

against unlooked-for delays, and fearing that he might yet lose the race against time with yellow-fever at Vera Cruz, the greater part of his transports and supply-ships were arriving one by one, all too slowly for his impatient spirit. But at last almost all his men and the chief part of his stores and equipment were assembled, and on the second of March he set sail for the anchorage off Vera Cruz.

Outside of that harbor lie seven distinct coral reefs forming a rough semicircle, some of them just awash at high-water and some of them rising to form low, sandy islands, in the lee of which vessels may lie at anchor with some safety during northerly gales. The outermost island—Verde, or Green Island—is about three miles due east of the harbor; while about three miles southeast from the harbor and a mile off the beach, lies the desolate island of Sacrificios. It derived its name from the fact that Juan de Grijalva, when he first visited this coast, in 1518, found on the island vestiges of human sacrifice.¹

Further down the coast, at a distance of some twelve miles from Vera Cruz, the island of Salmedina and a number of reefs lying to the eastward of it afford another passable anchorage near the beach, just opposite the small village of Anton Lizardo.

On the afternoon of Friday, March 5, the United States ship *Potomac*, one of the blockading fleet off Vera Cruz, was lying at anchor under the lee of Green Island in a moderate norther when, as one of her officers related,

“the man at the mast-head reported a sail to the Northward, and soon after we saw the long expected fleet coming down before the wind. What number of vessels were there I do not know, but there were more than we could count—the little brig *Porpoise* under her very efficient commander Lieutenant William E. Hunt, gallantly led the way. The first thing that excited our astonishment was the great amount of sail carried by the transports, and the next the skillful manner in which their captains threaded their way between the reefs! But as one of them remarked to me afterwards, ‘any one could see the channel in a gale of wind’; meaning that the breakers on the reefs would show the deep water. No words can express our excitement as

¹ Prescott, *Conquest of Mexico*, I, 227.

ship after ship, crowded with enthusiastic soldiers, successively came in; some anchoring near us, and others continuing on for the anchorage at Anton Lizardo. We had been so long on board our ships, and for some months so inactive, that we were longing for something to do. I cannot answer for others, but the scene of that day is so vivid, and the events so firmly fixed in my memory, that I can almost see the ship *Diadem* as she grazed our spanker-boom in her desire to pass near enough to speak us.”¹

Before leaving Lobos Island Scott had issued most detailed orders as to signals and ships, and as to the method of effecting a landing with the surf-boats. Further orders provided for the landing of intrenching tools and quartermasters' stores, the detailing of working parties, the methods of conducting a siege, and other particulars in relation to the debarkation of troops and supplies.² All was therefore in readiness the moment Scott arrived, and there remained only his decision as to the precise point of landing.

On Sunday, March 7, Scott and Conner, accompanied by the general officers and the principal members of Scott's staff, made a reconnoissance of Vera Cruz and its surroundings from on board the little steamer *Petrita*, with the result that it was agreed the landing should be made on the beach opposite the island of Sacrificios, under the lee of which American and foreign men-of-war generally anchored. The anchorage, however, was too cramped to allow all the transports to lie there in safety, and it was therefore decided to transfer the troops from the transports to the American naval vessels, and land from them. Scott accordingly issued his final orders directing the landing on the following day, Monday; but that day a gale of wind was blowing which

¹ Parker, *Recollections of a Naval Officer*, 82. Commodore Conner, on Feb. 27, had given orders to Captain Aulick, of the *Potomac*, to anchor under Green Island awaiting Scott's transports, and to send an officer on each vessel as she arrived to pilot her in, or, “should more vessels arrive at the same time than you have officers to take charge of, you will give the masters such sailing directions as will enable them to make the passage between the Blanquilla Reef and Point Anton Lizardo.”—(Conner to Aulick, Feb. 27, 1847; Conner's *Home Squadron*, 80.) There appears to be some confusion as to the date of the arrival of Scott's fleet. Conner, in his despatch to the Secretary of the Navy on March 7, gives the date of arrival as March 5, which from other circumstances appears to be correct.

² See general orders 27, 28, 34, 40-43; Conner's *Home Squadron*, 72-77.

prevented the operation, and it was postponed until the following afternoon. At daylight on Tuesday morning the transfer of the troops from the transports to the naval vessels began, and by noon, or shortly afterward, all the naval force, with Scott's troops on board, was at anchor opposite the point designated for debarkation.

