Occupying For Peace, The U.S. Army In Mexico, 1846-1848

DISSERTATION

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the United States’ execution of the military occupation of Mexico during the Mexican-American War (1846-1848). It argues that the occupation was successful and played an important role in achieving the American strategic objectives. The occupation succeeded because (a) President James K. Polk and his military commanders formulated a sound and flexible strategy, (b) a relatively competent corps of professional army officers executed that strategy, and (c) the United States Army maintained consistent military superiority over the Mexicans throughout the conflict.

This dissertation examines the military occupation in terms of the American management of the Mexican population down to the city level, and the American reaction to Mexican resistance after the conventional army was defeated and driven from different parts of the country.

The Americans were successful during the occupation because they applied an artful blend of conciliation toward the population, calibrated coercion, and co-option of much of the Catholic clergy and Mexican elite. The American victories on the conventional battlefield and conciliation of the population did not in themselves convince the Mexicans to cease resistance. The Army eventually succeeded by transitioning to a more punitive policy, targeting those who resisted or abetted resistance, particularly the elite, and by demonstrating to the Mexicans that they were committed to continuing the occupation indefinitely. Throughout the occupation the Americans demonstrated a flexible strategy that exploited social and racial fault lines in Mexican society.
This dissertation does not ignore the faults of the American army in Mexico, often undisciplined and driven by its perception of racial superiority over its adversary. The army committed many atrocities against the Mexican population, and in other circumstances these acts might have undermined the overall effort. Yet the faults of the United States Army did not undermine the occupation because of aggressive efforts by the American leadership to control its troops, the consistent American ability to defeat the Mexicans in battle, and Mexico’s own inability to unite against the foreign invader. Mexico’s isolation from external support further hindered its attempts to resist. While misconduct and racism did not undermine the U.S. effort, they did contribute to a legacy of antipathy between the neighboring states. Finally, while the American military occupation succeeded in achieving the U.S. strategic objectives, it left Mexico frail and vulnerable to invasion by other foreign powers.
Dedicated to my girls: Megan, Cauley, Abby, and Ellie
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INTRODUCTION

The Mexican War is typically remembered for its dramatic victories at Buena Vista, Cerro Gordo, and Mexico City, with little mention made of the occupation and the American interaction with the occupied population. The typical textbook interpretation goes directly from the fall of the Mexican capital to the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. Yet the Mexican government did not stop resisting after Mexico City fell, but instead relocated their capital out of range of the Americans and continued their efforts to thwart their enemy’s ambitions. They perceived the possibility of a European nation intervening on the Mexican side, and they found hope in the Whig Party’s opposition to the war and the possibility of a political shift in the United States that would neutralize the expansionist impulse that had brought on the war. These hopes were not misplaced. European powers did indeed indicate some interest in intervening and there was an active anti-war party in the United States.

In the meantime, lacking the ability to meet the U.S. forces in open battle, the Mexicans turned to guerrilla warfare. Mexico had succeeded through guerrilla warfare before, fighting for eleven years to throw off the yoke of Spanish colonization. Early successes inspired more hope in this course as guerrillas severely interdicted American supply lines and frustrated American commanders. It was not unreasonable for the Mexican government to hope that guerilla warfare could once again prevail.
The American army, however, succeeded in containing the guerrilla menace. It also maintained stability among the large, potentially restive Mexican populace through an artful combination of conciliation toward the population, calibrated coercion, and efforts to co-opt the Catholic clergy and Mexican elite. Ultimately the army not only contained the guerrillas but also played an important role in forcing the Mexican government to conclude a peace treaty by which it relinquished half of Mexico.

The American military occupation of Mexico was not a perfectly executed operation, but it succeeded because it applied a sound strategy, was well led by competent, relatively professional officers, and because the U.S. Army possessed significant military superiority over the Mexicans. In reality, the American government and army did not have to run a perfect operation because there were significant fault lines in Mexican society that the United States was able to exploit to prevent a “national” resistance from emerging. The fractured nature of Mexican society initially prevented the Americans from attaining the rapid peace they desired; in time, however, they were able to take advantage of the situation and force the Mexican leadership to accept their demands.

The American occupation strategy initially focused on appeasing the Mexican population and stabilizing the occupied cities. This being accomplished, the Mexicans still resisted and the U.S. Army next applied pressure on the social elite by exploiting the tension between the upper class, largely composed of Spanish or mixed heritage, and the large indigenous population. The Americans targeted the Mexican elites’ ability to quell indigenous revolution by expanding the occupation, taxing them heavily, and allowing Mexican liberals (Puros) to temporarily dominate the government. Feeling their social
status and political future threatened, enough Mexican moderate politicians (moderatos) eventually agreed to give in to the American demands.

The U.S. Army overcame the shortfalls of its own largely volunteer force by enforcing strict discipline and relying on a corps of competent, professional officers for the primary tasks associated with the occupation. Finally, the Americans seized the initiative from the Mexican guerrillas through aggressive counter-guerrilla raids, mostly led by Mexican spies. Competent political and military management of the occupation of Mexico convinced the Mexicans to accept the American terms of peace and end the resistance by February 1848.

My definition of military occupation is one nation temporarily controlling another, or a substantial portion of another, in order to achieve a military objective without attempting to annex that nation. The occupying nation must intend to withdraw as soon as its goals are met. Most occupations are preceded by a military phase in which the occupier defeats the military forces of the occupied country. This is not to say that occupation does not go on simultaneously with conventional operations, as in most instances it does.\(^1\) In modern day military lingo, this is a study of phase four military operations, where phase four refers to military activities that take place after conventional combat operations to stabilize and administer the occupied region.\(^2\)

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2 This definition is based upon Conrad C. Crane’s article, “Phase IV Operations: Where Wars are really won,” *Military Review* LXXXV, no. 3 (June 2005), 11.
Some scholars may not consider the United States’ mission in Mexico as including a military occupation, since the Americans never controlled the entire nation and were only in command in Mexico City for about nine months (September 1847 to June 1848). However, many occupations never exercise sovereignty over an entire nation, and in Mexico the Americans occupied the capital and the most densely populated states. Furthermore, while the occupation of Mexico City only lasted nine months, the occupation of the northern states of Nuevo Leon, Coahuila, and Tamaulipas exceeded two years.

Occupation is as difficult as any other military operation, though military commanders commonly overlooked it during war planning. The occupier’s greatest challenge during this type of operation is to convince the local population to accept foreign rule for a period of time before the home front tires of the war.\(^3\) Mexico mirrors other military occupations in history in that the Americans did not initially anticipate the mission. Specifically, in the northern states during 1846, Zachary Taylor’s army of occupation had no real plan for managing the Mexican population. This contributed to the initiation of a major guerrilla conflict.

The occupied nation usually continues to resist in whatever manner possible, especially during operations occurring before both sides have agreed to a cease fire and commenced peace negotiations. Guerrilla warfare is a common form of resistance during a military occupation. The ability to isolate the occupied resistance from external support

is a critical element to achieving success during a wartime occupation, and one that historically has undermined many successful military campaigns.4

Strategies of military occupation must pacify the population and run and effective military government. Simply stated, pacification strategies can be divided into three general categories: coercion, co-opting the elite, and conciliation of the entire population. Coercion can vary in its application from barbarism targeting the entire society, to discriminate application of force only to those involved in violent resistance. Co-opting the elite entails persuading the nation’s elite to cooperate by convincing them that what the occupier is offering is their best alternative. This course of action assumes that the elite can control the nation’s population, and convince them to refrain from resistance. Conciliation of the population involves providing benefits to win over a large portion of the population, and then using them to target the resistance.5

Each of these three approaches has its strengths and weaknesses, and in most successful cases a blend of all three, appropriate to that particular situation, is required. Coercion has worked at certain points in history, but no matter how controlled or discriminately applied, it runs the risk of alienating large portions of the population and creating more enemies. Burning a village that supported guerrillas could have the effect

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4 The International policy and defense analyst Jeffrey Record has convincingly argued that external assistance is the most important element to victory for insurgents over a more powerful occupying nation; see Jeffrey Record, Beating Goliath: Why Insurgencies Win, 1st ed. (Washington, D.C: Potomac Books, 2007), XII.

5 This paragraph is influenced by the work of David M. Edelstein, Occupational Hazards: Success and Failure in Military Occupation, (Cornell University Press, 2008), 49-55; John Nagl, Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife, Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), 26-28; and Field Manual 3-24, Counterinsurgency, (Headquarters, Department of the Army, December, 2006), 1-21.
of creating more guerrillas out of the innocent residents who lived there. Executing a well-controlled raid that captures or kills only the guerrilla is a superior tactic, but is difficult, relies on excellent intelligence that may not always exist, and may still alienate the friends or relatives of the neutralized insurgent.

Co-opting the elite depends upon the ability of the elite to control the population, and the occupier’s capacity to convince them to cooperate. Methods to convince the elite to cooperate can take on the form of positive or negative reinforcement. The occupier may offer promises of wealth or power (positive); or threaten the elites’ status in society by targeting their possessions, supporting their political enemies, or threatening their lives (negative). Because the intent of military occupation is to eventually return the government to the host nation, occupiers commonly involve the local elite in the government. If the elite can be convinced to support the invading nation’s goals, this technique has the additional benefit of providing a level of local expertise to the occupation force. However, convincing the elite to participate is no easy task; obstacles of national honor must be overcome and a commitment to supporting post-war stability demonstrated.

Conciliation of the entire population is the preferred method by most western democracies, but generally requires a major commitment of time and resources to protect the people and enable their economic survival. Gaining and maintaining this commitment, particularly in a democracy where the political will of the people is often unpredictable and can force the hand of a politician, makes long-term operations difficult. In the words of General George C. Marshall, the U.S. Army chief of staff during World
War II, “a democracy cannot fight a Seven Years War.” While history has proved Marshall wrong on several accounts, his point is still relevant to the Mexican War because of its controversial nature and the impatient character of American society during wartime.

In Mexico each of these strategies, coercion, co-opting the elite, and conciliation was applied to a degree during the military occupation, and the American command demonstrated excellent flexibility as it chose its strategy. In general, the Americans attempted a conciliatory strategy toward the population, but this strategy was at times undermined by the army’s lack of discipline, racism, and a desire for revenge among the U.S. soldiers. Simultaneously, the United States attempted to co-opt portions of the elite, namely the Catholic Church and city governments. Yet, even the elite in Mexican society were divided, and no one group held enough clout to force an early surrender to the Americans, even when it became obvious that military victory was unattainable. Late in the war, coercion was directed against those who continued to resist. Notably, the Americans threatened the Mexican elite in order to convince enough of them to cooperate, a combination of co-opting the elite and coercion.

Success in a military occupation can be defined as achieving an end state that (1) gains the occupying country’s strategic goals; (2) enables the occupier to withdraw fully;

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and (3) does not leave the country as a future threat to the occupying power’s interests. In Mexico, the Americans succeeded completely in the first two of these three areas, and partially in the third. They achieved their strategic goal and withdrew in a timely and complete manner, but the United States left Mexico weak and Mexicans bitter against their northern neighbor. The Mexican-American War contributed to overall weakness and financial instability of the Mexican government, which in turn made it vulnerable to French conquest and occupation from 1861-1867. The French conquest and occupation of Mexico contravened the U.S.’s strategic objective of preventing European incursion into the western hemisphere.\(^7\)

Yet another criterion for evaluating success in any military operation is to consider the cost of the project: is it worth the price in both blood and treasure? This is a challenging question to answer in any military problem as it is inherently difficult to measure the value of lives lost to achieve a political end. The cost of the war with Mexico for the United States was great; the Americans sustained 12,876 deaths, 26,732 total casualties, and expended approximately $140 million, including what was paid to veterans after the war.\(^8\) But the political gains were also great and endured long after the war’s end. The United States doubled its geographic size and gained massive amounts of natural resources that contributed to its eventual rise to the status of the world’s wealthiest nation.

\(^7\)The Mexican-American War was clearly not the only factor that led to Mexico’s debt and instability prior to the French incursion. Other factors also contributed, including the U.S.’s inability to react to the French incursion because it was in the midst of its own civil war.

\(^8\)“Combat and Noncombat Losses,” Senate Exec Doc 36, 30\(^{th}\) Cong, 1\(^{st}\) Sess, 6-7 (casualty figures); K. Jack Bauer, The Mexican War, 1846-1848 (New York: Macmillan, 1974), 397.
This dissertation will focus on the occupation south of the Rio Grande, the regions that Mexico retained after the war. It will not cover the occupation of the area north of the Rio Grande because the intent of the Polk administration was to maintain this region as part of the United States, which changed the context of the operation dramatically.

Chapter I describes the U.S. strategic objectives that drove the occupation of Mexico south of the Rio Grande, emphasizing that the Polk administration’s goals from the beginning were to remove the Mexican threat to Texas, and to gain control of California and the region between California and Texas for the United States. Polk underestimated the Mexican resolve to resist, and overestimated the Mexican governing elite’s ability to lead their nation to the peace table once it became apparent they could not compete militarily with the Americans.

Nevertheless, Polk’s resolve was strong, and he remained unwavering in his military objectives throughout the conflict. These objectives were limited relative to other commonly studied military occupations, such as the Philippines after the Spanish-American War, and Germany and Japan after World War II. In these cases, the Americans sought to either retain control of the country or to restructure the entire society. In contrast, the Americans merely sought to force the Mexicans to surrender land that, while vast, was sparsely populated, plagued by attacks from Indian tribes, and largely under-utilized by the Mexicans.

The Mexican government was constrained in what it could concede because of its tenuous hold on power. Mexico at the time of the war was an immature nation, only independent for twenty-five years. It was a ticking time bomb of resistance and rebellion, plagued by frequent transitions in government. To ensure post-war stability and their
hold on power, the Mexican governing party needed to demonstrate to their people that they had done all that they could and achieved the best peace terms possible under the dire circumstances that were thrust upon them. Many Mexicans also saw potential in the guerrilla resistance and continued to hope for a European intervention, but at the same time, the elite viewed guerrillas with great trepidation. They feared the effect of giving up too much power to the lower class of society who dominated the guerrilla parties. Finally, Mexico had a history of resistance to foreign invaders, and possessed the capacity to unite against the Americans. Honor was important in Mexican society, and powerful political forces demanded a great effort at resistance before giving up what amounted to half of the nation’s territory. Thus, astute management of the military occupation by the U.S. Army was necessary to prevent the Mexicans from uniting and fighting a “national” war.

Chapter II describes the U.S. Army during the Mexican War and argues that despite its shortfalls, the army executed the occupation well enough to win the peace. Racism toward dark-skinned Mexicans and poor discipline in some volunteer units caused problems for the Americans. However, budding professionalism within the regular army, strong leadership at the high levels of command, and American background combating Indians enabled the army to overcome these weaknesses. American military superiority—winning every battle and most engagements with guerrillas—also helped mitigate the effect of its disciplinary weaknesses.

Chapters III through VII cover the occupation of Mexico first in the north (Chapters III and IV), and then in central Mexico (Chapters V through VII). The Americans applied a policy of conciliation toward the Mexican population throughout the
conflict. This was important during the conventional phase of the war through October 1847, because it enabled the American generals to focus on defeating the Mexican regular army. However, conciliation was imperfectly applied and American racism and atrocities instilled passion and hatred for the foreign invader in many Mexicans.

Nowhere were the effects of racism and mistreatment of the Mexican population more apparent than in northern Mexico during 1847 under the Army of Occupation led by General Zachary Taylor, which is the topic of Chapter III. Americans, particularly those in the nearby states of Texas and Arkansas, poured across the border and “contributed” to the war effort. These soldiers brought their racist attitudes toward Mexicans with them, and inflicted many atrocities on the population, undermining conciliatory efforts. Complicating matters was the style of command employed by the American commander, General Zachary Taylor. Taylor was a great battlefield leader, but lacking when it came to enforcing high standards of discipline within his army. In a short period of time, the three occupied northern states of Coahuila, Nuevo Leon, and Tamaulipas, which originally contained sentiments of sympathy for the American cause and admiration of the American form of government, turned into an inferno of resistance to the Army of Occupation. This resistance threatened to undermine the American victories on the conventional battlefield by inflicting enough casualties through guerrilla attacks to weaken the American will to continue the war.

Chapter IV covers the army’s recovery in the north under the leadership of General John Wool. Wool commanded the Army of the Center that moved through the state of Coahuila from October 1846 to February 1847 when it joined Taylor’s army at Agua Nueva to fight the battle of Buena Vista. Wool took command of the Army of
Occupation when Taylor returned to the United States to pursue the presidency in October 1847, though he had in effect been in charge of large portions of the occupied territory several months prior. His taking command in the north coincided with an overall transition in the American strategy from one of conciliation to a harder form of war that included expansion of the occupation, heavy taxation on the Mexicans—particularly the upper class—forced contributions to offset the American war expenditures, and holding villages responsible for the attacks on U.S. forces in their vicinity. The army under Wool never completely pacified northern Mexico, but was able to marginalize the guerrillas and convince enough of the populace to cooperate. Wool accomplished this by instilling strict discipline in his army and applying punitive policies to Mexicans who resisted, while successfully courting the elite to cooperate. The Americans’ clear military superiority, the sparse population, and the constant threat of Indian attacks gave the United States additional advantages in gaining control of the population in this region.

Chapter V transitions from northern Mexico to central Mexico, where the Americans were under the leadership of the commanding general of the U.S. Army, General Winfield Scott. This was the critical theater of the war, as the population of central Mexico was eight times that of the northern occupied states and was the political and economic heart of Mexico. Scott was familiar with the nuances of managing a foreign population from both his pre-war studies of past military occupations and from observing Taylor’s struggles in the north. He instilled strict discipline in his force, and demonstrated to his own army and the Mexican population a commitment to order and fair treatment of the people through public punishment of offenders and an astute use of
the media. In addition to focusing on discipline within his army, Scott applied a strategy of conciliation toward the Mexican population, respecting their culture and institutions, most notably the Catholic Church. These measures, combined with the dominance of the American army at the major battles at Veracruz, Cerro Gordo, and Mexico City enabled Scott to convince much of the Mexican population to remain neutral and sell supplies to his army. The effects of Scott’s conciliatory policies were limited, however, and while this American strategy succeeded in getting the U.S. Army to the capital, it did not convince enough of the Mexican leadership that it should cease resistance and succumb to the American demands.

Chapter VI describes the occupation of Mexico City and explains why it was important to ending the war. The American military government achieved stability because it applied a firm yet conciliatory approach to the occupation of the Mexican capital. The Americans pacified a population of 200,000 Mexicans and prevented most of them from joining or abetting the resistance. The U.S. Army had perfected the techniques of occupying Mexican cities at Veracruz, Jalapa, and Puebla during the drive to the capital. These techniques included respecting the church, paying for goods the army consumed, and relieving the heavy tax burden the Mexican government had placed on the lower class. Scott then creatively leveraged existing political rivalries between moderate and liberal politicians within the Mexico City government, as well as the elite’s fear of social uprising, to pressure the Mexican leaders to accept the American peace terms.

Conciliation of the population and decisive defeat on the conventional battlefield did not break the Mexican will to resist; these measures alone did not achieve President
Polk’s ambitious strategic objective of gaining control of California for the United States and all of the land between that territory and Texas. Chapter VII covers the transition of American strategy toward the Mexican population in central Mexico from one of conciliation to one that would increase pressure on the Mexican people, particularly the elite, to end the war. The Americans fully implemented the change around October 1847, after Scott consolidated his control of Mexico City. This strategy showed no tolerance for Mexican guerrillas; it harried them in their sanctuaries, and targeted the Mexican elite and local leadership by threatening its grip on Mexican society and their economic well being. The Americans increased the number of troops in Mexico and implemented a taxation and expansion program that targeted the revenue that supported the Mexican government in exile. This policy had the dual effect of hitting some of the elite in their personal pocketbook, and more importantly impairing their ability to raise funds to support resistance or to send troops to quell rebellions that threatened the future territorial integrity of Mexico. Above all, this program sent a message to the Mexicans that the Americans were committed to finishing the war, and that their resistance efforts would not succeed in a timely enough manner to retain the social order they desired.

On 2 February 1848, the Mexican government agreed to the American terms for peace, which included fifteen million dollars and forgiveness of approximately three million more in debts, and renunciation of its claim to what is now California, Arizona, New Mexico, Nevada, Utah, and half of Colorado. The large payment and American promises of future support helped the Mexican leadership retain its honor and raise an army to quell indigenous uprisings that emerged during the U.S. occupation. The
American occupation had succeeded in convincing the Mexican government that peace was their best option.

Understanding how the Americans conducted this occupation in the face of Mexican resistance is important for our historical appreciation of the Mexican-American War. Historians all too often pass over the details of how the war was fought, instead focusing on the causes and the consequences of the conflict. In particular, the management of the Mexican population and occupation policy is often written off as unimportant or oversimplified by assuming the Americans merely forced cooperation by applying “scorched earth” tactics, burning every town or village that did not cooperate; or the opposite extreme, that Winfield Scott convinced the entire population to cooperate with his invasion force. Yet to truly understand the war’s effects, one must study the critical interactions between Mexicans and Americans on and off the battlefield.

This study describes one example of an American success in achieving a limited objective during an occupation of a foreign country. By limited objective I mean a war aim that is less than total conquest and employs less than the entire means of the nation. The United States has attempted invasions with limited objectives several times in its history, with varying levels of success. Few if any of these attempts exceeded the American success in attaining its strategic objectives achieved during the invasion of Mexico in 1846.

The military occupation of Mexico provides us with a case study in military occupation, pacification, and counter-guerrilla warfare. The United States’ success at exploiting the existing fissures in Mexican society contains lessons that are certainly applicable to future conflicts. The Mexican War experience also provides positive and
negative examples of how important military professionalism and discipline are during this type of operation. Undisciplined soldiers committed atrocities on the Mexican population that helped inspire the guerrilla war. Conversely, professional officers led the occupation and achieved order in the cities, treated the Mexican population well, and eventually established improved discipline within the American army. It is no coincidence that the primary duties of the occupation—military governors, police chiefs, tax collectors—were performed primarily by regulars or trusted volunteers who had demonstrated their commitment to high standards of professionalism.

American counter-guerrilla methods are also instructive. They mirror in many ways those described by the British soldier and military theorist C.E. Callwell in his famous work *Small Wars, Their Principles and Practice*. Callwell emphasized that the counter-guerrilla force needed to leverage intelligence to seize the operational initiative from the enemy guerrillas, and “to adapt to the terrain and climate, to match the enemy in mobility and inventiveness.”9 The American Army, leveraging its Indian war experience, was able to do exactly that. Specifically, the Texas Rangers and Indiana volunteers, led by Joseph Lane in central Mexico, used Mexican spies, rapid movement, and surprise to seize the initiative from the guerrillas and rout them in the cities in which they were based. Superior weaponry played a role, but technology alone did not win this phase of the war.

The counter-guerrilla war was important, but it was only one piece of Polk and his generals’ overall strategy for the military occupation. This study will primarily focus on

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the U.S. Army and its measures to implement that strategy. I will attempt to describe that strategy and its implementation without oversimplifying the importance of the surrounding circumstances that contributed to the American victory in Mexico.

At the same time, my intent is to avoid passing moral judgment on the American leadership during the Mexican War—a conflict in which many scholars have accused the United States of blatantly exploiting a weaker neighbor. I intend to describe what was done, and why it was done that way. This is not to deny the importance of morality in war, but I will not attempt to criticize a society so far in the past. Morality is clearly important in war. Beyond the obvious effect of ignoring moral restraints on the individual soldier’s conscience and mental health, history contains numerous examples of nations failing because they blatantly violated their own values in order to achieve expediency in war. This factor existed for the Americans during the Mexican War. Harsh measures employed in Mexico were subject to criticism in the United States, yet public opposition to the war never reached a breaking point. A society ultimately decides what it will morally accept to gain an objective, and the Mexican War may well be one of many examples in United States and world history of a nation lowering its moral standing out of desperation, anger, racism, or a combination of these factors, to achieve an objective. Acknowledging that the mid nineteenth-century is a different era than the one we live in today, I will attempt to avoid passing moral judgment on the actions of those involved in the Mexican-American War.

10 For example, the French harsh tactics during the war in Algeria in the late 1950s—a measure that sought results at the expense of French values—eventually contributed to the loss of the French homeland’s will to continue the war, and the international world’s tolerance for the conflict.

11 For a good discussion of political opposition to the war see John H Schroeder, Mr. Polk’s War: American Opposition and Dissent, 1846-1848 (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1973).
Chapter I: The Mexican War: Opposing Strategies of Occupation and Resistance

“In Mexico there is not, nor is there a possibility of developing a national spirit, because there is no nation.”
- Mariano Otero, 1847

As the United States gained momentum in its seventieth year as a nation, to its south and west, Mexico struggled politically and economically in just its twenty-fifth year of independence. In the United States, the population increased nearly six-fold between 1790 and 1850, with immigrants from around the world flocking to participate in its growing economy.12 The sparsely inhabited Mexican land to its west, and attractive ports in California, drew the American population’s interests; the Louisiana Purchase and the American demographic takeover of Texas encouraged ideas of continental domination. The conflict over Texas’s right to succeed from Mexico then join the United States provided the catalyst for the conflict. Texas declared its independence in 1835, and in March 1845 the United States stated its intention to annex the former Mexican possession. In response to Mexican threats to reestablish its claim to the wayward state, U.S. President James K. Polk ordered General Zachary Taylor and his small western

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army of 2,228 troops to move to what Texas claimed was its southern border. Taylor’s army occupied the land between the Nueces and the Rio Grande Rivers, over which the United States and Mexico claimed authority.

Texas’s argument for the Rio Grande boundary was tenuous as the republic had never governed any of the region south or west of the Nueces River. Nevertheless, President Polk, who was a virulent expansionist elected on a pro-expansion platform, ordered the army’s movement, possibly anticipating that this action would precipitate a conflict which he could use to justify the seizure of more Mexican territory. During the 1840s, many American citizens believed it was the U.S.’s “manifest destiny” to expand to the Pacific Ocean, even if it meant stepping on their weaker neighbor to the south.

Indeed, once the war commenced, Polk’s stated intention was to force Mexico to cede the land between Texas and the Pacific Ocean.14

The Mexicans reacted with force to Taylor’s occupation of the land south of the Nueces River, and Polk had his war. Between May 8, 1846 and February 23, 1847, General Zachary Taylor won a series of victories over the Mexican Army in the disputed territory. He then crossed the Rio Grande and began the occupation of Mexico. An influx of volunteer units to Taylor’s army gave him a force of 6,640 troops prior to the

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September 20-24 battle at Monterrey, the capital of the northern state of Nuevo Leon. The subsequent Battle of Buena Vista on February 22 and 23, 1847 was a closely run event during which the Americans sustained over 650 casualties and had several units flee the battlefield. The American commanders were in fact surprised when General Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna’s force, three times the size of the American force, fled during the night of February 23-24.¹⁵

Devastating though they were for the Mexicans, none of these defeats at Palo Alta, Resaca de Palma, Monterrey, or Buena Vista was enough to convince them to give in to the American demands to cede the northern half of their country. Instead, the Mexicans shifted to guerrilla warfare, briefly severing Taylor’s supply lines. Mexican cavalry formations under the leadership of General Jose Urrea and Antonio Rosillo Canales harassed the American lines and tried to rally the population to fight a “people’s war” against the northern invader. They were joined by Mexican bandits interested in exploiting the disorder created by the invasion. The U.S. Army was caught off guard as it had not anticipated or planned for the occupation of northern Mexico, or to fight a guerrilla war. Instead of winning a decisive victory and then going home as he had hoped, General Taylor found himself for the next year and a half running an occupation force and having to pacify the northern states of Coahuila, Nuevo Leon, and portions of Tamaulipas.

