

CHAPTER XXXVIII

A PLAN OF CAMPAIGN DEVELOPED

ON Sunday evening, the eleventh of October, 1846, despatches were received in Washington announcing the result of Taylor's operations at Monterey. President Polk and his cabinet were not much elated over the news. The earlier despatches from Taylor had not contained anything that would lead to an anticipation of so determined and sanguinary a resistance on the part of the Mexican forces, and the terms of capitulation granted to General Ampudia were such that the President thought them a great mistake.

"In agreeing to this armistice," the President noted at once on receiving the news, "Gen'l Taylor violated his express orders & I regret that I cannot approve his course. He had the enemy in his power & should have taken them prisoners, deprived them of their arms, discharged them on their parole of honour, and preserved the advantage which he had obtained by pushing on without delay further into the country, if the force at his command justified it. Our troops fought well, though with some loss of officers & men. It was a great mistake in Gen'l Taylor to agree to an armistice. It will only enable the Mexican army to reorganize and recruit so as to make another stand."¹

The next morning, at a cabinet meeting, all the members present were unanimous in condemning Taylor's course in granting such terms to the Mexicans, and Taylor's reasons, as stated in his despatch, were considered inadequate. The reasons he had alleged were "the gallant defence of the town" and the fact of the recent change of government in Mexico, which Taylor believed would be favorable to the

¹ Polk's *Diary*, II, 181.

interests of peace.¹ The cabinet were of the opinion that only two valid reasons could have justified Taylor's action; first, that he could not have captured the Mexican army, and, second, that the Mexican government was really disposed to make peace. As to these two reasons, the opinion of the cabinet was thus stated by the President:

"If the first reason existed Gen'l Taylor has not stated it in his despatches, and we have no information to justify the existence of this reason, though it may have existed. If the second reason was the one upon which he acted, then Gen'l Ampudia has overreached & deceived him. . . . The Cabinet were united in the opinion that if Gen'l Taylor had captured the Mexican army, deprived them of their arms, and discharged them upon their parole of honour not to bear arms during the war or until they were regularly exchanged, that it would have probably ended the war with Mexico. . . . It was agreed unanimously that orders should be forthwith sent to Gen'l Taylor to terminate the armistice to which he had agreed, and to prosecute the war with energy and vigor. It was agreed that this should be done in terms neither to approve or condemn his conduct in granting the capitulation and the armistice. All agreed that the officers and men had fought gallantly and deserved the thanks of the country, but regretted that the victory had not been crowned by the capture of the enemy's army."²

On the next day Marcy read to the cabinet a draft of his letter to Taylor, which was "critically and carefully examined," and as finally agreed to was sent from the War Department on the same day. Marcy began by praising the skill, courage, and gallant conduct displayed by the troops, which, he said, merited the warmest expressions of gratitude and praise. The President, however, regretted that Taylor had not deemed it advisable to insist upon the terms which he had first proposed.

"The circumstances which dictated doubtless justified the change. The President, uninformed of these circumstances, does not know in what degree the recent change in the government of Mexico may have contributed to this result. Certain it is, however, that the present rulers of that republic have not yet given any evidence that they are

¹ Taylor to Adjutant-General, Sept. 25, 1846; H. R. Doc. 4, 29 Cong., 2 sess., 79.

² Polk's *Diary*, II, 183-185.

'favorable to the interests of peace.' Of this you will have already been informed by my despatch of the 22d ultimo. . . . The government is fully persuaded that if you had been aware of the special reasons disclosed in the despatch of the 22d ultimo, and the intentions of the government still entertained, you would not have acceded to the suspension of hostilities for even the limited period specified in the articles of capitulation; but as its continuance depends upon the orders of your government, you are instructed to give the requisite notice that the armistice is to cease at once, and that each party is at liberty to resume and prosecute hostilities without restriction."¹

Taylor replied on the eighth of November, giving in much greater detail the reasons which induced him to agree to the terms of capitulation. His force, he said, was inadequate to invest Monterey so closely as to prevent the escape of the garrison. If he had insisted on more rigorous terms than those imposed, the result would have been the escape of the body of the Mexican force, with the destruction of its artillery and magazines at the expense of valuable lives and much damage to the city. The consideration of humanity had outweighed in his judgment the doubtful advantages to be gained by the resumption of the attack upon the town.

