

## CHAPTER XLI

### CHIHUAHUA AND VERA CRUZ

WHEN General Kearny started upon his march from New Mexico to California near the end of September, 1846, he left behind him at Santa Fe a regiment of Missouri volunteers under Colonel Alexander W. Doniphan.<sup>1</sup> Shortly afterward another regiment from Missouri under Colonel Sterling Price arrived in New Mexico, and, in accordance with the general purposes of the government at Washington, Doniphan set out in command of a small body to march to Chihuahua, where it was expected that he would effect a junction with General Wool's force marching from San Antonio.<sup>2</sup> So far as Wool was concerned, the plan was impracticable, owing, in the first place, to physical difficulties of which the authorities in Washington were ignorant, and, in the second place, because it proved to be much more important that Wool should unite with Taylor than with Doniphan.

Further orders from Kearny directed that before proceeding to Chihuahua Doniphan and his regiment should march into the Navajo country, cause all the prisoners and stolen property held by those Indians to be given up, and "require of them such security for their future good conduct as he may think ample and sufficient, by taking hostages or otherwise." How skilfully Doniphan executed this order, how he made a treaty with the Navajos, and how he brought about peace between the Navajos and the Zuñi Indians, need not be here related. His work was finished early in December,

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter XXXV, above.

<sup>2</sup> Kearny's orders No. 30 merely directed Doniphan to "proceed with his regiment to report to Brigadier-General Wool" at Chihuahua, five hundred and fifty miles away, in the very heart of an enemy's country!

and he was then ready to begin his long march to El Paso and Chihuahua.<sup>1</sup>

The town of El Paso was then held by a small detachment of Mexican troops, while Doniphan's men were assembled at Valverde, nearly two hundred miles further up the Rio Grande. His entire force, when he started upon his journey to Chihuahua, consisted of eight hundred and fifty-six effective mounted men, all armed with rifles; but he had ordered a battery of artillery with a hundred men to follow and join him at the earliest moment.

The march began about the middle of December, 1846, the rear guard, with the wagon-train and Doniphan himself, leaving Valverde on the nineteenth. The column suffered great hardship in toiling through the desert (the *Jornada del Muerto*), which they were compelled to cross for a distance of about ninety miles; but at last, on the afternoon of Christmas Day, the advance, consisting of about five hundred men, had reached a point twenty-five miles from El Paso, where they pitched their camp at a place called Brazito, where an island divides the Rio Grande into two arms or branches, the smaller of the two being on the easterly side of the valley, on which the Americans camped. The wagon-trains, escorted by the remainder of Doniphan's command, were several miles in the rear.

At about three o'clock in the afternoon the men at the camp were engaged in the usual occupations of obtaining wood and water for cooking purposes and forage for their animals, when a large cloud of dust to the southward announced the approach of a Mexican force. As subsequently ascertained by the Americans, this force consisted of 1,220 men, of whom 537 were cavalry, with one piece of artillery. They were in part regular troops and in part local militia or volunteers.

The American line was at once formed, facing eastward, with its back to the river, both wings being somewhat refused; and the Mexican line was formed about half a mile

<sup>1</sup> For an account of Doniphan's Indian campaign, see Hughes, 143-203; Connelley, 266-316.

away, facing and overlapping at each end the American line.

The skirmish seems to have consisted of a general advance by the Mexican force, firing wildly and ineffectually as it came on, until it was met and repulsed by an accurate and sudden fire from the American rifles—a part of the Americans, at least, lying flat upon their faces and reserving their fire until the Mexicans came within sixty paces. This novel method of awaiting attack seems to have surprised and deceived the Mexican forces; and as the hitherto silent American line delivered their volley at short range, the Mexicans fell back to the hills in disorder, some of them retreating along the plain and some of them taking refuge on the heights. They were pursued by the Americans for about a mile. A part of the Mexican force continued their flight to Chihuahua, while the local troops appear to have dispersed to their homes. The affair did not last more than twenty minutes.