West of Taylor’s line in Nueva Leon, General John E. Wool and his 3,400-man Army of the Centre had less difficulty with the Mexican population in the state of

Coahuila. This was partially because he did not cross the Rio Grande until early October 1846, after the Mexican Army had already lost several battles, including the destructive fight at Monterrey. Wool also led a smaller, more disciplined force than Taylor’s that was less prone to antagonizing the population. However, in the aftermath of Buena Vista (February 1847), guerillas attacked convoys and innocent civilians in Coahuila as well.  

16 In response to continued Mexican resistance, Polk ordered an invasion of the central part of the country to occupy the nation’s capital and force the Mexican leadership to agree to his terms for peace. Winfield Scott, the commanding General of the U.S. Army, personally led the campaign that traced Fernando Cortez’s invasion route into central Mexico. General Scott’s mission was “to compel the [Mexican] people, singularly obstinate, to sue for peace” under the terms Polk demanded.  

17 After conducting an amphibious landing at Veracruz in early March 1847, Scott defeated the Mexican Army in three major engagements and occupied Mexico City on September 14. Contrary to what many history textbooks indicate, the war did not end after American forces took the capital. While Scott engaged the Mexican conventional army around Mexico City, guerrilla parties grew in strength along his supply lines to the coast. In fact, the guerrilla war reached its apex at about the same time the capital fell. Additionally, the Mexican government displaced to Querétaro, approximately 200 kilometers northwest of the capital. There they held out and hoped that a foreign power

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would intervene or that guerrillas would undermine the Americans’ resolve to remain in Mexico.¹⁸

Map 1: The Mexican War Summary¹⁹


¹⁹ Map from U.S. Military Academy Department of History website: http://www.dean.usma.edu/departments/history, original cropped and labels added by author.
Polk’s Objective in Mexico

President James K. Polk’s goal during the Mexican War was to solidify the Rio Grande as the southern Texas border and to take control of New Mexico and California for the United States. Polk originally viewed the northeastern Mexican states of Coahuila, Neuvo Leon, and Tamaulipas—while having the potential for eventual annexation—as gambling chips to force the Mexican government to agree to the U.S. terms of peace. At different times in the war, Polk considered including portions of the northern states in his demands, but he never did include them, and in fact fought back members of the press and his cabinet who pushed for the acquisition of all of Mexico. Historian and Polk biographer Paul H. Bergeron explained the president’s maneuvering

| 20 In recent years, historians have reevaluated the Mexican American War, placing more emphasis on racial conflict between white Anglo-Americans and Mexicans, and have developed the role Mexican guerrillas played in the outcome of the conflict. Historians have argued that the Mexican resistance convinced the United States to change their war aims and “settle” for the land north of the Rio Grande, instead of taking all of Mexico or expanding to the twenty sixth parallel. Not to deny the intensity of Mexican resistance, but the problem with this analysis is that it misrepresents the American desire to annex Mexico south of the Rio Grande. Polk’s goal was only to annex California and the land between California and Texas. See Paul Foos, A Short Offhand Killing Affair, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002) 6-8; and Irving Levinson, Wars Within War, Mexican Guerrillas, Domestic Elite, and the United States of America 1846-1848, (Fort Worth: TCU Press, 2005) XVI. The twenty sixth parallel runs approximately west from Matamoros.

well: “Flexibility seemed to be his motto, as long as Upper California, as well as New Mexico, became a part of the United States.”

James K. Polk was elected in 1844 on a platform that included westward expansion as one of its primary elements. In his inaugural address he made it clear that expansion of the Union was inevitable and, in fact, he viewed it as more dangerous “if our present population were confined to the comparatively narrow limits of the original thirteen states . . .” Within three months of Polk’s election, the Washington Union, which was the political organ of Polk’s administration, began pushing for the acquisition of California. The rapid growth and stability of the United States, the low population of Mexicans in New Mexico and California, and the relative instability of the Mexican government made conflict in these regions seem nearly inevitable. Yet Polk’s desires in the war with Mexico were limited.

California was the prize the President truly desired. The goal of most manifest destiny enthusiasts was U.S. expansion to the Pacific Ocean. California’s ports were attractive to the entire nation, including Polk’s Whig rivals in the industrial centers of New England. The fear that California was in danger of falling into the hands of another foreign nation, namely Britain, also motivated Polk to act. New Mexico was sparsely populated and possessed great potential for development. Its location made it a natural

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22 Paul H Bergeron, The Presidency of James K. Polk, 82 (quote). New Mexico during this era referred to all of the land between Texas and California north of the Rio Grande, the region that currently embodies the states of New Mexico and Arizona.


24 Bergeron, 72.
addition if California were to be added to the Union. Despite pressure to take all of Mexico, or Mexico as far south as the twenty-sixth parallel, Polk’s strategic focus remained on New Mexico and upper California throughout the conflict.²⁵

Several incidents prior to and during the war clarified Polk’s true intentions. Before the conflict, his hope of acquiring New Mexico and California was clear from the instructions he gave to John Slidell, a Congressman from New Orleans who was sent to Mexico City to negotiate a peaceful solution to the conflict. Polk instructed Slidell to settle the Texas boundary and offer to purchase New Mexico and upper California.²⁶

Once fighting commenced, an incident within the President’s cabinet further clarified that Polk’s intentions were now greater than the Rio Grande boundary for Texas, but limited to New Mexico and California. As the nation prepared for war in May 1846, Secretary of State James Buchanan prepared a dispatch to his foreign ambassadors on the U.S. objectives of the war. This was an important document as the President feared foreign intervention, particularly from Britain and France. Buchanan concluded the document by claiming that the United States did not have any additional territorial claims beyond the Rio Grande border of Texas, and more specifically, that the Americans did not intend to take California and New Mexico. This drew Polk’s immediate objection, as the President viewed land as a potential indemnity that Mexico should pay for starting the war, and he wanted New Mexico and California. After two hours of heated debate, Polk struck the paragraph from Buchanan’s message and according to Polk’s records, told the Secretary

²⁶ Quaife, Polk Diary, Vol 1, 33-35.
of State “that before I would make the pledge which he proposed, I would meet the war which either England or France or all the powers of Christendom might wage, and that I would stand and fight until the last man among us fell in the conflict.”\(^{27}\) Finally, in his third annual message, after the Mexican capital had been taken but resistance continued, Polk told Congress that “the boundary of the Rio Grande and the cession to the United States of New Mexico and Upper California constitute an ultimatum which our commissioner was under no circumstances to yield.” He continued “that it might be manifest, not only to Mexico, but to all other nations, that the United States were not disposed to take advantage of a feeble power by insisting upon wrestling from her all the other Provinces . . .”\(^{28}\) The president clearly wanted California and New Mexico; if the northern states came along with them he might not have objected, but at no time did he indicate these were essential to what he defined as success during the conflict with Mexico.

If James K. Polk’s desires for expansion seem reasonable, his assessment of the Mexican determination to resist was uninformed. Despite Polk’s efforts, the political situation in Mexico left its leaders with little room to compromise. Based on his misinterpretation of the Mexican situation, Polk initially thought he would be able to purchase the land he desired and settle the dispute peacefully, as he had done with the Oregon Territory and Britain. When in November 1845 Polk sent John Slidell to Mexico in an attempt to purchase Texas, New Mexico, and California, he inadvertently

\(^{27}\) Quaife, *Polk Diary*, 397-399, quotes on 398; Bergeron 81-82.

undermined the Mexican President José Joaquín de Herrera’s political hold on the Mexican Presidency. The Mexican government was unstable and operating on a bankrupt budget, and it did not take much for a leader to lose credibility and to be overthrown. While Herrera hoped to reach a peaceful solution through Slidell, the Mexican political situation prevented him from accepting the American until the move was approved by the Mexican Congress, which did not meet until January 1846. Slidell’s arrival in November 1845 and his title as minister—which inferred a normalization of relations, and thus Mexico’s acknowledgment of the loss of Texas—made Herrera look weak in the face of the “illegal” American incursion. Many Mexicans were passionate over the issue of Texas, and perceived the American annexation of the region and offer to purchase nearly half of their country as an affront to their national honor. Herrera’s prestige was damaged and at the end of December 1845, he was ousted by the military chief Mariano Paredes y Arrillaga. Paredes, with a tenuous hold himself on the reins of power, could not afford to bend to American demands. Mexican resolve to hold on to its northern territories was influenced by politics in the capital, something the Polk administration did not understand.29

Polk continued to make efforts to purchase the land he desired and avoid war. In August 1846 he requested two million dollars from Congress to purchase California and New Mexico, citing as a precedent the grant given to Thomas Jefferson to expedite the Louisiana Purchase. Polk understood the financial straits Mexico faced, and hoped that the temptation of a rapid infusion of capital into the Mexican government might bring the

leaders in Mexico City to accept his terms for peace. Unfortunately for the President, Congressman David Wilmot of Pennsylvania attached an amendment to the bill, which became known as the Wilmot Proviso, banning slavery from any territory acquired from Mexico. The fierce debate over the Proviso overshadowed Polk’s request and precluded the bill from ever coming to a vote in the Senate.

Polk’s underestimation of the Mexican’s determination to resist was evident in his diary when he recorded that if the two million dollars had not been defeated “I am confident I should have made an honorable peace by which we should have acquired California & such other territory as we desired, before the end of October.”\(^\text{30}\) He made one final effort in March 1847, only to have his agent—Santa Anna’s personal representative, “Colonel” Alexander J. Atocha—thrown in prison by the radical Mexican Vice President Valentín Gómez Farías.\(^\text{31}\) These efforts only added to the Mexican distain for their northern neighbor, and increased the Mexican leadership’s resolve to resist.

Polk’s initial strategy of conciliation toward the Mexican population also reflected his misunderstanding of the political situation in Mexico. Conciliation entailed courting the Mexican population and enticing the northern states to separate with Mexico City and form an independent Republic of the Rio Grande, which might one day become a part of the United States. In central Mexico, the so-called “velvet glove” was also applied with hopes of turning the people against their government. Polk reasoned that once the

\(^\text{30}\) Bergeron, 85; Quaife, *Diary of Polk*, V2, 77.

Mexican government saw their own populace siding with the Americans, they would give up the war effort and agree to the American terms. Some Mexicans reacted as Polk had anticipated, but none had the political wherewithal to advocate a policy that gave up half of its nation’s territory without attempting more significant resistance. Conciliation succeeded in winning over portions of the populace, and was important to the overall U.S. success, but it was not enough to convince the Mexicans to agree to the American demands.

Conciliation failed to achieve Polk’s strategic objectives in Mexico. It overestimated the Mexican government’s ability to implement an unpopular policy and downplayed the Mexican will to resist. Furthermore, it assumed that American military commanders could control their troops’ virulent racism and excesses toward the Mexicans. It was only a feasible strategy if the people in the northern states were truly interested in separation from Central Mexico, and the Mexican leaders in the capital possessed little will to resist. While there may have been a level of northern separatist sentiment at the beginning of the conflict, American racism and atrocity combined with a genuine loyalty to the idea of a Mexican nation—or at least opposition to a foreign occupation—sustained the flame of resistance even after Mexico City had fallen.\(^{32}\)

Guerrilla war ensued and the Americans quickly saw that in the words of General John Wool, “kindness does not appear to have the desired effect on the Mexicans.”\(^{33}\)

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\(^{32}\) Historians disagree on the degree the periphery states in particular desired to separate from central Mexico. I have generally adopted Josefina Vasquez’s (1995) interpretation of northern Mexico, that the while individuals may have sought separation, on the whole the states did not.

Thus Polk’s early strategic management of the war facilitated the American Army’s mission in Mexico and made it more difficult. By having a clear and limited strategic goal of gaining control of the land north of the Rio Grande, Polk made his Generals’ jobs easier. By angering the Mexicans and insulting their honor with his naïve overtures to purchase the land he desired and employing a strategy aimed at using separatist Mexican states as pawns to force peace, he motivated Mexican resistance. Yet Polk should be held in high esteem as an American wartime president for the consistency he demonstrated in his strategic objective, and the flexible methods he applied to achieve these goals.

**MEXICO IN 1846**

In order to understand how the imperfect army of the United States was able to achieve such a striking success in Mexico, one must consider the fractured state of Mexico in 1846. Mexico was in no condition to fight a war at the start of the Mexican-American War. Its government’s inability to agree with itself and formulate consistent policy, even in the face of foreign invasion, made it relatively easy to defeat militarily, but difficult to pin down to a peace agreement.

In 1846 Mexico consisted of twenty-three states and sprawled over 1,972,550 square kilometers of territory. Census figures of 1810 indicate that sixty percent of the population of 7,016,300 were indigenous, twenty-two percent *mestizos* (mixed white and
indigenous blood), and eighteen percent white (European ancestry). The three states occupied by General Zachary Taylor’s Army of Occupation (Coahuila, Nuevo Leon, and Tamaulipas) were geographically expansive but sparsely inhabited with a combined population of only 276,512. In comparison, the three geographically smaller states under Winfield Scott’s command in Central Mexico (Veracruz, Puebla, and the state of Mexico) contained eight times as many people with a total population of 2,305,802. The topography of Mexico is dominated by mountainous regions along the east and west coasts—the Sierra Madre Oriental and Occidental—and a high, central plateau varying in elevation from about 4,000 to 8,000 feet (Mexico City is at about 8,000 feet). The coasts are tropical or semi-tropical and malaria infested, which historically had been a major factor for an invading army.

When war broke out with the United States, Mexico was in no position, financially or politically, to engage its northern neighbor. The destructive fight for Mexican freedom from Spain from 1810-1821 and the tumultuous interval between independence and the U.S. invasion in 1846 left the government bankrupt and the population highly polarized along class and racial lines. The total Mexican income in

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34 Size figures from CIA World Fact book (www.cia.gov); 1810 Census figures found in Irving Levinson, *Wars Within War, Mexican Guerrillas, Domestic Elite, and the United States of America 1846-1848*, (Fort Worth: TCU Press, 2005) 1; Justin Harvey Smith, *War with Mexico*, V1 (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1919), 407 cites an 1841 population census of 7,016,000, about 4,000,000 of which were indigenous.

35 Levinson, 18.

36 Smith, V1, 1-2.

37 For an excellent summary of the time period immediately prior to the U.S. invasion, see Michael P. Costeloe, *The Central Republic of Mexico, 1835-1846: Hombres de Bien in the Age of Santa Anna* (Cambridge, Eng: Cambridge University Press, 1993).
1845 was approximately 420 million, while its northern neighbor and adversary, the United States, had an income of 5,493 million.\(^{38}\)

Racial discrimination was a holdover from Spanish rule. The concept of purity of blood was inherent in Spanish colonial policy. The indigenous in Mexico were clearly of impure blood and thus the lighter-skinned elite perceived them as socially inferior. When a sense of nationalism did take hold in Mexico during the late eighteenth century, the concept was very different between the indigenous population and the European pure-blooded elite. The two were hardly united, and many from the upper class fought at the side of Spain. Several events during the revolution added to the upper classes’ fear of the large indigenous population, including the massacre of many Spaniards in the path of the Hidalgo uprising of 1810—the event that started the war for Independence. Many of the elite in Mexico desired order and protection of their land rights and privileges more than independence. Only after the Spanish King Ferdinand reinstituted the 1812 Constitution of Cadiz, which threatened privileges for the army and the clergy and offered full citizenship to the indigenous, did many upper-class Mexicans turn against the Spanish. The war for independence ended in a deal between two turncoat Spaniards instead of a victorious battle of a united Mexican resistance. This inglorious conclusion inspired little loyalty among the indigenous, and set a path for future class and racial conflict in the new nation.\(^{39}\)

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\(^{39}\) Eric Van Younge, *The Other Rebellion*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 3-4, 521 discusses in detail the separate parts to the Mexican Independence movement and emphasizes the large role the indigenous population played before they were slighted in the outcome and formation of the independent nation; For a brief overview of social conflict during the Mexican War for independence see or Jaime E.
Between 1824 and 1857 there were forty-nine different administrations in Mexico City, and the central government in the capital was kept functioning solely by a pool of upper class bureaucrats with flexible loyalty to whoever was in charge. The majority of the Mexican states, especially those on the periphery, felt little loyalty to the central government. They paid taxes, and in times of emergency usually sent troops, but for the most part considered themselves independent. A dizzying combination of monarchy, federalism, centralism, and dictatorship were experimented with since the diverse power groups could rarely agree. This political turmoil was aggravated by a constantly empty treasury and states edging toward complete autonomy.  

The army and the Catholic Church held enormous power in Spanish colonial society, and subsequently in early independent Mexico. Under Spanish rule, the military was one of the few areas *criollos* (of Spanish parentage but born in Mexico) could ascend to high positions of authority. The *criollo* army leadership secured victory in the revolution and the dictator/president for the next century was nearly always a military man. The social status of the army in society and the corruption within the officer corps was a major inhibitor to Mexican stability and its ability to resist the American invasion.  

In his excellent study of the Mexican Army during first half of the nineteenth century, historian William Depalo notes that “It was the volatility of those senior army

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The Mexican army was not a professional fighting force anywhere near the caliber of the invading American army. Regionalism and personal loyalties to caudillos (regional military leader) outweighed loyalty to the central government. Financially, the nation was in ruins and reliant on foreign creditors for its survival. Constantly in debt to exploitive foreigners, the leadership in Mexico City had little flexibility. Thus the army received scant funding from the central government and military power was held predominantly at the state level. Weaponry was significantly inferior to that with which the American soldier fought. For example, the standard Mexican rifle was the .75 caliber fusil, otherwise known as the Brown Bess, purchased secondhand from the British, and Mexican artillery was from the pre-Napoleonic era.

When a state (or one of the other power brokers such as the church or business interests) disagreed with the central government’s legislation, it frequently allied with other power entities, or bribed generals, and overthrew the governing body in what became known as a pronunciamiento. Finally, army leadership racially discriminated against and profiteered at the expense of its troops. This prevented the development of unit cohesion and loyalty between military leaders and their subordinates. Waddy Thompson, the American envoy to Mexico from 1842-1844, claimed that while the Army

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42 William A DePalo Jr., The Mexican National Army, 1822-1852, (College Station: Texas A&M Press, 1997), 304. Waddy Thompson, the American envoy to Mexico from 1842-1844, recorded in his journal “that which is in all respects the greatest nuisance, and the most insuperable barrier to the prosperity and progress of Mexico, is the army,” Waddy Thompson, Recollections of Mexico (New York: Wiley and Putnam, 1846), 168.
said it had 40,000 troops, “a large portion of them are men of straw—fictitious names fraudulently inserted for the benefit of the officers who pay them.”

Another weakness of the Mexican nation in 1846 that the Americans would exploit was the dominant position the Catholic Church held in society. The Church remained the largest landowner and wealthiest organization in the country. Its power was in a steady decline, particularly in the outer provinces, but it still had a major influence over the peasant population of central Mexico. While its monopoly over schooling is sometimes exaggerated, the local parish priest by nature of his education was a very influential person in all facets of daily life. After the 1827 exile of all Spanish from Mexico, the clergy were among a small group that possessed the education and oratory skills to perform political functions and administer academic institutions. Their political influence was so great that in 1828, 1832, and 1833 the puro (radical liberal) government of Valentín Gómez Farías had to issue formal warnings reminding the clergy that it was illegal to discuss politics from the pulpit. The church or individual parish priest sponsored multiple pronunciamientos when its possessions or privileges were threatened.

The clergy reflected local interests, and parish priests commonly took a different stance than the central church on important issues such as the status of the indigenous in

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43 Thompson, 168.

society. However, they were united in opposition to the invasion by a Protestant nation that openly supported freedom of religion. Yet as things began to go sour for the Mexican government during the American incursion, the church’s patriotism was tested, and its loyalty only went so far. During the war, Catholic leadership denied all Mexican government requests for financial assistance. The Church went as far as to collaborate with the Americans when it felt it was necessary to protect its wealth and privileged place in society.

In addition to the Church’s dubious loyalty to the nation, a simmering class and race conflict was ever present in Mexican society and prevented it from uniting against the foreign foe. Many *criollos* feared the barbarity the indigenous population might direct against anyone with white skin if the established order in society was challenged.

Land disputes were another issue that stoked the fires of class conflict. During the colonial era, indigenous communities held titles to their land, which was largely communal, and the Spanish established courts to protect land rights. After independence and into the 1830s, liberal legislation aimed to abolish communal land and convert it to private property. In theory, this would convert an economy based on sustenance farming to the more profitable commercial farming, ideally to the benefit of the entire society. In reality, the gains went to elites at the expense of the indigenous population. Again in the

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45 Staples, “Clerics as Politicians,” 235-236.

46 The church’s accommodation of Winfield Scott’s army in Puebla is one of the best known examples of the church’s flexible loyalties. This event is discussed in greater detail in Chapter V.

name of progress, liberal Mexican governments abolished the courts that protected peasants and tolerated wealthy land owners, using both physical and legal assaults to gain access to the formerly communal land. Thus, a peasant who once owned land was often relegated to the status of an employee working under harsh conditions. Many of these communities held religious attachments to the land, which added more passion to the conflict. These land battles between traditional indigenous societies trying to preserve their way of life and progressive, expansionist land owners were a key cause of social conflict in nineteenth-century Mexico.48

The Alvarez rebellion (1842-1845) was one land-inspired revolt with particular relevance to the Mexican-American War because of its temporal proximity to the American invasion. Juan Alvarez, a wealthy landholder, led the rebellion that spanned the regions of modern day Oaxaca, Guerrero, Puebla, Morelos, Mexico, Chiapas, and Michoacán. A combination of elite rivalries and threats to traditional peasant values caused the rebellion. The peasants who fought for Alvarez rebelled for social equality, relief from head taxes, and to preserve traditional values and land rights against private commercial expansion. Reminiscent of the Hidalgo revolt in 1810, the uprising quickly spread beyond Alvarez’s control, as indigenous peasants took revenge upon their wealthy

48 John M. Hart, “Chapter 8: The 1840s Southwestern Mexico Peasants’ War: Conflict in a Transitional Society,” in Friedrich Katz (ed.), Riot, Rebellion, and Revolution: Rural Social Conflict in Mexico (Princeton Univ Pr, 1988), 253-254; Americans in Mexico frequently commented on the slave-like conditions that Mexican peasant working on large ranches endured. In 1846, U.S. Ambassador Waddy Thompson noted, “The lands of the country belong to a few large proprietors, some of whom own tracts of eighty and one hundred leagues square, with herds of sixty and eighty thousand head of cattle grazing upon them, whilst the Indian laborers upon those farms rarely had enough to eat.” Thompson, 150; See also Jonathon W. Buhoup, Narrative of the Central Division or Army of Chihuahua, Commanded by Brigadier General Wool (Pittsburgh: M.P. Morse, 1847), 51; Samuel Ryan Curtis, Mexico Under Fire: Being the Diary of Samuel Ryan Curtis, 3rd Ohio Volunteer Regiment, During the American Military Occupation of Northern Mexico, 1846-1847 (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1994), 197.
oppressors. Alvarez was eventually compelled to side with the forces of the central
government to put down the rebellion.\footnote{Hart, “The 1840s Southwestern Mexico Peasants’ War,” 250-268.} Thus, as the Americans invaded to their north and east, the Mexican authorities had fresh in their minds their tenuous hold on several regions, notably the one just to their south.

The Mexican government’s control over society was questionable, even in times of peace. Banditry was a problem in Mexican society throughout the nineteenth century as a result of the weak central government and turmoil in what under colonial rule had been a highly stratified society. Bandits were people who committed criminal acts to improve their financial lot, to settle old scores, or to improve their overall place in society. Sometimes these rogue bands were hired by local power brokers to enforce their will on the population, and as their payment the bandits were permitted to plunder and pillage. They were not a creation of the American invasion and did not exclusively attack the U.S. soldiers and citizens.\footnote{Will Fowler, “Civil Conflicts in Independent Mexico, 1821-57: An Overview,” in Rebecca Earle (ed.), \textit{Rumours of Wars: Civil Conflict in Nineteenth-Century Latin America} (London: Institute of Latin American Studies, School of Advanced Study, University of London, 2000), 65-67; Paul J. Vanderwood, “Banditry” in Donald S Frazier, \textit{The United States and Mexico at War: Nineteenth-Century Expansionism and Conflict} (New York: Macmillan Reference USA, 1998), 38-39.} In 1835, the Mexican minister of war used as one of his justifications for a larger army the need to clear the roads of bandits, and in 1842 Waddy Thompson noted that five or six Americans who did not have their arms readily available “were robbed of everything they had with them.”\footnote{Thompson, 21 (quote); Fowler, “Civil Conflicts in Independent Mexico, 1821-57,” 65.}

In the northern regions the central government’s control over the population was also undermined by the Mexican Army’s inability to protect the frontier states from
Indians located on the plains on both sides of the Rio Grande. The Coahuilans and Texans quickly learned not to rely on the tumultuous government in central Mexico for protection against the Indians. Instead, the Mexicans created interdependent militias; villages supported each other in times of attack creating a society organized politically and militarily unlike that of central Mexico.\(^{52}\) Protection against Indian attacks was the top priority for many of the northern periphery states. This vulnerability was something the Americans would quickly realize and exploit.

Mexico’s inability to protect its people from bandits and Indians, and the instability of the government in Mexico City led some Mexicans to the realization that the nation could not successfully resist the aggression of their northern neighbor. Before the war commenced the minister of foreign relations, Manuel de la Peña y Peña, argued that Mexico should accept the U.S. offer of negotiations and give up Texas for a payment that might help stabilize the treasury. He justified this as the patriotic course of action because Mexico could not hope for victory in a war with the United States and the Mexican treasury could not support a war. Mexico was isolated from foreign support, and war would threaten the “social order” of the Mexican nation. According to Peña y Peña, “A war with the United States is a hopeless cause, which will . . . eventually destroy the republic itself.”\(^{53}\) Another important Mexican politician made a similar


argument about the Mexican nation. Mariano Otero published a pessimistic analysis of the state of Mexico titled *Considerations Relating to the Political and Social Situation of the Mexican Republic in the Year of 1847*. This widely-read pamphlet, which also appeared serially in the popular Mexican newspaper *El Monitor Republicano*, made the important point that Mexico could not mount a united resistance because “In Mexico there is not, nor is there a possibility of developing a national spirit, because there is no nation.”⁵⁴ Otero was clearly exaggerating to suit his own political objectives, but there was an element of truth to his point.

