

camp. But by this time Riley's troops had gained the shelter of the orchards near San Gerónimo, and a charge of the Mexican cavalry, in which General Frontera was killed at the head of his men, was quickly repulsed. The Mexicans, indeed, appear to have had little enthusiasm in their charge, and when their leader fell the whole body retired, and Riley's brigade continued through and beyond the village.

Meanwhile, Cadwalader had struggled across the Pedregal, descended into the ravine, and reached the San Angel road, when he became aware of a large body of Mexican troops advancing from the direction of the city of Mexico. Cadwalader was therefore between two bodies of the enemy, but he faced toward his new assailants and the latter did not attack. Instead, they moved off west of the road to occupy a hill lying between the villages of San Angel and San Gerónimo.

Pillow, perceiving the arrival of these Mexican reinforcements at about the same time that Cadwalader saw them, directed Morgan's regiment of Pierce's brigade to join Cadwalader; and at the same time General Smith, with his brigade of Twiggs's division, followed Morgan without specific orders. The remaining regiments of Pierce's brigade were thereupon moved forward to the support of the batteries and down the slopes of the ravine, occupying the place which Smith's brigade had thus far held. This position they continued to hold during the night, except that a body of Mexicans took and kept possession of the ranch buildings of Padierna.

While these several movements were going on, and somewhere about three or four o'clock in the afternoon, Scott himself arrived from San Agustín. By that time Riley and Cadwalader were in possession of the ranch of Ansaldo and the village of San Gerónimo, Riley having fallen back to the shelter of the village to join Cadwalader when he found a large force of cavalry under General Torrejón in his front. Scott saw at once that if San Gerónimo were strongly occupied by a force of infantry, such a force could arrest the re-

inforcements which Santa Anna was apparently sending from the city of Mexico, and thus ultimately decide the battle—which had now developed into a much more serious affair than he had at first intended. He therefore approved the dispositions made by Pillow; and when General Shields, with his volunteer brigade of Quitman's division (New York and South Carolina), came up from San Agustín somewhat later, Scott ordered Shields to follow and join the advanced forces at San Gerónimo.

The Mexican reinforcements from the direction of the city were, in fact, under the command of Santa Anna in person. He had received news at about two o'clock in the afternoon that the Americans were attacking Valencia's position, and he at once sent forward the brigade of General Francisco Pérez, then stationed at Coyoacán. He himself followed with his regiment of hussars and the light cavalry of Vera Cruz, together with a field-battery of five pieces. It was, as he reported, five o'clock in the afternoon when this whole force arrived near San Gerónimo, though the American reports would indicate that he was really upon the ground an hour or two earlier. He found it impossible to effect a junction with Valencia.

"There was," he wrote, "only one practicable road from San Angel to Padierna, very narrow, and commanded right and left by the positions which some of the enemy's battalions had seized. I endeavored to march by the flank, and I assured myself by examinations of the ground and by my own observation that the operation was not easy during what remained of that evening, since an advance on the right was impeded by a deep ravine which extended more than a league toward some hills on the southwest of San Angel; and there were enclosures and broken ground on the left; and as night came on while these reconnaissances were being made, there was nothing to do but to encamp and wait for daylight. A terrible tempest followed, accompanied by copious rain, which compelled me to order the infantry to take shelter in the neighboring village of San Angel, with orders to return at daybreak to their proper camp; in which I left the cavalry and artillery, who passed a cruel night because it continued to rain incessantly until morning."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Apelacion al buen Criterio*, App., 98.

The American troops meanwhile, all but Shields's brigade, had assembled in the village of San Gerónimo and between that and Ansaldo, facing Santa Anna, and General Smith, who took command of the whole body as the senior brigadier present, entertained an idea of attempting an immediate attack upon Santa Anna's troops, but the swift tropical night was falling and it was wisely determined not to begin the movement. Shields crossed the high-road after dark, halted to rest his men, and joined Smith's command at about ten o'clock at night—or possibly near midnight.

While the American infantry was thus pushing in between Valencia and Santa Anna, Scott, Twiggs, and Pillow had remained at the hill of Zacatepec, for it was quite impossible for any horse to follow the route pursued by the American infantry, and Twiggs was lame and unable to accompany his division on foot. At sunset Scott returned to headquarters at San Agustín, where he was joined later by Twiggs and Pillow, who, in trying to find Pierce's brigade, had lost their way, and had almost ridden into Valencia's camp.

At eleven o'clock that night Captain Robert E. Lee came in from San Gerónimo, having managed to make his way through the darkness and falling rain in spite of innumerable dangers and difficulties.<sup>1</sup> Lee reported that the commanding officers at San Gerónimo had determined to make an attack upon the rear of Valencia's position immediately before daylight on the following morning, and that in order to support this movement they wished "a powerful diversion" to be made on the front of Valencia's position. The plan was cordially approved by Scott, who directed that one brigade of Worth's division, and the remaining brigade of Quitman's division, should start at the earliest practicable moment—which would not be until daylight—to join Pierce's brigade. Twiggs and Lee then set out and rejoined Pierce that night; but Pillow, worn out with the fatigues of the day, was urged by Scott to remain at headquarters until morning—which he did.

<sup>1</sup> "The greatest feat of physical and moral courage performed by any individual, in my knowledge, pending the campaign."—(Testimony of General Scott in Pillow's court of inquiry; Sen. Doc. 65, 30 Cong., 1 sess., 73.)

