

Indiana, which until then had been stationed in the rear of Washington's battery and had thus far taken no part in the contest. The two regiments were, however, unable to check the Mexican cavalry, which were at this moment moving down directly toward the buildings at Buena Vista. In front of the hacienda, however, between it and the mountains, was a mixed mass of American cavalry consisting of Colonel May's dragoons and a portion of the Arkansas and Kentucky troops, and they succeeded in stopping temporarily the Mexicans and even in driving them back.

Meanwhile, the stragglers from what had been the American left, reached the hacienda, and while some of them continued their flight as far as the city of Saltillo (where they reported that the battle was lost and the American army in full retreat) a part were halted at the hacienda and posted in and on top of the buildings. At the same time the remaining American troops on the southern part of the plateau began pushing slowly forward toward the mountain, maintaining a heavy fire, at close range, both of artillery and musketry.

For a long while the conflict was continued without any decided success on the part of either army, the Mexican line extending in a sort of long semicircle from the road in front of Washington's battery, through a broad ravine up to the foot of the mountains, and thence northerly along their base to a point somewhere opposite Buena Vista. Toward their centre, near the mountain which Ampudia's troops had taken the night before, a Mexican battery had been established under the direction of General Micheltorena, whom we have seen governor of California and who was now Santa Anna's chief of staff. The American line, with the exception of Washington's battery, which held the road, was ranged irregularly along the western edge of the plateau, facing east, toward the mountains.

At about noon the Mexican right and centre began visibly to give way before the destructive artillery fire, and Taylor ordered four of the guns then on the plateau to proceed to the American left toward Buena Vista, which was now being

again attacked by a body of Mexican cavalry under Torrejon. Torrejon's men were unsuccessfully opposed by the same force of American cavalry as before, and a fierce *mêlée* ensued, a large part of the Mexicans, mingled with their American opponents, galloping headlong through the hacienda. A part of the Mexicans, however, turned back to the mountains, while another part rode down the road, crossed the stream, and returned on its west bank to join the Mexican reserves—having thus ridden completely round the American army. Lieutenant Reynolds's guns, which arrived at the hacienda as the cavalry swept by, opened upon them as they galloped away.

A third cavalry attack was now made upon the left of the American line—this time somewhat nearer the centre—where the Mexicans were opposed by the Mississippi regiment and the third Indiana. The Mexicans came down the plateau from the mountains at a gallop, the American infantry withholding its fire until it could be effectively delivered. As the Mexicans came on, the resolute attitude of the silent American line had its effect. The speed of the advancing riders was seen to slacken; they hesitated; they pulled up to a walk, and at length they halted before the thin infantry line. As they did so, a volley from the well-aimed muskets and rifles, with one gun of Captain Sherman's battery firing grape and canister within less than a hundred yards, so cut up the head of the column that in a moment the whole brigade gave way and fled toward the mountain, leaving behind large numbers of killed and wounded. The repulse of the Mexican cavalry was immediately followed up by an advance of the extreme American left, which was accompanied by a sharp thunder-shower—very remarkable at that dry season of the year. At the same time the whole of the American artillery on the plateau kept up a steady fire upon the Mexican columns, which had now begun to fall back in confusion toward and along the foot of the mountains.¹

¹ At this time, according to Taylor, a curious episode occurred. Some Mexican officers came up, apparently with the intention of opening a parley.

As the defeated Mexican right retired, Santa Anna ordered forward a part of his reserves. They came in upon the right flank of the American troops as they stood facing the retreating Mexicans near the mountains. The Kentucky and Illinois regiments, who formed the extreme right of this line, were driven back and down one of the ravines with very heavy loss, but the Mexican advance was momentarily checked by the unsupported artillery on the plateau. The moment was the most critical of the day for Taylor's army; but the artillery from the extreme left came up barely in time. Two more of the American guns were captured. Firing with desperate haste, the artillery under Bragg and Sherman poured grape-shot into the Mexican reserves at the shortest range. Their pieces, unlimbered far in advance of the approaching supports, kept up their fire until the infantry from the left—mainly Mississippi and Indiana—came to restore the battle. For some time a doubtful struggle continued, but at length the Mexicans began to fall back, and soon the whole of their army had given ground. It was not until nearly five o'clock in the afternoon that the American line was enabled to advance for even a short distance; and at length, at sunset, the two armies were left standing upon almost the same ground on which they had stood the night before.