The Mexicans were plagued in their defensive efforts by internal dissention, and the majority of the populace was not willing to pay the cost associated with resistance. However, on other occasions in its brief history as an independent nation, the populace of Mexico did unite and rise up, proving that despite the existing differences, Mexicans could overcome class stratification when they felt the cause was justified and there was a chance for victory.⁵⁵ During both the Federalist revolt in 1832 and the Revolution of Ayutla in 1854 to 1855, civilians put down their farming tools, left their families, and joined the fight against oppressive centrist regimes. These revolts caused a large numbers of casualties—969 at the Battle of Gallinero (18 September 1832) alone. The more total nature of the 1854 Revolution of Ayutla caused Antonio Lopez de Santa

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⁵⁵ Fanny Calderón de la Barca, a Spanish Ambassador’s wife, described the Triangular Revolt of 1841 as “a game of chess, in which kings, castles, knights and bishops are making different moves, while the pawns are looking on or taking no part whatever.” Calderón, *Life in Mexico*, 412 as cited in Fowler, “Civil Conflicts in Independent Mexico, 1821-57,” 70.
Anna—once again President of Mexico—to declare that “every single village which manifests itself on the side of the rebels against the supreme government must be burned to the ground” and all rebel leaders executed.\(^\text{56}\) At times during the Mexican-American war, large portions of the populace volunteered to fight the invading army. That Santa Anna raised an army of greater than 21,000 troops in less than a month before the Battle of Buena Vista, had it destroyed, and then raise another force of 12,000 troops to meet Scott at Cerro Gordo was a tribute to his ability to inspire loyalty and the Mexican will to resist.\(^\text{57}\) There was potential, if the occupation was mismanaged, for the Mexicans to unite against the Americans, but only if they perceived a direct threat to their livelihood and a chance of victory.

Another factor that kept Mexican hope alive and inspired resistance to the American occupation was the possibility of foreign intervention to end the war, or at least to support the resistance. Why then did France and England, the two European nations most engaged in nineteenth-century colonialism, not intervene in Mexico to protect their trade interests and curb American expansion and increasing dominance of the western hemisphere? France’s non-involvement is not difficult to understand. Its influence in the western hemisphere had largely been curbed during the late eighteenth century, and at home it was in many ways still recovering from the effects of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars. The liberal, nationalistic forces that instigated these conflicts would shortly resurface in the revolutions of 1848 and eventually lead to the rise of Louis

\(^{56}\) Fowler, “Civil Conflicts,” 67-69, quote on page 69.

\(^{57}\) Santa Anna’s army prior to leaving San Louis Potosi and marching to Buena Vista was 21,533 strong. The desert march lessened the force to 15,142 prior to the battle. Troop numbers from Bauer, *The Mexican War*, 206, 209, 246.
Napoleon Bonaparte claiming the title of Emperor Napoleon III. Facing significant internal tension in 1846, France had little interest in intervening in the North American conflict. Furthermore, economic reliance on the United States far outweighed the business it had in Mexico.\(^{58}\)

Britain seemed a more probable nation to intervene in the conflict and the Mexicans’ hope for British support lasted until the very last days of the war.\(^{59}\) The British had extensive economic interests in Mexico, and the Mexicans owed significant debt to British bondholders. Many Mexican mines were destroyed during the long revolutionary conflict just twenty five years prior, and the British had funded much of the reconstruction. War would destabilize Mexico and thus threaten British investments and loan repayments. Furthermore, an independent Texas represented a counterweight to the American cotton that British industry relied upon. In addition to economics factors, British abolitionists held significant influence over politics, and were in agreement with American abolitionists’ accusations that the acquisition of Texas was a ploy to secure slavery in the United States.\(^ {60}\) In 1842 the British sold two warships to Mexico to

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\(^{58}\) Sam W. Haynes, “What Will England Say? Great Britain, the United States and the War with Mexico,” in Richard V Francaviglia and Douglas W Richmond, *Dueling Eagles: Reinterpreting the U.S.-Mexican War, 1846-1848* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 2000), 21-22; David M Pletcher, *The Diplomacy of Annexation*, 28-30, 593. Trade between the French and Americans accounted for about one sixth or one seventh of each country’s imports. The British Foreign Secretary, the Earl of Aberdeen, and French Premier Francois Guizot worked hard in the years prior to the Mexican American War to improve relations and establish an *entente peu cordial*, but ultimately historic rivalry between France and Britain lingered and discouraged involvement in Mexico.

\(^{59}\) Pletcher, *The Diplomacy of Annexation*, 541.

support a campaign to recapture the wayward state, but the campaign never materialized and Mexico was forced to sell the ships back for funds to support its army once the war with the United States commenced.61

Yet none of these considerations would move Britain to war with what had become its most important trading partner. The United States was the primary provider of cotton for British factories and a major supplier of the corn and wheat that fed the British population. Between 1805-1835 British imports of southern cotton multiplied seven times, to almost 200,000 tons per year, and Americans were also the leading consumers of British factory goods. Achieving lower tariffs and maintaining efficient trade with the United States was a higher priority than securing its investments in Mexico.62 The British foreign minister, Lord Aberdeen, sent a clear signal that diplomacy was the preferred option for dealing with the Americans when, on June 15, 1846, he ended the long-running Oregon controversy by agreeing to the forty-ninth parallel as the Oregon border between the two nations.63 Ultimately, economics worked to the U.S.’s advantage in preventing Britain from entering the war.

Not only would Britain not go to war against the United States over Texas, but after Taylor’s convincing victories over the Mexican Army in May 1846, Aberdeen restated the British policy of noninterference and refused to extend any material or financial help to Mexico. During the same month, Mexican President Paredes went as far as offering California as collateral to the British in order to secure a loan. But Aberdeen

62 Pletcher, 11.
again deferred; he clearly understood that to Polk and many Americans, the British acquisition of any part of California was as good as a declaration of war with the United States, a war that would require the dedication of significant portions of the British fleet to the Pacific. While relations with France were temporarily on the upswing, Aberdeen never lost sight of the threat this traditional enemy represented, and would not risk such exposure of the homeland. Thus, despite individual efforts and occasional wild ramblings in the press, the British policy toward the Mexican-American War remained one of noninterference as long as the United States respected its trading rights.

Yet the Mexicans clung to the hope of international intervention until the very end of the conflict. Likewise, the Americans perceived Britain as a threat, particularly surrounding the annexation of California. There were individual British agents who advocated a more aggressive approach. Charles Elliot, the chargé de affaires to Texas, worked hard to thwart American efforts to annex the wayward Mexican state and to convince the British government of the importance of containing American expansion. The French intervention just fourteen years after the Mexican-American War is a clear demonstration of European opportunism when vulnerability existed in the American domination of Latin America.

Economic factors and Mexico’s inability to demonstrate that they could defeat the United States or organize an effective resistance dissuaded European intervention. Conversely, Mexico’s disorganized government frustrated the American desire to attain a rapid end to the conflict.

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64 Pletcher, *The Diplomacy of Annexation*, 442-444.

65 Pletcher, *The Diplomacy of Annexation*, 441.
Mexican Strategy

The lack of stability in the Mexican government precluded a consistent Mexican strategy throughout the war. Mexico’s initial plan was to prevent the U.S. penetration of its territory by meeting the Americans in the disputed territory north of the Rio Grande. When these efforts failed after the first few battles, only the distance, rough terrain, and American logistical difficulties prevented the U.S. Army in the north from moving on the Mexican capital. For many Mexicans, the return of Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna in August 1846, and the military leader’s political pact with the liberal politician Valentín Gómez Farías symbolized conservatism and the army (Santa Anna) finally coming together with liberalism and the people (Gómez Farias) in the face of foreign invasion. The devastating defeat in Santa Anna’s first battle at Buena Vista crushed some hopes, but it was Gomez Farías’s actions that shattered the short-lived Mexican coalition. Just prior to Buena Vista, Gómez Farías launched an ill-advised financial attack on the church by forcing it to loan the government money to support the war. While the move was tolerated by Santa Anna because of the desperate need for funds, the church and members of the army’s high command lashed back in the Mexican capital in what became known as the Polkos Rebellion. Political union was not to be.

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66 The National Guards in the capital were called polkos because the soldiers were generally drawn from the upper class in the city that were staunch supports of the church and enjoyed polka dancing. The rebellion was instigated in late February after Gomez Farias ordered the polkos to reinforce the units preparing for Scott’s attack on Veracruz, which the polkos interpreted as a ploy to get them out of the capital so the government could further attack the church. See Pedro Santoni, Mexicans at Arms, Puro Federalists and the Politics of War, 1845-1848, (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1996)172-174, 182-190.
The Mexican strategy changed to fortifying the mountain passes to prevent the invading armies from reaching the valley of Mexico. More specifically, to defend General Winfield Scott’s invasion from the east coast, Santa Anna established a defensive position at the pass just east of Jalapa called Cerro Gordo, with the aim of trapping the Americans in the disease-ridden lowland and allowing the environment to do its work on the invaders. Again, American military superiority undermined Mexican plans when Winfield Scott’s force routed the Mexicans at the battle of Cerro Gordo. When all else failed, the government opted for guerrilla warfare to harass the invading army and cut off their supply lines.67

The long-term hope of the guerrilla strategy was to target the will of the Americans to remain in Mexico, or to resist long enough for a foreign power to intervene. In the words of the guerrilla leader in Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas, Antonio Rosillo Canales, “We will not win grand battles, but little by little we will finish with our conquerors.” Of those who opposed the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in early 1848, one of every four thought continued guerrilla warfare would undermine the U.S. resolve. All conventional efforts ended after Santa Anna’s third defeat at Mexico City, which crushed the morale of many to resist, and shifted the strategic emphasis entirely to the guerrillas. Despite the disastrous results of the conventional phase of the war, many Mexicans still had faith in guerrilla warfare, hoped for foreign intervention, and saw promise in the growing dissention on the American home front as the war dragged on.68

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67 Pletcher, The Diplomacy of Annexation, 441.

68 Antonio Canales as cited in Delay, 280. (quote); Robinson, A View from Chapultepec, 2.
While the Mexican elite recognized that guerrilla warfare was the only feasible option after the fall of Mexico City, it was certainly not the preferred course. To succeed meant arming the lower classes and allowing them to work in small groups. Combined with the tenuous loyalty of much of the Mexican populace and the tradition of banditry, many elite feared the threat this plan posed to the existing social order. Yet prior to the fall of Mexico City, as the U.S. Army neared the capital, the defending government made the decision to sponsor partisan bands.

On April 28, 1847, after its army was routed at Cerro Gordo, the Mexican government signed a decree that called for a light corps of guerrillas to wage war against the Americans. The government was unable to fund the decree, which limited its effectiveness, but it did provide motivation and recruiting authority to several guerrilla leaders. They attempted to mitigate social chaos by only granting authority to raise partisans to the wealthy, who drew most of their troops from their employees and peons. One recruiting message published in Mexico City read, “The conduct of the enemy, contrary both to humanity and natural rights, authorizes us to pursue him without pity. War without pity, unto death! will be the motto of the guerilla warfare of vengence.” This harsh rhetoric foreshadowed the brutality and lack of humanity that would characterize the guerrilla war at its height.

Mexican guerrillas had diverse reasons for attacking the Americans. While some were motivated by nationalism, or simply anti-Americanism, many desired only to

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70 Marian Salas, Proclamation, April 21, 1847, H. Ex Doc 60, 30th Cong., 1st Sess., 951-952; Emphasis in the original document.
plunder the U.S. supply trains and merchant trains under American escort. Occasionally their efforts succeeded; on June 7, 1847, guerillas captured 24 of the 128 wagons that were a part of Colonel James MacIntosh’s convoy at Paso de Ovejas, just twenty five miles northwest of Veracruz. Early successes motivated many former Mexican soldiers to join the criminal elements that already existed in central Mexico. These bands preyed on U.S. soldiers, as well as innocent Mexicans.\footnote{Nathan C. Brooks, \textit{A Complete History of the Mexican War: Its Causes, Conduct, and consequences: Comprising an Account of the Various Military and Naval Operations, from its Commencement to the Treaty of Peace}, (Philadelphia: Grigg, Elliot & Co., 1849), 445; Smith, \textit{The War with Mexico}, V2, 171, 422; Levinson, \textit{Wars within War}, 82.}

There were also major groups of guerrillas who never desired to fight the Americans and were affected little by the government’s April decree. Rural, mostly indigenous rebels took advantage of the instability the invasion created to attack wealthy Mexican land owners who exploited their labor for profit or who had taken their communal land. The system that unfairly exploited rural workers could not be supported without the backing of the Mexican military. In November 1847, the leadership in a village outside of Tampico (in northern Veracruz province) issued a manifesto declaring that it fought for the restoration of “rights they believe they have to lands possessed by some of the hacienda [plantation] proprietors.”\footnote{General Fancisco de Garay of Linea Militar de Huejutla, letter, 14 November 1847, as cited in Levinson, \textit{Wars within War}, 77.} Colonel George W. Hughes, the military governor of Jalapa, reported that a nearby town had been taken over by the Indian population who appealed to him to support their claim against the \textit{criollo} minority.\footnote{Colonel George W. Hughes to Scott, Jan 8, 1848, Justin Harvey Smith Collection, V 12, BLAC, University of Texas, Austin.}
These revolts frequently showed little restraint as years of pent up anger led to atrocities and plundering of towns and haciendas. Some Mexican authorities in regions outside the U.S. occupation formed their own paramilitaries to combat rural laborers and bands of criminals. Others looked to the United States to defend them against the peasants. Toward the end of 1847 and early in 1848 the U.S. Army occasionally sent forces to quell rural workers rioting against their landlords, but this was never a high priority for the occupiers. In fact, the disorder created by guerrillas may have benefited the Americans in their negotiations with the Mexican government that was dominated by society’s elites. The Mexican administration feared what would happen after the United States left if the rural peasants gained too much power during the occupation. As such, some politicians may have more readily accepted peace so they could focus their energies on restoring their dominance over the rebelling peasants.74

In addition to guerrilla warfare, Mexicans resisted the American occupation by other means, including refusing to sell goods to the army, performing their duties as civil administrators half-heartedly or not at all, and channeling funds and supplies to guerrillas. In the city of Jalapa, the military governors (Thomas Childs, then George W. Hughes) went through at least three different Mexican administrators in the first nine months of the occupation before they found one who would serve voluntarily and with some level of

74 Much of the argument put forth in this paragraph is derived from Irving Levinson’s work, Wars within War, (in particular pages 82, 93-96) and his article “A New Paradigm for an Old Conflict: The Mexico-United States War,” The Journal of Military History, Vol 73, Issue 2, (April 11, 2009), 393-416; See also Smith, The War with Mexico, V2, 173.
The Sánchez Nazarro family in Coahuila supplied the American Army but at times channeled funds and supplies to guerrillas. This prudent family feared what would happen after the Americans left, thus by keeping relations open with the guerrilla leaders, aimed to position themselves so they could remain in power.

Mexican resistance was characterized by persistence despite repeated military disaster, but in general was not well coordinated. The guerrilla effort reflected the lack of unity that plagued the Mexican government throughout the conflict. The Americans made false assumptions about the ability of the Mexican government to control its populace and overcome its differences in order to accept their terms for peace. Conciliatory at first, the U.S. leadership quickly became frustrated and concluded that to end the war, the United States had to compel the Mexican elite by threatening their economic and social status.

*Polk’s Transition*

It did not take long for President Polk to recognize that the original conciliatory strategy was not achieving results. On September 22, 1846, he had Secretary of War William Marcy pen instructions to Taylor ordering that he modify his conciliatory policy to make those who still resisted “feel the weight of war” in the form of contributions to

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75 Letters dated May 7, Nov 11, Nov 27, 1847, Jan 21, 1848 Jalapa (Mexico) Ayuntamiento: Papers 1847-1848, Yale University, Beinecke Rare Books and Manuscript Library (hereafter BLY). These letters describe vacancies in the Jalapa city government and Mexicans refusing to work for the Americans for a variety of reasons including supposed illness and being threatened by other Mexicans.

cover the U.S. expenses. Polk and his Treasury Secretary Robert J. Walker felt that the Mexican populace had experienced such a boon with the tax relief and high prices the Americans paid for goods that many sought to drag out the war to maintain this increased income.\footnote{Marcy to Taylor, Sept 22, 1846 in HED 60, 30\textsuperscript{th} Con, 1\textsuperscript{st} Sess, 341-342.} Taylor saw things differently, however, and perceived that if he imposed such a tax, he might alienate much of the population and not be able to collect the supplies his army required from the Mexicans.\footnote{Taylor to AG, 26 Oct 1846, in RG 94, E 130A, Army of Occupation Letters Sent, April-December 1846, NARA 1; James K. Polk, “Third Annual Address,” Dec 7 1847 in A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, ed. James D. Richardson (New York: Bureau of National Literature, 1897), 2397.} Winfield Scott initially refused to institute the tax for much the same reason as Taylor.\footnote{Winfield Scott, Memoirs of Lieut.-General Scott, LL.D (New York: Sheldon & company, 1864), V2, 552.} Polk allowed his commanders this leeway, at least temporarily.

Six months later (March 1847) Polk ordered more aggressive financial measures to pressure Mexico to succumb to U.S. demands. He ended the blockade, but dictated that all vessels entering port pay a financial contribution. The President intended that merchants pass the levy on to the Mexican consumers in order to persuade them to pressure their leaders to end the conflict. Aware of the danger of smuggling if the tax was set too high, Treasury Secretary Walker initially sought to keep it low enough so that goods would still be profitable. On November 5, “based on experience and practical application,” Walker increased the tax to 30\% on fifteen specific goods, including cotton, coffee, steel and iron, and 20\% on most others. Finally, on November 16, Walker reinstituted the tax on gold and silver at a similar rate to what the Mexican government had charged—3\% on gold, 6\% on coined silver, and 7\% on wrought silver. The target of
these taxes was the Mexican populace, in order to convince them to pressure their
government to work toward a peace settlement. Polk was gradually moving toward
harsher treatment of the Mexicans.

The President moved a step closer on September 1\textsuperscript{st} when John Y. Mason, the
acting Secretary of War while Marcy was sick, authored Polk’s intent to Scott related to
management of the population. Mason reiterated the idea of taxing the Mexicans so that
they felt the war’s “evils.” He criticized the Mexicans for not obeying the rules of
civilized warfare and committing atrocities on the Americans. The secretary then
addressed Scott’s argument that the people would turn against him if he taxed them,
explaining that the Army’s situation, now in control of the Mexican capital, had changed,
and so should Scott’s approach:

> It is not improbable that men of wealth and means may profess to belong,
mainly, to the peace party; and it may be apprehended that they will be
driven from their pacific position by coercive proceedings. But, however
such an effect may be apprehended, it is more probable that their
exertions to promote a termination of the war will be made more serious
and efficient when they feel the oppressive evils of the state of war.

Yet while Polk clearly wanted Scott to impose heavily upon the wealthy in order to
encourage them to agree to peace, he again deferred to the General’s judgment: “The
safety and subsistence of the troops under your command will, of course, not be placed in
jeopardy by the desire to enforce this system . . .”\textsuperscript{81}

\textsuperscript{80} Robert J. Walker to Polk, 30 Mar 1847, 5 Nov, 1847, 16 Nov 1847, and James K. Polk’s Third Annual
Message all in United States, A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents. (New York: Bureau of National Literature, 1897), 525-531, 541-546, quote on page 531.

\textsuperscript{81} John Y. Mason to Scott, Sept 1, 1847, in 30\textsuperscript{th} Congress, 1\textsuperscript{st} Sess., Ho Ex Doc 56, 195-196.
On October 6, 1847 the President ordered Marcy to pen guidance to the military commander in Mexico, forcefully instructing him to harden the policies toward the Mexican populace. No other document so clearly demonstrates the transition in strategy from conciliation to a harder form of war than the October 6 letter to Winfield Scott, which was subsequently forwarded to Taylor (soon after replaced by Wool) in the north. The leadership in Washington informed Scott that many more troops were en route to his location and that he was to expand the occupation. Second, the army was no longer to protect the Mexican populace from the pains of war. Marcy wrote: “It should be borne in mind that the people of Mexico, . . . are not less parties to the war than the Mexican Army; and as a means of peace, they must be made to feel its evils.” The heavy contributions earlier specified were to be implemented. Guerrilla parties were to be vigorously pursued, and all those who support them “are much less entitled to favorable considerations than the soldiers in the ranks of the regular Mexican army.” Finally, the commanders were to inform the Mexicans that Nicolas Trist, the diplomat Polk sent to Scott’s army to negotiate a treaty, had been recalled and the onus was upon them to forward to the President an acceptable proposal to end the war. In the meantime, the United States would continue to expand the occupation, at a cost to the Mexicans.\(^8^2\)

Polk’s frustration with his inability to achieve an acceptable peace from the disorganized yet resilient Mexican government had pushed him to transition to a more direct and punitive strategy.

\(^8^2\) Marcy to Scott, Oct 6, 1847, 30\(^{th}\) Congress, 1\(^{st}\) Sess., Ho Ex Doc 60: 1007-1008; Quaife, *Diary of Polk*, Vol 3, 185-186.
The American occupation of Mexico was not a perfectly run military operation, but the circumstances of its existence dictated that it did not have to be. President Polk was clear and relatively consistent in his objectives, which were the acquisition of California and the land west of Texas to California. This relatively limited objective facilitated the job of his Generals. In addition, the Mexican government was unable to unite its people and did not have the financial means to mount an effective resistance.

The political, class, and racial conflicts in Mexican society prevented the Mexicans from mounting a successful resistance, but at the same time kept the Americans from forcing the rapid peace that they desired. Mexicans were unable to come together in the face of a superior enemy, and on the whole worked against each other or collaborated with the enemy. This internal stratification and Mexico’s inability to win victories on the battlefield, augmented by Polk’s aggressive nature in international relations, enabled the Americans to isolate Mexico from foreign support. Yet even as unstable as the nation was, it would be an oversimplification to assert that the Mexicans could not have come together and resisted effectively. They fought fiercely at times, and had the potential to unite against the foreign invader or hold on until the next American presidential election in late 1848 changed the American policy. Thus, despite existing Mexican divisions, a sound administration of the military occupation by the U.S. Army was essential to achieving American strategic objectives.
CHAPTER II: The United States Army and Military Occupation

“Our reliance for protection and defense on the land must be mainly on our citizen soldiers, who will be ever ready, as they ever have been ready in times past, to rush with alacrity, at the call of their country, to her defense.”

- President James K. Polk, First Annual Message, Dec 2, 1845

“I give it as my fixed opinion that, but for our graduated cadets, the war between the United States and Mexico might, and probably would, have lasted some four or five years, with, in its first half, more defeats than victories falling to our share; whereas, in less than two campaigns, we conquered a great country and a peace, without the loss of a single battle or skirmish.”

- General Winfield Scott, June 21, 1860

The United States Army in 1846 had never before occupied a foreign nation for an extended period of time. Aside from brief occupations of Spanish Florida in 1818 and British Canada during the War of 1812, the war in Mexico was the first time the American army invaded another country and temporarily ran a military government. That being said, the U.S. Army’s leadership was not totally unprepared for this mission. By 1846 the army was a relatively professional force, and at least portions of it espoused the academic study of warfare. More specifically, officers studied European warfare that contained examples of past military occupations. Furthermore, its combat experience fighting American Indians prepared the army well for dealing with the Mexican guerrillas. This was, however, a far-from-perfect force for the mission of military occupation. A large portion of the army in Mexico was made up of volunteers, some of whom lacked experience, discipline, and respect for military orders. A portion of the
American officer corps also rejected the academic study necessary to become professional and prepare for different forms of combat. In the end, however, there was a large enough pool of experience and academic familiarity with military occupation to win this phase of the war with Mexico.

**Professionalism and the Regular Army**

While small, the performance of the U.S. Army in Mexico supports the argument that the regular army had completed critical steps between 1815 and 1845 towards becoming a professional force. The traits of professionalization include specialized education, group consciousness, and social responsibility. Like a doctor or a lawyer, a professional officer feels secure that his career is long-term, and makes a commitment to standards and continuing professional development. A professional performs a service to society, is accountable to that society, and is motivated by this duty.¹

Of these attributes of professionalism, commitment to duty and standards was the most important to the U.S. occupation of Mexico. Occupation duty was difficult, without the glory of the conventional battlefield. Guarding posts, chasing elusive guerrillas, and conducting hundreds of fruitless presence patrols wore on the American soldiers. In the

¹ This definition comes from a combination of several sources on military professionalism including William B. Skelton, *An American Profession of Arms: The Army Officer Corps, 1784-1861* (Lawrence, Kan: University Press of Kansas, 1992), xiii-xvi; Allan Reed Millett, *Military Professionalism and Officership in America* (Columbus, OH: Mershon Center of The Ohio State University, 1977), 2; Samuel Watson, “The Uncertain Road to Manifest Destiny: Army Officers and the Course of American Territorial Expansionism, 1815-1846,” in *Manifest Destiny and Empire: American Antebellum Expansionism*, 1st ed. (College Station, Tex: Published for the University of Texas at Arlington by Texas A&M University Press, 1997).
aftermath of the occupation of Mexico City, the army headquarters received daily applications from regular officers to be relieved of their duty for a wide variety of family and personal reasons, many of which were likely exaggerated in order to get out of this undesirable duty. For example, Lieutenant Daniel Harvey Hill (USMA, 1842), who frequently complained in his diary about the frustrations of occupation duty, applied to leave the country and perform recruiting service because his elderly mother needed help at home.\(^2\) Winfield Scott denied all of these requests for several months after the occupation of Mexico City began except for those who were legitimately very ill.

These professional officers dutifully served on, performing the essential tasks at the core of the occupation including military governors, police chiefs, and tax collectors. The regulars, who made up forty-four percent of the army in Mexico, were the front line when it came to interacting with Mexican population.\(^3\)

The lesser of these attributes of professionalism was the formal, theoretical education and commitment to a broad study of war. The heavily mathematics and engineering based curriculum at West Point, which produced approximately seventy percent of the army officer corps when the Mexican War commenced, did not prepare the

\(^2\) DH Hill to Scott, Dec 24, 1847, Mar 4, 1847, in RG 94, E133, Box 8 of 16 “Mexican War, Army of Occupation Letters Received from Officers, A-K,” NARA 1. This series of boxes at the Nation Archives contain numerous examples of these types of requests. Another example of a more senior officer desiring to leave Mexico during the occupation is Colonel Thomas Childs, the military governor of Jalapa then Puebla. See Col Thomas Childs to Winfield Scott, Jan 22, 1847, Child’s, Thomas, Letters Jan -April 1848 when acting as Military Governor of Puebla, M 1597 Brough House Books, Reel 2 of 3, Property of the University of North Carolina.

\(^3\) U.S. House of Representatives, House Executive Document (HED) No. 24, 31st Cong., 1st Sess., 6. Percentages derived by the author by multiplying the number of soldiers in Mexico by the length of service. At any given time, this percentage fluctuated. For example, in March 1846 when Winfield Scott’s force invaded Veracruz the army was a higher percentage of regulars while Zachary Taylor’s army in the north, which Scott had stripped of the regulars, was mostly volunteers.
cadets well for service during the occupation. Yet the military academy contributed to
the development of professionalism in other ways. Sylvanus Thayer’s West Point helped
develop a professional subculture with a common idea that the army had a mission to
serve society. Through their shared suffering of the rigors of cadet life, a bond formed
and a level of pride developed among graduates. The young West Pointers were
educated and capable, and instilled with a sense of duty to serve their country.5

Winfield Scott wrote of the Military Academy after the war

I give it as my fixed opinion that, but for our graduated cadets, the war between
the United States and Mexico might, and probably would, have lasted some four
or five years, with, in its first half, more defeats than victories falling to our share;
whereas, in less than two campaigns, we conquered a great country and a peace,
without the loss of a single battle or skirmish.6

While Scott’s comment is typically viewed as referring to the conventional fighting in
Mexico, his inclusion of and a peace likely refers to the military occupation. So while
the engineering-based curriculum at West Point may not have adequately prepared cadets
for occupation duty in Mexico, the lessons in professionalism did.

