

the prospects of their favourite. No sooner is it introduced than a few ultra Southern members are manifestly well satisfied that it has been brought forward, because by seizing upon it they hope to array a Southern party in favour of their favourite candidate for the Presidency. There is no patriotism on either side, & it is a most wicked agitation that can end in no good and must produce infinite mischief."<sup>1</sup>

During the first week in February he was even more troubled over the delay of Congress in passing the bill for raising ten additional regiments. Could it have been passed in December, the President thought it would have been of great importance, but by February the favorable season for military operations in Mexico was already nearly half over.

"In truth," he wrote, "faction rules the hour, while principle & patriotism is forgotten. While the Democratic party are thus distracted and divided and are playing this foolish and suicidal game, the Federal party are united and never fail to unite with the minority of the Democratic party, or any faction of it who may break off from the body of their party, and thus postpone and defeat all my measures. I am in the unenviable position of being held responsible for the conduct of the Mexican War, when I have no support either from Congress or from the two officers (Scott & Taylor) highest in command in the field. How long this state of things will continue I cannot foresee."<sup>2</sup>

But the session of Congress necessarily came to an end on the fourth of March, and the President and his cabinet were left free for the next nine months to make the most of the powers which had been conferred on them.

In the course of the session the President and his policies had been publicly denounced in the most violent terms, the war itself had been declared by members to be dishonorable and unjust, and yet ample means, both in men and money, had been voted, after quite inexcusable delays, for carrying it on. The members of Congress scattered, and some two weeks later New Orleans newspapers were received in Washington which contained vague rumors of a battle fought with great loss on both sides near Saltillo. It was reported that Taylor's army was in the most critical position.

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, 347.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 368. Polk invariably referred to the Whigs as "the Federal party."

## CHAPTER XL

## BUENA VISTA

WHILE General Taylor had been scattering his troops over a line hundreds of miles in length, General Santa Anna was concentrating every available man at San Luis Potosí. A small garrison was left at Vera Cruz, and a division of infantry under General Vasquez was stationed at Tula, in the mountains in the southwestern corner of Tamaulipas, while some small bodies of cavalry were stationed along the road leading from San Luis to Saltillo. But the larger cities were denuded of their garrisons with a view to assembling an army capable of striking a decisive blow at the American invaders.

Santa Anna's preparations for an advance went forward as rapidly as the very limited means at his disposal would permit. Clothing and ammunition were manufactured and all *matériel* was put in condition for service; yet in spite of Santa Anna's utmost energy the work of preparation progressed but slowly. The commissary department could hardly have been said to exist, any more than the medical branch of the army. There were, of course, no wagons for transport and the troops had no tents. The press of the capital, however, kept urging a forward movement, and in every note of patriotism, sarcasm, and ridicule they called upon the army to leave the Capua in which they had been taking their pleasure, and to go out to meet the invaders.

It was noticeable that the mass of the people remained calm and indifferent.

"It cannot be denied," wrote an officer who was in the army at San Luis, "that the state of San Luis has distinguished itself by its patriotism and services in this war. . . . Nevertheless one failed to note throughout the republic the patriotic fire, the enthusiasm of a

people which rises *en masse* to defend its homes. The aspect of the city was tranquil; and if the presence of our troops had not given it a certain martial appearance there would have been nothing to recall the fact that the nation was sustaining a just war against invading foreigners."<sup>1</sup>

The attacks and taunts of the metropolitan press finally wrought upon the nerves of Santa Anna and his officers to such an extent that on January 26, 1847, orders for an advance were actually issued. The immediate occasion for those orders seems to have been the receipt on the previous day of an account of the capture of an American detachment of cavalry at a hacienda known as La Encarnacion, a place on the road between San Luis and Saltillo, and nearly fifty miles south of the latter.

This party was composed of about thirty-five of the Kentucky cavalry, which had joined Taylor after the capture of Monterey, and about the same number of men of the Arkansas cavalry, which formed a part of Wool's brigade. While in camp at the hacienda the detachment was quietly surrounded at night by a larger force of Mexican cavalry, and surrendered early the next morning, January 23, without firing a shot. One man escaped while a prisoner on the march southward, and brought back the news of the capture to Saltillo.<sup>2</sup>

On Wednesday, January 27, the first of Santa Anna's infantry started from San Luis on their march of two hundred and forty miles to Saltillo. They consisted of a battalion of engineers, three companies of artillery serving as infantry, and a company called the "Irish Volunteers" or the "Battalion of St. Patrick," who were in fact deserters

<sup>1</sup> Balbontin, *Invasion Americana*, 58.

