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Political.

REPORT OF THE SECRETARY OF WAR.

We cannot do our readers better service than to publish so much of this able document as relates to the movements of the army during the past year, simply pre-mising that it will be found exceedingly interesting, and a valuable report for future reference. The Secretary says,

Previous to my last annual report, the largest part of our regular force had been concentrated at Fort Leavenworth, in the department of Texas, and in March last, pursuant to instructions from this department, he moved forward, to be in a situation more effectively to execute that purpose, to the left bank of the Rio Grande, where he arrived about the end of that month, selected a position for the army opposite to Matamoras, and proceeded to strengthen it by the erection of necessary field works, at the same time establishing a depot of supplies at Point Isabel, about thirty miles distant in his rear, and near the coast.

Notwithstanding the object of this movement of our troops was made known, and all intention of doing more than peacefully to occupy the territory of Texas was disavowed, soon after the arrival of the army on the Rio Grande a hostile feeling began to be manifested by the Mexican forces stationed on the opposite bank of that river, and on the 24th of April the Mexican general, Arista, informed General Taylor that "he considered hostilities commenced, and should prosecute them." On the same day a detachment of our dragoons, sent up the left bank of the river to observe the movements of the Mexican forces, became engaged with a large body of those troops, and after a short affair, in which some sixteen were killed and wounded, was compelled to surrender.

After this occurrence, there could no longer be a doubt that the Mexican authorities had designedly changed the relation of peace between the two countries into a state of actual war. General Taylor, availing himself of the authority vested in him by your direction, called on the governors of Texas and Louisiana for four regiments of volunteers from each State, to be sent forward with the least practicable delay. In the meantime, owing to the scarcity of provisions for the army encamped opposite to Matamoras, and being apprehensive that the enemy would endeavor to cut off the communication with the depot whence supplies were drawn, the general, leaving a part of his force to defend his entrenched camp, (Fort Brown,) moved with the rest of his army to Point Isabel. After securing his supply train, he commenced his return march on the 7th of May, and on the next day encountered the enemy in considerable force at Palo Alto, where an action ensued, which was obstinately contested by the enemy from two o'clock in the afternoon until nearly dark, when the Mexican army was finally driven, with immense loss, from the field. The American force engaged in this action was 2,288. That of the enemy, as admitted by their own officers taken prisoners, amounted to six thousand regulars, together with a considerable irregular force.

On the next day the enemy was again met seven miles in advance, at Resaca de la Palma, where he was drawn up in equal force, with the advantage of positions judiciously selected by himself. Here another action ensued, in which the enemy was signally defeated, and driven across the Rio Grande with still greater loss, leaving a large amount of munitions and baggage of every description, which fell into our possession. His loss in killed, wounded, and missing, in the two engagements, has been estimated at one thousand men.

During the absence of General Taylor with a part of his force from Fort Brown, that post was bombarded by the enemy's batteries from the 4th to the 9th of May.

Of these gallant achievements it is not necessary to speak more in detail, as the official accounts were laid before Congress at the last session. They are considered, everywhere in our own country, & admitted abroad, to be examples of courage and skill scarcely excelled in the history of military operations—reflecting the highest credit alike upon the officers and soldiers who participated in these memorable actions.

For several successive years this department had asked authority to prepare a ponton train, but the prospect of having use for it seemed to be so remote that no provision therefor had then been made, and for want of means of pursuing the enemy across the river, the commanding general was unable to avail himself, to the utmost extent, of the advantages of these decisive victories; and it was not till the 18th that he succeeded in crossing the river and taking military possession of the city of Matamoras; which was, on his approach, hastily abandoned by the Mexican troops, leaving behind them a considerable supply of ordnance and public stores.