Perhaps to an even greater degree than the social isolation that came from
attending the Military Academy, the physical isolation while on duty in the west

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Station: Texas A & M University Press, 2000), 63-64; Statistics from Francis B Heitman, *Historical
Register and Dictionary of the United States Army, from Its Organization, September 29, 1789, to March2,
1903*, 2 vols (Washington: Govt. Print. Off, 1903); See also Skelton, “The Army in the Age of the Common
Man,” 95; Skelton, *An American Profession*, 167. This statistic excludes medical corps, pay, and
purchasing officers.


6 Winfield Scott, June 21, 1860 in George W Cullum, *Biographical Register of the Officers and Graduates
of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, N.Y. from Its Establishment, March 16, 1802, to the Army Re-
facilitated the development of professionalism among the junior army officers. The hardships of living in isolated army garrisons and performing the undesirable and occasional unethical duties related to pacifying Indians helped officers develop a sense of service and sacrifice for the cause of the American population. A “military culture” developed on frontier outposts, and soldiers gained a certain pride in the duty they performed.7

West Point and frontier duty were not the only factors that contributed to the professionalization of the American Army. Winfield Scott was among an older group of officers who played a major role in molding the army into the force that served in Mexico. While the American public may have predominantly remembered the War of 1812 from the volunteer victory at the battle of New Orleans, the officers who served at Queenstown Heights, Plattsburg, or Detroit in 1812 never forgot the hard lessons they learned when volunteers refused to fight, or fought poorly. Winfield Scott, Edmund Gaines, and John E. Wool fought in these early battles, and in the aftermath of the war, under the leadership of Secretary of War John C. Calhoun, took critical steps toward creating a professional standing army in order to avoid suffering the same fate in America’s next major war. This included the institutionalization of an intellectual approach to preparation for war, the development of a military bureaucracy and permanent staff departments, and the expansion of opportunity for long-term service in the army as a full-time occupation. Their leaders constantly emphasized the need for the regular force to focus on training for war fighting versus completing the country’s engineering projects. They attempted to gain exclusive control of the right to use

violence to defend the nation, but at the same time remained dedicated to the service of that society.  

By 1845, most regular army officers clearly understood and accepted their role as public servants accountable to civilian authority. While the desire for military glory and career progression was obviously present, for the most part regular officers went to Mexico because they felt it was their duty to serve. Many, including Lieutenants Ulysses S. Grant and George Gordon Meade, both West Point graduates and future Civil War heroes, personally objected to the war, but fought valiantly as professional soldiers ordered to do so by their civilian masters. Grant expressed this picture of a small but professional army well in his description of Taylor’s force at the beginning of the conflict:

at the battles of Palo Alto and Resaca-de-la-Palma, General Taylor had a small army, but it was composed exclusively of regular troops, under the best of drill and discipline. Every officer, from the highest to the lowest, was educated in his profession, not at West Point necessarily, but in the camp, in garrison, and many of them in Indian Wars.

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9 Samuel Watson, “Manifest Destiny and Military Professionalism: Junior U.S. Army Officers’ attitudes Toward War With Mexico, 1844-1846,” Southwestern Historical Quarterly 99 (April 1996): 466-489. Professor Watson examined the letters and journals of a large number of junior officers who served in Mexico and concludes that they had embraced the professional attribute of service to their civilian leaders.

Mexican civilians also understood the difference between volunteers and regulars, and clearly preferred the latter.¹¹

The regulars were not without their problems. The American public had gradually, although far from entirely, come to accept that a standing army was essential. While they accepted the need, they did not necessarily like it. The fact that the average enlisted soldier was from the lower classes—and frequently an immigrant—further alienated the army from society. Volunteer soldiers commonly looked down upon the regulars, as did the society from which they came. Lieutenant John W. Dodd of the ⁴th Indiana volunteers wrote to his wife about the regulars, “Besides that the regulars are the lowest part of our population (generally speaking) a great proportion of them Irish and Dutch, without character or friend. They fight because they are trained to and because it is death to run.”¹²

Dodd accurately reflected the makeup of the army, which in the 1840s consisted of forty percent immigrants, and thirty-five percent could not sign their own names.¹³ Many immigrant soldiers enlisted as their only option for employment, and had little loyalty to the United States. This, combined with heavy-handed punishments for


disciplinary infractions, and in some cases sympathies toward fellow Catholics, led to major desertion problems in Mexico. Once the deserters were free from army discipline, some released their frustrations on the Mexican populace. This was particularly relevant in the north, where Americans could easily move back and forth across the border after they deserted. During the final months of the war, General John Wool had to send multiple parties out to track down bands of American deserters who were inflicting atrocities on the Mexican population.14

The most popularly recounted case of inflicting discipline on American deserters was the capture and execution of the San Patricios (Saint Patricks), a group of foreign soldiers—not exclusively Irish or Catholic, despite their title—who deserted and fought for the Mexicans. Most deserted not because of religion, but because of the harsh treatment they received as immigrant soldiers serving in the American army. Relatively new to the country, these immigrant soldiers did not share the patriotic sentiment with their fellow soldiers. Yet they were subject to the same, or possibly worse, punishment for their crimes, including bucking,15 riding the wooden horse for eight hours a day every day for week, and severe lashings.

14 Total desertion among regulars was 10.6% (2,849 in total) during the Mexican War compared to 6.6% (3,876 in total) in the Volunteers. Data from Foos, Paul, A Short, Offhand, Killing Affair: Soldiers and Social Conflict During the Mexican-American War. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 85; Wool to Butler, Feb 1, 1848, Wool Papers, Box 60, V34, NYSL; Wool GO 67, Feb 26, 1848, Wool Papers, Box 63, NYSL.

15 Bucking was the act of making a soldier sit on the ground with his knees pulled up to his chest, then binding his hands in front of his shins, and finally placing a pole under his knees but above the elbows. Soldiers were sometimes left in this uncomfortable position for hours or days and occasionally gagged as well. See James M McCaffrey, Army of Manifest Destiny: The American Soldier in the Mexican War, 1846-1848, (New York: New York University Press, 1992), 106-107; Cunliffe, Soldiers and Civilians, 24.
The San Patricios Battalion was two hundred strong by July 1847 and they fought hard, notably during the battle for Mexico City. General William Worth, after his unit captured a large group of these traitors at Churubusco, reported “These wretches served the guns—the use of which they had been taught in our own service—and with fatal effect, upon the persons of their former comrades!” Sixty percent of the San Patricios Battalion died in the battle at Churubusco and fifty more were hanged by the Americans. In a dramatic scene at the subsequent battle for the castle at Chapultepec, Colonel William Harney had thirty of the traitors—including one who had lost his legs and was unconscious—positioned with their necks in a noose for three hours on a hill where they could see the battle. When the American flag went up over the castle he ordered them hanged. This is just one of many examples of the challenges facing the regular army in Mexico. It had its problems, particularly in the lower ranks, but the officer leadership demonstrated professional traits that would prove important to the success of the military occupation.

**Learning from History**

The early American army as a whole did not dedicate time to the study of military history. However, certain key individual, notably Winfield Scott, did study history and their knowledge benefited the whole. The senior leaders were familiar with historically-based laws of war and throughout the Mexican War, Scott and Polk consistently


supported their policies with reference to international law. The American newspapers in Mexico also cited law and criminalized the Mexicans for using illegal tactics. One argued that “the government of Mexico would do well to ponder on the consequences of carrying on war against the laws of war, and in contempt of the civilization of the world.”18 Law books that addressed war generally relied on history for examples. The primary works used at West Point were Emmerich de Vattel’s *Laws of Nations* (1758), Henry Wheaton’s *Elements of International Law* (1836), and James Kent’s *Commentaries on American Law* (1836); Vattel’s work was the most influential among generals and government officials. Winfield Scott was certainly familiar with Vattel as he was a student of law before entering the army in 1810. The rhetoric Scott used in his letters and orders clearly reflected his legal training, and at times Scott’s prose mirrored that of Vattel.

In the era prior to the Hague Convention of 1899, there was not a standard, accepted law of war. Vattel produced his work in an attempt to fill this void since he believed there were “certain maxims and treatises recognized among nations.” His work is not a strict set of rules but more of a philosophical essay based on what he refers to as

18 *American Star no. 2*, July 8, 1847, (Puebla, Mexico, Peoples, Barnard & Callahan), found in Independent Mexico in Newspapers, the 19th Century, Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, U of Texas, Austin, Reel 19 (quote). Polk and Scott both referred to the law of war regularly. For example, Polk, in his Third Annual Message when he was discussing the policy to tax the Mexicans for the cost of the war, see James K. Polk, “Third Annual Message,” in United States, *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1902*, V4 (New York: Bureau of national literature and art, 1896), 549; An example of Scott’s reference to the law can be found when he addressed treatment of the guerrillas, see Scott, General Order 372, December 12, 1847, RG 94, E 44G, “General and Special Orders from the Mexican War,” NARA I.
Vattel accepted extreme measures as acceptable in war as long as the war was just and they were warranted. He clearly believed in the protection of non-combatants. Women, children, feeble men, and the sick were exempt from punishments of war since they could not take up arms. Vattel believed in the protection of legitimate combatants who surrendered, but allowed for the denial of quarter (execution) where violations of the laws of war were evident. He felt it was necessary to punish the enemy for their criminal acts in order to prevent further violations. Even in extreme cases, Vattel urged caution, and demanded that special attention was paid to disciplining only the guilty. A nation fighting a just war could take away and destroy enemy property in order to affect the enemy’s ability to resist, but Vattel cautioned that “measures are only to be pursued with moderation, and according to the exigency of the case.” He warned that “those who tear of the vines and cut down the fruit-trees are looked upon as savage barbarians.” Vattel encouraged the collection of a contribution on the entire enemy population:

Instead of the custom of pillaging the open country and defenseless places . . . Thus he (the victor) obtains a part of what is due to him; and the enemy’s subjects, by consenting to pay the sum demanded, have their property secured from pillage, and the country is preserved.

Vattel’s vision of the occupation of enemy territory was harsh, but aimed to be fair, and to protect peaceful inhabitants from hostilities.20


20 Vattel, para 145, p 351, para 141, p 348 (1st quote), para 166, p 366 (2nd quote), para 165, p 366 (3rd quote), para. 147, p 352.
In his discussion of what later became known as guerrilla warfare, Vattel demonstrated little sympathy. The *Laws of Nations* idealized that military conflicts should only be fought by soldiers. According to Vattel, when peasants took up arms, they were considered illegal combatants and the enemy could therefore show “them no mercy,” and hang them “as he would so many robbers or banditti.”

Vattel provided a guide that clearly influenced the American occupation policy in Mexico. Whether the American interpretation was correct, and American policies just, is certainly a matter of opinion since the question of whether the entire Mexican War was a “just” endeavor is questionable. The no quarter policies toward guerrillas applied late in the war were morally questionable but justified by the American commanders based on their understanding that partisans were illegal combatants who did not take prisoners. This was true in many instances, yet on some occasions the guerrillas were acting under legitimate commissions from the Mexican government. In more cases than not, however, Mexican guerrillas were either criminal in nature or not fighting for the national cause, did not take prisoners, and occasionally mutilated the bodies of the dead.

*Learning from History: The American Revolution*

In addition to its study of the historically-based laws of war, the U.S. Army could have looked to its own military history for examples of military occupation and the management of a civilian population, starting with the American Revolution. The

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21 Ibid., para 226, p 399.
Revolution was truly a “national war,” which the Americans tried to prevent in Mexico. The British army’s methods could have served as an example for the Americans of how not to engage a populace. The British strategy toward the American people was characterized by good insights, yet ultimately failed because of its own inconsistent execution, several critical American military victories, and foreign intervention. Thus there were many lessons that the U.S. Army might have taken away from a study of the American Revolution, yet because of the migration of its military tradition to a more conventional-oriented “American way of war” and West Point’s focus on engineering, it is unclear that they did. Yet a short examination of the British and American experience in the revolution provides a useful comparison to the Mexican War experience.

The British strategy under William Howe and subsequently under Henry Clinton might have succeeded if well executed. Howe employed a strategy of conciliation early in the war. In the battles around New York during 1776, he opted to allow the Continental army to escape at Long Island and Kip’s Bay rather than destroying it. The idea was to try to reach a negotiated settlement after a clear demonstration of British military prowess. This strategy almost worked, but for Howe’s overconfidence and George Washington’s superior instincts that combined to produce the American victory at Trenton. British strategic disunity and John Burgoyne’s arrogance led to the British disaster at Saratoga shortly after Trenton. These victories in turn inspired greater faith in Washington’s army among the population, and more importantly, brought the French into
the war. Few historians would disagree that the foreign support the French provided was critical to the rebellion’s victory over the militarily superior Britain.\textsuperscript{22}

In the southern colonies the British strategy of enlisting loyalist support to augment their troop strength had great potential, if it were properly executed. Henry Clinton’s success at Charleston in 1778 and the large number of loyalists who swore an oath to the crown in the immediate aftermath serve as initial evidence of the potential of this strategy oriented on protecting the populace. However, the British continued fascination with attempting to destroy Washington’s army at the expense of providing adequate troops to support the loyalists in the south plagued their efforts. In addition, the rebellion’s skillful war-making under the leadership of Nathanael Greene and its success with southern militia led to critical victories at Kings Mountain and Cowpens. Perhaps more important than these battlefield victories, however, were the brutal attacks the rebel militia staged on loyalists in the south, who were left hanging by the British unwillingness to dedicate the necessary assets for their protection.\textsuperscript{23}

Despite the success of irregular warfare methods, particularly in the south, Americans remembered the Revolution as a conventional victory, and there is no indication the army recognized the potential behind the British strategy. This was largely


\textsuperscript{23} Ibid. 39-43; For a good discussion of the British perspective see Jeremy Black, War for America: The Fight for Independence, 1775-1783 (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1991), 14-15, 28, 246-247. Black emphasizes the shortage of British troops and their unwillingness to commit the required amount to win over the populace in America because of the lack of British public support for the war. For an excellent discussion of the war in the Carolinas see John S. Pancake, This Destructive War: The British Campaign in the Carolinas, 1780-1782 (University, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1985).
because of the important conventional battles like Saratoga and the great surrender at Yorktown, but also because of Washington and other senior officers’ aversion to the use of irregulars. Even Nathanael Greene gave little credit to the guerrillas in the ultimate victory. In January 1781, Greene compared them to “garnish on the table; . . . but they afford no national security.”

Thus it is unclear that the American commanders absorbed many of the lessons of managing guerrillas that could be found in a study of the American Revolution. The importance of Greene’s application of guerrilla tactics was not taught at West Point. The great irony is that the Mexicans, in response to American accusations of their employment of “illegal” guerrillas, reminded the United States of its own reliance on guerrillas during the American war for independence. During the peace negotiations, Carlos María Bustamente informed the invaders that they had “cruelly persecuted those who were labeled as loyalist,” and accurately accused the United States of forgetting its own history.

The American Revolution is useful today as a point of comparison to the occupation of Mexico as the circumstances were similar, but the end state was very different—the weaker power at the beginning of the American Revolution prevailed in the end. Unfortunately for the Mexican resistance, great victories equivalent to those at Trenton and Saratoga never happened during the Mexican War, nor did the renewed faith in the Mexican government or foreign intervention occur. The American Army also did

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24 Weigley, History of the U.S. Army, 74; John S Pancake, This Destructive War, 132 (Greene quote).

not demonstrate the “poverty in strategic conception” that characterized the British, and in the end, the Americans demonstrated great commitment to completing the mission. The opposite is true of the British at Yorktown in 1781, who were thoroughly distracted by competing international events.26

Learning from History: The Indian Wars

As opposed to the experience of the American Revolution, the regular army’s background fighting Indians prior to the Mexican War contributed to its preparation for the challenges it would face with Mexican guerrillas. The regulars and frontier volunteers such as the Texas Rangers brought to Mexico years of unconventional fighting experience against the American Indians, and techniques were quickly implemented from the Indian War play book.

Americans had been countering Indian guerrilla tactics since early colonial times. Historian John Grenier describes the colonial experience with Indians as “a military tradition that accepted, legitimized, and encouraged attacks upon and the destruction of noncombatants, villages, and agricultural resources . . . in shockingly violent campaigns to achieve their goals of conquest.”27 Vattel’s respect for the civilian population often fell to the wayside during the Indian wars because these conflicts were often truly wars for survival. Race was also an important factor that made atrocities more popularly accepted than during wars with white Europeans. The Pequot War in 1636 and 1637 was

26 Quote from Weigley, The American Way of War, 21.

an early example of colonists resorting to mass killing of civilians when it became clear that they might be annihilated by the Indians. During the Mystic River massacre the colonists slaughtered five hundred Indian men, women, and children. During King Philip’s War in 1675, the colonists again employed total war tactics and also leveraged rival tribes as allies to destroy the Wampanoag and Narragansett. At the conclusion of the conflict, the Wampanoag society was destroyed and prisoners executed or sold into slavery.28

Some of these tactics carried over to the post-independence era in America, though not regularly reaching the same level of total war as the colonial era. The Black Hawk War of 1832 witnessed the army pitting rival tribes against Black Hawk, and eventually the Sauk chief was betrayed and turned over by Winnebago Indians.29 This conflict also demonstrated the challenges army officers faced as the army professionalized. Officers on the frontier often found themselves in morally undesirable positions as ambitious western settlers lacked patience for negotiations with Indian tribes or the paternalistic approach the army sometimes adopted. During the nineteenth century, the massacre of Indian tribes was frowned upon by humanitarian interests in American upper society. William Skelton, in his work on army professionalism, explains that “whenever regulars served with militia or volunteers, they carefully distinguished

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their conduct from the allegedly cruel and irresponsible behavior of the citizen-soldiers.”

Leading up to the Black Hawk War army officers, including Colonel Zachary Taylor, struggled with coal miners and expansionists who had little sympathy for Indians in their path.  

The intent is not to argue that Indian removal prior to the Mexican War was fair or humane, but to clarify that army officers were often unfortunate agents of the racist society that they served. The massacre of the Sauk Indians as they attempted to flee across the Mississippi in 1832 and the infamous 1838 “trail of tears” removal of the Cherokee, clearly demonstrate that racism enabled terrible treatment of Indian tribes. In fact, the army’s capacity to flagrantly target civilians was demonstrated in the major Indian war most proximate in time to the Mexican conflict, the Second Seminole War from 1835-1842.

During this painful conflict, many different measures were attempted to defeat the persistent Seminoles in the treacherous terrain and weather of the Florida everglades. The army struggled against the Seminoles because the Indians used the swamps and heavy vegetation to hide their home bases and restrict the army’s maneuverability. General Thomas S. Jesup, the fourth of seven commanders to try their luck against the Seminoles, described the frustration he felt in a letter to the Adjutant General in 1837:

“This is a service which no man would seek with any other view than the mere performance of his duty: distinction, or increase of reputation, is out of the

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question; and the difficulties are such, that the best concerted plans may result in absolute failure, and the best established reputation be lost without a fault.\footnote{Jessup to Jones, Feb 7, 1837 as quoted in Prucha, \textit{Sword}, 284.}

Winfield Scott failed in Florida because his rival, General Edmund Gaines, intervened and exhausted his logistics, because Scott tried an overly conventional approach that was inappropriate against the elusive Seminoles, and finally because he became sick and lost his will to continue. The one major operation he oversaw was a three-pronged attack that was picked apart by Indians employing guerrilla tactics. Zachary Taylor achieved a level of success that earned him a brevet brigadier-generalcy when he won the only real conventional battle of the war at Lake Okeechobee after pressing deep into the swamps and threatening the Indian homes. It is notable that Taylor employed Delaware and Shawnee Indian allies during this campaign to help locate the Seminoles. After two more years of trying, Taylor achieved some success at forcing the Indians south of the Withlacoochee River by dividing the area into twenty square mile regions and then building and occupying a fort in each region with twenty to thirty men who would aggressively patrol their area. However, the American public lacked the patience and resources required to expand this plan. Finally, Colonel William Worth, who would later serve under Scott in central Mexico, conceived a more effective tactic. Worth ended the war by forcing his men to fight a summer campaign despite the debilitating heat and sickness in the everglades. He directed his men to target the Seminole settlements and crops during harvest season, which was apparently the U.S. public tolerated because of their great frustration with the long and expensive war, and the outrage at some of the brutal and deceptive tactics the Seminoles had employed. In
the end, after seven years, the combined efforts of Generals Jessup, Taylor, and Worth wore the Seminoles down to an estimated 240 personnel, 80 of whom were warriors, and the U.S. declared victory.33

The army clearly took lessons from the struggle in Florida that would benefit them in Mexico. Both Scott and Taylor experienced great frustration with volunteers; Missouri volunteers serving under Taylor fled the battlefield at Lake Okeechobee, and Scott, after his first campaign, requested 3,000 “good troops, (not volunteers),” much to the displeasure of the Jackson Administration.34 Indigenous scouts proved useful to Taylor in the time leading up to Okeechobee, and the successful tactic of building a string of posts occupied through enemy territory was later replicated in Mexico. Perhaps the most important lesson was the undesirability of combat against guerrillas. Long, expensive, and painful, the Americans sought to avoid this form of warfare at all cost in Mexico.

The army’s mission during the 1820s through 1840s provided a level of preparation for the occupation of Mexico, even though its top priority remained training for conventional war. Yet the Mexican War was not the Indian Wars, and the policy towards civilians in Mexico was different. Historians commonly argue that the total war tactics—inspired by racist attitudes and used by the army against the Indians during the colonial era, and to a degree in the early nineteenth century—carried over to the dark-skinned Mexicans. While racial prejudice against the Mexicans was strong and it


34 Scott to Jones, April 30, 1846, quoted in Prucha, Sword, 292.
definitely facilitated the atrocities the army inflicted in Mexico, attacks against civilians and crops never became the official policy. Haciendas that supported guerrillas were commonly burned, and property occasionally taken as punishment if American trains were attacked nearby, but there are few documented instances of the blatant targeting of civilians. When civilians were targeted with military force it was in a fit of rage or when the American commander felt that the military necessity of the situation mandated it. Winfield Scott’s bombardment of Veracruz is one such instance of military necessity: civilians had been given the opportunity to evacuate, and Scott’s army was threatened by Santa Anna’s force moving towards the coast to break the siege. The policies of retribution on those who supported guerrillas was seen by American commanders as corresponding with Vattel’s guidance that “The right to security often authorizes us to punish injustice or violence,” and by the end of 1847 the policy was to collect contributions from towns near guerrilla attacks as opposed to burning them to the ground.

The nature of the war in Mexico was different than in the Indian wars. Many of the Indian wars were seen by the American populace as wars of survival for colonists or frontier settlers. Conversely, the Mexican War was a war of expansion into foreign territory, thus the tolerance for atrocity was lower. Furthermore, the demographic balance in Mexico was the polar opposite of that in the Indian wars. During the Mexican War the Americans were in the great minority. Massacres, rather than breaking the will

35 Vattel, para 162, p 364.
of the enemy, were more likely to inflame the populace to resistance, an effect that could have been overwhelming since the population greatly outnumbered the U.S. Army.

Most of the atrocities, particularly in central Mexico, were more punitive or brought about by a desire for revenge rather than by racism. The Texas Rangers’ massacre of twenty-four Mexicans at Rancho Guadalupe on March 24, 1847, while terrible, was a response to evidence that the Mexicans in the town were involved in the killing and mutilation of forty American teamsters at Ramos a month earlier. The American command did not order the attack, and censured the behavior of the Rangers after it occurred. The massacre by General Lane’s troops at Huamantla in October 1847 was a reaction to the attack in which the town’s people had clearly participated, during which eleven Texas Rangers, including the beloved Samuel Walker, were killed. Racism may have made the degree of these massacres greater, but they were caused by revenge and passion. There were exceptions when racism was the cause of abuses, including clashes early in the war between Texans and guerrillas, but these were the work of individuals acting outside the sanctioned policy when discipline was lacking.

While atrocities were always problematic for the army, the worst cases occurred in the sparsely populated regions of northern Mexico, and were brought under control as the war progressed. Army commanders’ controlling influence, and fear of the consequences of igniting a “people’s war,” insured that the official policy and execution was in line with Vattel’s *Laws of Nations* concerning respect for the rights of non-

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combatants. The Mexican War never became a race war, unlike early colonial wars and some nineteenth century Indian Wars.

Learning from History: European Wars

Like the Indian wars, the Wars of Napoleon had a major influence on the American occupation of Mexico. The record of Napoleon’s campaigns was considered the premier military doctrine of the day. The tactical manual that Winfield Scott originally authored in 1817—then republished nine times through 1861—and Scott’s General Regulations, which Congress sanctioned as the official handbook for governing the army, were rooted in Scott’s study of European armies, and the French system of war was his preference. Scott was fluent in French and these manuals closely mirrored the French guides. Baron Antoine-Henri Jomini, the French staff officer and then premier historian and military theorist on the Napoleonic wars, vividly described the failings of Napoleon’s army in combating the Spanish insurgency from 1808-1813.38

Jomini’s writings dominated the abbreviated history curriculum at West Point, as the U.S. military viewed French doctrine and Napoleon’s methods as the authority in military affairs throughout the first half of the nineteenth century. From West Point to General Scott’s personal reading program, the army learned important lessons from its study of the French defeat in Spain.

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During his 1808-1813 campaign in Spain, Napoleon’s army applied a “war must feed the war” policy, which extracted from the enemy state the costs of the occupation and showed blatant disrespect for cherished cultural traditions of the Spanish. The most notable of these was the French disrespect toward the Catholic Church. Napoleon himself aggravated the situation with his brutal policies targeting Catholic clergy who supported the Spanish guerrillas. Priests in Spain eventually led many of the guerrilla parties. These cultural faux pas, combined with overly harsh measures on areas harboring resistance, alienated the Spanish population from the French and their revolutionary ideas, and instigated massive resistance.

The Spanish eventually turned back the French and killed 300,000 French soldiers over the duration of the conflict. It was in Spain that the term guerrillo first entered the Spanish vocabulary, later to be adopted in English as well (guerrilla). The most striking example of the Spanish will to resist was the battle of Saragossa, when the French had to fight street to street for four weeks, and killed 54,000 Spaniards before taking the city—but not before the Spanish inflicted 20,000 French casualties. With the support of the British, including an eventual invasion led by Arthur Wellesley—named the Duke of Wellington after his victory at Vimeiro in Spain—the Spanish turned back the French.  

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While guerrillas played an important role in Spain, it is important to note that one of the premier historians of the Peninsular War, Charles Esdaile, argues convincingly that “given sufficient time and sufficient troops, then, the French could restore order in the occupied territories.” The guerrillas were enablers, but without the British support, they probably could not have defeated the French.40

Partisans also plagued Napoleon’s army during the invasion of Russia. During the long trek to Moscow, the massive French army was forced to live nearly entirely off of the land, and did not pay for goods, which left many Russians critically short of sustenance as the winter approached. Thus, during their retreat from Russia, French troops starved and froze under the unsympathetic eye of the same Russian civilians they had taken from months before. The Russian cossacks, much better prepared than the French for winter operations, and motivated by the destruction caused by the French including the burning of Moscow, wreaked havoc on the retreating army. Of the 650,000 troops that invaded Russia, only 93,000 returned.41

The army’s senior leadership, most notably Winfield Scott, was deeply influenced by the French experience and understood what had happened to Napoleon’s army in Spain. The rhetoric in Scott’s letters to the Secretary of War during his preparation for the invasion of central Mexico clearly demonstrate his fear of a large uprising mirroring the French experience in Spain: “If you come with few, we will


overwhelm you; if you come with many, you will overwhelm yourselves.” 42 In a later letter to the Secretary of War, as he was lobbying for a larger number of troops for the Veracruz expedition, Scott parrots Jomini when he refers to the war becoming “national.” 43 Finally, Scott’s plan and its implementation in Mexico clearly reflected the problems the French faced in Spain, most notably his efforts to neutralize the influence of the Catholic Church by courting it to the American side. When it came to pacifying the population, the Americans were familiar with the problems they might face because they had studied the Napoleonic wars.