At two o'clock in the afternoon the signal was made for the first detachment of troops, consisting of Worth's division of regulars, to prepare to land. In a few minutes the troops had entered the surf-boats, which were to be rowed by seamen from the naval vessels, and all was in readiness. Each boat carried forty or fifty soldiers fully armed.

The scene must have been exciting and exhilarating in the highest degree as, under the brilliant tropical sun, the boats rowed over a perfectly smooth sea toward the beach. Two small steamers and four schooners, all of light draught, were shelling the sand-hills back of the beach. Three foreign men-of-war—English, French, and Spanish—at anchor under Sacrificios, were witnesses to the excellent arrangement and good order with which the American army conducted the hazardous attempt; and the American naval vessels at hand also testified their interest, with their crowds of soldiers and seamen who watched from deck or rigging the approach of the boats toward the silent and apparently deserted shore.

Scott fully anticipated a vigorous opposition. He believed—which was not quite accurate—that the castle of Ulúa had been "greatly extended—almost rebuilt, and its armament about doubled"—and that it had the capacity to sink the entire American navy.¹ He also still believed that Santa Anna would concentrate against him, and not against Taylor; for it was not so apparent then as it was to critics later that Santa Anna must inevitably march on Saltillo and Monterey. Being therefore ignorant, as Scott wrote,

"of President Santa Anna's desperate march over the desert, upon Major-General Taylor, we did not doubt meeting at our landing the most formidable struggle of the war. No precaution therefore was neglected."

¹ Scott's *Autobiography*, 422.

General Worth, in a fast-rowing boat, personally led the way, and was the first man ashore. As the heavy surf-boats grounded on the beach the men jumped out, waded to dry land, formed rapidly in line at the edge of the water, and with a simultaneous rush and shout the whole division ascended the nearest sand-dunes, in full expectation of a hostile reception. To their surprise, and the surprise of all onlookers, not a shot was fired; and as the American line crowned the summits of the sand-hills the men aboard all the ships in the neighborhood cheered again and again at the success of the landing party.

Worth's division was followed immediately by the volunteers under Patterson, and they by Twiggs's division of regulars; and by ten o'clock that night practically the whole force of Scott's army—about twelve thousand men, with rations for two days—some horses and some field artillery, were safely on shore.¹

During the night a party of Mexican infantry fired upon Worth's pickets, but otherwise there was no attempt to molest the invaders. The next morning Scott himself landed, and from that time on, the troops and the men from the naval vessels and transports were busily engaged, as the weather permitted, in landing siege-guns, ammunition, and supplies for the use of the army.

Worth's division invested the city, beginning at a high sand-hill near the beach and extending thence northwesterly toward the interior, forming the right of the American line. Next to it came Patterson's division forming the centre of the line, while Twiggs's division marched around beyond Patterson, ultimately occupying the small village of Vergara, on the sea-shore north of the city, thus completing its investment from the land-side.

¹ Much the best account of the landing operations is contained in a "Memoir of the Landing of the United States Troops at Vera Cruz in 1847," by the late Admiral W. G. Temple (then a passed midshipman), which is printed in Conner's *Home Squadron*, together with all the naval and military orders, pp. 58-83. Other reports of eye-witnesses will be found in Scott's report, Sen. Doc. 1, 30 Cong., 1 sess., 216; Commodore Conner's report, H. R. Doc. 1, 30 Cong., 2 sess., 1177-1179; Parker, 83; Semmes, 125, 128; *Autobiography of an English Soldier*, 145-150.

In the ensuing operations the land fortifications bore the whole burden of the defence of the city. These remained very much in the same state in which they had been at the time of the French attack, in 1838. They consisted of a series of small bastions and redans, solidly built and capable of mounting from eight to ten guns each. The curtains by which they were connected consisted of a "thin wall, proof only against musketry and of but little use." None of the defences were protected by ditches, as the shifting sands which surrounded the city on all sides would soon have filled any ditch in the event of a heavy gale.