According to American accounts, the Mexican losses were 43 killed, about 150 wounded, and 5 prisoners; while the Americans had but seven wounded. The Mexican howitzer, with a quantity of munitions of war, fell into Doniphan's hands.<sup>1</sup>

Doniphan's wagon-train and the rest of his men came up during the evening, and on the following morning the whole force resumed their advance, meeting with no further opposition. They crossed the Rio Grande and entered El Paso on the twenty-eighth of December, Doniphan agreeing to respect the lives and property of all citizens who remained peaceable and neutral during the war.<sup>2</sup>

At El Paso Doniphan remained for six weeks, very much to the satisfaction of his men who found the comforts of the village—situated in the midst of smiling fields which for more than two centuries had been irrigated and well culti-

<sup>1</sup> See Doniphan's Official Report; Sen. Doc. 1, 30 Cong., 1 sess., 497. Hughes, 260-267; Edwards, *Campaign in New Mexico*, 52-57; Connelley, 370-378; *Apuntes para la Historia de la Guerra*, 139-143.

<sup>2</sup> The town which then went by the name of El Paso is now known as Ciudad Juarez. The present town of El Paso, on the north or east bank of the Rio Grande, was founded some time afterward.

vated—extremely seductive after the hardships and labors they had undergone almost continuously since leaving Missouri, six months before. At length, however, the expected reinforcements of artillery arrived, and on the evening of February 8, 1847, Doniphan set out with 924 men and six guns, his own wagon-train, and 315 wagons belonging to American merchants who were conveying goods in the ordinary course of their business to the city of Chihuahua.

For more than two weeks the march was uneventful through a desolate country, and was entirely unopposed. On the day of the battle of Buena Vista the caravan was still eighty-four miles north of the city of Chihuahua. Marching steadily forward, Doniphan learned on the twenty-seventh of February that the Mexican troops occupied in force a strong position, known as the Pass of the Sacramento, some eighteen miles north of the city—a position which, it seems he had previously learned through Indian sources, could readily be turned.

At the point where the Mexican army awaited the arrival of the Americans the road to Chihuahua crossed at right angles a low ridge lying between two streams which ran from west to east, directly across the line of the American advance. The first of these—dry in the month of February—was the Arroyo Seco; the second, beyond the ridge occupied by the Mexicans, was the Rio Sacramento. To the American left the ridge rose abruptly out of the plain, and there the Mexican army was strongly intrenched, with artillery commanding the road for a considerable distance. Their line of earthworks ran along the edge of the bluff at the easterly end of the ridge, and then turned off at a point just east of the road, and ran south, parallel with it. One or two other guns were in position on a hill south of the Rio Sacramento. To the west of the road the ridge fell gradually away for a considerable distance, so that about a mile from the point where the road crossed the ridge it was possible for wagons and artillery to ascend the slope and continue along the ridge to join the road again.