While this long and desperate battle was raging to the southward of Buena Vista, Miñon with his brigade of cavalry had arrived in front of Saltillo under orders from Santa Anna to remain there until the American troops gave way, and then to intercept their retreat. The American garrison of Saltillo, which occupied a redoubt just south of the town, fired upon them at long range without doing any material damage, and a sortie was made which also proved more noisy than effective. Miñon, however, took prisoners one or more

They were understood to say that they came from Santa Anna to ask Taylor what he wanted. In reply to this question he sent Wool with a flag of truce, and the American batteries ceased firing. The Mexicans, however, paid no attention to the flag and Wool returned. This pause, it is thought, may have been contrived so as to enable the Mexican right to extricate themselves. See Ripley, I, 414.

men who had fled from the field of battle, and shortly afterward fell back to the east, thus reopening communication between Saltillo and the American army.

At sunset the firing in front of Buena Vista had died away, and the exhausted troops on both sides lay down to obtain much-needed rest. The night, as usual at that season and in that altitude, was extremely cold, but in view of the immediate presence of the two armies few fires were lighted.

During the night the American wounded were removed to Saltillo, and preparations were made to meet the attack which Taylor felt sure would have to be met in the morning. The troops which had garrisoned Saltillo were ordered to the front, a force which had been holding the road to Monterey with four heavy guns was reported near at hand, and a few uninjured men were sent back from Buena Vista to hold the city. On the whole, Taylor was as strong on the morning of the twenty-fourth as on the morning of the previous day; but at dawn of day he discovered that there was no Mexican army in front of him. They had withdrawn early in the night, and by the time Taylor discovered their retreat they had reached Agua Nueva.¹

Santa Anna, as soon as darkness fell, had given the order to retreat, and his troops—worn out by the long marches and fierce fighting of the previous three days—had immediately started by the feeble light of a new moon. The movement was made without attracting attention from the American lines, and was at first conducted in tolerable order; but as the moon set and the darkness increased the various bodies of the army fell into confusion, the exhausted men stumbling along in the night, and finally throwing themselves on the ground to rest wherever possible. Most of them succeeded in reaching Agua Nueva before daylight.

¹ Taylor's report of the battle of Buena Vista, with the subreports from his officers, is in Sen. Doc. 1, 30 Cong., 1 sess., 97-210. Santa Anna's report, dated February 27, 1847, is in *México á través de los Siglos*, IV, 620-624. Accounts by other eye-witnesses are, from the American side, that of Captain Carleton (first U. S. dragoons) in his *Battle of Buena Vista*, 21-132; and, from the Mexican side, that of Lieutenant Balbontin in his *Invasión Americana*, 71-95. See also Ripley, I, 392-444; Howard's *General Taylor*, 240-273; *Apuntes para la Historia de la Guerra entre México y los E. U.*, 97-104.

There the army remained encamped until the afternoon of Friday, the twenty-sixth, when they began their toilsome march across the intervening deserts toward the city of San Luis. Such of the wounded as could be moved were sent on in the front, either in wagons or in improvised litters, each carried by four soldiers. The men, weary and discouraged, weakened by hunger, many of them sick themselves, frequently dropped their charges by the way-side. The road was lined with stragglers, with the wounded, and with the dead. A shocking picture has been drawn of the first night of this retreat on the waterless wastes between Agua Nueva and La Encarnacion.

"An icy breeze drove above our heads the powdery dust which the column raised in marching. The pale moon, which seemed to career madly across the clouds, barely lighted up this sombre scene, contrasting with the hot light of entire groves of burning palms, and of prairies covered by sheets of flame caused by the fire at the hacienda, which had been started on the night of the twenty-first and had spread unchecked.