The country lying between the walls of the city and the American camps was generally a level sandy plain, bounded by high sand-hills that rose at a distance from the city, which varied from about a thousand yards on the south and east to nearly two miles on the north. The valleys between the hills were filled with a thorny underbrush.¹

The question as to the mode of attack had not been fully determined when the American troops first landed. Scott states that his own opinion from the first was that the castle of Ulúa should be captured under the shelter of and through the city; but whether the city should be taken by a regular siege or by an assault remained open. After a conference with his staff, Scott determined upon a siege, and batteries were accordingly established, under the direction of his engineers, as rapidly as possible. The work, however, was greatly retarded by a constant succession of the northers which habitually blow with such violence off Vera Cruz during six months of the year as to make any landing on the beach impracticable during their continuance. However, the toilsome work was in time accomplished, the task being made doubly difficult by the necessity of moving guns and supplies through the blowing sand, which, during the prevalence of gales, added enormously to the discomforts of the troops in their improvised camps. But at length, after more than ten days' hard work, trenches had been dug and platforms for some of the guns had been erected, and on March

¹ Ripley, II, 19.

22 Scott summoned the Mexican commander to surrender the city.

The total force in the city, according to Mexican accounts, consisted of 3,360 men. It was made up of small detachments of various regiments of the line, artillerists, and men belonging to the Mexican navy—about 700 in all; of the battalions of Oaxaca and Tehuantepec, numbering 460; and about 2,200 "national guards" from Vera Cruz itself, Puebla, and other places near by. The castle of Ulúa was garrisoned by 450 artillerists and by 630 men from the battalions of Puebla, Jamiltepec, Tampico, Tuxpan, and Alvarado—in all 1,030 men. Thus the garrisons of city and castle amounted in all to 4,390; but whether this figure included commissioned officers does not appear. The city defences mounted 89 pieces of artillery (including mortars) of various calibres and ages, while the castle had 135 guns and mortars, mostly of heavy metal. Both were well supplied with ammunition.

The general in command of both city and castle was Juan Morales, who had conducted an unsuccessful campaign in Yucatan five years before. Under him General José Juan Landero was in command of the city, General José Duran of the castle, and Lieutenant-Colonel Manuel Robles Pezuela was chief of engineers. The latter, it seems, had urged the importance of throwing up outlying defensive works, which, he believed, would serve to delay the invaders a fortnight; but Morales was unwilling to risk diminishing his scanty force, and contented himself with opposing and delaying Scott's preparations by a distant cannonade from the city's walls.¹

In reply to Scott's demand for a surrender, Morales wrote that the city and castle of Ulúa would be defended at all cost, to effect which he "counted upon the necessary elements," and that he would make it good to the last. Scott immediately opened fire upon the city from seven mortars, and at the same time some of the lighter vessels of the Ameri-

¹ Roa Bárcena, *Invasion Norte-Americana*, 157-160; *Apuntes para la Historia de la Guerra*, 154.

can squadron also shelled the city from a position close in to the beach, where they were partly protected from the castle. Arrangements had previously been made with the naval commanders to land six heavy guns, which were placed in position about the centre of the American lines soon after the army batteries opened, and were manned and worked with great efficiency by detachments of seamen from the squadron.

For four days an almost unremitting fire from the American batteries was kept up, which was vigorously replied to by the Mexican artillery. The loss of life among the combatants on both sides was small; but great damage was done to the city itself, practicable breaches were made in the walls, and a number of non-combatants were killed or wounded. On the morning of March 26 proposals of surrender were received from General Landero, to whom General Morales, in accordance with a not uncommon Spanish practice, had turned over the command under a pretext of ill-health.¹

While the siege was thus progressing some Mexican cavalry and rancheros in the neighborhood had timidly and ineffectively tried to annoy the American camps. Shots had been nightly fired, which had cost the American soldiers a vexatious loss of sleep, but only two serious skirmishes had occurred. The first was with a detachment of the mounted rifles (of which Persifer F. Smith had been appointed colonel) forming a part of Twiggs's division. This detachment found several hundred Mexicans intrenched among the sand-hills on the road to the city of Mexico, at a point about two miles and a half from Vergara. The Americans at once deployed to the right and left of the road, outflanking the Mexicans in both directions, and advanced. The Mexicans made no stand, but incontinently abandoned their posi-

¹ The official reports of the siege operations from the American commanders are in Sen. Doc. 1, 30 Cong., 1 sess., 216-255; H. R. Doc. 1, 30 Cong., 2 sess., 1179-1192. Accounts by eye-witnesses will be found in *Autobiography of an English Soldier*, 145-166; *Reminiscences of a Campaign in Mexico*, 214-233; Maury, 32-34; Semmes, 125-141; Parker, 79-102; Wilcox, 242-262; Oswaldel, 67-102; Meade, I, 191-193, and Anderson, *An Artillery Officer in the Mexican War*, 65-105. See also Ripley, II, 19-52; Roa Bárcena, 152-193; *Apuntes para la Historia de la Guerra*, 151-167.