"In regard to the temporary cessation of hostilities, the fact that we are not at this moment (within eleven days of the termination of the period fixed by the convention) prepared to move forward in force, is a sufficient explanation of the military reasons which dictated this suspension of arms. It paralyzed the enemy during a period when, from the want of necessary means, we could not possibly move. . . . The task of fighting and beating the enemy is among the least difficult that we encounter: the great question of supplies necessarily controls all the operations in a country like this. . . .

"I have touched the prominent military points involved in the convention of Monterey. There were other considerations which weighed with the commissioners in framing, and with myself in approving, the articles of the convention. In the conference with General Ampudia I was distinctly told by him that he had invited it to spare the further effusion of blood, and because General Santa Anna had declared himself favorable to peace. I knew that our government had made propositions to that of Mexico to negotiate, and I deemed that the change of government in that country since my last instructions fully warranted me in entertaining considerations of policy. My grand motive in mov-

¹ Marcy to Taylor, Oct. 13, 1846; H. R. Doc. 60, 30 Cong., 1 sess., 355.

ing forward with very limited supplies had been to increase the inducements of the Mexican government to negotiate for peace. Whatever may be the actual views or disposition of the Mexican rulers, or of General Santa Anna, it is not unknown to the government that I had the very best reason for believing the statement of General Ampudia to be true. It was my opinion at the time of the convention, and it has not been changed, that the liberal treatment of the Mexican army, and the suspension of arms, would exert none but a favorable influence in our behalf.

"The result of the entire operation has been to throw the Mexican army back more than 300 miles to the city of San Luis Potosi, and to open the country to us, as far as we choose to penetrate it, up to the same point."¹

A newspaper controversy naturally followed, in which the wisdom or unwisdom of Taylor's action was vigorously discussed. His course was warmly defended in a letter published in the *Washington Union* from Taylor's son-in-law, Colonel Jefferson Davis, of the Mississippi regiment, dated January 6, 1847, in which the details of the discussions between the American and Mexican commissioners were set out.²

The armistice agreed to at Monterey was all the more unwelcome at Washington because, prior to learning of the results of Taylor's movements, and about the time when he was beginning his march from Camargo, the authorities had again turned their attention to questions of strategy, and the suspension of hostilities introduced a new element into their problem. They had learned on the first of September of the occupation of California. On the next day a letter was addressed to General Taylor asking for information in relation to the topography of the country in the vicinity of Tampico and his views as to the effect of taking possession

¹ Taylor to Adjutant-General, Nov. 8, 1846; *ibid.*, 359.

² The letter is printed in Reid, 205-209. Davis was one of the commissioners. The others were General Worth and Governor Henderson, of Texas. Jefferson Davis married, in 1835, General Taylor's second daughter, much against her father's will. She died shortly after the marriage. Before the Mexican war, and on the occasion of Davis's second marriage, to Miss Howell, he and General Taylor became reconciled and continued warm friends until the latter's death. The conduct of Taylor in respect to the capitulation is vigorously criticised by Ripley in his *War with Mexico*, I, 257-268, and warmly defended by Stevens in his *Campaigns of the Rio Grande*, etc., 29-32.

of the port and penetrating the enemy's country from that as a base, and also as to the amount and kind of force necessary. It was stated to be the opinion of the War Department that fifteen hundred or two thousand men would be enough to take and hold possession of Tampico.¹ The original of this letter never reached Taylor, but falling into Mexican hands seems to have been the cause of the subsequent hasty abandonment of Tampico.

Without knowledge of the loss of this despatch, the War Department on the twenty-second of September, at the very moment Taylor was attacking Monterey, addressed him another letter, based upon the assumption that by the time he received it he would have reached Monterey and perhaps Saltillo, and would be able to offer a definite opinion of the possibility of progressing beyond the latter point. The immediate incident which called out this letter was the receipt on the nineteenth of September of Rejón's reply to the overtures for peace.² The President, on reading the reply, had reached the conclusions that Tampico should be seized at once, that the mode of carrying on the war with Mexico should be changed, and that instead of paying for supplies they should be levied on the country. The despatch to Taylor of September 22, therefore enclosed a copy of Rejón's reply, and instructed Taylor to levy contributions on the country, provided he was satisfied he could get abundant supplies for his forces in that manner, but otherwise he was to get what he could by purchase.³ The despatch then went on to state the intentions of the government as to the next campaign. The plan of the American government was stated to be to take possession of the department of Tamaulipas, or some of the principal places in it, at the earliest practicable period. A force of three or four thousand men, acting in co-operation with the navy,

¹ Marcy to Taylor, Sept. 2, 1846; H. R. Doc. 60, 30 Cong., 1 sess., 339, 340.