"The troops who formed the rear guard soon overtook and passed the convoy of wounded, producing an inevitable confusion. The setting of the moon was another cause of disorder; and the poor wounded were victims of a thousand inhuman acts. The vanguard began arriving at La Encarnacion at one in the morning, and, as at Agua Nueva, each man lay down how and where he could. This night also might with reason be designated as the *noche triste*."¹

On the same Friday that Santa Anna retreated from Agua Nueva, Taylor, who had only advanced on Wednesday three or four miles from the battle-field, received news that the Mexicans were beginning to break up their camp and were falling back toward San Luis. He immediately put his troops in motion, and on Sunday, the twenty-seventh, his army was again encamped at Agua Nueva, after less than a week's absence.

"The ruins of the village," says Carleton, "were literally crowded with the enemy's wounded, and many who had died were lying about

¹ Balbontin, 96. See, as to the original *noche triste*, Prescott's *Conquest of Mexico*, II, 364-380.

still unburied. Here we learned from the surgeons and wounded officers, who had been left behind, that the whole Mexican army was in a state of utter disarray and demoralization; that four thousand men, at least, had deserted, three thousand of them having abandoned their colors on the night of the twenty-third."

Taylor's horses were in no condition at that time to attempt a vigorous pursuit, but on the first of March a small detachment of cavalry, accompanied by two guns and some infantry in wagons, left Agua Nueva and followed the line of march which Santa Anna three days before had pursued.

"There was every indication for the whole of the way," according to the same eye-witness, "of a most hurried retreat and the most dreadful distress. The road was literally strewed with the dead and dying and with those perishing from fatigue and want of water. It was a most melancholy and touching picture, that of soldiers in uniform, who, having been spared in battle, were now yielding up their lives without a wound. . . . We imagined, that, during the battle, and upon the field when the conflict was ended, and afterwards upon the road over which the enemy had retreated, we had witnessed human suffering in its most distressing forms. But such was not the case. The scenes presented to our eyes on entering within the walls of Encarnacion were so filled with extreme and utter agony that we at once ceased to shudder at the remembrance of any misery we had ever before looked upon."¹

So much of Santa Anna's army as was in a condition to move had abandoned La Encarnacion two days before the American advance reached it. Struggling along the dry and stony tracks that led to the south, the remnant of the army, broken and dispirited, at last arrived at San Luis Potosí by March 12, and Santa Anna himself set out to restore order in the capital and to take over the government from Gómez Farias.

The numbers of which Santa Anna's army was composed have been very variously stated. He himself, in his summons to Taylor on the morning of the battle, announced that he had under him twenty thousand men. This doubtless was an intentional exaggeration. According to one Mexican author,

¹ Carleton, 143, 146-148.

Santa Anna's entire army, including the detachments which had left San Luis before him, amounted to twenty-one thousand three hundred and forty men; and this did not include the troops who were left behind at San Luis.¹

Santa Anna's official report states that when he left San Luis Potosí he had the following force:

Twenty-eight battalions of infantry and engineers.....	13,422 men
Thirty-nine squadrons of cavalry.....	4,348 "
Seventeen guns with.....	413 "
	18,183 "
To which must be added commissioned officers.....	1,342 "
Making a total force of.....	19,525 "

From this were to be deducted the detachments left at San Luis and at various points on his line of communications, two battalions of infantry left in reserve at Matehuala, and a brigade of cavalry under Urrea (one of Santa Anna's Texas subordinates), who had been sent by way of Tula to raid the neighborhood of Monterey.

The losses on the northward march, from sickness and desertion, numbered about a thousand; but some detached parties had been picked up at Matehuala and elsewhere along the road, partially, at least, making good these losses. After Miñon had been detached with a force which Santa Anna stated at a thousand sabres, the army at Encarnacion on February 19 numbered 14,048 non-commissioned officers and privates and 1,104 commissioned officers, or 15,152 in all. Adding Miñon's command, the entire Mexican force on or near the field of battle must have numbered between sixteen thousand and sixteen thousand five hundred men, of whom over five thousand were cavalry.²

As to the American force, the return of the troops engaged in the action showed 4,759 officers and men of all ranks,³

¹ *Rapida Ojeada*, 7.