tion, and were pursued for about a mile, with apparently slight loss on either side.¹

On the next day, March 25, a party of the second dragoons, under Colonel Harney, were sent out by Scott's orders to disperse a Mexican force which was reported to be encamped on the Medellin River, south of Vera Cruz. Harney met with no opposition until he came near a stone bridge across the river, which he was informed was fortified and guarded by two thousand men and two pieces of artillery. He thereupon halted and sent forward skirmishers toward the bridge. The Mexicans, on the other side of the stream, opened a musketry fire, and Harney, seeing that the bridge was in fact fortified, sent back to camp for two pieces of artillery which shortly after arrived, accompanied by a number of dismounted dragoons and parts of the first and second Tennessee volunteers. After six or eight rounds from the guns, the infantry and the dismounted dragoons carried the bridge, whereupon the mounted men who had been held in reserve came up and pursued and completely dispersed the enemy. The pursuit was continued beyond the village of Medellin, six miles from the bridge; and Harney's command returned to camp early on the morning of March 27, having lost two men killed and nine wounded. "It is not ascertained precisely," Harney reported, "what number of the enemy was killed; but it is known that not less than fifty fell in the attack and subsequent pursuit."²

Scott, when he received General Landero's proposals of surrender, had been planning an assault upon the city, and he very readily agreed to the suggestion to appoint three commissioners to treat for terms of accommodation. His first demand was that the whole garrison should be surrendered as prisoners of war, but after two days of discussion it was finally agreed that they should be permitted to march out with the honors of war, to lay down their arms outside the city, and to return home on parole not to serve

¹ Report of Colonel Smith; Sen. Doc. 1, 30 Cong., 1 sess., 249-250. Maury, *Recollections of a Virginian*, 33.

² Sen. Doc. 1, 30 Cong., 1 sess., 250.

again until duly exchanged. In accordance with a special request of the Mexicans, Scott not only guaranteed protection to the inhabitants of the city and their property, but also that there should be absolute freedom of religious worship and ceremonies. On the morning of Monday, March 29, the American troops took possession of the city of Vera Cruz and the castle of San Juan de Ulúa.¹

What the total Mexican losses were is not known. The Mexican historians put them at "over six hundred," of whom four hundred were killed; but these figures must be grossly exaggerated. The American loss, in an army of about twelve thousand men, was twelve killed and forty-nine wounded. The navy lost seven men killed and eight wounded, the naval battery being specially exposed.

Scott's conduct of the military operations was beyond criticism, but the Mexican defence had been marked by almost incredible ineptitude. The obvious measure of opposing the first landing of troops on the beach had been totally neglected. The landing was effected in full sight of the city and castle, so that, with the slightest energy on the part of Morales and his men, a formidable force might readily have been placed in shelter on the sand-hills to open fire upon the boats as they approached the beach, and might have inflicted the most severe losses upon the landing party before they reached the shore. Such losses would not only have greatly weakened Scott in point of numbers, but would have seriously impaired the morale of the besieging army, even if they had managed to get ashore at all to begin operations.

Morales, also, before the siege was in command of a body of regular cavalry and rancheros who were respectable—at least in point of numbers. These men, if skilfully and boldly

¹ *Ibid.*, 229-238. A striking picture of the scene as the Mexican troops laid down their arms and marched out with their women and children will be found in Semmes, 146. A naval officer who was in the first boat to land at the castle of San Juan says: "It was certainly the filthiest place I had ever been in; and as for *smells* the city of Cologne itself could not surpass them."—(Parker, 101.) How far the Mexican troops observed their parole is not very clear. Roa Bárcena in his *Invasion Norte-Americana* says that the government more or less directly compelled the men who had surrendered to continue in service (p. 187).

handled, could unquestionably have greatly impeded Scott's troops' toilsome march through the sand around the city, and could have kept the camps in a constant state of alarm; but as a matter of fact they did nothing.

However, the harbor of Vera Cruz had now been secured, and preparations for holding it as a base of supplies and for beginning an advance into the interior of the country were actively pursued.