<sup>2</sup> The men captured at La Encarnacion numbered six officers and sixty-six privates. A few days later another scouting party of volunteer cavalry, consisting of two officers and seventeen men, was captured. The prisoners were all marched to the city of Mexico, and were not released until the following autumn. An account of their adventures was published at Louisville, Kentucky, in 1848, in a pamphlet entitled *Encarnacion Prisoners*, etc. An appendix to this pamphlet contains the report of Major Gaines, commanding the first detachment captured, which is dated at San Luis Potosi February 10, 1847.

from the American army. The policy of the Mexican commanders, persistently followed up to the time of the capture of Monterey, had been to encourage desertion by every means in their power; and a number of men, mostly Irish, had deserted from Taylor's force. Some of these men had been recognized in the ranks of the Mexican army as they marched out of Monterey, and their fate if they fell into the hands of their former comrades was not difficult to predict.

Santa Anna himself, with the head-quarters staff, left San Luis on February 2, passed through the towns of Matehuala and Cedral, and on Sunday, the thirteenth, the whole army was encamped at Salado, about one hundred and forty miles from San Luis. The army suffered severely from very unusual extremes of cold and from a remarkable fall of rain and snow, and, being entirely without shelter, several men and some of the women following the army were frozen to death.

On their journey, not long after leaving San Luis, the army met both detachments of the American prisoners, who had been captured near La Encarnacion. To the latter, the sight of the marching Mexicans was of the greatest interest. The first feature which attracted their attention was "Santa Anna in person, seated in a chariot of war drawn by eight mules and surrounded by his staff elegantly and gorgeously equipped," and followed by a number of women and a train of pack-mules, among which were said to be five loaded with fighting cocks. The second point of interest was "O'Reilly and his company of deserters bearing aloft in high disgrace the holy banner of St. Patrick." Some rather unprintable compliments appear to have passed between the prisoners going south and the deserters marching north.<sup>1</sup>

Leaving Salado on the fifteenth, the Mexican army reached the hacienda of La Encarnacion on Wednesday, February 17, and there they halted for four days. Between one and two o'clock on the afternoon of Sunday, the twenty-first, they started on what was expected to be the last stage of their journey, over an uninhabited and water-

<sup>1</sup> *Encarnacion Prisoners*, 43-46; Balbontin, *Invasion Americana*, 63.

less region. Marching well into the night, the troops were halted at midnight and lay down by the roadside for a short rest, the cavalry holding their horses by the bridle. At dawn on the following morning, the twenty-second of February, the army was again put in motion, with the expectation of finding Taylor immediately in their front at the hacienda of Agua Nueva.

We have now to see what Taylor had been about since he despatched Worth and the second division of regular troops to join Scott upon his expedition to Vera Cruz.

It will be remembered that Scott had written to Taylor, first from New York late in November and again more definitely from New Orleans late in December, to the effect that it was intended to attack Vera Cruz, and thus to open, if successful, "a new and shorter line of operations upon the capital of Mexico"; that the first great difficulty was to get together a sufficient force to give a reasonable prospect of success before the first of April, the beginning of the unhealthy season upon the coast, and that it would be necessary to take from Taylor Worth's division of regulars, two field-batteries, a thousand cavalry, and as large a force of volunteer infantry as could possibly be spared, leaving Taylor only enough to defend Monterey and keep his communications open with the mouth of the Rio Grande.

The letter from New Orleans was not received by Taylor until nearly a month after its date. Meanwhile Scott had come to the Rio Grande, and failing to meet Taylor had sent him written orders, on January 3, to detach the troops above mentioned. This latter despatch was sent on to Saltillo, thence back to Monterey, and thence toward Victoria, where Taylor then was. On January 11 Lieutenant Richey, the bearer of despatches, while riding alone in advance of his escort, was captured and murdered, and the papers were supposed by Taylor to have been transmitted to Santa Anna. If so, they would have reached Santa Anna shortly before his advance from San Luis; and his knowledge that Taylor was to be deprived of a large part of his

force, pending a descent by Scott upon Vera Cruz, might naturally have suggested to Santa Anna the urgent importance of a rapid movement upon Saltillo or Monterey before the American army could be reinforced from the United States.<sup>1</sup>