² Full details are given in the appendix to Santa Anna's *Apelacion al buen Criterio*, 66, 67.

³ Sen. Doc. 1, 30 Cong., 1 sess., 142.

so that it may be confidently assumed that Taylor had considerably less than one-third of Santa Anna's force.

The losses on the Mexican side were correspondingly far greater than those on the American. Taylor had 746 killed, wounded, and missing—not quite sixteen per cent of his total force.¹ The Mexican losses, as reported, were no less than 3,494, of which more than half were reported missing and were either prisoners or deserters. This was about twenty-three per cent of Santa Anna's army. But these figures, bad as they were, were not so bad as those published by Santa Anna himself. He stated that three days after the battle, at the camp of Agua Nueva, he had with him but 9,905 officers and men, a loss in the week of no less than 5,247, or more than thirty-four per cent of his original force. Moreover, these figures did not include the casualties—whatever they were—which were suffered by General Miñon's detachment; nor did they include the losses sustained in the subsequent disastrous retreat across the desert, which were estimated in all accounts at not less than three thousand men, the greater part of whom were deserters. If these figures are to be relied on, Santa Anna lost fully half his army.²

Santa Anna's retreat was, of course, a subject of the most hostile criticism on the part of his countrymen. It was asserted that if the battle had been renewed on Wednesday, the twenty-fourth, the Mexican army could not have failed to gain the victory. The mere scarcity of provisions, it was argued, was not a sufficient cause for falling back, because there were no additional provisions to be got short of La Encarnacion, many miles in the rear, and as a matter of fact it turned out that with merely the provisions the troops had with them, they were able to maintain themselves for two or three days at Agua Nueva. The excuse that the men were tired out was said to be a reason for permitting them to rest on Tuesday night, rather than for compelling them to march eleven or twelve miles back to a place where they might have had to fight if the Americans, as was quite possi-

¹ *Ibid.*, 143.

² Balbontin, 91; *Apelacion al buen Criterio*, App., 67.

ble, had attempted to pursue them. A retreat was certain to cause great discouragement in the ranks, while a prospect of advancing and capturing the large stores of supplies belonging to the American army would have been an incentive to renew the battle. A renewed battle on the twenty-fourth of February would certainly not have cost any more losses than the fatal retreat to San Luis, and would probably have resulted in the capture of Taylor and his entire army, who were helpless in the midst of a hostile population.

But more fundamental criticisms were made in relation to Santa Anna's strategy. What, it was asked, was the objective with which the campaign was undertaken? Why did he advance upon the distant right flank of the American forces, across hundreds of miles of desert, and leave Vera Cruz and the neighborhood of the city of Mexico entirely unprotected? Why did he advance from La Encarnacion to make a frontal attack upon an enemy who might be assumed to be holding a strong fortified position in the mountains? Why, when he discovered that the position of Agua Nueva had been abandoned, did he make no attempt to turn Taylor's new position by a wide flanking movement? And why did he advance with such precipitate haste beyond Agua Nueva, bringing his men, weary and unready, upon the field of battle?

Santa Anna's own reply to the last criticism was that when he found Taylor in position in front of Buena Vista it was impossible to avoid an action, for to fall back without fighting would have been a defeat for the Mexican arms. To defer an attack, and to undertake strategic movements at that moment, would have resulted in the army perishing with hunger, or at least suffering severe hardships in a country totally lacking in supplies. His excuse for having undertaken the expedition was, as already stated, the newspaper attacks upon his apparent policy of inaction in the "Capua" of San Luis Potosí. Some writers, he protested, had done what they could to embarrass his plans, while they kept up a most unjust fire (*dispararon los tiros más injustos*) upon the army as a whole and upon individual