² See page 245, above.

³ Taylor replied to this part of the letter in a separate despatch, to the effect that unless he paid for what the army needed he could get nothing. The plan of levying on the country he considered entirely impracticable.—(Taylor to Adjutant-General, Oct. 26, 1846; H. R. Doc. 60, 30 Cong., 1 sess., 354.)

was thought to be necessary for this purpose; but the government was still without "sufficiently accurate knowledge of the country to determine definitely as to the manner of conducting this enterprise." Orders had been given to the navy to take Tampico, and it was expected that the place would be captured by them before Taylor's troops could reach that point.¹

At the same time, a copy of the despatch to Taylor was sent to General Patterson, in command of the troops on the Rio Grande, and he was very injudiciously informed that the land expedition into southern Tamaulipas would be under his immediate command, and his views as to the amount of force necessary were requested. Patterson was directed to reply "without the delay of sending through General Taylor," and to give his opinions and state all the facts having a bearing on the proposed expedition.²

Taylor received the Secretary's letter of the twenty-second of September at Monterey about October 12, and replied to it in detail on October 15. He pointed out, in the first place, that, under the terms of the armistice, the proposed advance could not at once be made. In the next place, he stated that Ampudia's force had fallen back from Saltillo to San Luis Potosí, where it had joined the main body of the Mexican army.³

"Whether the withdrawal of the forces to San Luis be intended to draw us into the country, far from supplies and support, or whether it be a political movement connected with Santa Anna's return to power, it is impossible to say; it is sufficient for my present argument to know that a heavy force is assembling in our front. . . . In view of the above facts, I hazard nothing in saying that a column, to move on San Luis from Saltillo, should, to insure success, be at least 20,000 strong, of which 10,000 should be regular troops. After much reflection, I consider the above as the smallest number of *effective* troops that could be employed on this service, without incurring the hazard of disaster, and perhaps defeat. There would be required, besides, to

¹ Marcy to Taylor, Sept. 22, 1846; *ibid.*, 341.

² Marcy to Patterson, Sept. 22, 1846; *ibid.*, 344.

³ This force, when it joined Santa Anna, numbered 5,795.—(Santa Anna, *Apelacion al buen Criterio*, App., 66.)

keep open our long line, protect the depots, and secure the country already gained, a force of 5,000 men; this without including the force necessary to send to Tampico, to take or hold that place."

As to a simultaneous movement on San Luis and Tampico, suggested in Marcy's letter of September 22, Taylor said that as he had only half the force that he considered necessary to march on one of the points, it would be quite impossible to march on both. In case of an advance on San Luis, he considered the possession of Tampico indispensable; but he had not previously suggested it on account of "the known exposure of the place to the ravages of yellow fever." Under all these circumstances, he thought it was for the government to determine whether to prosecute the war by directing an active campaign against San Luis and the capital, or whether the country already gained should be held and a defensive attitude assumed. In the latter case, "the general line of the Sierra Madre" might very well be taken; but even then, with the enemy in force in his front, it might be imprudent to detach three or four thousand men. If, therefore, the co-operation of the army was deemed essential to the success of the expedition against Tampico, he trusted it would be postponed for the present.

On the whole, he was of the opinion that the best course to take was to occupy a defensive line along the Rio Grande; or, if a larger army could be spared, to establish a line with a strong force at Monterey, and an advance at Saltillo, with small bodies at Santa Fe, Chihuahua, Monclova, Linares, Victoria, and Tampico. If, however, the government determined "to strike a decisive blow at Mexico," he was of opinion that the force should land near Vera Cruz and march thence on the capital. For this service he thought an army of twenty-five thousand men, of which at least ten thousand should be regular troops, would be required. He ended with a vigorous protest against orders being sent directly to his subordinates from the War Department.¹

¹ Taylor to Adjutant-General, Oct. 15, 1846; *ibid.*, 351-354. The line traced by Taylor from Santa Fe to Tampico would have been not less than fourteen hundred miles long.