But whether this information really came into the hands of Santa Anna is doubtful. Santa Anna in 1849 published an answer to those who had criticised his march to meet General Taylor. His defence rested upon two assertions. In the first place, he said he had only been made general in command of the Army of the North, and therefore had no right to abandon that part of the country in order to oppose the invasion from the Gulf. In the second place, he said he was uncertain at the time his march against Taylor was undertaken whether General Scott would land at Vera Cruz at all. Indeed, he asserted, the information he then had was that Scott was collecting a large body of troops at Tampico in order to march thence directly on San Luis Potosí, and when that city was occupied to advance to the capital.<sup>2</sup>

American authors, on the assumption that Santa Anna had really read the despatches of which the unfortunate Lieutenant Richey was the bearer, have built up a theory of their own as to the Mexican movements. Santa Anna, it is said, having discovered from these despatches what the American plan was,

"resolved upon a campaign equalling in greatness of conception the most masterly of Frederick's, and which, had it been successful, would have placed him high on the roll of the masters of the military art. It was to launch his whole force in succession against the two columns into which our army was now divided, and by one great effort, to drive from the soil of Mexico the armies of her invaders. It being doubtful whether he could reach Vera Cruz in season to resist the landing of General Scott's column, his first movement was of necessity against General Taylor. Nowhere else could he be so sure of bringing a preponderating force to bear upon his enemy."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Scott, however, thought the effect would be that Santa Anna, on receipt of the news, would at once move his army to Vera Cruz.—(Scott to Marcy, Feb. 4, 1847; H. R. Doc. 60, 30 Cong., 1 sess., 876.)

<sup>2</sup> *Apelacion al buen Criterio*, 32.

<sup>3</sup> Stevens, 42.

Santa Anna was never prone to undervalue his own abilities, and it seems likely that if he had really planned a campaign so brilliant, and founded upon such sound principles of the military art, he would have said so. When he wrote his defence he was being accused before the Congress of his countrymen of gross mismanagement; but his defence in respect of his northern campaign was entirely silent as to any strategic plan, and really amounted only to saying that he did not know at the time what Scott intended to do, and that he attacked Taylor because the Mexican press were taunting the army at San Luis with cowardice. It may be very well doubted, in view of his own contemporaneous and subsequent assertions, whether Santa Anna had any clearly defined plan whatever when he left San Luis.<sup>1</sup>

Taylor received duplicates of Scott's orders of January 3, addressed to himself and General Butler, just on the eve of leaving Victoria, and he at once wrote to Scott to say that he had been awaiting advices from him for some time past; that the letter of December 20 from New Orleans, to which Scott referred, had never been received; and that the first definite information from any source of the intention to deprive him of so large a portion of the troops under his command was what was contained in the letter just received.

"I cannot," he wrote, "misunderstand the object of the arrangements indicated in your letters. I feel that I have lost the confidence of the Government, or it would not have suffered me to remain, up to this time, ignorant of its intentions, so vitally affecting interests committed to my charge."<sup>2</sup>

To the adjutant-general Taylor wrote a few days later more fully, but much to the same effect.

"Having," he said, "fulfilled my duty in carrying out what I believed to be the wishes of the government, I now beg leave to invite the attention of the department to several points of grave interest to

<sup>1</sup> For a further exposition of Santa Anna's views, reference may be made to his manifesto of Jan. 26, 1847; *Apelacion al buen Criterio*, App., 177-184.

<sup>2</sup> Taylor to Scott, Jan. 15, 1847; H. R. Doc. 60, 30 Cong., 1 sess., 862.

myself, and not without importance in their bearing upon the public service. I have, therefore, to request that this communication may be laid before the Secretary of War, and by him be submitted to the President of the United States.

"I will first speak of the extraordinary reserve manifested by the Department of War in not communicating to me the intentions of the Government—at least in regard to the withdrawal of so large a portion of my command. Had I not been deemed a safe repository of its purposes, I might, at any rate, have been instructed to hold the troops in readiness for detachment. A special messenger, despatched from Washington when the employment of Major General Scott was determined upon, would have reached me at the very latest by the 8th of December—in time to suspend the movement on Victoria, to spare a portion of the army, including myself, a long and expensive march of 400 miles, and to prevent the murder of a young officer with important despatches, now in the hands of the enemy. But, up to this moment, I have not received a syllable from the Department of War on this subject. . . .