"The harbor became thenceforth crowded with vessels; some under contract with the government, and some pushing their fortunes in the way of trade. European vessels began to come in also, on speculation, and probably, Vera Cruz, never before, presented such a spectacle of mingled thrift and warlike preparation. . . . The reef of the Gallega, on which the proud old castle of San Juan de Ulua had alternately slumbered in lordly repose, and awakened the echoes of war, for so many generations past, was degraded into a coal depot for steamers; a substantial wharf of newly-sawed timber having been extended from it into the harbor, for the convenience of discharging and receiving the materiel. Sheds and wharves, for a similar purpose, had been constructed, also, at the island of Sacrificios. The channels of the harbor were marked out and buoyed, and pilot boats from the Chesapeake might be seen daily cruising many miles out at sea, to pick up in-ward bound vessels. Forges, and other workshops for the squadron were erected on Green Island, and a commodious hospital already loomed up from the little sand key of Salmedina at Anton Lizardo. Not the least of the improvements which had been made in the city, was the total revolution which had taken place in the custom house. The eighty or ninety Mexican officials, who had formerly occupied this building, had, of course, vacated their posts, and our friend Dimond, the former consul of the port, with half a dozen assistants, now performed the increased duties of collection, with a simplicity and rapidity that astonish those that had been accustomed to the cumbersome machinery of the defunct government."¹

While the tedious preliminaries of preparing for an advance were going on, the navy, under Commodore Matthew C. Perry, who had relieved Commodore Conner, again began the task of reducing the small towns lying along the Gulf. The first to be attacked was Alvarado, about thirty miles from Vera Cruz, which the squadron had twice attempted

¹ Semmes, 149.

in vain to capture.¹ A detachment from the army under General Quitman was sent along the beach to co-operate with the navy, but on arrival at the mouth of the river they found that the fort, as well as the towns higher up, had already surrendered to the United States steamer *Scourge*.

A few days later Commodore Perry undertook with his naval forces to capture the town of Tuxpan, lying about half-way between Vera Cruz and Tampico. He started on April 12 from Vera Cruz with the steam-vessels in his squadron, having sent his sailing vessels a few days beforehand to meet him at Lobos Island, where the whole fleet concentrated on the seventeenth. The next morning the small vessels of the squadron were towed up the river to attack the forts, which were under command of General Cos, the hero who had defended San Antonio against the Texans in 1835. As the flotilla approached the first of the forts, about a mile and a half below the town, the rowing boats were run ashore, and the men in them jumped out and carried the fort in an instant. The remaining forts higher up the river were in like manner carried by assault, the town was taken, and a custom-house established.²

The American forces, therefore, now held at their mercy the whole Gulf coast of Mexico, including its one reasonably good harbor—that of Vera Cruz—and were henceforth able, through their undisputed command of the sea, to land and supply troops in such number as they might think advisable.

¹ Conner's want of success at Alvarado was thought by many men in the navy to be due to his lack of dash and enterprise—the consequence perhaps of continued ill-health. He was a great sufferer from neuralgia. It is, however, very doubtful whether any one could have done any better, considering the imperfect means at his command. See Conner's *Home Squadron*; Curtis, *Life of Buchanan*, I, 603.

² See reports of Commodore Perry in H. R. Doc. 1, 30 Cong., 2 sess., 1192-1203.

CHAPTER XLII

CERRO GORDO

SANTA ANNA and his men, as they retreated after the battle of Buena Vista, reached the neighborhood of San Luis Potosí by the ninth of March, and there they were met by accounts of the recent outbreak of the clerical party against the established government. As it was evident that the time had come when Santa Anna must declare himself and intervene in the contest between the factions, which was paralyzing the government throughout the country, he started out, after a very short delay, upon his journey of something over three hundred miles to the capital.

From the remnants of his shattered army and the garrison that had been left behind in San Luis, Santa Anna was able to organize a body of troops fit for service, composed of four battalions of light infantry, two battalions of the line, two batteries of artillery, and some squadrons of cavalry. The infantry, amounting to about four thousand men, was organized in two brigades under the command of Generals Ciriaco Vasquez and Pedro Ampudia, respectively, while the cavalry was under General Julian Juvera. This force, numbering in all 5,650, was ordered to march in the direction of the capital, and it started from San Luis about the fifteenth of March. Santa Anna's favorite regiment of hussars was selected to escort the general-in-chief to the city of Mexico, and General Mora y Villamil was left at San Luis, in command of the remnants of the army, with orders to reorganize them, and make up what was to be called the Army of the North.¹

Travelling rapidly, Santa Anna with his cavalry escort

¹ Balbontin, *Invasion Americana*, 105.