Volunteers

Professionalism and experience countering guerrillas meant nothing if the soldiers on the ground could not or would not execute the policies their commanders formulated. Even in 1846, Jacksonian-era egalitarian ideas that valued the citizen soldier over the regular were still evident if not dominant in the United States. The Mexican War was fought with an army that on average consisted of 56% volunteers and 44% regulars. 44 As opposed to the army’s obvious preference for regulars, the American public viewed the citizen-soldier as appropriate to ensure defense without running the risks to liberty that a standing army presented.

42 Scott to Marcy, Oct 27, 1846, HED 59, 30th Cong., 1st Sess., 54.

43 Scott to Marcy, Nov 12, 1847, HED 59, 30th Cong., 1st Sess., 57.

44 These numbers are based on HED 24, 31st Cong, 1st Sess, Table IV (. . . aggregate number of regulars and volunteers employed during the war, with their average duration of service, . . .) p 6. While significantly less regulars actually served, their tours were much longer than Volunteers.
This fear of a standing army had its origins in the oppressive royal army under British rule before the American Revolution. During the Revolution, George Washington built a regular army capable of fighting the British redcoats, but the memory of militia successes at famous battles including Bunker Hill and Cowpens stood out in the nation’s historic memory. Fear of a standing army was reaffirmed by the excesses of the French Revolution early in the nineteenth century when the military overthrew the democratic government, warping the very ideas in which the revolution was rooted.

Back in America, the U.S. militia for the most part failed during the War of 1812. But memories of the 1814 Battle of New Orleans, when Andrew Jackson’s volunteer militiamen decisively defeated the British, lingered more than the early failures at Queenstown Heights and Plattsburg. No one put the American philosophy toward a standing army better than Polk:

> It has never been our policy to maintain large standing armies in time of peace. They are contrary to the genius of our free institutions, would impose heavy burdens on the people and be dangerous to public liberty. Our reliance for protection and defense on the land must be mainly on our citizen soldiers, who will be ever ready, as they ever have been ready in times past, to rush with alacrity, at the call of their country, to her defense.

As such, at the start of the Mexican War the regular force consisted of only 734 officers and 7,885 enlisted men, far fewer than would be needed to invade Mexico and seize its capital.45

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The volunteer concept was created to fill the ranks of the army in a time of war. Congress authorized increasing the number of volunteers during the War of 1812 and then again in 1836 during the Second Seminole War in order to overcome the limitations of the state militia. The militia, which was designed as a home defense organization, by law, could neither serve outside of the United States, nor for periods of longer than three months without the consent of the state governor, legislature, and in some cases the soldiers themselves.46

At the beginning of the Mexican War, Congress authorized Polk to call up 50,000 volunteers, of whom he immediately activated 20,000 from “Western and South Western States”; the other 30,000 were kept in reserve until needed. The outpouring from the American public in response to the President’s call was overwhelming, and volunteers rushed to their recruiting stations. Seven hundred men were turned away in Ohio at the first recruiting drive in June. Those rejected were angry and rioted, tearing up American flags and burning several buildings near Camp Washington outside of Cincinnati. This lack of military discipline and disregard for the rule of law foreshadowed the actions of some of the 3,000 troops who were enlisted that day in Cincinnati, but theirs would be directed against Mexicans.47

On the whole, volunteers did not view themselves as regular soldiers. They looked down on regulars as wage-laborers or mercenaries while they, in contrast, had answered their country’s call and fought to avenge the death of those Americans killed

46 Winders, Mr. Polk’s Army, 68.
47 James K Polk, The Diary of James K. Polk During His Presidency, 1845 to 1849, ed. Milo Milton Quaife (Chicago: A. C. McClurg & co, 1910), 404.(quote). Winders, Mr. Polk’s Army, 69; Foos, Short, Offhand, Killing Affair, 48.
during the Texas revolution. Besides patriotism, some volunteers signed up for the adventure associated with going to Mexico and seizing the “Halls of Montezuma.” William Prescott’s account of Hernan Cortez’s conquest of the Aztecs was popular among soldiers in Mexico as they crossed over the same route the Spanish took in 1521. Others went for the opportunity to better themselves. A volunteer private’s pay was a meager $7 a month in most cases, but after twelve months of service the government promised him sixty acres of land or $100 in land script, making it worth his while to complete his tour. A few may have also seen the trip to Mexico as a way to improve their lot at the expense of an inferior race of Mexicans by seizing Mexican land and subverting their labor.\textsuperscript{48}

Historians have frequently referred to this group as an “army of manifest destiny” filled with the ideas of herrenvolk democracy. “Manifest Destiny” was the idea that U.S. westward expansion to the Pacific Ocean, perhaps beyond, was predestined. Herrenvolk democracy as applied to American nineteenth-century society was an ideology of equality amongst white male land owners supported by the labor of inferior, subservient races.\textsuperscript{49} Indeed, the rhetoric of some U.S. soldiers from the Mexican War reflected these ideas. One Indiana officer wrote in regard to the Mexican people that “it requires no gift of prophecy to foretell their doom, and they are destined soon to fall before the all


grasping & all conquering genius of genuine Americanism.” Another recorded, “As to the miserable inhabitants of the same fate will await them that happened to the Indian tribes of our own frontier. They will naturally vanish before civilization.” This idea of Mexican inferiority made it easier for soldiers to justify the unwonted killing of Mexicans that would accompany some counter-guerrilla efforts. Feelings of guilt were assuaged by the inevitability of the situation.

Many volunteer units had discipline problems. They saw themselves as Jacksonian democrats who valued their individualism and independence, traits not overly compatible with military discipline. Most joined with the idea of fulfilling their vision of the citizen-soldier who elects his own officers and serves with men from his home town. Battles were to be won on enthusiasm and the martial prowess of the Anglo-American man, not necessarily discipline and marching.

The quality of volunteer soldiers in Mexico varied greatly depending upon their leadership. In some cases they were very good. When the war commenced and it became apparent that citizen soldiers would be mustered, Winfield Scott ordered his quartermaster to send fifty copies of his tactical manuals to volunteer units at Cincinnati, Nashville, and Louisville. There is evidence that officers used these manuals. Colonel William Campbell went a step further and acquired a copy of Scott’s _General_...

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50 Henry Smith to Samuel Stone, November 5, 1846 in James McCaffrey, _Army of Manifest Destiny_, 68.

51 John Cantey to his cousin, March 6, 1848 in McCaffrey, _Army of Manifest Destiny_, 46.


53 Foos, _Short Offhand Killing Affair_, 32-33.
Regulations. By the time his unit arrived in Mexico he bragged that they could perform several complex, battalion-level maneuvers including transitioning from line to column and forming a square.\textsuperscript{54} Lieutenant John Dodd of the Indiana volunteers recalled drilling his men six hours a day in Puebla, Mexico, and that while the adjacent Ohio Volunteers had nicer uniforms, his unit “in consequence of pride among the officers and men, [we] can beat them in maneuvering.” While Dodd acknowledged his unit would never drill like regulars, he thought “our regiment will do themselves credit anywhere with regulars or volunteers.”\textsuperscript{55}

Many former regulars, who were mostly West Point graduates, returned to the service as commanders of volunteer units. These include names like Henry Clay, Jr., Albert Sydney Johnson, Samuel Ryan Curtis, Jubal Early, and Jefferson Davis. In total, eleven commanded regiments as colonels. The second call for Volunteers in early 1847 brought back over one hundred officers who had already served a tour, thus there was a level of combat experience in the volunteer ranks during the latter half of the war.\textsuperscript{56}

Several officers, including Ulysses S. Grant, noted that working in close proximity with professional regulars helped volunteers rapidly transition into competent soldiers. Major John R. Kenly, a Maryland volunteer, while manning a fort at the national bridge in Veracruz state, noted that two West Point officers—Ambrose Burnside and John Gibbon—passed through and while temporarily stranded at his post “were of material assistance to us, cheerfully laboring to instruct and drill the troops, and upon all

\textsuperscript{54} Winders, \textit{Mr. Polk’s Army}, 73-74.

\textsuperscript{55} John W. Dodd Papers, MSS 512, Ohio Historical Society, Columbus, OH, 87.

\textsuperscript{56} Winders, \textit{Mr. Polk’s Army}, 74, 78.
occasions showing such zeal and alacrity in the performance of duty, as to inspire in our officers a noble emulation.\textsuperscript{57}

There were some good volunteer units, but there were clearly some problems with this method of raising a military force. The system of electing officers did not lend itself well to enforcing discipline. Politicking was common, and particularly around election time, which in some units happened annually, discipline slipped. There were even several cases of officers offering alcohol to their men in exchange for votes, a practice directly counter to the standards Taylor, Scott, and Wool strove to enforce.\textsuperscript{58} Many resisted the strict discipline army commanders enforced, arguing that volunteers should not be subject to the same standards and punishment as regulars. Because several states had outlawed corporal punishment prior to the Mexican War, some volunteers felt that their status as citizen-soldiers should free them from this grotesque form of discipline. In reaction to five soldiers being whipped in the public square in Jalapa, a private in the Illinois volunteers recorded, “No doubt they were guilty of the crime alleged against them and received their just deserts. But still it chills one’s blood to see free born Americans tied up and whipped like dogs.”\textsuperscript{59}

Not all volunteer units had the benefit of competent officers, and misconduct that alienated portions of the Mexican population occurred. Examples of problems with the system occurred early on when the local militia in New Orleans had to be called out to

\textsuperscript{57} Weigley, \textit{History of the U.S. Army}, 186; John Reese Kenly, \textit{Memoirs of a Maryland Volunteer. War with Mexico, in the Years 1846-7-8} (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & co, 1873), 323 (quote).

\textsuperscript{58} Winders, \textit{Mr. Polk’s Army}, 83.

subdue a group of Mississippi volunteers en route to Mexico. A gang of Pennsylvanians were thrown in jail in New Orleans around the same time. Perhaps the Arkansas volunteers serving under Colonel Archibald Yell in the Northern states were the most unruly. Yell, a politician by trade, seemed to spend more time building camaraderie over a drink with his men than drilling and disciplining them. Yell’s men were responsible for several massacres of Mexicans early in the conflict while serving in the northern states.

In some cases, officers who applied the letter of the law too strictly on their volunteers also struggled to retain control. Colonel Robert Paine commanded a North Carolina regiment stationed at Buena Vista. Paine was a strict disciplinarian and a Whig who was appointed to command by the Whig governor of North Carolina, which from the beginning brought resentment in the largely Democratic force. Paine vigorously enforced orders. For example, when a group of soldiers illegally stole corn on their march to Monterrey, he ordered them to return and pay the owner, then report to him for further punishment. Paine did not hesitate to apply corporal punishment to unruly volunteers, and in early August he had two wooden horses erected in front of his tent, presumably as a threat to his soldiers that he would implement a common punishment used in the regular army. Being sentenced to “ride the wooden horse” meant that the guilty party

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61 The circumstances of this massacre are unclear. Samuel Chamberlain tells an exaggerated tale of the event that included the Arkansas volunteers scalping men and killing women and children in a cave. Chamberlain, despite his penchant for gross exaggeration, does provide some insight into the mindset of the Arkansas men who came to Mexico only to fight, “looked upon “greasers” as belonging to the same social class as their own Negro slaves,” and would not take orders from “a little yankee general like Wool,” Chamberlain, *My Confession*, 86-90; Foos, *Short, Offhand Killing Affair*, 124.
would be tied to the horse and forced to sit in the uncomfortable position for hours, sometimes at intervals over several days. In protest to Paine’s threat, a group of approximately one hundred volunteers dismantled the horse and threw stones at Colonel Paine’s tent. Paine and two or three of his loyal officers put down the mutiny, but not before the Colonel was forced to fire into an angry crowd of soldiers, killing a North Carolina volunteer and wounding a Virginian.62

Perhaps the most effective and most brutal of the citizen-soldiers were the Texas militia, or Texas Rangers as they were commonly known. Mexicans feared the Texas Rangers for their lethality and the brutality they inflicted throughout the war. Many of these men, including Captain Samuel Walker, had family members who were killed during the savage fighting that accompanied the Texas War for Independence, or the 1840 Mexican incursions into south Texas.

The Texans had a major advantage over the Mexicans in the pair of the newest model Colt revolving pistols each man carried. These gave them enough firepower to overwhelm a significantly larger force. This six-shooter fired a .44 caliber round, which far exceeded other pistols in its class, and was rifled, giving it a longer effective range. It was described to be “as effective as a common rifle at one hundred yards, and superior to a musket even at two hundred.”63  The Walker Colt was designed based on Samuel

62 Wool Order #404, Aug 16, 1947; Marcy to Taylor, Oct 25, 1847; Paine to McDowell (Wool), Aug 28, 1847 all in Wool Papers, Box 28, F 17, NYSL; Paine to wife, Aug 13, 1847, in Smith and Judah, Chronicles of the Gringo, 424-429; Curtis, Curtis Diary, Chance(ed.), 277; Foos, Short, Offhand, Killing Affair, 91-92.

Walker’s request to the manufacturer and arrived in the middle of October 1847. Both the six-shooter and its predecessor, the five-shooter, gave the Rangers and mounted riflemen the ability to fire rapidly without having to reload; this in an era when rifles and muskets still had to be loaded from the end of the muzzle. In addition to their weapons, the Rangers had experience fighting Indians and Mexicans, and could nearly match the guerrillas in mobility and survivability in the harsh terrain. Still, their leader, Colonel John Hays, would not challenge the Mexican lancers (light cavalry) in mounted battle as he regarded them as superior at maneuvering on their smaller and swifter horses. Unless he had greater numbers or the element of surprise, Hays would dismount his troops and focus his fires to break the Mexican formation, then remount and charge the fleeing enemy.

The Texans played a crucial role in defeating the Mexican guerrillas, and while significantly more discriminate in central Mexico than in the north, the burning of ranches with any link to guerrillas was a common Ranger tactic. Doctor A. Wislizenus, a German-born scientist on an exploratory mission and traveling with the American army, noted as he left the country the large number of ranches that had been burned by the Americans along their main supply route. Yet having witnessed the horrors the guerrillas inflicted along the route, he reasoned, “In seeing such horrors, known only in old Indian warfare, can anyone blame the American troops for having sought revenge, and burning all the villages and ranchos on their route which gave refuge to such bands of worse than

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64 Charles M. Robinson, III. *Texas and the Mexican War, A History and a Guide.* (Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 1949), 85-89.

highway robbers?” Wislizenus reasoned that while these were harsh measures, “when carried out with some circumspection, [they] will break up these guerrilla bands much sooner than too lenient a course.”

The Texans’s six-shooters were not the only technological advantage the Americans brought to Mexico. A major advantage the American army had throughout the conventional fight and during the occupation was the superiority of their weapons. The American army primarily used flintlock muskets and carbines similar in form to the Mexican arms. Comparably, however, the American flintlocks were much newer, mostly 1840s-era Springfields, and operated more efficiently than the Mexican fusil or Brown Bess that was commonly over forty years old. In addition, some of the Americans fought with more accurate and reliable percussion carbines. American artillery was lighter and more maneuverable, though rarely used during the guerrilla war. Better weapons contributed to the American military superiority in Mexico, which was an important factor during the conventional battles and the military occupation.

During the first half of the nineteenth century the U.S. Army moved on two disparate paths: the first was to prepare for war with Europe; the second and noticeably less emphasized, was its role as a frontier constabulary, managing relations between Indians and the expanding settlers. The dual preparation for conventional and

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67 The one major exception to this was Jefferson Davis’s Mississippi regiment who used the Mississippi rifle. Since the minié ball had not yet been invented, these rifles were significantly slower to load than the standard smooth bore, but fired with much greater accuracy.

unconventional war prepared it well for fighting in Mexico. First it destroyed a conventional army; second it pacified the Mexican populace and fought back Mexican guerrillas, who with their superior skills on horseback and tendency to fight only when they chose to, resembled the American Indians. The U.S. Army was not as well prepared by their combat experience for running a military government, but the progress toward professionalization of the army enabled them to overcome this shortfall. Their studies of the mistakes the French army had made in Spain and Russia prepared the army to deal with the Mexican populace, but it would take time to work out the kinks in the military governments in cities across the country.

Historians agree that the discipline problems, particularly among the volunteers, had the potential to undermine the American command’s best efforts. Not all volunteers were rapists and murderers, however, and some, often under the leadership of former regular officers, served honorably. Others did not, and their behavior undoubtedly hurt the American occupation mission. These units need to be examined on a case-by-case basis, and there is no simple classification of the quality of the volunteers. To their credit, regular officers recognized the danger of mistreatment of the Mexican population, and implemented measures to prevent misconduct and mitigate its effects. These included enforcing strict standards of discipline and minimizing the exposure of undisciplined units to the population by stationing them outside of cities.

Finally, one must also be careful to delineate what happened early in the war from what happened in the later half. Polk initially called for “Western and Southern volunteers,” to respond to the crisis, and General Edmund Gaines in New Orleans ordered his own call up of volunteers from Mississippi, Arkansas, and Alabama.
Gaines’s volunteers were shortly recalled by the federal government, but not before many had crossed the Rio Grande. The scene of Texans and Arkansas volunteers descending on northern Mexico in overwhelming numbers put Zachary Taylor, not known for his high standard of discipline, in a difficult position. Central Mexico was different. The martinet Winfield Scott, with his hand-picked regulars and better trained and more experienced volunteers, commanded a force that behaved significantly better. Indeed, discipline was bad early on, but the worst happened in the sparsely populated north, and the Americans had time to take corrective action in preparation for the invasion of the densely populated central Mexico.

The challenges of the occupation were great, and the American army, while capable and somewhat professional, was not the perfect tool. Yet under good leadership, it proved good enough to win the war “and a peace.”
Chapter III: The Learning Phase: The Initial Occupation of the North (May 1846-October 1847)

Had these people sense they would desire to have the laws of the American Union extended over them to shield them from robbers, their own government and the Comanches . . . But of this truth I am now convinced that their hatred to the Americans is deep seated. Those who have joined us will become outcasts—with the great mass hatred to Americans will become an inheritance from father to son.

Captain Franklin Smith, January 29, 1847

The initial invasion of northern Mexico under the leadership of General Zachary Taylor aimed to employ a conciliatory strategy toward the Mexican population and to convince the northern states to split off from the Mexican central government. This fragmentation of their country would in turn increase pressure on Mexico City to give in to American demands. This strategy failed and by early 1847 there was significant guerilla resistance in the northern states and the Mexican government continued to refuse American peace terms. Taylor’s occupation was ineffective because American soldiers inflicted atrocities on Mexicans that undermined the Polk administration’s conciliatory approach. The American strategy also overestimated the desire of the Mexicans in the northern states to cooperate with the invasion force and misjudged central Mexico’s willingness to resist the American demands.
The occupation of the north was important not because it was the central theater of the war but because, if mishandled, it had the potential to undermine American strategic objectives. If guerrillas were able to inflict enough damage on the occupation force, the Mexican strategy to convince the Americans to give up the war effort might succeed. Taylor’s struggles early on were also important because they served as a training ground for the U.S. Army prior to the occupation of central Mexico, which proved to be the decisive campaign of the Mexican War.

Conciliate and Separate

In early May 1846 General Zachary Taylor led a small force of regular army soldiers to two stunning victories at the battles of Palo Alta and Resaca de Palma against the forces of the Mexican Army of the North. Zachary Taylor had thirty eight years of military experience by the time he led the invasion of Mexico, most of which was spent managing Indians on the American frontier. He participated in the Black Hawk War in 1832, where he was exposed to many of the frustrations of managing a mixed force of volunteers and regulars while trying to control a civilian population. Taylor achieved a level of success during the Seminole War, leading the Army to victory at the battle of Lake Okeechobee and then clearing large parts of the Florida swamps of the persistent Seminoles by dispersing forts throughout the Florida swampland and encouraging aggressive patrolling.¹ The majority of Taylor’s career was spent at frontier posts

commanding regulars, where camaraderie was high and his subordinates relatively well trained and led primarily by West Point-trained officers.

Figure 1: Zachary Taylor (Library of Congress)

Taylor had 4,000 regulars under his command for the initial invasion of Mexico, and the army was led by a relatively professional corps of officers. According to Second Lieutenant Ulysses S. Grant, “A better army, man for man, probably never faced an enemy than the one commanded by General Taylor in the earliest two engagements of the Mexican War.”

The unit functioned efficiently in combat, easily defeating the opposition, and discredited the highly influential Mexican leader, Major General Mariano Arista. After Resaca de Palma, Arista’s force retreated to Monterrey, the centrally-

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3 Arista was a popular figure in northern Mexico who for years had served as the link holding these states in union with the unstable government in Mexico City; Miguel A. González Auíroga, “Nuevo Leon Ocupado: El Gobierno De Nuevo Leon Durante La Guerra Entre Mexico Y Los Estados Unidos” in
located capital of Nuevo Leon, and the U.S. Army peacefully occupied the important commercial city of Matamoros, the first of many cities the United States would occupy during the war with Mexico.

The American strategy post Resaca de Palma was based upon the perception that the states south of the Rio Grande, like their neighbor Texas, had separatist tendencies from Mexico City and might be coerced into breaking away from the Mexican government. President James K. Polk and Secretary of War William Marcy made it clear in Taylor’s orders that he was to exploit the natural schisms in Mexican society and court the population to the American side. This in turn would demonstrate to central Mexico that they could not hold on to their northern states if they continued the war, and thus convince them to give in to American demands. Polk went as far as to have the Secretary of War draft for Taylor “A Proclamation By the General Commanding the Army of the United States of America To the Mexican People” promising security, respect for their religion, and protection of their rights and property. The administration also played upon the Mexican’s fear of Indian attacks: “It is our wish to see you liberated from despots, to drive back the savage Comanches, to prevent the renewal of their assaults, and to compel them to restore to you from captivity your long lost wives and children.”

This was not the first effort the Americans had made to exploit the Indian menace in the north. In September 1845, the U.S. government had commissioned Pierce M. Butler, a former governor of South Carolina who had experience negotiating with Indians


4 Taylor, Zachary, “A Proclamation By the General Commanding the Army of the U.S. of America To the Mexican People” June 4, 1846, (HED 60, 30th Cong, 1st Session), 286-288.
elsewhere on the American frontier, to approach the Comanches, who were the most threatening of the tribes in Texas, and gain a promise of neutrality in the pending conflict. Butler succeeded in earning the Comanches’ support after he agreed to biannual gifts, promised that the tribe could send representatives to Washington whenever they desired, and made an ambiguous commitment to recognize Indian land claims. In an additional gesture of friendship, M.G. Lewis of Tennessee, Butler’s partner in the expedition, led a party of Indians from Texas to meet the president in early July 1846. It was a good start, but both sides eventually reneged on the promises made during these meetings.\(^5\)

The June 4, 1846 “Proclamation” formed the basis of the original conciliatory and separation strategy the Americans employed in Mexico. Once in Texas, Taylor reported information that furthered Polk’s perception of the northern states’ desire for separation. Based on intelligence from a reliable spy, he wrote to the Secretary of War that “the frontier departments of Tamaulipas, Coahuila, and Nueva Leon, will probably declare themselves independent of the central government and establish pacific relations with us.” Thus, based on their perception of weak ties to central Mexico, and possibly some arrogance about the appeal of union to the United States, the American leadership started the occupation with a conciliatory strategy, hoping to inspire a spontaneous separation of the northern states from central Mexico.\(^6\)

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Taylor, thinking more operationally, realized that the American logistics system was too underprepared to support a foreign occupation and that at times during the campaign he would need to rely on the support of the populace for basic supplies. A hostile population who actively resisted might cut the tenuous American supply lines. On August 23, 1846, Taylor wrote to his trusted medical officer, Dr. R.C. Wood that “my greatest apprehensions are that they will avoid us in force, attempt to harass us in small parties, attack our trains, attempting to cut our supplies at favorable positions, destroy the corn, & drive away the stock.”

The American conciliatory strategy had some merit, particularly because the Mexican fear of Indian attacks was a vulnerability that the invasion force could exploit. Since the early 1830s, the tribes of the southern plains including Comanches, Kiowas, and Apaches had been a major destabilizing influence for the northern Mexican states. Major George W. Hughes, an officer in General John E. Wool’s Centre Division that passed through Coahuila in 1846, noted in his travel journal that large parts of the state were “now nothing but a desert waste, abandoned to the dreaded Comanches, or the not less terrible Mescaleros and Apaches, who have driven the timid inhabitants from their rural dwellings.”

Mexico City had mismanaged the Indian problem for years prior to the American invasion. In 1835, eleven years prior to the war, the then Mexican president Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna disbanded the regional militias in an effort to strengthen the

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7 Zachary Taylor, *Letters Of Zachary Taylor From The Battlefields Of The Mexican War* (Kessinger Publishing, LLC, 2007), 44.

influence of the central government over the states. The northern population objected because they viewed the militias as essential for protection against Indian attacks. Santa Anna’s intent was to replace the militias with a strengthened national army.

The first revolt against Santa Anna’s efforts occurred in Zacatecas, which the new President crushed with an army of 4,000 regular troops. Problems followed in nearly all of the northern states, most significantly in Texas, which would declare its independence in October 1835 and defeat Santa Anna’s Army in 1836. Coahuila and Nuevo Leon also rebelled, but the separatist fervor of the largely Anglo-American population in Texas did not exist south of the Rio Grande. Coahuila’s 1836 independent government was crushed by internal forces, while Nuevo Leon’s 1836 revolt succumbed to the popular leader Mariano Arista—later defeated by the Americans at Palo Alta and Resaca de Palma—who was sent from Mexico City to deal with the separatist movement. Arista, who held great popularity in this region, worked closely with a pragmatic group of leaders in Monterrey and was able to maintain a balance between conservatives and federalists until the American invasion in 1846. The militias remained largely intact, but the Indian problem was one the Mexican government could not solve. Protection from Indian attacks would later become a tool the Americans leveraged to gain the tacit support of some northern regions.9

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The U.S. made another major effort to win over the people south of the Rio Grande by ending prohibitive taxes on Mexican trade and business. The cut in taxes, combined with the influx in capital from the American force who paid for their goods and housing, led to rapid economic growth. This economic boom mitigated some of the evils inflicted by the occupation. By removing taxes and providing protection from Indian attacks, the Americans were able to address two of the most prominent complaints the northern states rendered against Mexico City. Later the Americans would use the tax in an effort to force the Mexicans to accept peace, but through September 1847 they were still trying to win over hearts and minds, and relieving taxes worked well.  