officers. He, too, like Scott, had suffered from a fire in the rear.¹

Santa Anna, in his report of the battle, did not, of course, hesitate to claim it as a victory. The Encarnacion prisoners, two pieces of American artillery, and three guidons taken in battle seemed ample proof; and the news was greeted in the city of Mexico with the usual demonstrations of high-masses, ringing of bells, and official speeches. In the United States, on the contrary, the first reports were extremely grave, for, as we have seen, the rumors ran that a battle had been fought near Saltillo with great losses on both sides, and that Taylor's army was in a most critical position.² The fact was that Taylor's communications had been cut off by Urrea's cavalry brigade, which Santa Anna had detached with orders to operate in the neighborhood of Monterey. Travelling by way of Tula and Montemorelos, Urrea fell upon some supply trains and small detachments of American troops in the neighborhood of Marin, not far north of Monterey, and succeeded in capturing some wagons, killing a number of teamsters, and isolating the city of Monterey and Taylor's immediate forces. The raiders were, however, shortly driven back and retired into the mountains; and thenceforward the whole of the states of Tamaulipas and Nuevo Leon remained in peaceable possession of the American troops during the remainder of the war.³

Until the road between Monterey and Camargo was cleared, no authentic intelligence could be received in the United States from Taylor's army, but rumors of disaster came pouring in, based, no doubt, upon stories received through Mexican sources along the line of the Rio Grande. It was not until the first of April that Taylor's official despatches were received in Washington, and on the same day information was received that General Scott's forces had landed near Vera Cruz. The President on that day ex-

¹ *Apelacion al buen Criterio*, 20-29, *passim*; *México á través de los Siglos*, IV, 620.

² *Polk's Diary*, II, 433 *et seq.*

³ For details, see Taylor's official reports in H. R. Doc. 60, 30 Cong., 1 sess., 1119, 1123.

pressed his opinion of Taylor in the following words, which may very well serve as a summary of the criticisms made by other writers:

"Had Gen'l Taylor," wrote the President, "obeyed his orders & occupied Monterey and the passes beyond it, the severe loss of our army, including many valuable officers, would have been avoided. It was great rashness to take the position he did in advance of Saltillo. Having done so he [is] indebted not to his own good generalship, but to the indomitable & intrepid bravery of the officers and men under his command for his success. He exposed them to an opposing army of three or four times their number. The Mexican army were suffering for want of food, and took up their retreat shortly after the battle. Gen'l Taylor is a hard fighter, but has none other of the qualities of a great General. From the beginning of the existing War with Mexico he has been constantly blundering into difficulties, but has fought out of them, but with very severe loss. His first blunder was in separating his army from his supplies, which caused the battle of Palo Alto and Resaca de la Palma. His second was in moving upon Monterey with an inadequate force, leaving more than two-thirds of his whole army behind him with [the] battering trains, & this caused the hard battle & some loss at Monterey; & the last is in taking his position so far in advance of Monterey, which caused the late sanguinary battle. I rejoice that our brave army have been successful in this battle, but deeply lament the severe loss they have sustained."¹

Taylor was also criticised for his tactics, especially in leaving his left flank so weak and unduly strengthening his right, when it should have been apparent that Santa Anna's only chance of success was to turn the American left.

The American public, however, when they received the news of the victory of Buena Vista, heightened as it was by coming immediately after the depressing rumors of defeat, were by no means disposed to be critical. Taylor had conquered in four hard-fought battles—the first battles of the war. He and his officers had not failed to let it be known that he had been deprived of a large part of his army at the

¹ Polk's *Diary*, II, 452; Ripley, I, 434-436. General I. I. Stevens contends that if General Taylor had retired upon Monterey Santa Anna would not have followed him, and therefore that Taylor was right in holding his position in advance of Saltillo. But this assumes that Santa Anna was carefully following out a strategic plan worthy of Frederick.—(Stevens, 39, 40.)

very moment when he was about advancing upon the enemy, and he became at once a hero in the public estimation. In any view of the matter, his achievements at Buena Vista were worthy of the thanks of the nation, which Congress later conveyed to him; but their more immediate effect was to make him a presidential possibility. He seemed to an excited public an admirably successful general whom an envious Democratic administration had done its best to deprive of the means of victory; and therefore, though he was a slave-owner and a Southerner, and though his politics were not known, and he had had no experience of public life, the Whig newspapers with a shout proclaimed him their candidate for the Presidency.