As soon as it became known at this place that Mexico had commenced hostilities, Congress recognised the existence of war between the United States and that republic, and on the 13th of May authorized the President to accept the service of volunteers, not to exceed 50,000. Under this act, requisitions were immediately made upon the governors of the States of Arkansas, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, Tennessee, Kentucky, Missouri,

Illinois, Indiana, Ohio and Texas, for a volunteer force equal to 26 regiments, amounting in all, with a battalion from this District and Maryland, to about 23,000 effective men, to serve for the period of twelve months, or to the end of the war. This call was responded to in a prompt and patriotic manner, and the force duly organized and sent forward to the points of destination with the least practicable delay. Much the largest portion of it was designed to co-operate with the regular army under General Taylor, then on the Rio Grande. After establishing his base of operations on that river for several hundred miles, he moved into the enemy's country in the direction of Monterey, in the department of New Leon. Another portion was concentrated, under General Wool at San Antonio de Bexar, for a movement upon Chihuahua; and the volunteers from the State of Missouri assembled at Fort Leavenworth, to compose, with a few hundred regular troops, an expedition to Santa Fe, under Gen. Kearney.

Owing to the great difficulty in providing the means of transporting supplies for so large a force as that concentrated on the Rio Grande; to the necessity of drawing all those supplies from the United States—the enemy's country being destitute of them; to the unusual freshets which retarded the progress of boats on the river, and to the impracticability of the land route for wagons at that time, arrangements for the movement upon Monterey from Matamoras, by the way of Camargo, the route selected by the commanding general, were not completed until the latter part of August, when a column, consisting of about 6,000 regular and volunteer troops, commenced a forward movement by brigade upon Seralvo, and thence upon Monterey, before which place it arrived on the 19th of September.

On approaching Monterey, our army saw before them a city strong in natural defenses, and made much more so by works of art, with a citadel protecting it on one side, and fortified heights on another; the avenues to it guarded by fortresses, well armed, and fully manned, and every house a strong hold. Thus strong in position, with more than forty pieces of artillery skillfully placed for destructive resistance, well might its defenders exult in their fancied security, and defy their assailants. Here, the valor, skill, and heroism which had recently shone so conspicuous on the well-fought and victorious fields of Palo Alto and Resaca de la Palma, were to be put to

The attack was commenced on the 21st, and continued through the two successive days. The enemy was assailed in his fortified positions; his batteries captured; his fortresses one after another carried; and at length, dispossessed of most of his defensive works and more than half of the city, he solicited terms of capitulation, and liberal terms were granted.

No better justice can be done to the merits of the officers and soldiers who participated in the achievements of the three glorious days before Monterey, than is presented in the perspicuous despatch of Major General Taylor, and in the reports of the officers in subordinate command on that occasion, which are here transmitted. A plain narrative of their deeds is their best eulogy.

It is gratifying to learn that in the scenes at Monterey, where the bravery and conduct of our army were subjected to the severest tests, the volunteers, who were with the advancing column, bore a prominent part, and entitled themselves to an equal share in the honor and glory of the achievement.

Neither at Monterey, nor on the banks of the Rio Grande, were our brilliant successes gained without a price. The nation has to lament a severe loss in officers and men. Many gallant spirits there sealed their devotion to their country with their blood; they fell in the honorable discharge of their duty, leaving a name which, whenever and wherever mentioned, will be the theme of praise by their grateful countrymen.

In fulfillment of the terms of capitulation, the city, fortifications, cannon, munitions of war, and all other public property, with certain exceptions, were surrendered to our arms.

On receiving General Taylor's despatches announcing the terms of capitulation, he was instructed to give the requisite notice that the armistice, which was made subject to the ratifications of the respective governments of the belligerent forces would cease at once, and that each party would be at liberty to resume and prosecute hostilities without restriction.

The advance column under Brigadier General Wool, about 1,400 strong, destined for Chihuahua, commenced its march from San Antonio de Bexar on the 29th of September, and was followed in a few days thereafter by the rear division of equal number. By the last advice from that officer, a copy of which accompanies this report, it appears that the column under his command has crossed the Rio Grande, penetrated the department of Coahuila within thirty miles of Santa Rosa, and was pursuing its route to Chihuahua, though not official, information has just been received that he entered Monclova on the 31st of October, without resistance, and was received in a friendly manner by its inhabitants.