The American assessment of northern Mexico’s desire for autonomy was not entirely off base. While the Mexicans generally did not desire separation from Mexico City, there were certainly elements of the population that sought the security a union with the United States might bring. General Zachary Taylor noted the fear of the tribesmen and the warm reception the Americans received as they moved into the cities south of the Rio Grande. Shortly after his army arrived in Mexico, the General responded to a request from the governing bodies in the towns of Meir, Reynosa, Guerrero, and China to provide a force for protection from Indian raids. As the Americans moved into these towns they were graciously received. In November 1846, Lieutenant Daniel Harvey Hill recorded the warm reception his unit received in Saltillo, which is over one hundred miles south of

the Rio Grande. He wrote that streets were crowded “and the ladies were at the windows and in the balconies all apparently manifesting a kind, friendly feeling.” Even one of the Texas Rangers, Samuel Reid, noted the welcome his party received in several villages as they returned to the United States in October 1846.\textsuperscript{11}

While the Northern states wanted federalism, evidence does not support that the majority wanted separation and alignment with the U.S. Texas was unique in that it shared a border with the U.S., and by the time it declared independence was more American in demographics than Mexican. While there were instances outside of Texas where the states declared independence as their intention—Antonio Canales’s 1840 declaration of the “Republic of the Rio Grande” comes to mind—there were many more acts that demonstrated a cautious loyalty to Mexico. Even New Mexico, one of the farthest states from the capital, approved the “Plan of Tome” in 1836, which supported the Mexican Constitution. New Mexico suffered from a serious class struggle between the impoverished Indian and the wealthy land owner, and was subject to regular Indian raids. Despite tenuous security conditions and little support from Mexico City, the New Mexicans never agreed to the overtures from Texas to leave the Mexican federation. As

\begin{itemize}
\item Wilson to Taylor, June 10, 1846, \textit{Mexican War Army of Occupation Letters Received, June 10, 1846-July 21, 1846, RG 94, E133}, National Archives and Records Administration I (NARA I), Washington D.C.;
\item Taylor to AG, Aug 10, 1846, \textit{Army of Occupation Letters Sent, Apr-Dec 1846, RG 94, E 130A}, NARA I;
\end{itemize}
late as 1841, when Texas sent a three-hundred-man expedition into New Mexico that became known as the “Texas Santa Fe Expedition,” the New Mexicans fought it off.

The states south of the Rio Grande were even more tightly bound to Mexico City. Unlike Texas, they shared a common race and culture with the Mexicans. The prefect (governor) of Tamaulipas expressed the resolve of his people to Taylor just prior to the commencement of hostilities when he wrote to his American adversary: “in the most solemn manner, that neither now nor at any time do they (the people of Tamaulipas), or will they, consent to separate themselves from the Mexican republic, and to unite themselves with the United States.”

Fear of American racism also affected the northern states’ preference for Mexico City. In the words of a Chihuahua newspaper, if Mexicans allied with the Anglo-Americans, they would be “sold as beasts” because “their color was not as white as that of the conquerors.” American attitudes toward Mexicans and their own dark-skinned inhabitants support this opinion. Even after the crushing defeats at Palo Alta and Resaca de Palma, the Mexicans did not waiver in their resistance. In response to American peace overtures—which of course included the transfer of lands north of the Rio Grande—they demanded the U.S. Army withdrawal from their territory before negotiations would be considered. The Polk administration’s assumptions of the separatist sentiments in northern Mexico were clearly overstated.

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12 Weber, 261, 266; Juan Cardenas (Tamaulipas) to Taylor, 23 Mar 46, in 30th Congress, 1st Session, House Executive Document 60, 131-132.

While most were not ready to resign their fate to the will of their northern
neighbor, many Mexicans did collaborate with the Americans during the war. Overall,
the way the U.S. Army was received was largely contingent on the region’s ability to
resist, and few towns had sufficient capability to fight after the Mexican Army retreated
in May 1846. The Mexican fear of Indian attacks and the hope that their powerful
neighbor might prove adequate protection also influenced some to cooperate, as was the
case in the previously mentioned towns of Meir, Reynosa, Guerrero, and China.

John Taylor Hughes kept a record of the variety of receptions his small advanced
party in front of Colonel Alexander William Doniphan’s Missouri volunteers received as
they moved between Chihuahua and Nuevo Leon. In general, small villages welcomed
them and gave them decent places to stay. Generally, larger towns with well established
governments were more hostile to the Americans. As they approached Durango,
Hughes’s party was met by a wealthy Mexican named Don Ignacio Jirmenez and a group
of seventy-five armed men who were sent by the governor to take them as prisoners.
However, the Mexican resolve weakened when Hughes’s party began loading multiple
weapons, including the feared six-shooter they each carried. Most towns did not bother
the Americans provided they promised not to occupy their village. The ever-present fear
of Indian attacks also convinced some Mexicans to cooperate with the Americans.¹⁴

Some Mexicans collaborated for purely financial reasons. The Americans
employed many Mexican spies, mail carriers, and guides throughout the occupation.
The Americans in Camargo employed Mexican mail carriers for $45 a month and gave

¹⁴ Delay, War of a Thousand Deserts, 264; John Taylor Hughes, Doniphan’s Expedition. (College Station:
them a horse and mail bag, good pay considering the American volunteer only earned around $7 a month. However, by the middle of 1847 as the guerilla war heated up, this became dangerous duty and on several occasions the Americans’ aides disappeared or were found brutally killed.\footnote{Chance, The Mexican War Journal of Captain Franklin Smith, 21, 22, 209; Cheairs and Johnson, Hill Diary, 46. Most monetary transactions between Mexicans and Americans were made in hard coinage, although in the north, American dollars may have occasionally been used.}

The Mexican officials who cooperated with the Americans usually did so because they saw it as the only way to protect themselves, their property, and the Mexican population. Most collaborated begrudgingly and consistently walked the fine line between resistance and cooperation. They realized that Americans were likely to leave someday and Mexican leaders would have to face their countrymen.\footnote{Miguel A. González Quiroga, “Nuevo León ocupado: El Gobierno De Nuevo León durante la Guerra entre México y los Estados Unidos,” in Josefina Zoraída Vázquez, México Al Tiempo De Su Guerra Con Estados Unidos, 1846-1848, Sección de obras de historia; (México : Secretaría de Exteriores : El Colegio de México : Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1997), 350-351.}

**Trouble With Volunteers: Matamoros and Monterey**

Matamoros was the first major city the North Americans occupied. It surrendered without a fight after the Mexican Army of the North was routed at Resaca de Palma and retreated to Monterrey. Taylor followed the Polk administration’s guidance to treat the Mexicans with respect, to play upon the natural divisions in the society, and to encourage separation from Mexico City. The Matamoros ayuntamiento (city council) met Taylor as he approached and surrendered the city. This Mexican governing body recognized that more could be gained for the Mexican people if the existing government accepted the
American offer that allowed them to maintain a degree of administrative authority. Taylor guaranteed to protect private property, recognize the city council, and allow it to continue to govern under the occupation based on the legal principle of *jus gentium*. The General’s guidance to his first military governor, Lieutenant Colonel Newman S. Clarke was a direct reflection of the guidance he had received from Secretary of War William Marcy. It was conciliatory in nature and courted separation from central Mexico. Taylor wrote Clarke: “A firm, yet conciliatory course in his opinion, may be adopted, which will secure the respect of the population . . . any disposition on the part of the citizens to throw off the yoke of the central government, will be judiciously encouraged, and you will please assure them of our protection in such case.” 17

Taylor kept the majority of his force camped outside of the town to avoid conflict with the people. Patrols were kept in the city around the clock to guard against an attack and to arrest unruly Americans. While Taylor remained in his camp outside the city, the U.S. military government headquarters was eventually located in several of the residences on the city square that were deserted by many of the upper class citizens. The Army seized military armaments and the tobacco owed by the Mexican government-run monopoly. One of the Mexican *ayuntamiento’s* first tasks was to show the Americans where all of the weapons were cached within the city. Tobacco was distributed amongst the American soldiers. 18

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18 Lieutenant Napoleon Dana, an officer in Taylor’s command remembered that when the Americans took command of Matamoros “the general obliged the town to surrender at discretion, with the promise that the rights of persons and civil authority should be respected insofar as they did not conflict with his own...
Upon occupying the town, General Taylor issued Polk’s proclamation to the Mexican people with all of its slander against the Mexican government and promises of liberty if the Mexican citizens cooperated. The Americans leveraged newspapers to encourage separatism from Mexico and suppressed papers who published negative articles about the American occupiers. The name of the American sponsored newspaper in Matamoros during the first two months of the occupation was titled *The Republic of the Rio Grande and Friend of the People*, and it was published in both Spanish and English. By July, the situation had deteriorated in Matamoros and more Mexicans fled the town. Symbolic of the increasing tense relationship between Americans and Mexicans, the paper changed its name to *The American Flag*. The paper’s last issue under its original title and with an entirely Spanish version—afterward only a few articles were in Spanish—contained a revealing comment on the subject of Mexican interest in separation: “if they are satisfied with our exertions, we are perfectly content to leave them work out their own salvation.” Despite American efforts, the Mexicans on the whole seemed uninterested in breaking away from Mexico City and joining their northern neighbors.  

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The July 16, 1846 issue of the *American Flag* revealed much about the early occupation. The issue contained the Polk-authored proclamation to the Mexican people. Another article described the Mexicans as receptive to the American message and welcoming toward their northern neighbors. In stark contrast, a later article threatened the Mexicans responsible for stealing several horses from a group of Texas Rangers: “In our judgment it would be well for Mexicans generally to have an eye to the return of the horses, for should these gentlemen be brought in conflict with their people, dire will be the revenge they will take for the loss of their steeds.” The occupation was conciliatory on the surface, but seeds of hatred lurked below.\(^{19}\)

As promised during negotiations to surrender the city, Taylor kept the *ayuntamiento* nominally in charge of the day-to-day governance. He also maintained the Mexican police forces and allowed them to keep their weapons, but there was never a question of who was really in command. The Mexican administrators attempted to function and aggressively addressed the concerns of the population to the military governor. For example, they pleaded with Taylor to stop the illegal seizure of corn by the Americans and pushed for the reopening of the local hospital in the weeks following the occupation.

The Mexicans quickly became frustrated with the lack of responsiveness to their requests and the increasing lack of respect the army showed to their people. The *ayuntamiento*’s ability to enforce order within the town was inhibited by their inability to collect taxes and American troops’ disregard for their authority. While American military governors ordered their soldiers to respect the Mexican police and not to

\(^{19}\) *The American Flag*, Oct 16 1846.
interfere with them, there is little indication that they did anything to enforce these orders. Furthermore, many of the Mexican police forces simply melted away as the guerrilla war in the north gained momentum and they became targets for working with the Americans. The city government’s efforts were further undermined when in mid-September the American military governor ordered the police forces to vacate the rest of the buildings on the city plaza because the Americans needed them to administer the city. Afterwards, the Mexican government was forced to work out of the local prison. Ignored, unfunded, and increasingly threatened by their own citizens, the ayuntamiento in Matamoros did little to increase the quality of life for their people. By late 1846, Matamoros business and politics was almost entirely dominated by Americans.\footnote{Jesus Cardenas to Taylor, 22 May 1846, Records of the Adjutant General’s office: Mexican War Army of occupation Letters Received May 1 1846 – June 9, 1846, RG 94, E133, Box 5, NARA 1, both letters dated 22 May, 1846; N.S. Clarke order, Oct 7, 1846, RG 94, Entry 134, Vol 5, Matamoros Orders, July 1846-Oct1847, NARA 1; Clarke to Prefect of Matamoros, Sept 14, 1846, RG 94 E 130 Vol 7, Letters Sent, Department of Matamoros, July 1846-Aug 1847, NARA 1; Zorilla, Pérez, and Flaquier, 616-621.}

While the pre-war political situation in Northern Mexico was set for the Americans to oversee a relatively peaceful administration, the U.S. Army’s own actions undermined the administration’s efforts. The army was a far cry from the well-trained and disciplined force required to manage in the manner that Polk had hoped. While it is clear that Taylor understood the importance of treating the occupied population firmly, but with respect, his army was too undisciplined to properly manage this type of operation.

By the end of May 1846, masses of volunteers began arriving in Matamoros. Taylor complained to the Secretary of War that 18,000 volunteers—responding to the patriotic call to aid the war effort and avenge Mexican atrocities on Americans in
Texas—appeared at Brazos Island shortly after his victory at Resaca de Palma, untrained, and without the supplies to feed or house themselves. The Army would peak at about 20,000 camped along the Rio Grande during the summer of 1846, many of whom Taylor would send home by August.21

The volunteers were devastated to find that the Mexican Army had already been defeated and had retreated. Once in Matamoros, bored and drunken volunteers brawled in the streets and committed criminal acts on residents. Captain George Gordon Meade reported that by the end of May, two thousand volunteers had arrived and the stockhouse was full of drunkards; and that the random firing of weapons and brawling made a day in his tent as dangerous as a close battle with the enemy. On May 30, 1846 Taylor received one of the first of many complaints about the behavior of U.S. troops. A Mexican policeman working at the prison in Matamoros requested protection for his family while he was at work because American volunteers were forcing their way into his home and “insulting and otherwise maltreating” his family.22 These acts encouraged the Mexicans to resist the occupation. Early on, Mexicans freely sold goods to the occupation force, but by December 11, the military governor had to order the surrounding villages’ alcalde’s (village chiefs) to bring food to the city. Matamoros quickly became a town dominated by American gambling and brawling, producing the opposite effect on the population than what the political and military leadership desired.23

21 Smith, War with Mexico, V 1, 205; Taylor, Letters of Zachary Taylor, 176.

22 Meade, Life and Letters, 91; LT A. Doubleday to Capt M. Bouche, 30 May, 1846, Mexican War Army of Occupation, Letters Received, May 1, 1846-June 9, 1846, RG 94, E133, Box 5, NARA 1 (quotation).

23 July 1846-Aug 1847, Letters Sent, Department of Matamoros, RG 94, E 130 Vol 7, NARA 1.
Occasionally officers tried to maintain order, but independent-minded volunteers resisted. Sergeant DeWitt Clinton Loudon of the first Ohio Volunteers referred to one General as a “jackass” for making the volunteers leave the town in mid-January. But apparently they were allowed back in February and on payday there was “melee” in the streets, resulting in many drunken men being thrown in the guardhouse.24

The high military command in Matamoros attempted a progression of measures to check the excesses U.S. soldiers inflicted on the Mexicans. Taylor recognized the problems drunken soldiers were causing, and on August 2, 1846 banned the sale of alcohol in the city. The military governor, Lieutenant Colonel Clarke, ordered patrols in the streets, demanded respect for Mexican police, and by November 1846 banned gambling altogether in the city.25

A major roadblock for the American commanders, however, was that they had little authority to punish volunteers. They discovered shortly after the war began that U.S. military law was sorely lacking when dealing with foreign occupation. Written in 1806, the “Act for Establishing Rules and Articles for the Government of the Armies of the United States (April 10, 1806),” stated that American soldiers were to be tried by civilian courts or local courts for any offense not covered in the articles of war. Crimes against civilians, including murder, were not covered in these laws, and trying soldiers in Mexican courts was out of the question. The authors of the laws never anticipated the

24 MSS 610 DeWitt Clinton Loudon Papers, Ohio Historical Society, Columbus, Ohio. Quotes on pages 62-63, 70.

U.S. would invade a foreign country, so they assumed American civilian courts would be available when needed. In essence, the Army leadership had no way to legally discipline its troops for many crimes committed against Mexicans, and the government, already concerned about the popularity of the war, was hesitant to authorize harsh punishment on volunteers.26

In early November 1846, a fight broke out in Matamoros between several Americans over a game of chance leading to one being shot and killed. Clarke reacted quickly but could only send the offenders back to New Orleans for trial. It is difficult to track what happened to the guilty party, but Lieutenant Colonel Samuel Ryan Curtis, a lawyer in his civilian life who witnessed the ugly scene, suspected that once in the United States they were released by writ of habeas corpus and not punished for their discretions. And even after Winfield Scott declared martial law in all of occupied Mexico, many volunteer officers who owed their rank to the votes of their men, resisted punishing the American patriots who had volunteered to come to Mexico.27

While the occupation of Matamoros started off well but then deteriorated over time, the occupation of Monterrey was problematic from the start. The Mexican Army at Monterrey put up fierce resistance to the Americans during the battle for the city, including fighting within the city limits. Once the fighting ceased, General William


Worth, acting as the initial military governor, instituted a ban against alcohol, and Taylor issued orders forbidding entry into the town unless one had legitimate business to conduct.

While sound in principle, once again these orders were difficult to enforce. Subordinate commanders, particularly the volunteer officers, were lax in disciplining their soldiers and Taylor proved both personally reluctant and legally restrained. As a result of the urban fighting, many American soldiers ended the battle within the perimeter of the city. While Taylor reported “the troops, except those in necessarily quartered in the city, will be disposed in good camps in the neighborhood,” in fact an entire division—of the three present—quartered inside of Monterrey. Ben McCullough’s Texas Rangers were also allowed to remain inside of the city.28

The Army occupied over half of the buildings on the central square and approximately one hundred private residences. Most were deserted prior to the battle, but when the owners were present, the Americans ordered them to leave their homes, though they did pay rent to the Mexicans for the use of their property. The U.S. Army did more than just evict Mexicans. At the end of the battle for the city, the Texans had a short free-for-all inside its perimeter. They shot seven Mexicans in retribution for one Texan who was killed. The American commanders tried to control the Texans, and after a Mexican soldier was shot in cold blood at midday in front of a crowd of citizens, General Worth posted regulars as guards throughout the city. Upon their request, Taylor gladly ordered this group back to the border. Lieutenant Napoleon Dana, a regular and West Point

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28 Taylor to the A.G. of the Army, Sept 28, 1846, 29th Congress, 2nd Session HED 4, 82. (quote). A division consisted of anywhere from 6,000-10,000 soldiers; Reid Jr, 216, 222.
graduate, made the prescient observation that these acts “will tend to excite the Mexican soldiery to acts of cruelty when they can get a chance.”

Map 2: Northern Mexico

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The government of the Mexican state of Nuevo Leon, of which Monterrey was the capital, realized that after their city fell and the Mexican army evacuated, their only option was to cooperate with the American military government. At the same time, they sought to avoid appearing as willing collaborators against their fellow countrymen. Francisco de Paula Morales was the governor of the State of Nuevo León and attempted to continue to function in this position under the watchful eye of the occupiers. He quickly found out that his complaints to Taylor about soldiers’ atrocities went unheard, and in short order the Mexican population refused to sell goods to the Americans. On September 30, 1846, the military governor of Monterrey, General Henry Whiting, ordered Morales to force the Mexican vendors to bring mules and corn to the city to sell to the Army or he would confiscate them without compensation. In addition to performing this and other unappealing duties, the state government could not force the subordinate municipalities to cooperate and pay taxes. Mexican society was split between collaborationists, those who resisted, and those like Morales’s pragmatic administration, were stuck powerless in the middle. By early 1847, less than a year into the occupation, American atrocities against Mexicans had not subsided, the guerrillas were becoming more numerous, and Morales was subject to death threats from the Mexican resistance. He resigned in mid-March leaving the state without a Mexican government.31

As General Worth moved forward to Saltillo and a new military government was appointed in Monterrey, the American offenses against the population continued. Around the middle of November 1846, a group of Kentucky volunteers, tired of being

cooped up in camps outside Monterrey and hungry for action, broke into a Mexican house, threw out the husband and “committed outrages” on his wife. A few days later a lone Kentucky soldier outside of camp was attacked and had his throat cut, presumably by the offended husband. A band of angry volunteers next shot two Mexicans working in the field in repayment for their lost comrade, to which the Mexicans responded by cutting another volunteer’s throat and delivering his dead body to the Kentucky volunteers’ base.

At this point, Taylor intervened, forbidding soldiers from leaving their camps under arms unless on an official duty, and ordering the officers to restrain their men. Additionally, he ordered all “riding animals” belonging to the rank and file to be sold by December 1. Taylor’s words were apparently inadequate, as the following day another Mexican was shot while working in a field, and a twelve-year-old Mexican boy was shot and had his leg broken. The citizens of Monterrey took the dying boy and laid him outside of Taylor’s camp so the General could see his men’s work. In response, Taylor ordered the Kentucky volunteers’ regiment back to the American border. A few days later, however, he reneged on his order when the leadership of the volunteers promised to find and punish the guilty parties.³²

The regular soldiers in Mexico, while significantly more disciplined than the volunteers, also contributed to the disorder. Desertion was high among the troops of the line.³³ One volunteer claimed that fifty regulars deserted in Monterrey during the months


³³ Total desertion among regulars was 10.6% (2,849 in total) during the Mexican War compared to 6.6% (3876 total) in the Volunteers. Data from Paul Foos, A Short, Offhand, Killing Affair: Soldiers and Social Conflict During the Mexican-American War. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 85.
of January and February 1847. There were also occasions when regular officers lost control of their troops in the Mexican cities. Captain Bradley Smith Roberts, a regular company commander temporarily stationed in Monterrey in late 1846, recorded in his diary that the day after he paid his men the guardhouse was full of his soldiers and that the company formation was empty. Since, according to Roberts, every other granary sold whiskey, his men spent their paychecks on alcohol and “fought among themselves as furiously as they have ever fought the enemy, being intoxicated.”

Occasional outbursts aside, the regulars, with their presidential appointed—not elected—West Point-trained officers were significantly more disciplined than the volunteers, and whenever possible, they conducted the occupation duties in the cities. The regulars employed the same court martial system as in garrison to discipline their troops, and did not have the legal issues like the volunteers, who resembled union contract workers more than soldiers in this regard. Before long, the Mexicans clearly understood the difference between regulars and volunteers. One regular officer noted that while the population feared the volunteers, they treated the regulars “with civility if not friendship.” Unfortunately for General Taylor, after February 1847, when the regulars en mass moved to participate in Scott’s campaign, he had no choice but to rely on volunteers to occupy the northern cities.

34 Giddings, Sketches, 267; Bradley Smith Roberts Diary, Dec 5, 1846, The United States Military Academy Library, West Point, NY, (quote).

35 After February, 1847, when the regulars en mass moved to participate in Scott’s campaign, Taylor had no choice but to rely on volunteers to occupy the northern cities.

36 LT Daniel H Hill also noted that his regulars were drunk in formation on 16 November 1846, and that two regulars were imprisoned for killing a Mexican woman in early January, 1847. Hill, Journal, 36, 55, quote on page 44.
Taylor and the regulars neither planned for nor wanted a long war with Mexico. The original strategy, in a simplified form, was to win one great battle that would convince the Mexicans to agree to Polk’s demands so the Americans could return home. In letters to his wife, Captain George Gordon Meade, a West Point graduate serving with Taylor, consistently expressed hope that the Mexicans would stand up and fight so the war could soon be over. He criticized Taylor for not adequately preparing for a pursuit after Resaca de Palma that might have destroyed the Mexican army and broken their will for further resistance. Once the volunteers began arriving and mistreating the Mexican populace, Meade expressed fear that the war would become one against the people of Mexico: “The consequence is they are exciting a feeling among the people which will induce them to rise en masse to obscure our progress, and if, when we reach the mountains, we have to fight the people as well as the soldiers, the game will be up with us.”

Meade’s fear of a war against the people clearly reflects his study of Napoleon’s troubles in Spain from 1808 to 1813, which he was likely familiar with from his study of Jomini while he was at West Point.

Once Taylor realized this would be an extended stay in Mexico, he made efforts to control his troops. Before the army crossed the Rio Grande he issued orders forbidding soldiers from plundering and committing aggressive acts against unarmed Mexicans. His weakness was in enforcement. Other commanders, notably John E. Wool and Winfield Scott, had greater success by employing harsh measures that were not compatible with Taylor’s leadership style. Taylor was a soldier’s leader, who succeeded based on his ability to motivate soldiers out of loyalty to his character. He was not a

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37 Meade, *Life and Letters*, 101, 110, emphasis that of the original author.
stern disciplinarian, and as his campaign progressed and his candidacy for the presidency became increasingly more likely, he became less inclined to enforce what many volunteers called “lynch law,” referring to the stern punishments that Generals Wool and Scott enforced on their troops.38

Without the threat of physical punishment, it seemed Taylor’s orders held little sway over the citizen soldiers. On February 10, 1847 as the American forces prepared for the Battle of Buena Vista, a group of Arkansas volunteers slipped away from camp and massacred between twenty and thirty Mexican civilians. The volunteers were reacting to the killing of one of their privates who had wandered too near a hostile village. Taylor ordered the unit back to the border. Colonel Archibald Yell, the commander of the Arkansas troops, pleaded for leniency citing the unit’s honorable service during the battle of Buena Vista, which happened ten days after the incident, and promised Taylor he would control his men. The General forgave the offense but took the opportunity to issue two strongly worded orders forbidding soldiers from leaving camp without their commander’s approval and under the supervision of a sergeant or officer. But as before, the enforcement of these orders was Taylor’s weakness. Eventually, near the end of his term in Mexico, Taylor would request that the Secretary of War send him no more Texans, yet he never stopped them from conducting escort and counter-guerrilla operations that were important to maintaining his supply and communications lines.39


39 Taylor, AO order #9, Feb 11, 1847, Mexican War Army of Occupation Special Orders and Orders, Jan 47-Nov 47, RG 94, E134, Vol 4, NARA 1; Taylor to AG, June 16, 1847, HED 60, 30th Cong, 1st Session, 1178; Bauer, The Mexican War 208-209.
Guerrilla Response

As the summer of 1846 became fall, the Mexicans’ agitation with the abusive volunteers grew, and Taylor’s military government remained unresponsive to their complaints. On August 12, 1846 the comandante general of Nuevo León wrote in a broadside:

People near Matamoros, previously inclined to favor the Americans, have written these weighty words: ‘The domination of the Grand Turk is kinder than that of the Americans. Their motto is deceit. Their love is like the robber’s. Their goodness is usurpation; and their boasted liberty is the grossest despotism, iniquity and insolence, disguised under the most consummate hypocrisy.’

Guerrilla parties soon appeared along the roads in the American rear areas. Captain Franklin Smith, a Volunteer officer who performed quartermaster duties during his six month in Matamoros and Camargo, witnessed the transition to resistance in many Mexicans and captured it well in his journal. When he first traveled to Camargo at the end of August 1846, he noted the friendly reception the Mexicans gave the Americans in both Reynosa and in Camargo. By the end of that year, however, he described a change:

Had these people (the Mexicans) sense they would desire to have the laws of the American Union extended over them to shield them from robbers, their own government and the Comanches to whose inroads in turn they are perpetually exposed and of some of which they live in such constant dread that all the pleasure of their existence must be poisoned. But of this truth I am now convinced that their hatred to the Americans is deep seated. Those who have

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joined us will become outcasts—with the great mass hatred to Americans will become an inheritance from father to son.\(^{41}\)

On September 20, 1846, as the Battle for Monterrey was about to begin, guerrillas attacked two American volunteers who fell behind during the march toward the city. Upon finding their mutilated bodies, sixteen Americans took retribution on nearby rancheros by beating them and killing one Mexican. The tit-for-tat of national warfare—guerrilla warfare—had begun.\(^{42}\)

By the end of 1846 the Mexican resistance was gaining momentum. During November, an Englishman living in Mexico during the Mexican War told Lieutenant Daniel Harvey Hill that “the war will be interminable, that no (Mexican) leader dare make peace and that their policy will be to lead us on further and further into the country, resisting us only when they can do so with some success.” He continued “upon the slightest reverse the whole country will be up in arms and every bush will conceal a Ranchero.”\(^{43}\)

Guerrilla parties formed under the leadership of Antonio Rosillo Canales, the politician and soldier from Tamaulipas. By January, the American’s were receiving reports of parties of up to 300 guerillas under his command planning attacks on American occupied cities. While these attacks never materialized, Canales’s men did attack vulnerable convoys, stragglers from formations, and small, under-gunned groups. Canales claimed to have killed 161 Americans during the month of February 1847.