"Again I would respectfully state that no reply has been received to my communications of October 15, November 8, and November 12, replying, respectively, to the despatches brought out by Lieutenant Armistead, Major Graham, and Mr. McLane. In those communications I expressed fully and frankly my views on many important points connected with the prosecution of the campaign, and had reason to expect at least the courtesy of an acknowledgment.

"While exercising a command which, it is well known, I never sought, it has been my constant aim to perform my whole duty without fear and without favor. The best interests of the service and the country have been my guide, and will continue to be while I remain in command, however limited may be my force or embarrassing my situation; but from the course which the department had pursued in the above particulars, I am constrained to believe that I no longer possess the confidence of the government. I can only regret that the President did not think it proper, while withdrawing so large a portion of my command in the manner above indicated, to relieve me from a position where I can no longer serve the country with that assurance of confidence and support so indispensable to success."<sup>1</sup>

Scott with unusual reticence replied to the letter addressed to him, saying that there were some expressions in it which, as he wished to forget them, he would not specify or recall; had he been within reach of Taylor at the time he called for troops he would have consulted him fully, but, as it was, he

<sup>1</sup> Taylor to Adjutant-General, Jan. 27, 1847; *ibid.*, 1100-1102.

had been compelled to act promptly and to a considerable extent in the dark. And, he added,

"I must ask you to abandon Saltillo and to make no detachments, except for *reconnaissances* 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."<sup>1</sup>

When Taylor received this letter he was already south of Saltillo, and in no frame of mind to accept advice from Scott or anybody else in respect to the movements of the small body of troops which remained with him.<sup>2</sup> After complying with Scott's demands, he had only two squadrons of regular cavalry, four batteries of field artillery (in all sixteen guns), one company of regular artillery stationed at the citadel in Monterey, two regiments of volunteer cavalry (Kentucky and Arkansas), and eight regiments of volunteer infantry with two pieces of artillery. Of the volunteers, only one regiment—Jefferson Davis's Mississippi Rifles—had ever been under fire. In addition, three regiments of volunteer infantry held the river and the line from Monterey to Camargo.<sup>3</sup>

Until the first of February Taylor himself had remained at Monterey, and had then set forward in person for Saltillo. Two or three days before, he had received reports from General Wool giving an account of the capture of the two reconnoitring parties from the Kentucky and Arkansas regiments of cavalry, which, Wool stated, was due entirely to disobedience of orders in failing to maintain pickets or sentinels. Wool also reported that there were nightly alarms of the approach of the enemy. It was this news that brought Taylor to the front.

On arriving at Saltillo Taylor found everything quiet. The force which made the recent captures, he learned, was

<sup>1</sup> Scott to Taylor, Jan. 26, 1847; *ibid.*, 864. See p. 307, above.

<sup>2</sup> Taylor's letters to Doctor Wood of Jan. 30 and Feb. 9, 1846, are filled with complaints against Scott and Marcy, whom he accuses of intrigue, trying to force him to resign, etc.—(*Taylor's Letters from the Battlefields*, 83-88.)

<sup>3</sup> Taylor to Adjutant-General, Jan. 26, 1847; H. R. Doc. 60, 30 Cong., 1 sess., 1097.

composed entirely of cavalry, and was believed to have fallen back to Matehuala; and he also was informed that a large portion of the troops at San Luis Potosí had taken the direction of Vera Cruz. On February 5 he removed his head-quarters to Agua Nueva, a hacienda about eighteen miles south of Saltillo, leaving only seven companies of volunteer infantry to hold the city.

While in camp at Agua Nueva, only a day or two after reaching it, he received Scott's letter advising him to abandon Saltillo. Taylor chose to consider Scott's language as advice merely and not as an order.