On the 30th of June, Brigadier General Kearney, with the force under his command, amounting, in all, to about 1,600 men, regulars and volunteers, moved from

Fort Leavenworth upon Santa Fe, where he arrived, after a march of 873 miles, on the 18th of August, and took military possession of New Mexico without resistance. The Mexican forces, about 4,000 in number, which had been collected near the city under the late government. Armiño, to oppose his progress, dispersed on the approach of our troops, and the governor fled himself with a small command of dragoons in the direction of Chihuahua. Under the apprehension that the force which left Fort Leavenworth, in June, might not be sufficient fully to effect the purpose of the expedition, which was, to found practicable, to pass on to California after conquering and securing New Mexico, General Kearney was authorized to organize and muster into service a battalion of the emigrants which were on the way to California or Oregon. This has been done, and also one thousand additional volunteers from Missouri were sent on as reinforcements, and to augment his disposable force for California; but he had not joined General Kearney when he departed for that country. After making the necessary arrangements at Santa Fe, consequent on the military occupation of New Mexico, General Kearney moved with a part of his force to the village of Tome, about 100 miles down the Rio Grande. The inhabitants, not only at Santa Fe, but throughout the whole of this department, are represented to be well satisfied with the change which had taken place, and the General reports that there can no longer be apprehended any organized resistance to our troops in that territory.

With a regular force of about 300 dragoons, leaving orders for a part of the volunteers to follow, he commenced his march from Santa Fe for California, intending to proceed down the Rio Grande about two hundred miles, thence to strike across to the Gila, and to move down that river near its mouth, then across the Colorado to the Pacific, where he hoped to arrive about the last of November. After proceeding about 180 miles on his route, he was met by an express from California, sent by Lieutenant Colonel Fremont. On learning the condition of things in that quarter, and deeming that an additional force would not be required in California he directed most of that with him to return to Santa Fe. Selecting about one hundred men to accompany him, he continued on his route. The prompt and energetic manner in which General Kearney has conducted to a successful termination a very difficult and distant enterprise, is worthy of high commendation.

It was deemed important that military occupation should be taken of California. Early attention was given to this subject. General Kearney was directed to proceed, with what force he could spare, across the Rocky mountains to that country. A company of U. S. artillery, in July, and a regiment of New York volunteer infantry, in Sept., were sent to sea by California; but before these forces reached their destination, and even before their departure from the United States, the Mexican authority in the whole province of the Californias has been subverted. As the series of events which led to the overthrow of the Mexican power in that extensive country, and its occupation as a conquest of the United States, are not contained in any official report yet received, but collected from various sources considered authentic, I deem it not inappropriate to present them with more than usual particularity.

In May, 1845, John C. Fremont, then a brevet captain in the corps of Topographical Engineers, and since appointed a lieutenant colonel, left here under orders from this department to pursue his explorations in the regions beyond the Rocky mountains. The object of this service were, as those of his previous explorations had been, of a scientific character, without any view whatever to military operations. Not an officer or soldier of the United States army accompanied him, and his whole force consisted of sixty-two men, employed by himself for security against Indians, and for procuring subsistence in the wilderness and desert country through which he was to pass.

One of the objects he had in view was to discover a new and shorter route from the western base of the Rocky mountains to the mouth of the Columbia river. This search, for a part of the distance, would carry him through the unsettled, and afterwards through a corner of the settled parts of California. He approached the settlements in the winter of 1845-'6.—Aware of the critical state of affairs between the United States and Mexico, and determined to give no cause of offence to the authorities of the province, with commendable prudence he halted his command on the frontier, one hundred miles from Monterey, and proceeded alone to that city, to explain the object of his coming to the Commandant general, Castro, and to obtain permission to go to the valley of the San Joaquin, where there was game for his men and grass for his horses, and no inhabitants to be molested by his presence. The leave was granted; but scarcely had he reached the desired spot for refreshment and repose, before he received information from the American settlements, and by expresses from our consul at Monterey, that General Castro was preparing to attack him with a comparatively large force of artillery, cavalry, and infantry, upon the pretext that, under the cover of a scientific mission, he was exciting the American settlers to revolt. In view of this danger, and to be in a condition to repel an attack, he then took a po-

sition on a mountain overlooking Monterey, at a distance of about thirty miles, entrenched, it, raised the flag of the United States, and with his own men, sixty-two in number, awaited the approach of the commandant general.