Meanwhile the American force at San Gerónimo passed some bitterly uncomfortable hours. The night was excessively cold and unusually rainy, and the men—exposed to the weather, without tents, and with little food—suffered severely. Fortunately for them, the Mexican troops were suffering quite as much from the elements and exhibited no desire to renew the conflict of the afternoon. Santa Anna remained at San Ángel, waiting for daylight, while Valencia in his camp was celebrating what he regarded as the triumphs of the Mexican army. In a despatch dated at eight o'clock that night from "the triumphant camp of Padierna" he reported that after a desperate combat with the whole American army he had put their forces to shameful flight; and that, the honor of the republic having been preserved by the efforts of those under his command, he felt no hesitation in promoting the officers who had had a share "in this heroic day." By a general order to his troops, he thanked them for their distinguished services in repelling the invaders of the republic, and in the name of the nation promoted a number of officers by name.<sup>1</sup> At 9 P. M. he sent a second despatch to the Minister of War, condemning the failure of Santa Anna's troops, "commanded by the criminal General Don Francisco Pérez," who had not only failed to assist him, but had not even sent him a single message to inform him where the enemy was so that he could complete his triumph "and destroy the miserable remains of the Anglo-Americans who are shut up in Ansaldo to the number of two thousand men."<sup>2</sup>

This last despatch was sent as a reply to a verbal order from Santa Anna—transmitted by an aid who had managed to get from San Ángel to the hill of Padierna by a circuitous mountain route—to the effect that Valencia should spike his guns and retire as soon as possible that same night to join the main army. Valencia was further informed that Santa Anna had with him six thousand men, with five guns, but was unable to attack the enemy in consequence of the

<sup>1</sup> Valencia to Minister of War, Aug. 19, 1847; *Apelacion al buen Criterio*, App., 154-160.

<sup>2</sup> Same to same, Aug. 19, 1847; *ibid.*, 155.

ravines which were in his front. But Valencia, without allowing Santa Anna's aid to finish delivering his message, interrupted to say that he had fought the enemy for five hours, that he was now holding him with one battalion of infantry and Torrejon's cavalry, and that he (Valencia) would not retreat. This message, with Valencia's note, was delivered to Santa Anna before morning by the aid who had left Valencia's camp at ten o'clock at night.<sup>1</sup>

At three o'clock in the morning of the next day (Friday, August 20) the American troops from San Gerónimo were punctually ready to start for the attack upon Valencia's rear. The route which they designed to follow was the ravine coming in from the southwest and falling into the main stream just south of the place where the Americans had crossed the latter on the afternoon before. The men were drenched to the skin, cold, and hungry; but these physical discomforts probably served only to sharpen their anxiety for action. The line of the advance had been reconnoitred by Riley on the afternoon before, and was re-examined by engineers and other staff officers during the night; but the ground was so difficult and the night so dark that it was not until nearly daylight that the last of the American troops were out of the village. Riley's brigade led, followed by Cadwalader and then Smith, while Shields was left behind at Ansaldo.

By sunrise the leading American troops had reached a point directly in the rear of Valencia's position and, having drawn their wet loads and renewed the priming of their muskets, made ready to attack. They were still sheltered by the westerly slope of the hill from Valencia's observation, but as they rose to the crest of the hill they found that their movement had just been discovered. With loud shouts the American troops at once dashed from three directions into the left flank and rear of the Mexican intrenchments, where they were received by the hasty fire of two guns which had been turned in their direction, and by a scattering fire of ill-aimed musketry. The Mexicans were naturally in the greatest disorder, for Valencia fled at the very beginning of

<sup>1</sup> Memorandum of J. M. Ramiro; *ibid.*, 155.

the combat and the command devolved upon ex-President Salas, as second in command. Salas ordered the cavalry to charge, but Torrejon, "far from obeying my order, took to cowardly flight, and the cavalry following his example trampled down the infantry and ended by scattering them, thus consummating our defeat." The flying Mexicans gained the San Angel road, and, as they passed near Ansaldo, Shields's brigade opened upon them, while Pierce, who had advanced toward the ranch of Padierna, crossed the stream and joined in the pursuit. The battle itself lasted just seventeen minutes, but the road toward the capital was strewn for miles with the Mexican dead and wounded.

"Thus," as Scott reported, "was the great victory at Contreras achieved; one road to the capital opened; 700 of the enemy killed; 813 prisoners, including, among 88 officers, 4 generals; besides many colors and standards; 22 pieces of brass ordnance—half of large calibre; thousands of small arms and accoutrements; an immense quantity of shot, shells, powder and cartridges; 700 pack mules, many horses, etc., &c.—all in our hands."

Two of the guns taken from Valencia were the brass six-pounders which had been captured from Taylor at the battle of Buena Vista. They were retaken by a company of the fourth artillery—the same regiment which had lost the guns, "though without the loss of honor"—and the achievement was greeted by what a Mexican officer described as "*hurras atronaderas*."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Scott's report of Contreras is in Sen. Doc. 1, 30 Cong., 1 sess., 303-308. Annexed thereto are the reports of his subordinates, which are combined with the reports of the subsequent battle of Churubusco. A great mass of additional information as to the events of that day will be found in the testimony taken by the court of inquiry in the case of General Pillow, who had been charged by Scott with writing untruthful accounts of this battle, in which Scott's own share in it was improperly minimized. The evidence will be found in Sen. Doc. 65, 30 Cong., 1 sess. The findings and opinion of the court exonerating Pillow are at pages 328, 329. The reports of Santa Anna and Anaya are printed in the appendix to the *Apelacion al buen Criterio*, and have been already referred to. For the statements of other eye-witnesses of the battle see *Autobiography of an English Soldier*, 253; Hitchcock, 276-279; Balbontin, 110-118. Reference may also be made to Ripley (who was at this time on Pillow's staff), 211-246; Wilcox, 358-377; and *Apuntes para la Historia de la Guerra*, 231-242.