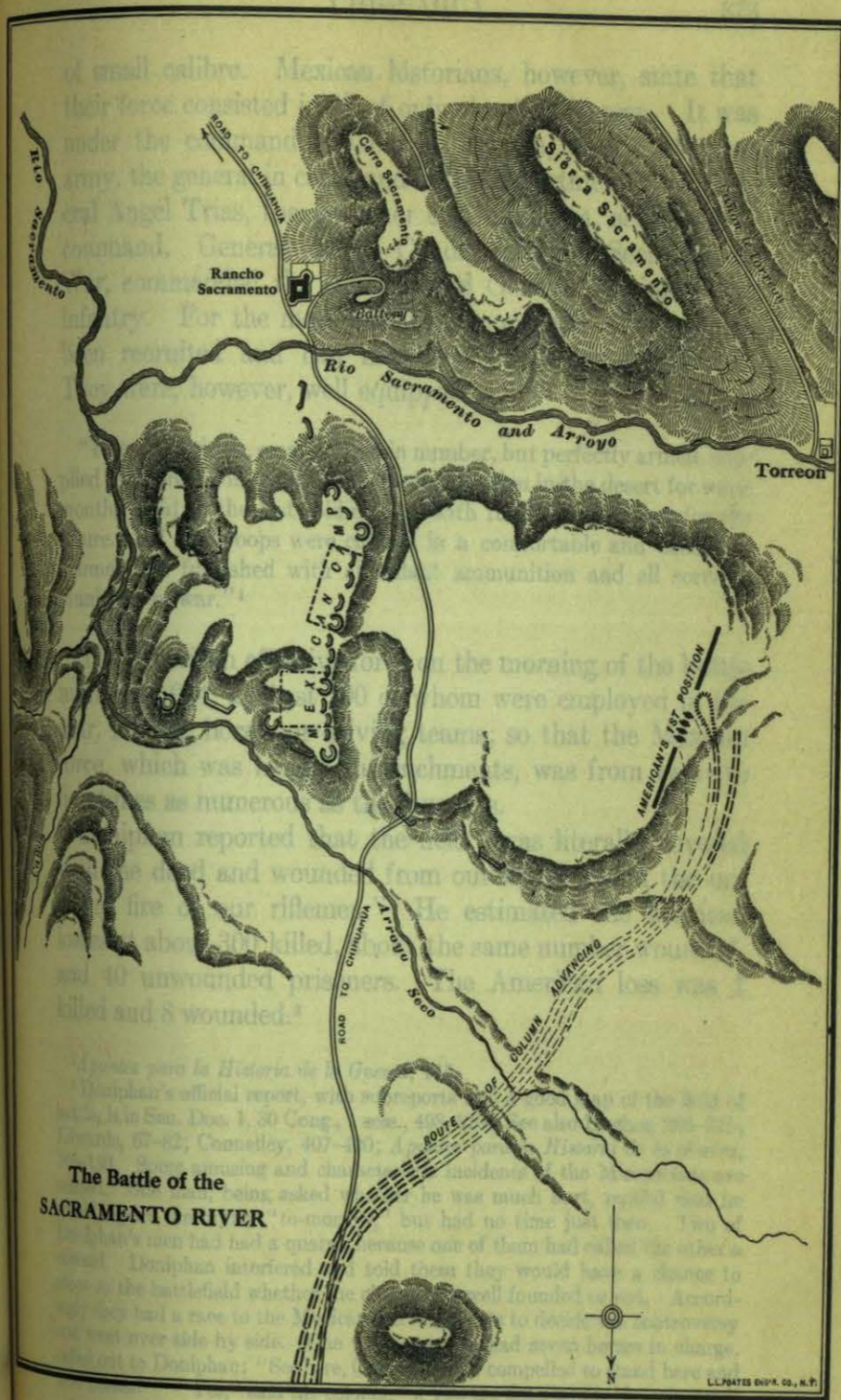
Starting at daylight from his camp at a hacienda by the