From the 7th to the 10th of March, Colonel Fremont and his little band maintained their position. General Castro did not approach within attacking distance, and Col. Fremont adhering to his plan of avoiding all collisions, and determined neither to compromise his government nor the American settlers ready to join him at all hazards if he had been attacked, abandoned his position and marched to Oregon, intending, by that route, to return to the United States. Deeming all danger from the Mexicans to be passed, he yielded to the wishes of some of his men, who desired to remain in the country, discharged them from his service and refused to receive others in their stead—so cautious was he to avoid anything which would compromise the American settlers, or give even a color of offence to the Mexican authorities. He pursued his march slowly and leisurely, as the state of his men & horses required, until the middle of May, and had reached the northern shore of the greater Tlamath Lake, within the limits of Oregon Territory, when he found his further progress in that direction obstructed by impassable snowy mountains and hostile Indians, who had been excited against him by General Castro, had killed and wounded four of his men, and left him to repose either in camp or on his march.—At the same time information reached him that General Castro, in addition to his Indian allies, was advancing in person against him with artillery and cavalry, at the head of 4 or 5 hundred men; that they were passing around the head of the bay of San Francisco to a rendezvous of the north side of it, and that the American settlers in the valley of the Sacramento were comprehended in the scheme of destruction meditated against his own party.

Under these circumstances he determined to turn upon his Mexican pursuers and seek safety, both for his own party and the American settlers, not merely in the defeat of Castro, but in the total overthrow of the Mexican authority in California, and the establishment of an independent government in that extensive department. It was on the 6th of June, and before the commencement of the war between the United States and Mexico could have been there known, that this resolution was taken, and by the 5th of July it was carried into effect by a series of rapid marches, quick to perceive, and able to direct the proper measures for accomplishing such a daring enterprise.

On the 11 of June, a convoy of two hundred horses for Castro's camp, with an officer and fourteen men, were surprised and captured by twelve of Fremont's party; on the 15th, at daybreak, the military post of Sonoma was also surprised and taken, with nine brass cannon, two hundred and fifty stand of muskets, and several officers, and some men and munitions of war.

Leaving a small garrison in Sonoma, Colonel Fremont went to the Sacramento to rouse the American settlers but scarcely had he arrived there, when an express reached him from the garrison at Sonoma, with information that Castro's whole force was crossing the bay to attack that place. This intelligence was received in the afternoon of the 23 of June, while he was on the American fork of the Sacramento, eighty miles from the little garrison at Sonoma, and at 2 o'clock on the morning of the 25th he arrived at that place with ninety riflemen from the American settlers in that valley. The enemy had not yet appeared; scouts were sent out to reconnoitre; and a party of twenty fell in with a squadron of seventy dragoons, (all of Castro's force which had crossed the bay,) attacked and defeated it, killing and wounding five, without harm to themselves—the Mexican commander, De la Torre, barely escaping, with the loss of his transport boats, and nine pieces of brass artillery spiked.

The country north of the bay of San Francisco being cleared of the enemy, Colonel Fremont returned to Sonoma on the evening of the 4th of July, and on the morning of the 5th called the people together, explained to them the condition of things in the province, and recommended an immediate declaration of independence. The declaration was made, and he was selected to take the chief direction of affairs.

The attack on Castro was the next object. He was at Santa Clara, an entrenched post on the upper or south side of the bay of San Francisco, with 400 men and two pieces of field artillery. A circuit of more than an hundred miles must be traversed to reach him. On the 6th of July the pursuit was commenced by a body of 100 mounted riflemen, commanded by Colonel Fremont in person, who, in three days, arrived at the American settlements on the Rio de los Americanos. Here he learnt that Castro had abandoned Santa Clara, and was retreating south towards Ciudad de las Angeles, (the City of the Angels,) the seat of the governor general of the Californias, and distant four hundred miles. It was instantly resolved on to pursue him to that place. At the moment of departure the gratifying intelligence was received that war with Mexico had commenced; that Monterey had been taken by our naval force and the flag of the United States there raised on the 7th of July; and that

the fleet would co-operate in the pursuit of Castro and his forces. The flag of independence was hoisted down, and that of the United States hoisted amidst the hearty greetings and to the great joy of the American settlers and the forces under the command of Colonel Fremont.