\(^{42}\) Clarke to Taylor, Sept 20, 1846, Letters Sent, Dep of Matamoros, July 1846-Aug 1847, RG 94, Vol 7, E 130.

\(^{43}\) Hill, *Diary*, 42.
Despite several early successes, Mexico’s internal conflict plagued the guerrilla effort. Many Mexicans feared the guerrillas as much as they did the American volunteers. Canales’s guerrillas were drawn largely from the lower class, indigenous part of the population, and fought for plunder as well as for country. They were reported to punish uncooperative Mexican as severely as they did Americans. Canales was the epitome of what plagued the Mexican efforts throughout the war. The Mexican government never trusted him because of his separatist tendencies. In 1838-1840 he had led an effort against the central government, possibly with the intent of forming an independent republic in the northeast. Canales commanded the Tamaulipas militia, which consisted of irregular cavalry. At Resaca de Palma, his units’ performance was lackluster and they were the first to retreat. When ordered by the Mexican commander to delay and harass the Americans as they moved on Monterrey, Canales came back with a string of excuses why he could not, for by this time he was harboring hopes of American support for a separate state. Canales was an opportunist, however, and as the Mexican people became disgruntled with the occupation, and it looked as if the Mexicans might mount another campaign, he once again took to guerrilla warfare against the invader.

The plight of the Mexican civilian became increasingly bleak during the early months of 1847. In mid-January, while on a sixty-man strong mission to relieve a mule

44 Donald S. Frazier, The United States and Mexico at War: Nineteenth-Century Expansionism and Conflict (New York: Macmillan Reference USA, 1998), 75-76; Chance, Smith Journal, 208-209; Levinson, Wars within War, 82; Smith, The War with Mexico, V2, 171.

45 Toward the middle of 1847 Canales would apply to General Wool to work with the Americans and form a breakaway state, a proposition that Wool had the wisdom to ignore because of the Canales’ flawed credibility.

46 The United States and Mexico at War: Nineteenth-Century Expansionism and Conflict, (New York: Macmillan Reference USA, 1998), 75-76.
train that had been attacked by guerrillas, Captain Franklin Smith noted that all of the fighting age males in the villages along the Rio San Juan, which ran south of Camargo and just east of the common route to Monterrey, were gone and the villages only occupied by women, children, and those too old to fight. The mule train the Americans sought was surrounded by guerrillas and resisting as the relief force moved cautiously toward their location. Smith recounted how his rescue party stopped in a local village and forced the alcalde to refresh their horses, holding several citizens captive to ensure cooperation. The same alcalde turned over a Mexican spy to Smith’s party, who they interrogated with a rope strung around his neck until he revealed the location of the captured American train. After relieving the besieged party, who by the time they arrived had lost all of its mules, the Americans traveled only under cover of darkness to get back to the safety of Camargo. During their return the party came across a spy who they had sent ahead at the beginning of the recovery mission. He was stung up by his feet, beaten, burned, and left to die. The middle, neutral ground for noncombatants was rapidly disappearing.47

Some Mexicans may have been encouraged to resist in October 1846, when General Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna arrived in San Luis Potosi, a waypoint city between the Mexican capital and Monterrey, at the head of a 21,553-man force. Brigadier General José Urrea commanded an additional 6,700 Mexican cavalry that accompanied the Mexican army.48 Santa Anna had been recalled from exile in Cuba by the Mexican government because of his prior service as the savior of the Mexican people

48 Bauer, The Mexican War, 206.
from foreign invasion. During the Spanish invasion of 1829 he led the force that defeated the European colonizers and saved Mexican independence. He was a remarkable motivator and organizer, and would soon lead his force in a long march across the expansive, arid terrain between San Luis Potosi and Saltillo to challenge Taylor’s Army at the Battle of Buena Vista.

On February 22 and 23, 1847, just two weeks before General Winfield Scott’s force landed at Veracruz, Santa Anna nearly defeated General Taylor’s army at the Battle of Buena Vista. American artillery and leadership on the battlefield at Buena Vista, combined with disorder in Mexico City that required Santa Anna to rush back and restore order in the capital, foiled the Mexican leader’s plan to defeat Taylor’s force by frontal assault. However, Urrea and Canales’s mobile force, drawing support from much of the population, struck hard at the American Army’s rear area. On February 24, 1847, near the city of Ramos, the mounted forces struck at an American convoy consisting of 110 wagons and 300 pack mules and committed what may have been the worst massacre of the war, killing and mutilating the bodies of forty to fifty American teamsters, and capturing or destroying the majority of the supplies. The passion of what was becoming national war manifested itself in this massacre.

The Mexicans were reacting to the American excesses. In April 1847 Canales, acting as the self-proclaimed leader of the guerrillas, proclaimed martial law and declared

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49 The Polk administration allowed Santa Anna to slip through the blockade because in secret negotiations with the Americans he had promised to agree to generous peace terms that included the land Polk desired. Once in Mexico, he reneged on his promise and led the Mexican Army to challenge Taylor’s force at Buena Vista.

50 Giddings, Sketches, 304; Taylor to Marcy, 22 March 1847, 30th Cong, 1st Sess, HED 60, 1123-1124.
that “all individuals who are capable of bearing arms and do not do so will be considered traitors and will be shot immediately.” He continued: “you are authorized to give no quarter to any Americans whom you may find.” Unfortunately for Canales, a leader cannot order nationalism, an important element for the Mexicans if they hoped to bring together a powerful force. He did, however, make it more difficult for Mexican civilians to remain neutral.

**Conciliation’s Shortfalls**

Many officers engaged in fighting Mexican guerrillas came to the conclusion early on that the velvet glove approach was not going to succeed. The twenty-three-year-old Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Y. Redd, commander of the Georgia volunteers, expressed this sentiment in an October 3, 1846 conversation with Captain Franklin Smith. He feared that the Mexicans were improving in their basic soldiering, more specifically in accurate shooting, from when he had fought them in Texas years before. Redd also detected a patriotic spirit forming among the Mexicans. As such, he claimed that he would not bother General Taylor with prisoners, but would hang all Mexicans who opposed him: “we ought to be friends or enemies—it is a one sided game now—we furnish them the sinews of war, rent their horses pay them for everything—they hoist the black flag, cut the throats of our men, and mutilate them within a hundred yards or our camps—It is time that the game should cease.” Lieutenant Colonel Clarke, the military governor in Matamoros, shared Redd’s sentiment. When in January 1847, the *alcalde*

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complained of American abuses against Mexicans inside the city, Clarke apologized but quickly reminded the Mexican authority of a recent attack against Americans, laying the blame back on the Mexican resistance. Three months earlier Clarke explained to Taylor that while the massacre of sixteen civilians in response to the beheading of one Texan was not the preferred method, the Mexicans had behaved notably better in its aftermath.\footnote{52 Chance, \textit{Smith Journal}, 32; Clarke to Matamoros Prefect, Jan 5, 1847, Letters Sent, Matamoros, July 1846-Aug 1847, RG 94, E130, V7; Clarke to Taylor, Oct 1, 1846, Ibid.}

Taylor never fully made the shift to a harder strategy toward the Mexicans. In response to the attack and mutilation of the Americans by Urrea and Canales’s forces in the aftermath of Buena Vista, he issued what on the surface was a harsh punishment on the Mexican people. His message condemned the brutal attack on the American supply train and demanded an indemnity of $96,000 from the states of Nuevo Leon and Coahuila to replace the stolen and damaged goods. How much of this was collected is unclear, but in response to complaints by the Mexican authorities in early May, Taylor backed down and softened the wording of his order making its collection contingent on the cooperation of the Mexican population.\footnote{53 The General in Chief of the American forces to the inhabitants of Tamaulipas, Nuevo Leon and Coahuila, March 22, 1847, Army of Occupation Letters Sent, Jan-Nov 1847, RG 94, E130A (3 of 3); May 10, 47: Ignacio de Mora Y Villamil, Commander of the North to Taylor, HED 60, 30\textsuperscript{th} Cong, 1\textsuperscript{st} Session, p 1040-1041; Giddings, \textit{Sketches}, 330-331; Chance, \textit{Smith Journal}, 173.} He was still attempting to appease.

While Taylor never hardened his stance toward the Mexican populace, he did take steps in that direction, notably in his use of the Texas Rangers to keep his supply lines open. The Texans were capable and motivated to clear Taylor’s supply lines, and from April to November 1847 a war characterized by harsh tactics and mass burning of homes suspected of housing guerillas took place. Samuel Reid, in his first person history of the
McCulloch’s Texas Rangers, scoffed at the orders not to harm unarmed Mexicans and claimed that the many dead along their route must have committed suicide during a “fit of remorse and desperation, tortured by conscience for the many evil deeds they committed.” Taylor tolerated the atrocities that accompanied this guerrilla war because he felt powerless to affect them and they kept his logistics lines open.  

One of the Ranger’s tasks was to escort large groups of Americans between the major cities or camps. In early July 1847, Lieut. Col. Samuel Ryan Curtis, an Ohio volunteer, joined an escort body of Texas Rangers traveling from Monterrey to Camargo. Curtis was exiting the country and he had spent almost his entire time in Mexico on occupation duty, never seeing direct combat, and it seems he was anxious to get into a fight, and saw the Rangers as the most likely group to find one. The group of fourteen traveled parallel to the main body, exploring the villages the Texans suspected were guerilla hideouts. On July 3, Curtis’s team charged into a village and surprised what he called a “Ranchero force of Canales.” Most of the guerrillas threw down their arms and retreated, but the Rangers captured two and after a harsh interrogation that included both death threats and promises of favors if they cooperated, the Mexicans guided them to the guerilla cache. The Rangers found wine, brandy, and articles of American clothing that had been captured in an earlier ambush of a supply train. The party made the decision not to pursue the rest of the guerrillas, despite having good evidence where they were, because they had too much “commissary captured” to travel the extra distance. While

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Curtis made no mention of burning the small village where the guerrillas were captured, in most cases Texans burned the homes if evidence of guerrilla activities was found.\textsuperscript{55}

Taylor turned a blind eye to the obvious excesses the Texans committed. He clearly understood the effect the unruly volunteers had on his operations, but never employed effective measures to control their excesses. On June 16, 1847 Taylor wrote to the adjutant general,

There is scarcely a form of crime that has not been reported to me as committed by them . . . Were it possible to rouse the Mexican people to resistance, no more effectual plan could be devised than the very one pursued by some of our volunteer regiments now about to be discharged.\textsuperscript{56}

There were measures Taylor could have employed that might have at least lessened the damage the volunteers were causing. In October 1846, when he first applied to the Secretary of War for guidance on how to deal with the unruly volunteers, Marcy turned to Winfield Scott, his chief military advisor in Washington, for clarification of the laws of war. Scott’s law background is evident in his lengthy and detailed response and recommendation on how to enforce discipline in this grey area. He recommended to Marcy that American commanders follow the British precedent of establishing martial law once deployed outside the United States. Scott emphasized that “the good of the service, the honor of the United States, and the interests of humanity, demand that the


\textsuperscript{56} Taylor to Adjutant General, June 16, 1847, 30\textsuperscript{th} Cong., 1\textsuperscript{st} Sess., Ho Ex Doc 60, 1178.
numerous grave offenses . . . should not go unpunished.” However, the very thought of martial law offended the average American’s sense of justice, and Taylor was hesitant to go to such extremes.

When questioned by a friend about several of the reported excesses committed by the Texas volunteers, Taylor replied “I have not the power to remedy it, or apply corrective, I fear they are a lawless set.” Taylor’s continued unwillingness to inflict harsh punishment on the volunteers for their discretions can be attributed to several factors. First, Taylor had never been a stern disciplinarian, and as his campaign progressed and his candidacy for the presidency became increasingly more likely, he became less inclined to alienate future voters by applying what many Americans considered inhumane physical punishment. Second, he was tired of this war, having never anticipated that it would become a long, drawn out occupation. Taylor resented occupation duty, and chose to remain located in his camp at Walnut Springs, several miles outside of Monterrey and isolated from close interaction with the Mexicans. Finally, Taylor had already won his glory and by February 1847, it was clear that the main effort had shifted to Winfield Scott’s campaign in central Mexico. He was weary of the Polk administration, which he felt had set him up for failure prior to the Battle of Buena Vista when it shifted nearly all


of his regulars to Scott’s invasion force and left him with a lesser army to face Santa Anna’s large force. Taylor’s letters between the Battle (February 22-23) and when he handed over command to General Wool in November 1847 were increasingly dominated by politics and slander against the administration, and less concerned with the execution of the war.60

Fortunately for the Americans, the Mexican guerrillas lacked unity and combat power. While Taylor chose not to fully enforce his orders, Canales lacked the military power to implement his declaration of martial law. As poorly as the U.S. Army treated the population, the Mexicans never achieved the necessary military victories to convince the people they were a viable option. Military superiority matters, and the Americans consistently dominated this realm. One or two instances aside, Mexican guerrillas could not score major successes over the Americans, and could not shut down their supply lines. Taylor understood this, and when the Mexican military commander of the north, Ignacio de Mora Y Villmil, threatened him with military repercussion in response to the levy Taylor demanded after the Ramos attack, Taylor mockingly replied “In regard to the implied threat of reprisal, I beg you to understand that I hold it at its just value, and that I am at all times prepared to meet suitably any policy or any mode of warfare which the Mexican government or its generals may see fit to adopt.” The only time Taylor’s supply lines were shut down was in the immediate aftermath of the Battle of Buena Vista when he was engaged with Santa Anna’s army to his front. Once the Americans focused their

60 Zachary Taylor to Dr. R.C. Wood, Aug 23, 1849, March 20, 1847, April 4, 1847, Letters of Zachary Taylor from the Battlefields of the Mexican War, 46-47, 91, 95.
energies on clearing the roads, they had little fear of the guerillas inflicting enough
damage to have strategic impact.61

While they could not change the outcome of the war, the guerrillas never
disappeared, and the Army of Occupation could not completely pacify the northern states
region. Taylor admitted that significant guerrilla resistance remained in his area as he
transitioned out of the country in November 1847. Notably, a party of 150 Mexicans
attacked a group of 25 Dragoons and Texas Rangers on 2 November 1847, and nearly
overcame the Americans who eventually fought their way out of the ambush, but at a cost
of four men killed and several more wounded. While the intensity of this event was
higher than most, guerrillas continued to be a threat in the north through the end of
1847.62

In his defense, Taylor was dealt a hard hand by the mass of unruly, racist
volunteers who descended upon Mexico in the beginning of the war. Furthermore, in
February 1847 Scott stripped away all of his regulars to support the invasion of central
Mexico. Taylor’s efforts at conciliation might have worked better had his army been
more disciplined. The Mexicans in Tamaulipas, Nuevo Leon, and Coahuila did not love
the government in Mexico City, but they learned to hate the northern invaders because of
the crimes the Americans committed. As he left the country, Zachary Taylor saw little
hope of the war ending any time soon.63

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61 Taylor to Villmil, May 18, 1847, in HED 60, 30th Cong, 1st Sess, p 1142; Taylor, April 4, 1847, Oct 27,
1847, Letters of Zachary Taylor from the Battlefields of the Mexican War, 91, 146.

62 Taylor to R.C. Wood, Nov 2, 1847, Letters Of Zachary Taylor From The Battlefields Of The Mexican
War, p 149.

63 Ibid.
By the end of 1847, as Taylor returned home to focus his full energies on his presidential campaign, the war in the North was at a stalemate. The guerillas could not win decisive victories or string multiple successful ambushes together to achieve a clear result, and Taylor’s Army of Occupation could not win over enough of the Mexican population to eradicate the resistance. The strategy of conciliation had failed because of the Mexican will to resist and the Army of Occupation’s inability to control its own troops. A change in strategy was needed, but Taylor had neither the energy nor the will to make that transition.
CHAPTER IV: Making them Feel the Evils of War: Gaining Control in the North
(October 1847 – June 1848)

“The General desires me again to caution you on the subject of the intercourse your men should hold with the inhabitants—and wishes you should impress upon them the distinction which should be made between men in arms and men peaceably following their usual avocation. He hopes that at the same time severity is used towards the former, that mildness may mark your intercourse with the latter.”

Capt Irvin McDowell, Adjutant General to General John E. Wool, October, 20, 1847

General John E. Wool crossed the Rio Grande with his army of 3,400 soldiers on October 12, 1846 operating under the same strategy of conciliation as General Zachary Taylor. Wool was greeted graciously at Presidio del Rio Grande, a small border town in the state of Coahuila. During his campaign through Coahuila, his force met little resistance, but in the wake of the Battle of Buena Vista, as boredom began to set in, his troops became more difficult to control, and shortly Wool found himself engaged in a war against Mexican guerrillas and wayward Americans. Wool, initially as the military commander of Coahuila, then as commander of the entire northern Army of Occupation, was up to the challenge.

1 Captain Irvin McDowell to Major Walter Lane, Oct 20, 1847, John E. Wool Papers, Box 59, V33 Letter Books, Centre Division May – Dec 1847, New York State Library (NYSL), Albany, New York.
While plagued by many of the same disciplinary issues with which Zachary Taylor struggled, Wool successfully pacified northern Mexico by enforcing strict order on his Army, pressuring the elite in the population to support the Americans, and consistently dominating the Mexicans in battle. He was able to exploit existing chasms in the society to win over some powerful Mexicans, and he imposed confiscation or heavy taxation on others to convince them to shorten the Americans’ stay by agreeing to the U.S. demands. By pacifying the occupied states in modern-day northern Mexico, Wool made a significant contribution to the defeat of the Mexican strategy of prolonged guerrilla resistance.

GENERAL JOHN E. WOOL

John E. Wool’s reputation as a disciplinarian dated back to his service during the War of 1812. Captain Wool earned fame at the battle of Queenstown Heights, where he was injured but still led a successful attack on a British redoubt. Throughout the campaign around Lake Champlain, Wool made a reputation for himself as hard working, energetic, and resourceful; he was also a stern disciplinarian. According to an eyewitness, the young captain steadied his faltering militia in battle around Plattsburg by ordering his subordinates to “Shoot down the first man that attempts to run, or I will shoot you.”

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Wool served as an Inspector General from 1816-1841, initially for the Northern division, then from 1821 forward as the IG of the entire army. His superiors consistently noted his efficiency and at times brutal honesty, particularly when assessing the readiness of the units he inspected. After touring the Canadian frontier in 1824 he wrote that “I did not in my inspections find a post . . . that wholly met my approbations.” He continued that discipline was poor, officers were deficient in military knowledge, and ordinance was mismanaged.³

Wool’s twenty five years as the Inspector General exposed him to the ills of the army and taught him valuable lessons that would prepare him to run the occupation of northern Mexico. He consistently called for measures to improve discipline and

³ Hinton, 62, 63; Quote from Wool to Calhoun, Oct 23, 1824, as cited in Hinton, 63.
conditions for the troops. Throughout his army career Wool perceived alcohol as one of the great evils that afflicted army professionalism, and a popular target of his criticism was the whiskey ration. During his frequent travels across the American west as IG he witnessed the challenges associated with managing the Indian population and countering Indian guerrilla tactics. When in command of the displacement of the Cherokee Indians during the infamous “trail of tears,” Wool demonstrated his firm managerial style, yet showed compassion toward these destitute people. He refused to move when supplies were short, and stood firm against unjust orders from his superiors. At the same time, the General showed pitiless efficiency in moving the Indian nation.4

CONCILIATION IN COAHUILA

The Centre Division’s movement through the state of Coahuila met a cordial reception from the population of the federalist-leaning cities it encountered. The state was formerly Coahuila y Texas prior to Texas’s separation in 1835, and it shared with Texans its orientation to the north. Located on the extreme periphery of the Spanish empire and then the Mexican nation, the population of Coahuila y Texas felt little attachment to Central Mexico and lived in constant fear of Indian attacks.

At the same time, Coahuila mirrored Mexico at large in that it was plagued by its own internal dissention. Outside of the cities, society consisted of wealthy families of mestizo (mixed blood) landowners with hundreds of indigenous peasant laborers working

4 Ibid., 67, 87-95.
their land. These peasants frequently seized upon disorder to rebel against the society that sentenced them to a life of servitude. Rival landowning families competed for power within the state as well.

The typical Mexican conflict of central power advocates versus federalists, who argued for a weak central government and powerful states, was also alive and well in Coahuila. Saltillo, located in the far southern region of the state, was the capital of Coahuila y Texas until 1833. Mountain ranges as well as sheer distance set it apart from the rest of the massive state, and its main trading partner was San Luis de Potosi, located 250 miles to its south. In 1833, in conjunction with a series of other reforms designed to cope with the problems of the state’s northern regions, the leadership displaced the capital to the more centrally-located Monclova. Monclova and Saltillo, despite their relative geographic proximity, represented opposite ends of the political spectrum; Monclova’s radical federalists as opposed to Saltillo’s conservative centralists.5

Events in Mexico City affected the outcome of the feud in Coahuila. Santa Anna’s 1835 reforms drastically decreased the size of the state militias and increased the power of the central government at the expense of the states. The Coahuila government in Monclova rejected the reforms, refused to disband its militias, and declared its federalist loyalties. General Martín Perfecto de Cos, the commanding General of the

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Eastern Interior Province and Santa Anna’s brother-in-law, sent troops to Monclova to arrest the liberal governor Agustín Viesca, who subsequently fled to San Antonio. This internal dissention contributed to the argument the Texans made for their own independence from Mexico. These feuds also inhibited the Coahuila’s ability to resist the pending U.S. incursion.6

Wool’s Army of the Centre crossed the Rio Grande into Coahuila on October 12, 1846. The timing of this movement after Monterrey had just fallen to Taylor’s Army, combined with Wool’s cautious leadership, contributed to the cordial reception in the state. The Mexicans welcomed the American force and immediately informed Wool of the results of the Battle of Monterrey, and that they desired U.S. protection from the Indian attacks. To ensure his soldiers did not abuse the population, Wool ordered the army to camp outside of Presidio and forbade his men from entering the town. He issued the proclamation the Polk administration had provided, which promised security, respect for their religion, and protection of Mexicans’ rights and property, as long as the people remained neutral in the conflict.7 Relations were cordial with the Mexicans, and when the Army moved south from Presidio del Rio Grande, Mexicans followed closely trying to sell their goods. En route to Monclova the Army of the Centre passed through the

6 Weber 244, 247; Frazier, 100.

7 “A Proclamation By the General Commanding the Army of the U.S. of America To the Mexican People” in House Exec Doc 60, 30th Cong, 1st Session, 286-288; Josiah Gregg, Diary & Letters of Josiah Gregg, Vol 1, 1st ed. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1941), 256-257; Hinton, 195-198; Population figure found in Frazier, 332-333.
Presidial towns of San Fernando de Rosas and Santa Rosa María, and were greeted warmly in this federalist-oriented region.\(^8\)

In late October 1846, when the Army arrived in Monclova, the capital of Coahuila, the people greeted the Americans with less enthusiasm, but still cooperated in the procurement of supplies. Much of the town of about eight thousand residents had fled, but those remaining were primarily of the extreme federalist political party, who favored the United States. Several of the leading citizens expressed to the Americans that they would have been more accommodating but for the fear of retribution from the Mexican government after the Army left. On this occasion, likely because it was the state government, Wool lodged in the governor’s house, but the American troops remained camped several miles outside of the town. The General ordered a full military parade through the town, and required the troops to clean up and shave. Wool likely had dual intentions for this seemingly unnecessary formality: first, to demonstrate the Army’s dominance of the state capital to the Mexicans; and second, to instill discipline in his camp after the long march. The soldiers grumbled, but did as they were told. Brigadier General James Shields, his staff, and approximately fifteen dragoons attended a Sunday church service as a conciliatory measure toward the Mexicans.\(^9\)

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\(^{8}\) A Presidial town is one that grew out of a former Spanish military guard post which was called a Presidio. These small towns existed across Northern Mexico. These first three towns were all former guard posts remaining from the Spanish frontier fortification system that had grown to a population of about three thousand each; see Weber, 107-122 for more on Presidio towns.

\(^{9}\) Wool to Taylor, Nov 1, 1846, in Francis Baylies, *A Narrative of Major General Wool’s campaign in Mexico* (Little & Company, 1851), 17; Jonathon W. Buhoup, *Narrative of the Central Division or Army of Chihuahua, Commanded by Brigadier General Wool* (Pittsburgh: M.P. Morse, 1847), 56-57; Gregg, Vol 1, 272, 275.
Wool remained in Monclova for twenty seven days waiting for the end of the armistice Taylor had agreed to after Monterrey. During this time the American soldiers were on a strict schedule of drill and training. Wool appointed a military governor in the town, a Provost Marshal to run the holding facility in the camp, and an American police force to patrol the streets of Monclova. Wool demanded that the Mexican town leadership maintain control of the local population and threatened to hold the leaders responsible for misconduct.

The Provost Guard ran the prison that held those who broke the camp rules. Common offenses were sleeping on guard duty, mutinous behavior, and leaving camp without permission. The accused volunteer or regular would perform hard labor until their court martial. If the court found a soldier guilty, the typical punishment was fifteen or twenty days of hard labor and a curtailment of several months’ pay. Wool used these courts to enforce strict discipline on his relatively small army from the start of the campaign.  

Recognizing the logistical challenges of moving his army deeper into Mexico, Wool sought out local sources of supply. The major land-owning family in the region was the Sánchez Navarro clan, who agreed to supply the Army of the Centre after Wool promised to protect the family land and property and pay a generous price for all goods. Jacobo Sánchez Navarro, the leading male of the family, shared Wool’s desire for order, owned numerous ranches that accounted for nearly half of the state of Coahuila, and employed thousands of peon workers. When the Americans passed through the region,

10 Buhoup, 55-60.
they commonly compared these peons to American slaves. One soldier described a peon village in his journal: “We entered a large enclosure, where we beheld about one hundred small huts, and in these there were indeed objects of pity, living, or rather staying, in all the dirt and filth imaginable.” In order to maintain their control over the peons, the wealthy ranchers needed an orderly society. Some of the peons undoubtedly served later in the war as guerrillas, and when the opportunity presented itself, showed little restraint against the property of the wealthy land owners who had oppressed them their entire lives.

Similar to the ranchers, merchants in the occupied cities were also happy to sell to the U.S. Army. An American living in Monclova, when asked how the Mexicans felt about the occupiers, responded that they loved them because the merchants could sell their goods at three times the usual price.

The story of the Sánchez Navarro family during the Mexican War demonstrates a critical weakness in Mexican society that contributed to the U.S. success in the Mexican War. Instead of banding together against a common enemy in support of the nation, the local leadership used the invasion to advance its own political and economic interests over their rivals. The Sánchez Navarros were businessmen first, and Mexicans second, and were willing to play both sides to their advantage. When Ampudia’s Mexican Army moved north in early 1846, the family supplied the seven-thousand man force with all of

11 Buhoup, 51; Several other soldiers refer to the “Mexican slavery” Buhoup observed, see Josiah Gregg, V1, 270.

12 Charles H Harris, A Mexican Family Empire, the Latifundio of the Sánchez Navarros, 1765-1867 (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1975), 241-243; Buhoup, 66.
its flour and over one thousand cavalry horses. The Mexican disaster at Monterrey and
the subsequent arrival of Americans in Saltillo quickly changed the family’s tune.