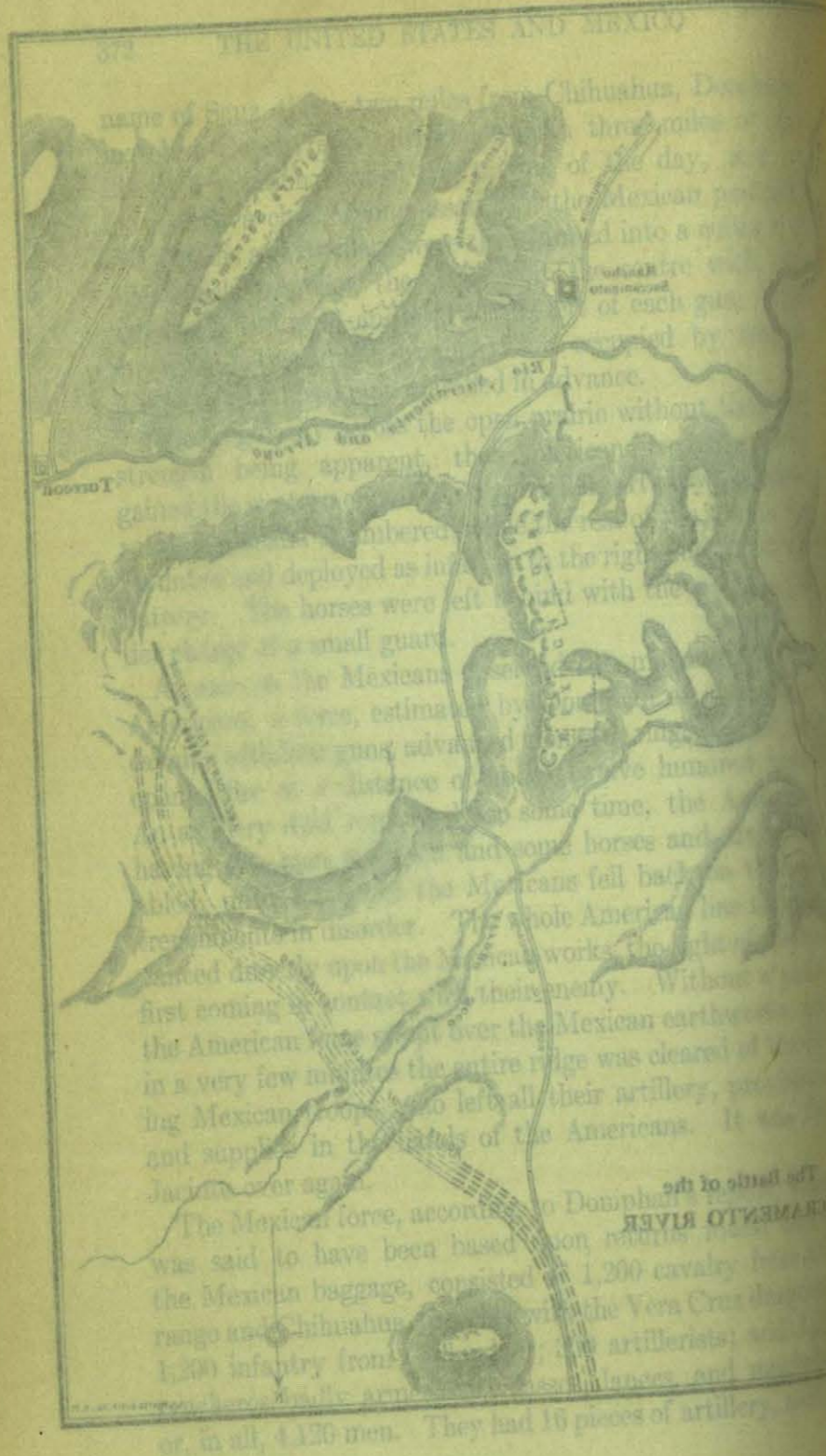
name of Sauz, thirty-two miles from Chihuahua, Doniphan marched eleven miles, arriving within three miles of the Mexican position toward the middle of the day, and at once made a close reconnoissance of the Mexican position. His wagons and artillery were then formed into a column of five vehicles abreast, the artillery in the centre with two wagons to the right and two to the left of each gun. The intervals between the wagons were occupied by troops. About two hundred men marched in advance.

Sweeping easily across the open prairie without their full strength being apparent, the American troops rapidly gained the western end of the ridge. The artillery was there run forward and unlimbered, while the rest of the troops dismounted and deployed as infantry to the right and left of the battery. The horses were left behind with the wagons, under charge of a small guard.

As soon as the Mexicans observed this movement of the Americans, a force, estimated by Doniphan at a thousand cavalry with four guns, advanced along the ridge, halted, and opened fire at a distance of about twelve hundred yards. An artillery duel continued for some time, the Americans having two men wounded and some horses and mules disabled, until at length the Mexicans fell back on their intrenchments in disorder. The whole American line then advanced directly upon the Mexican works, the right of the line first coming in contact with their enemy. Without a pause the American force swept over the Mexican earthworks, and in a very few minutes the entire ridge was cleared of the flying Mexican troops, who left all their artillery, provisions, and supplies in the hands of the Americans. It was San Jacinto over again.

The Mexican force, according to Doniphan's report, which was said to have been based upon returns found among the Mexican baggage, consisted of 1,200 cavalry from Durango and Chihuahua, together with the Vera Cruz dragoons; 1,200 infantry from Chihuahua; 300 artillerists; and 1,420 rancheros badly armed with lassos, lances, and machetes; or, in all, 4,120 men. They had 16 pieces of artillery, mostly





of small calibre. Mexican historians, however, state that their force consisted in all of only about 2,000 men. It was under the command of General Heredia, of the Mexican army, the general in command of this department, with General Angel Trias, the governor of Chihuahua, as second in command. General García Conde, formerly Secretary of War, commanded the cavalry, and General Justiniani the infantry. For the most part the troops had only recently been recruited and had not been previously under fire. They were, however, well equipped.