"I beg leave to say," he wrote in reply, "that I consider the occupation of that city, or rather a position in its front, as essential to the due defence of the line which I am now reduced to hold. I have, therefore, established a camp at this point, eighteen miles in advance of Saltillo, and shall concentrate here all the troops in front, except a small garrison left in that city. It is my purpose to hold this position, unless I am positively ordered to fall back by the government at Washington, to which my views and the position of affairs here are fully communicated."<sup>1</sup>

On the same day he wrote the adjutant-general at Washington as follows:

"Although advised by Major General Scott to evacuate Saltillo, I am confirmed in my purpose of holding not only that point, but this position in its front. Not to speak of the pernicious moral effect upon volunteer troops of falling back from points which we have gained, there are powerful military reasons for occupying this extremity of the pass rather than the other. The scarcity of water and supplies for a long distance in front compels the enemy either to risk an engagement in the field or to hold himself aloof from us; while, if we fall back upon Monterey, he could establish himself strong at Saltillo, and be in position to annoy more effectually our flanks and our communications."<sup>2</sup>

At Agua Nueva, therefore, Taylor stubbornly remained, drilling his raw troops and keeping a watchful eye for any indications of a movement on the part of the Mexicans. On

<sup>1</sup> Taylor to Scott, Feb. 7, 1847; *ibid.*, 1162.

<sup>2</sup> Taylor to Adjutant-General, Feb. 7, 1847; *ibid.*, 1110.

February 7 he wrote that there was understood to be no considerable force in his front, and he did not think it likely "that any serious demonstration would be made in this direction." A week later he wrote that he had been joined by General Wool with all the remaining troops left in the rear, and that rumors reached the camp from time to time of the projected advance of a Mexican force upon this position—"but I think such a movement improbable."<sup>1</sup> On that same day Santa Anna's whole army was encamped at Salado, some sixty miles distant.

When Santa Anna advanced from Salado, he was necessarily compelled to pass through the hacienda of La Encarnacion. From that point he had the choice of three routes to Saltillo. The first and best road was the direct one passing through Agua Nueva. The second road led from La Encarnacion westerly to a point known as Santa Elena, where there was a well and a tank, and whence a road led through the pass known as the Puerto del Capulin to the road leading from Parras to Saltillo, and then fell into the main road north of Agua Nueva, thus completely turning Taylor's position from the west. The third road, which was barely passable for artillery, led to the westward through a hacienda known as La Hedionda, whence a path led through the mountains coming into the main road not far to the northward of Agua Nueva, thus turning it from the east.

By Saturday, the twentieth of February, Taylor received information to the effect that a force of cavalry under General Miñon, which was estimated at about two thousand men, was operating in the mountains, with head-quarters at a hacienda known as Potosí, about sixty miles east of Saltillo, and that Santa Anna's main force was advancing on the direct road from San Luis Potosí through Cedral and La Encarnacion. But Taylor still thought that his advanced position at Agua Nueva should be maintained. As he had pointed out in writing to the adjutant-general, the whole thirty-five miles south of Agua Nueva to La Encarnacion

Same to same, Feb. 14, 1847; *ibid.*, 1113.

was through a waterless desert. If, therefore, Santa Anna should attempt to attack the American camp by an advance along the main road, his men and animals would arrive on the field of battle after a fatiguing march, unfit for further immediate exertion, and with the sole supply of water in the possession of the Americans. Santa Anna, in the language of a Mexican author, would thus place his men in the position of having to conquer their enemy in order to get a drink of water.

"It is certainly very hard that voluntarily, either because he did not carefully examine the country or because of uncalculating haste, he should have risked the fate of our arms and the fate of the republic upon the illusory idea of carrying a strong position, by soldiers who must have marched twelve leagues without water and who, in order to drink, were under the necessity of carrying a fortress at the point of the bayonet."<sup>1</sup>

Agua Nueva, however, was far from being a fortress. Taylor and Wool, his second in command, seem to have considered it more important to drill their men than to attempt to throw up intrenchments, and it does not appear that anything whatever was done toward adding to the natural strength of the position.

Taylor remained without definite information as to the Mexican movements, until at daybreak on Sunday morning a reconnoitring party under Lieutenant-Colonel May (who had been promoted for his gallantry at Resaca) came in with information that Miñon and his cavalry were marching in full force upon Saltillo from the east. At about noon another scouting party, under Major McCulloch, of the Texan rangers, came in from the south with definite news as to the composition and size of Santa Anna's main army, which was then at La Encarnacion. McCulloch estimated the Mexican force at about twenty thousand men.

The receipt of this news led Taylor, for reasons never fully explained, to decide hastily on abandoning Agua Nueva, notwithstanding the "powerful military reasons" which he had adduced in his letter to the War Department, and to fall

<sup>1</sup> *Rapida Ojeada*, 10.