Owing doubtless to difficulties of communication, Taylor's letter—which was far from offering a clear-cut solution of the problems of the war—was not received in Washington until November 20. It produced a very bad impression upon the President's mind.

"It was written," he noted, "in bad temper, and was wholly unwarranted by the despatch of the Secretary of War to which it was a reply. . . . I was very indignant at Gen'l Taylor's letter & directed the Secretary of War to prepare a proper answer. It is perfectly manifest that Gen'l Taylor is very hostile to the administration and seeks a cause of quarrel with it. This he shall not have unless he places himself wholly in the wrong, as indeed he has already done. He is evidently a weak man and has been made giddy with the idea of the presidency. He is most ungrateful for I promoted him, as I now think beyond his deserts, and without reference to his politics. I am now satisfied that he is a narrow minded bigoted partisan, without resources and wholly unqualified for the command he holds."¹

But while Taylor was writing the letter which gave so much offence—and of course more than a month before its receipt in Washington—the cabinet had come to the conclusion that an expedition to Vera Cruz was perfectly practicable and that the town could be taken, with the co-operation of the navy, by landing a force of no more than three or four thousand men.² Having reached this conclusion, the President next brought before the cabinet the very important question—

"whether Gen'l Taylor should advance with the main column of the army further into the interior of Mexico than Monterey where he now is, or whether he should hold & fortify that position and also hold the adjacent Northern Provinces, and send a part of his force to co-operate with the expedition ordered on the 22nd ultimo to invade Tamaulipas and by a combined operation of the Navy and the army to take Tampico and, if practicable, Vera Cruz. The subject was fully discussed, and the Cabinet were unanimously of opinion that under existing circumstances Gen'l Taylor should not advance beyond Monterey and the positions necessary to secure that City and the Department of New Leon of which it is the Capital. . . . It was agreed also that Gen'l Taylor should be authorized to stop Gen'l Wool's expedition to Chihuahua, if he deemed it proper to do so. . . .

¹ Polk's *Diary*, II, 249 (Nov. 21, 1846).

² *Ibid.*, 196.

Subsequent events have rendered the objects expected to be attained by the expedition to Chihuahua less certain, & indeed comparatively unimportant. Moreover the contemplated expedition to Tampico and Vera Cruz is regarded as much more important. It was agreed therefore to leave it to Gen'l Taylor's discretion to order Gen'l Wool to abandon the Chihuahua expedition and join the main army, as this would enable Gen'l T. to spare 2,000 additional troops or more for the Tampico and Vera Cruz expedition."

Despatches to the above effect were to be sent to Taylor and were to be carried by Mr. Robert M. McLane, a son of the minister to England, who was also to be intrusted with verbal messages to General Taylor.

"Mr. McLane is a graduate of West Point, was many years in the army, and is a very intelligent gentleman. His mission to the army will be more important than as the mere bearer of despatches."¹

On Thursday, October 22, 1846, the Secretary of War accordingly presented to the cabinet the draft of a despatch to Taylor setting out the views of the cabinet in regard to the prosecution of the war. For more than two hours the subject was under consideration, and the opinion of each member of the cabinet individually was taken. The despatch, as finally agreed upon, was then read to Robert McLane, with whom the President and the Secretary of War had a full conversation in relation to the subject.

Marcy also, with the President's consent, stated the conclusions of the cabinet in confidence to General Scott, who, as Marcy reported, interposed objections to the contemplated Vera Cruz expedition, but expressed a desire to command it himself, and thought that twenty-five thousand men or more were necessary before it could be undertaken with safety. The President, however, dismissed this subject with the short statement that, after Scott's letters of the previous May, he was unwilling to assign him to the command and considered his objections intended to embarrass the administration.²

The despatch of October 22 to Taylor, about which so

¹ *Ibid.*, 198-200.

² *Ibid.*, 204, 205.

much care had been taken, began by stating that Santa Anna was at the head of the war party in Mexico and appeared to have entered with zeal upon his duties as general-in-chief. It was thought not improbable that he might succeed in collecting and keeping together a considerable force, although this might be intended rather for operations against domestic than foreign enemies. This preliminary confession must have cost Polk's government a severe searching of spirit after they had so deliberately facilitated Santa Anna's return to Mexico; but at least it was well for them that they did confess their fault and did fully and frankly recognize the zeal and energy with which Santa Anna was at work collecting an army.