"It was a division, small indeed in number, but perfectly armed, supplied with provisions of all kinds for a campaign in the desert for some months, paid to the last soldier, and with funds in the chest for the future. All the troops were clothed in a comfortable and becoming manner and furnished with abundant ammunition and all sorts of munitions of war."<sup>1</sup>

The American effective force on the morning of the battle numbered 924, at least 100 of whom were employed in the rear, holding horses or driving teams; so that the Mexican force, which was behind intrenchments, was from twice to five times as numerous as the invaders.

Doniphan reported that the field "was literally covered with the dead and wounded from our artillery and the unerring fire of our riflemen." He estimated the Mexican losses at about 300 killed, about the same number wounded, and 40 unwounded prisoners. The American loss was 1 killed and 8 wounded.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Apuntes para la Historia de la Guerra, 145.

<sup>2</sup>Doniphan's official report, with subreports and a good map of the field of battle, is in Sen. Doc. 1, 30 Cong., 1 sess., 498-513. See also Hughes, 286-315; Edwards, 67-82; Connelley, 407-420; Apuntes para la Historia de la Guerra, 146-150. Some amusing and characteristic incidents of the Missourians are related. One man, being asked whether he was much hurt, replied that he would report the injury "to-morrow," but had no time just then. Two of Doniphan's men had had a quarrel because one of them had called the other a coward. Doniphan interfered and told them they would have a chance to show on the battlefield whether the charge was well founded or not. Accordingly they had a race to the Mexican intrenchments to decide the controversy and went over side by side. One volunteer who had seven horses in charge, called out to Doniphan: "See here, Colonel! am I compelled to stand here and hold horses?" "Yes," said the colonel, "if you are detailed for the purpose."

On the next day, March 1, 1847, without any further opposition from the Mexican forces, Doniphan and his men took possession of the city of Chihuahua, releasing a number of American merchants who had been arrested and held in prison for some time previously. Benton's friend, James Magoffin, who had been among them, was not found, as he had been carried off by the Mexican troops in their hasty retreat toward Durango.

At Chihuahua Doniphan remained for about two months, preserving good order in the city, apparently to the entire satisfaction of the inhabitants. When he arrived, his information (received, of course, from Mexican sources) was that General Wool, to whom he had been directed to report, was shut up in Saltillo by Santa Anna.

"Our position," he wrote, "will be ticklish, if Santa Anna should compel Taylor and Wool even to fall back. All Durango, Zacatecas and Chihuahua will be down upon my little army. We are out of the reach of help, and it would be as unsafe to go backward as forward.— High spirits and a bold front, is perhaps the best and the safest policy. My men are rough, ragged, and ready, having one more of the R's than Gen. Taylor himself. We have been in service nine months, and my men, after marching two thousand miles, over mountains and deserts, have not received one dollar of their pay, yet they stand it without murmuring. Half rations, hard marches, and no clothes! but they are still game to the last, and curse and praise their country by turns, but fight for her all the time."<sup>1</sup>

It was not until March 18 that Doniphan received news through the Mexican newspapers of the result of the battle of Buena Vista, which they claimed as a victory. But as the Mexican forces had retreated to San Luis Potosí, Doniphan thought it safe to send a small body of men with despatches to General Wool begging to be allowed to join Taylor's army and protesting against remaining in Chihuahua "as a mere wagon guard, to garrison a city with troops wholly un-

The volunteer tied the seven bridles together, threw them down, seized his rifle and started off to join the troops in the charge on the breastworks, with the casual remark to those near him: "Hold hell, in a fight! I didn't come here to hold horses—I can do that at home."

<sup>1</sup> Hughes, 334.

fitted for it, and who will be soon wholly ruined by improper indulgences."

Travelling rapidly over the six hundred and seventy-five miles which separated Doniphan from Wool, the party arrived at Saltillo and delivered their despatches on the second of April. A week later the party, reinforced by a company of the Arkansas cavalry, set out on their return, reaching Chihuahua on April 22. Doniphan with his whole force shortly afterward abandoned that city, and, marching steadily and peaceably across the country, reached their destination without molestation. On May 22 the command was reviewed close to the field of Buena Vista by General Wool, who highly complimented them in general orders. Their term of enlistment being now nearly up, the Missouri volunteers were marched from Saltillo to the mouth of the Rio Grande, where they were embarked for New Orleans, and finally reached their homes about the beginning of July.

