he wrote, "I have left, or shall leave you, including the new volunteers who will soon be up, a competent force to defend the head of your line (Monterey) and its communications with the depots in the neighborhood. To enable you to do this more certainly, I must ask you to abandon Saltillo, and to make no detachments, except for *reconnoissances* and immediate defence, much beyond Monterey. I know this to be the wish of the government, founded on reasons in which I concur; among them, that the enemy intends to operate against small detachments and posts."²

Here, then, was at last the definitive plan of campaign. Tampico, with a small garrison, was to be held. Saltillo was to be abandoned. Taylor's entire remaining force was to be concentrated in Monterey, with only such detachments as might be needed to keep open his communications by way of Camargo and the mouth of the Rio Grande. And Scott, at the head of all the troops that could be collected, was to seize Vera Cruz, and thence—following the line of march pursued by Cortés—to endeavor to strike a decisive blow upon the capital of Mexico.

¹ Marcy to Scott, Jan. 4, 1847; *ibid.*, 389.

² Scott to Taylor, Jan. 26, 1847; *ibid.*, 864.