The instructions to Taylor next went on to discuss the difficulties which appeared to exist in the way of his marching beyond Monterey, and the importance of securing his position there and keeping open his line of communication with the Rio Grande. He might use his own discretion in regard to any forward movement, provided the enemy's forces were withdrawn or ascertained to be in small numbers; but it was thought that a permanent position should hardly be taken as far in advance as Saltillo. With respect to General Wool, it was suggested whether it would not be best to have his forces united with those of Taylor's; but precautions were to be taken in that event to secure the safety of the troops which General Kearny was intending to detach for Chihuahua to join Wool at that point.

Taylor was further informed that, "upon a more full consideration of the subject," it was believed that Vera Cruz might be taken; that with the co-operation of the navy four thousand troops would suffice, of which about half should be of the regular army; that it appeared to be scarcely possible to get the requisite number of regulars without withdrawing some of those under Taylor's command; and that if Taylor was not going to make any forward movement, it was presumed the requisite force for the expedition to Vera Cruz could be detached by him without interfering with his plans of operation.

"Whilst the government is anxious that nothing should occur to prevent the expedition to Vera Cruz, regarding it of great importance, yet if by withdrawing from your immediate command the force necessary for this purpose the army with you may be placed in danger, this expedition must, for the present, be either deferred or abandoned; a result deeply to be regretted. . . . It is desirable to avoid delay; you will, therefore, unless it materially interferes with your own plan of operations, or weakens you too much in your present position, make the necessary arrangements for having four thousand men (of whom fifteen hundred or two thousand should be regular troops) ready to embark for Vera Cruz or such other destination as may be given them, at the earliest practicable period."

In conclusion, it was suggested that General Patterson should be placed in command of the expedition against Vera Cruz, that General Worth should command the regulars who were to form a part of his force, and that a brigadier-general to be selected by Taylor should command the volunteers.¹

A copy of this despatch was sent a week later to General Patterson, with the explanation that the fitting out of an expedition to Vera Cruz was a suggestion which depended upon Taylor's concurrence. If he approved of detaching troops for any expedition, it would then become an important question whether such a force should be directed against Vera Cruz or confined to operations in the department of Tamaulipas. The taking of Vera Cruz, it was thought, would strike an effective blow at the enemy; but it was doubted whether a sufficient force could be assembled for that purpose without materially interfering with other operations. If Vera Cruz should, all circumstances considered, be found to be too dangerous an enterprise to be attempted, then an effort should be made by the army to capture Tampico; but definite directions could not be given from Washington, as the movements of the expedition "must depend in a great measure upon the condition of things at the moment of action."²

¹ Marcy to Taylor, Oct. 22, 1846; H. R. Doc. 60, 30 Cong., 1 sess., 363-367.

² Marcy to Patterson, Oct. 28, 1846; *ibid.*, 367, 368.

In all this painful uncertainty only one thing seemed clear. If the proposed expedition under Patterson was to be directed to Vera Cruz it would have no defined object beyond the mere capture of the city—a result which would annoy the Mexicans, relieve the American navy from the difficulty of maintaining an effective blockade, and impress the American people with the idea that something was being done. It could not by any possibility inflict a fatal or even a dangerous blow on Mexico.

These despatches to the generals in the field faithfully portrayed the perplexity of the government at Washington during the month of October. The great object was to avoid the necessity of calling at that time for additional volunteers. The elections for Congress were coming on in the course of a fortnight. It had been the hope of the government that the war would be neither prolonged nor expensive. It was expected that brandishing the sword in one hand and tendering the olive-branch in the other would induce the Mexicans to listen to proposals for buying a peace, and for this purpose Santa Anna's return to Mexico had been encouraged. But it had now become plain to the President that Santa Anna was not to be relied upon, and that peace could only be gained by conquest and after a long and costly war. This unpalatable truth was becoming evident also to the country, and the administration considered it highly impolitic to embark upon extensive expeditions, or to call for new troops, until after the elections should have shown the temper of the American people.

General Taylor, however, had no need of paying attention to considerations of that sort, and he therefore now urged upon the government the necessity for forward movements, which would necessarily require considerable reinforcements.

Before receiving the instructions from the Secretary of War of October 22, Taylor had made up his own mind that the moment the armistice expired he would move forward to Saltillo; and accordingly, on November 8, general orders were issued directing General Worth to march on