Doniphan's expedition from Santa Fe to Chihuahua, and thence back to the United States, had, of course, no direct influence upon the course of the war; but indirectly it served to demonstrate two facts: first, the efficiency of American volunteers in marching and fighting, and, second, the apathy of the great mass of the Mexican population. At both El Paso and Chihuahua Doniphan, with a mere handful of men, had occupied populous towns without the least trouble. He had marched for an immense distance on the journey from New Mexico to Saltillo, partly through deserts and partly through well-settled districts, without any opposition except such as he experienced from the organized Mexican forces. He had apparently the hearty good-will of the inhabitants of every locality through which he passed.

The same thing had been already experienced in a remarkable degree by Taylor and Wool. The American authorities had anticipated the possibility of a prolonged guerilla warfare, for which the country they occupied was well adapted, but nothing of the sort was experienced. In the rural districts, as in the cities, the Americans were generally received with kindness, and the people, after recovering from

their natural impulses of fright, were quite ready to supply them with any quantity of provisions and forage. The fact probably was that the great mass of the Mexican population of Indian descent had no national feeling or impulses of patriotism, and looked upon Americans or Spaniards as being very much the same sort of people—incomprehensible, irresistible, stronger than the native races, and made to be silently obeyed. Whatever opposition the Americans experienced during the whole war came, in general, from unwilling forces organized and led by men of Spanish descent.

Doniphan's spectacular success served also to confirm the Mexican hopelessness. Though the Spanish element might characteristically refuse to look the unpleasant fact in the face, and might try to postpone the evil day when they must own they were beaten, yet inevitably, in their hearts, they began to look upon the American soldiery as invincible. The Mexican army, on its part, began to acquire the habit of defeat. In every conflict thus far they had been worsted, and every new disaster must have added to the despairing sense of an inevitable doom. An attack from a new quarter now came, to add to their difficulties.

While General Taylor on the twenty-third and Colonel Doniphan on the twenty-eighth of February were winning their battles at Buena Vista and the Sacramento Pass, General Scott was assembling his forces for the projected attack upon Vera Cruz. His original orders had been intentionally vague and indefinite. He had simply been ordered to repair to Mexico and take command of an expedition to operate on the Gulf coast, and he was told that "it is not proposed to control your operations by definite and positive instructions."<sup>1</sup> The whole subject of the projected expedition had, however, been quite fully discussed verbally, as well as in written memoranda submitted by Scott to Marcy, and the subject was thus very fully understood.

Scott before leaving Washington had made arrangements, through the general staff of the army, to procure surf-boats

<sup>1</sup> Marcy to Scott, Nov. 23, 1846; H. R. Doc. 60, 30 Cong., 1 sess., 372.

to land the troops, to obtain transports, and to have ordnance stores and other supplies in readiness for the expedition; and he informed the Secretary of War that he had, through the general staff of the army, "laid a sufficient basis for the purposes" of the command.

Going by way of New York, and thence by sea, he reached New Orleans on December 19, where he remained for four or five days, continuing his preparations for the forwarding of men and supplies.<sup>1</sup> The troops that were to follow him from Gulf ports were to be collected at Pensacola and New Orleans, and with those sailing from Atlantic ports were to assemble off Lobos Island, a point some time before selected as a rendezvous.<sup>2</sup>

Sailing from New Orleans on the twenty-fourth of December, Scott, while on his journey, wrote to Commodore Conner, then commanding the blockading squadron off Vera Cruz, asking him to study particularly the best location for landing troops on the beach near Vera Cruz, and explaining the plans for a rendezvous of all the army transports under the lee of Lobos Island.<sup>3</sup>

On arriving at the Rio Grande, Scott, as has been already seen, proceeded up the river to Camargo and sent orders for detaching Worth's division, in addition to Twiggs's division of regulars and Patterson's division of volunteers, who were already on the march to Tampico. Returning to Point Isabel, Scott waited in the greatest impatience for the arrival of the transports and the additional volunteers. But everything seemed to him to go wrong. The vessels he had relied upon did not appear, Worth's division did not arrive as early

<sup>1</sup> President Polk thought that Scott at this time was "wasting himself in most extravagant preparations," and making a "parade before the public." "His vanity is such that he could not keep the most important secrets of the Government which were given to him."—(Polk's *Diary*, II, 394.)

<sup>2</sup> Scott to Marcy, Dec. 21 and 23, 1846; H. R. Doc. 60, 30 Cong., 1 sess., 838, 840.