The combined pursuit was rapidly continued, and on the 12th of August, Commodore Stockton and Colonel Fremont, with a detachment of marines from the squadron and some riflemen, entered the City of the Angels—without resistance or objection, the Governor General, Pico, the Commandant General, Castro, and all the Mexican authorities having fled and dispersed. Commodore Stockton took possession of the whole country as a conquest of the United States, and appointed Colonel Fremont governor under the law of nations, to assume the functions of that office when he should return to the squadron.

Thus, in the short space of sixty days from the first decisive movement, this conquest was achieved, by a small body of men, to an extent beyond their own expectation; for the Mexican authorities proclaimed it a conquest, not merely of the northern part, but of the whole province of the Californias.

The Commandant General, Castro, on the 9th of August, from his camp at the Mesa, and next day "on the road to Sonora," announced this result to the people, together with the actual flight and dispersion of the former authorities; and at the same time he officially communicated the facts of the conquest to the French, English, and Spanish consuls in California; and, to crown the whole, the official paper of the Mexican government, on the 16th of October, in laying these official communications before the public, introduced them with the emphatic declaration—"The loss of the Californias is consummated." The whole province was yielded up to the United States, and is now in our military occupancy. A small part of the troops sent out to subject this province will constitute, it is presumed, a sufficient force to retain our possession, and the remainder will be disposable for other objects of war.

In the foregoing remarks I have presented to your consideration the destination and operation of the public forces since the commencement of the war with Mexico. When its existence was recognized by Congress in May last, our entire military force, then stationed at different points in our widely extended country, did not exceed 7,640 men. Our preparation for a large expansion of the army, and raising "by voluntary avocations" on military operations, in many respects, quite deficient. Such an army suddenly to be raised would want of more than 30,000 men, to be sent to several different and distant expeditions, could not at once be made.

The duties of this department have been, since the commencement of the war, arduous and embarrassing, and its unremitting efforts have been directed to discharging them in the manner best calculated to facilitate the operations of our forces in the field. To these forces belongs the merit of the successes which have attended their movements, and these successes are not inconsiderable. By the operations of the land and naval forces we are now in military possession of the department of Tamaulipas, of the right bank of the Rio Grande for several hundred miles from its mouth, and of the department of New Leon, Coahuila and Chihuahua are, in effect, wrested from the control of Mexico; all Mexican authority, both civil and military, has been displaced in New Mexico and the Californias, and these large and important provinces are in our quiet occupation. Such are the achievements of our arms within the short period of seven months from the commencement of a war, suddenly forced upon us, when our force in the field was less than three thousand effective men, with a hostile army of double its numerical strength prepared to assail it, and exulting in the confident hope of a decisive victory.

In relation to the further prosecution of the war the Secretary says:—

Authority was given at the last session of Congress to increase the rank and file of the regiments in the regular service to more than double the former number.—Prompt measures were taken to procure recruits; but they have not been attended with the desired effect. When filled up to the maximum allowed by law and executive approbation, our regular forces will be 16,998 officers and men; but it does not now exceed 10,300. The want of better success in recruiting is, I apprehend, mainly to be ascribed to the large number of volunteers which has in the meantime been called out. The volunteer service is regarded generally by our citizens as preferable to that in the regular army; and as long as volunteers are expected to be called for, it will be difficult to fill the ranks of regular regiments, unless additional inducements are offered, or the terms of service modified. A small pecuniary bounty given at the time of the enlistment, or land at the end of the term of service, would, it is believed, have a most beneficial effect. Probably an equal favorable result would flow from annexing a condition to the present period of service, allowing the recruit to be discharged at the end of the present war.

It is not possible to foretell with much precision what number of troops the exigencies of the war may require for the ensuing year. The estimates presented to the Secretary of the Treasury have