<sup>3</sup> Scott to Conner, Dec. 26, 1846; *ibid.*, 846, 847. The quartermaster-general of the army, writing at the same time to the War Department, said that the anchorage near Lobos Island was perhaps the best on the Gulf—sufficient for a hundred ships, well sheltered from the northers. "The English have used this anchorage for their smuggling operations for more than a century."—(Jesup to Marcy, Dec. 27, 1846; *ibid.*, 568.)

as he had hoped, and two-thirds of the ordnance and ordnance stores and half the surf-boats had not been heard from.

"Perhaps no expedition," he wrote, "was ever so unaccountably delayed—by no want of foresight, arrangement, or energy on my part, as I dare affirm—under circumstances the most critical to this entire army; for every body relied upon, knew from the first, as well as I knew, that it would be fatal for us to attempt military operations on the coast after, probably, the first week in April."<sup>1</sup>

But at last Worth's division arrived (having really marched very rapidly from Saltillo), and Patterson reported his arrival at Tampico accompanied by Twiggs's division on January 23, with Pillow and Quitman close at hand. The total force of Scott's army was then estimated at 13,660 men, including the new volunteers.<sup>2</sup>

On February 15 Scott left the Brazos de Santiago, stopped at Tampico for a day, and arrived off Lobos Island, where he found the anchorage even better than he had anticipated, and perfectly secure against northerly gales. A case of small-pox having been brought down by one of the Pennsylvania regiments of volunteers, the men were landed on the island so as to give an opportunity for ventilating and fumigating the ship, and other troops were also landed and drilled while waiting the arrival of additional men and supplies. A few of the surf-boats were launched and found to be "admirably adapted for the purposes for which they were intended."<sup>3</sup>

While at anchor at Lobos Island General Scott also utilized the time to organize his army. There were to be two divisions of regulars—one under Worth, the other under Twiggs—while the third division, consisting of volunteers, was to be under General Patterson, and was to be divided into three brigades, under Generals Quitman, Pillow, and Shields, respectively.

<sup>1</sup> Scott to Marcy, Feb. 28, 1847; *ibid.*, 897.

<sup>2</sup> Patterson to Scott, Jan. 24, 1847, and memorandum of Adjutant-General H. L. Scott; *ibid.*, 879.

<sup>3</sup> The daily events at Lobos Island during the stay of the troops, from the point of view of a private of a Pennsylvania regiment, will be found related in J. Jacob Oswald's *Notes of the Mexican War*, 57-63.

Robert Patterson was a merchant of Philadelphia, a native of Ireland, and was now just fifty-five years old. He was the son of a leader in the unfortunate Irish rebellion of 1798, and had been brought to America as a mere child. When only sixteen years old he was given a commission in the United States army near the close of the War of 1812, where he does not appear to have seen much fighting; and from the close of that war, when his company was disbanded, he was active in the affairs of the Philadelphia militia. He had had no other experience to qualify him for the command of troops. He had, however, been continuously in service on the Rio Grande since the early summer of 1846, receiving and organizing the new troops, and must have acquired some knowledge of military routine.

Of the three volunteer brigadier-generals, Quitman was the only one who had thus far actually been engaged, his brigade having borne an active and efficient part in the capture of Monterey. Gideon J. Pillow has already figured in this book as the chairman of the Tennessee delegation to the Democratic convention which nominated Polk. Having succeeded unexpectedly well in that command, he was appointed brigadier-general in July, 1846, and was sent at first to the Rio Grande; but he saw no active service until Vera Cruz. James Shields, the third brigadier-general, was born in Ireland in 1810, and came to the United States when he was sixteen. He practised law and politics at Kankakee, became a judge of the Supreme Court of Illinois, and later was appointed commissioner of the general land office in Washington when the Democrats came in. He was appointed a brigadier-general as of July 1, 1846, and he also saw no active service until he joined Scott.

Pillow's brigade consisted of the first and second Tennessee, the first and second Pennsylvania regiments, and one battery of artillery. Quitman's brigade was made up of the South Carolina, Georgia, and Alabama regiments; and Shields's of one New York and two Illinois regiments. Only the first Tennessee had ever been in battle.

During the ten days that Scott lay at Lobos Island, chafing