When the American Army arrived in Saltillo, Jacobo Sánchez Navarro was in
Mexico City and unable to influence events in state politics. In his absence, Jacobo’s key
rival, José María Aguirre, held a flawed election, claimed the governorship of Coahuila,
and made a public declaration that he would lead the resistance against the Americans.
Upon his return, however, Sánchez Navarro quickly determined that the real power
broker in northern Mexico was now the U.S. Army, and by cooperating he could both
gain the upper hand over Aguirre and benefit economically from the invaders, who not
only paid more than Mexicans for their corn, flour and meat, but paid in cash.

And pay they did. The American demand became so great at one point that
several of the tenants were having difficulty maintaining enough corn to feed their peons.
Captain George Hughes, who managed much of Wool’s logistics noted of the Sánchez
Navarro family, “nearly all our expenditures for supplies have found their way directly or
indirectly into the coffers of these princely nabobs.”

Loyalty ran low in this business-oriented family, especially when it looked as if
the tide might turn in favor of the Mexicans, or when American atrocities were directed
toward the family property, which happened on at least two occasions. The family

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13 Harris, A Mexican Family Empire, 242-243, quote from George Hughes Memoir, 31-1 Congress,
S.Exec.Doc. 32, 40.

14 In early January 1847, Wool had to send dragoons to Patos, a Sánchez Navarro ranch between Parras and
Saltillo, to calm Arkansas volunteers who were committing outrages on the inhabitants. (Hinton, 208).
Samuel Chamberlain, an Illinois Volunteer then later a regular dragoon, described Patos as friendly town
and frequent scene of lively fandagos for American visitors. He recorded one gruesome scene of Mexicans
torturing a Texas Ranger who had attacked a priest and desecrated a church in a drunken rage. Coming
upon the scene, the rest of the Ranger’s company proceeded to massacre many of the Mexican crowd who
were involved. Chamberlain claimed that when Jacobo Sánchez Navarro reported the incident to Wool, the
honored a previous commitment to supply Mexico City with 14,480 sheep per year until the capital city fell to the Americans in September 1847. Family ties also contributed to the Sánchez Navarros’ occasional double dealing. When Santa Anna’s massive force moved north to attack Taylor at Buena Vista, the family provided intelligence to the Mexicans through communications with their cousin Juan Sánchez Navarro, who served on Santa Anna’s staff. The family supported the army directly by allowing one of its members, Juan N. De Arizpe, to raise a guerrilla force made up of their ranch hands to attack the American Army as it retreated from Saltillo. Immediately prior to the battle, Manuel Blanco, a cousin of the family, guided a Mexican cavalry brigade to the Hacienda de Encaración, where it captured an eight-man American scouting party. The unexpected result of the February 1847 battle of Buena Vista obviously put Jacobo Sánchez Navarro in an awkward situation, and he did all he could to cover the support his business had provided to the Mexican army. He employed flattery and sincere promises of his future loyalty to General Wool to avoid American retribution and shortly the relationship was reestablished. In reality, Wool was as reliant on the wealthy ranch family as they were on him. Without the family’s cooperation he could not feed his army. Nonetheless, Wool would later remind the Sánchez Navarros of this betrayal in order to insure their consistent cooperation, and occasionally to ask forgiveness for the abuses rogue Americans committed on their lands. Ultimately, the Sánchez Navarro family was successful at playing both sides of the war, doing enough to claim a patriotic contribution.

two decided to keep the conflict “secret from the world.” While there is surely an element of truth in Chamberlain’s story, one must use caution when examining this soldier’s records as he was prone to wild exaggeration and it has been proven that he was not present for several of the incidents he claims to have observed. See Samuel E. Chamberlain, My Confession: Recollections of a Rogue (Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 1996), 173-174.
and maintain their hegemony on the state of Coahuila. In the process, they undermined the hope of Mexican unity against the Americans.  

The Sánchez Navarro family was not alone in their capricious cooperation with the Americans. Instances of nonviolent Mexican resistance abound. For example, during the summer of 1847, the Mexican vice-governor of Saltillo, Edward Gonzalez, tried to raise the price of grain to benefit the Mexican merchants. Wool reacted by having him arrested and only releasing him after Gonzalez swore to act neutral between vendor and consumer. Newspapers published in the periphery cities and in Chihuahua and Durango continually called for assistance from the Mexican government and armed resistance from the people. Despite aggressive rhetoric, most Mexicans concluded that without significant assistance from central Mexico or an external power, the relative security against Indians brought by the Americans was their best option. In addition, Coahuila was a poor state and ultimately the people needed to work their land in order to feed their families.

During the first half of 1847 the American War strategy changed, the emphasis shifting toward Winfield Scott’s campaign in central Mexico. Wool’s original orders were to march his army west to Chihuahua. However, Taylor felt vulnerable because so many of his troops had been pulled to Scott’s army, and sought instead to consolidate his

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15 Harris, A Mexican Family Empire, 243, 286-289; Wool reminded the Mexicans of their betrayal of his trust in GO 11, Dec 17, 1847, Wool Papers, Box 28 Folder 10, NYSL and in Wool to Edward Gonzalez, Vice Governor of Satillo, March 18, 1847, in Baylies, 48; Prieto, “Coahuila y la Invasión,” in Vásquez, Mexico Al Tiempo, 174-175.

forces. In December 1847, General Taylor ordered Wool to move his army into a position where he could, in a short march, support the American front under Brigadier General James Worth at Saltillo, and to gather as much forage as he could to help feed the now stationary armies. To comply with Taylor’s order, Wool moved his army south again to the city of Parras during the last week of November. He trusted the people of Monclova enough to leave several sick Americans there under Mexican care, and two weeks later he would trust the people of Parras with a similar responsibility.\footnote{Wool to Taylor, Nov 1, 1847, in Baylies, \textit{A Narrative}, 17, 99; Wool to quartermaster captain (name illegible), June 21, 1847, \textit{Wool Papers, Box 59}, NYSL.}

Parras was a city that demonstrated little attachment to the central government. Its diminutive size and geographic location—west of Monclova and Saltillo—made it more vulnerable to Indian attacks than any other city the Americans encountered in Coahuila. Captain Abner Doubleday noted in his journal: “As the Indians seldom failed to pay it (Parras) several visits during the year, the people live in constant fear of being surprised.” The prominent family in Parras—the Ibarra family—had ties to the United States. The two oldest brothers attended school in Kentucky as children and spoke fluent English. The occupation of Parras for eleven days during December 1846 was fondly remembered by many American troops and Wool would take special care to watch over the city during his entire time in Mexico. Later in the occupation the General sent troops to protect Parras from guerrilla attacks when the city was threatened because of its loyalty to the invader by the exiled Mexican governor of Coahuila. On the whole, the Army of
the Centre’s experience with the Mexicans thus far, in the words of an American soldier, made them “seem much more friends than enemies.”

It is important to note that these three cities—Presidio, Monclova, and Parras—were among the most independent-minded, federalist-oriented in the north, and that individuals with greater loyalty to Mexico had mostly fled prior to the arrival of Wool’s force. This refugee group would later lead the guerillas that executed Mexico City’s April 1847 call for guerrilla war. Those who stayed were either pro-American or found themselves with no choice but to cooperate with the occupation force. Their calls for support from central Mexico were ignored, and the Americans brought much needed protection from the Indians.

The Indian factor

The Picket Guard, a newspaper run by several volunteers in Saltillo, Coahuila recorded in mid 1847 that “a much more dreaded foe than the Americans appear at the

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19 Chihuahua Newspaper, undated (estimated April 1847), Wool Papers, Box 28, F 13, Translations of Spanish Language Documents, NYSL; Quiroga in Francaviglia et al., Dueling Eagles, 97-99.
time to be the Indians to the Mexicans of this part of the country.”

The Americans were sensitive to the weaknesses of the northern Mexican states and attempted to leverage the population’s fear of Indian attacks. When dealing with the Indians, the Americans played both sides of the coin, but more times than not used the Native threat to win favor with the Mexicans. Before Wool crossed the Rio Grande, Polk had negotiated a treaty with the dominant tribes in the area, bribing them with $15,000 to leave the population of Northern Mexico alone while under the U.S. occupation. Wool was under orders to ensure that the Indians adhered to these terms and did not attack the population. Before even crossing into Coahuila, he wrote in a letter “that if they [the Indians] committed more depredations on this side of the Rio Grande I would pursue and chastise them.”

Early on Wool made efforts to stand behind the American promises to protect the Mexicans against the Indians. In mid-October 1846, two Lipan squaws approached the camp of the Texas Rangers under Wool’s command and offered to sell them two Mexican girls they had captured and made slaves. An American Volunteer described the girls as “dreadfully emaciated and almost destitute of a single garment of clothing.” The Texans seized the Indians and took them to Wool’s headquarters. Upon interviewing them and learning that the Indian tribe had killed the hostages’ families and had abused

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20 “Indians,” *The Picket Guard*, May 21, 1847, (Saltillo, Mexico: W. & M. Osman), Independent Newspapers in Mexico, Microfilm Reel 7, Benson Latin American Collection, UT Austin, 42.

the girls while in captivity, the General promptly arrested fifteen Indians from the nearby camp and freed the children.\textsuperscript{22}

The Americans also won a few significant battles over the Indians on the frontier during 1847. In May, sixty to seventy Lipan Indians raided the city of Parras, which had been extraordinarily kind to Wool’s troops as they passed through, and kept a number of sick American soldiers in their care after the Centre Division moved to Saltillo. The Indians stole over one hundred horses and mules, in addition to a group of women and children. Shortly afterwards, the lead elements of Colonel Alexander Doniphan’s command, coming east from Chihuahua and made up of a small band of Missouri mounted volunteers under the command of Captain John Reid, arrived in Parras. When approached by Don Manuel de Ibarra, the head of the Americanized family Wool had worked with in Parras, Reid agreed to mount an expedition to try to recover the hostages and stolen property. The small American party and several Mexicans from the town quickly outmaneuvered the Indians, who were slowed by their stolen property, and laid in a well-positioned ambush to gain an advantage over the larger Indian party. When the scouts reported the Mexicans were en route, Reid, accompanied by Ibarro and two other Mexican ranchers, moved toward the Indians to engage them and draw them into the American position. When the Indians charged into the American ambush, Reid’s men cut them down with musket and pistol fire.

After a short mêlée, the natives retreated, dragging behind them as many of their

\textsuperscript{22} “Lipan Indians,” \textit{Niles Register}, Oct 24, 1846 (quote); Delay, 265.
dead as they could, and leaving their captives and the stolen horses and mules behind. One account of the incident noted that the Lipans were not accustomed to fighting well-trained soldiers who would hold their ground in the face of a determined charge. The Americans found a total of fifteen dead Lipans on the field and recovered eighteen kidnapped Mexicans. Save several horses and an arrow wound to Reid’s shoulder and chin, the Americans sustained no casualties.23

Despite the early American efforts, which achieved a brief slowdown of Indian attacks, the tribes were driven by drought and tempted by disorder to launch an increasing number of raiding parties in early 1847.24 The American commanders, despite their desire to keep the promises they had made to protect the Mexicans, were distracted during the first quarter of 1847 by Santa Anna’s large army moving north, and failed to leave adequate forces to protect the cooperative population. In at least one city, Parras, the leading family who had collaborated with the Americans were forced to flee to the mountains when their countrymen threatened them for their traitorous activities.25 This unwillingness to sacrifice elsewhere in order to fulfill the promises they had made to

23 Captain John Reid to Gen John Wool, May 21, 1847, 30 Congress, 1st Session, HExecDoc 60, 1144-1145; Frederick Wislizenus, Memoir. A tour to northern Mexico, connected with Col. Doniphan’s expedition, in 1846 and 1847, (30 Congress, 1st Session, S.Misc.Doc. 26, 1848), 72-73; Gregg, Diary, Vol 1, 123-125; Delay, 267-268; In the aftermath of the battle, Wislizenus, who was on a scientific exploration trip with the U.S. Army, cut off the head of an Indian Medicine man who was killed and after boiling off the flesh, sent it back to the United States for scientific studies trying to determine the comparative brain size of Indians to white-skinned Americans. See Reginald Horsemen, Race and Manifest Destiny, the Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxons, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981, 123-125) for more on this topic.

24 Delay, 283.

25 Gregg, Vol. 1, 364.
protect the Mexicans from Indians and their fellow countrymen reflected the American denial that this would be an extended occupation. Taylor and Wool clung to the hope that a decisive victory would end the war, but even the great victory at Buena Vista in late February 1847 did not convince the Mexicans to concede. During the final months of the occupation, once Wool became convinced his Army would not move further south, he sent troops to protect several of the frontier towns. So while the United States clearly could not stop the Indian attacks, and deserted some who had cooperated early on, they demonstrated more commitment to defeating the Indians than the Mexican capital had, and remained throughout the conflict the militarily superior force. Josiah Gregg, an American doctor and explorer in Mexico who served as an American translator during the war, noted that

> although at war with the Mexican nation, we have never pretended to hostilize the unarmed citizens; and, under no circumstances, could we permit the savages to butcher them before our eyes. This display of a spirit to defend the people against their worst enemies, the Indians, will, I hope, be attended with a good effect.\(^{26}\)

**DISCIPLINE AND MISCONDUCT**

The perceptive Arkansas volunteer Jonathon Buhoup noted in his journal of his time in Mexico a harsher side to Mexican/American relations than is typically portrayed. First, he mentioned that while the Americans were forced by their vigilant commander to pay for all of their goods, a Cherokee Indian who traveled with them serving as a guide and advisor consistently took freely from the Mexicans. Just after crossing the Rio

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\(^{26}\) Gregg, Vol. 2, 1944, 125.
Grande, when he observed an attractive blanket on a wealthy Mexican, the Indian
followed the man out of the camp joking to his volunteer friends that “anything is fair in
war.”

When the American command tried to punish him he feigned sickness, and if his
pay was garnished he made up for the shortage by stealing from the Mexicans. Bahoup,
in order to preserve the historic record of his own unit, may have blamed some of the
discretions committed by the Arkansas men on the Indian. What is clear is that Wool’s
orders and reports did not always reflect the reality on the ground. The volunteer
regiments enforced the Generals’ mandates in different degrees.

Much has been made recently by historians of the atrocities committed by
Americans during their time in Mexico. Yet Wool’s Army, while far from perfect,
demonstrated significantly more sensitivity to the Mexican population than Taylor’s.
Particularly during his initial movement through Coahuila, there were few incidents
between the Mexicans and Wool’s largely volunteer force. The General was well aware
of the hazards of stationing a relatively untrained group of American volunteers, with all
of their racist attitudes and longing for glory and riches in the middle of Mexico. He had
passed the first few months of the war organizing the masses of unruly volunteers at a
recruiting station in Cincinnati, Ohio, where he observed the enthusiasm but utter lack of

27 Buhoup, 27.

28 Paul Foos makes this assertion about Buhoup’s recollections about “the Indian,” see Paul W. Foos, A
Short, Offhand, Killing Affair: Soldiers and Social Conflict During the Mexican-American War (Chapel

29 Paul Foos, A Short, Offhand, Killing Affair: Soldiers and Social Conflict During the Mexican-American
War. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002) is the most prominent historical work on
American atrocity in Mexico. More recently, Michael L. Collins, Texas Devils: Rangers and Regulars on
the Lower Rio Grande, 1846-186. (University of Oklahoma Press, 2008) has focused strictly on the Texas
Rangers.
discipline in the volunteer troops. His time as the Army IG had exposed him to the hazards of placing untrained soldiers on the frontier, and his experience in the War of 1812 taught him the problems with the volunteer system. Thus, once in command, Wool mandated a strict schedule of drill and preparation. Before crossing the Rio Grande, Wool tried by court martial and then discharged several Illinois and Arkansas volunteer officers for drunkenness, disorderly conduct, and insubordination.\textsuperscript{30} The day before crossing into Coahuila, Wool issued strict guidance to his soldiers on how to treat the Mexicans:

\begin{quote}
We have not come to make war upon the people, or peasantry, of the country, but to compel the Government of Mexico to render justice to the United States. The People, therefore, who do not take up arms against the United States, . . . will not be molested or interfered with, either as regards to their persons or property . . . and whatever is received from them will be liberally paid for . . . and depredations on the persons or property of the people of the country are strictly forbidden; and any soldier, or follower of the camp who may forget his duty, as to violate this injunction will be severely punished.\textsuperscript{31}
\end{quote}

Initially, Wool’s job was easier than Taylor’s because he only oversaw 3,400 troops, enabling him to personally supervise and influence more soldiers. He was challenged because better than three quarters of his troops were volunteers, including a regiment from Texas and Arkansas. Volunteers from these states generally had the least respect for Mexicans because of their history of brutal conflict with Mexico and the culture of discrimination against slaves in the South. In a letter to Taylor at the end of

\textsuperscript{30} Wool GO 13, Aug 26, 1846, \textit{Wool Papers}, Box 62, F 36, NYSL; Hinton, 189.

\textsuperscript{31} Wool GO 89, 9 Oct 1846, \textit{Justin Smith Collection}, Vol 11.
1846, Wool described the Arkansas volunteers under Colonel Archibald Yell as “ignorant of all duty necessary to make them useful to themselves, or the country.”

Many American soldiers, particularly volunteers, grew tired of the strict drill, discipline, and hardship associated with Army life. They had come to fight, and the Army of the Centre had seen no real action. The repeated parades, the quartering in camps outside of the towns, and the harsh punishments for leaving the camp led to a buildup of resistance among the volunteers, who longed to turn east and link up with Taylor’s “fighting” command. Minor incidents occurred. After parading through the streets of Monclova and then being sent to their camps outside of the attractive town, a group of volunteers destroyed the freshly planted cottonwood and fig trees near their post so they could have firewood for the cold night. In response, Wool paid the Mexican who owned the trees $400 and ordered that all firewood be paid for and brought in from other areas. The soldiers suffered many cold nights after this incident.

One of the largest conflicts during the Centre Division’s march happened outside of Monclova, as supplies started to run low and the system of local supply, not yet efficiently established, faltered. In what many referred to as the “corn law,” Wool ordered his soldiers to use their hand mills, typically reserved for emergency cases, to grind corn for their subsistence. Each soldier was then issued eight pieces of corn a day. There were obvious problems with this, as a sick soldier often could not grind his own corn, the raw corn was bulky to carry when on patrol, and most preferred the less

32 David J. Coles, “Wool’s March,” in Frazier, 483-484; Bauer, 147; Wool to Taylor, Dec 15, 1846, Army of Occupation, Letters Received, RG 94, E133, Box 9, NARA I (second quote).

33 Buhoup, 56-57. While it is unclear what kind of money the Americans used to pay the Mexican from this account, other witnesses refer to the use primarily of gold and silver coins, which would mitigate currency challenges for the Americans.
plentiful wheat meal over corn meal; in fact, many considered the local corn fit for animals but not people. In protest, the volunteers organized a rowdy town-hall-type meeting and sent a petition to the commander. The next day they had a corn throwing contest and when Wool rode by on his regular rounds volunteers brayed like mules as he passed. The regulars on guard arrested a number of volunteers and broke up the meetings. The protests were eventually heard, but not before the threats of mutiny were great. Wool revoked the “corn laws” after several days but much damage had already been done.  

Dr. Josiah Gregg, a scientist who traveled with Wool as a guide and translator, expressed his distaste for the General that well represents how many of the volunteers felt. He called Wool “decidedly old-womanish” and criticized the General for thinking that “the whole fate and success of the army to depend almost exclusively on military forms and ceremonies.” He went on to say that Wool was “not only of a very unpleasant, whimsical temperament . . . but palpably lacks the requisite capacity for such a command.” While Gregg was clearly bitter at Wool for not giving him a higher position in the command and the respect this talented linguist and explorer felt he deserved, his complaints reflect the sentiments of much of Wool’s command in late 1846 and early 1847.  

Wool had little sympathy for the inexperience of the Volunteers under his command. His short temper added to the conflict. An Illinois soldier recorded an incident Wool had with his commander around the same time as the “corn laws” conflict.

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34 Buhoup, 67-72; Hinton, 207.  
35 Gregg, Vol 1, 256, 260.
When the Illinois volunteers continually fell asleep or otherwise shirked their guard duty, Wool scolded their commander telling him “that the officers of the Volunteers were not worth a damn, and that he would discharge them all and send them home in disgrace, and put sergeants at the heads of their companies.”

One of Wool’s toughest challenges was with the Arkansas volunteers under the command of Colonel Archibald Yell. Wool ensured that this group of unruly troops was kept a good distance from the Mexican population. In November 1846, while the Centre Division was camped outside Parras, Yell refused to accept his unit’s assigned camp, preferring to reside closer to the city. Wool arrested his regimental staff and only released them after they conceded to his orders. Wool enforced his threats with strict disciplinary measures. Even before General Scott had issued his martial law order (General Order #20), Wool was punishing soldiers for crimes against Mexicans. In early January 1847, he had three volunteers drummed out of the army: two for stealing blankets from the Mexicans and one for shooting a Mexican’s dog. Later in the war, Wool’s discipline problems reached extremes. In early January 1848, an Arkansas volunteer private was shot to death for mutiny after he attacked his captain. Another volunteer from the same company was hanged for killing a Mexican who did not reply when he addressed him in the street.

Wool’s soldiers did not love him, at least in the beginning, but he did a far better job of keeping them under control than Taylor had. Josiah Gregg was one of Wool’s


37 Wool to Taylor, Dec 15, 1846, Army of Occupation, Letters Received, RG 94, E133, Box 9, NARA I; McDowell to Yell, Jan 4, 1947, in Col Archibald Yell Letters Sent and Received, June 46-Feb 47; RG 94, 132A Vol 3, NARA I; Hinton, 203, 209; Gregg, Vol 2, 205.
greatest critics, but in an unintended praise of the General he recorded that “those in Gen. Wool’s column (two regiments from Illinois and one of Arkansas) certainly have done much better, at least while I was with them; in fact, almost wholly unexceptionable was their conduct during that period.” When they arrived at Saltillo, Gregg noted the great disparity in discipline between the troops of the Centre division and the rest of Taylor’s army stationed there. 38 That being said, random acts of misconduct invariably occurred in Wool’s and Taylor’s columns, and seeds of dissent lay in the wake of the American movement south. As the Army consolidated at Saltillo to face Santa Anna at the Battle of Buena Vista, the door was left open for the former leadership in Coahuila who had fled these northern cities to inspire guerrilla resistance.

**TRANSITIONING FROM CONCILIATION**

The Battle of Buena Vista transpired on 23 February 1847, and after the U.S. Army defeated the significantly larger Mexican Force, General Zachary Taylor’s heroic image was complete, and his candidacy for the presidency of the United States solidified. After the battle, Taylor moved back to his headquarters outside of Monterrey, and General Wool took up residence at the Buena Vista battlefield and command of the forces stationed on the southern flank of the Army and in Coahuila. The main city he was concerned about was Saltillo. In contrast to their neighbors to the north, the people of Saltillo gave the American troops a cool reception. Straight line distance, Saltillo was not far away from Parras and Monclova, but it was geographically separated by mountains.

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38 Gregg, Vol 1, 334-335, 364.
and politically separated by its orientation south toward San Luis Potosi and Mexico City. A city of 15,000 before the war, Saltillo’s economy was a primarily commerce based. During the first months of the war, the city’s people had generously supported the Mexican army of the North as it moved to combat the invaders. The Mexican patriots took in the retreating soldiers, but found themselves more preyed upon than protected by the broken army. In the aftermath of the bloody battle of Monterrey in late September 1846, desperate and hoping to avoid the destruction comparable to what Monterrey had suffered, Saltillo paid the remnants of the army of the north a generous “donation” of $3,000 not to occupy the city, but to continue south to San Luis Potosi. Patriotism had quickly turned to pragmatism in the face of U.S. military superiority.39

When the Americans originally entered the city in November 1846, the people who remained feared the conquering army and retreated to their homes, shutting their doors and windows. Wool’s force did not arrive in Saltillo until late December, but responsibility for the unruly volunteers stationed there quickly fell upon him. The troops under the politician-turned-general William O. Butler were quickly alienating the local populace by drink freely in the town and committing offensive acts against Mexican citizens or destroying their property. On January 28, 1847, Taylor ordered Butler north to command the garrison at Monterrey and placed Wool in charge of preparing the defense of the Army’s southern flank. While his focus was on preparing to meet the large Mexican Army rumored to be moving north, Wool immediately implemented strict measures on the population in Saltillo. This included expelling all who did not have

productive work or family in the city, imposing a strict curfew, and instituting a pass system requiring all those who arrived or left the city to report to the military governor. At the same time, Wool courted Mexicans willing to cooperate. He had posted fliers throughout the city that read, “all Mexicans who conduct themselves with propriety, and do not directly or indirectly conspire against the arms of the United States, are not only entitled to our protection, but kind and civil treatment.”

In the immediate aftermath of Buena Vista, Wool took measures to provide stability for the people and logistics for the army. Taylor returned to Monterrey in early March, granting Wool command over Coahuila, but retaining the power to order military commissions to try Mexicans. This forced Wool to request approval from Taylor whenever he needed to stand up a military commission. This restriction was likely a reaction to the problems Taylor was experiencing with the population and his subordinate commanders taking matters into their own hands, and in the process, further alienating the population.

Despite these restrictions, Wool took aggressive action to gain control of the population and the American troops. He stationed one company inside the city to manage police duties while the rest of the army remained several miles outside the city. Mexicans who did not have productive business in the city were ordered to leave or were placed under arrest if suspected of spying for the enemy. Only soldiers with passes from their commander could enter the city. Americans paid for their supplies and churches

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40 Doubleday, 133; Prickett Journal, Justin Smith Coll, Vol 14, F13, 160 (quote); Prieto, “Coahuila y La Invasión Norteamericana,” 173,174; Chamberlain, 83, 87; Hinton, 208; Gregg, 326-328; Wool GO 202, Jan 22, 1847, Justin Smith Coll, Vol 11; LT Col W.B. Warren, Military Governor of Saltillo, Order dated Feb 27, 1847 published on April 26, 1847, Picket Guard (Saltillo) (quote).
were respected. While never perfect, Wool managed to calm the fears and temporarily win the trust of many Mexicans in the city through his fair policies. First Lieutenant John A. Prickett, an Illinois volunteer, recorded in late January 1847 that “the Mexicans bring us in everything their country affords: Oranges, cabbage, onions, peppers, sugar peaches, grapes and all sorts of breads.” The economy of Saltillo experienced a temporary boom, which endeared the people to the Americans.41

Before long, however, the soldiers of the Army of Occupation became bored with occupation duties. The volunteers, who joined the army to fight and not to drill and occupy, committed criminal acts that alienated much of the Mexican population. Despite being banned from going into the cities, soldiers left camp in the evenings and got drunk, brawled, and occasionally broke into Mexican homes. Wool stationed the unruly Arkansas volunteers five miles outside of the Saltillo at Encantada, with the hope of keeping them away from the Mexican population center. Within a month, however, he was receiving reports from Haciendas that were supplying the army that soldiers were stealing and slaughtering their animals. Wool wrote to Taylor in August 1847,

It would appear that the Volunteer officers, as well as men, are impatient of delay, and that when they volunteered they expected on their arrival in Mexico, to get into a fight and then go home. Believing they are to be disappointed they have become impatient of the restraint of discipline.42


42 Wool to Taylor, Aug 8, 1847, RG 94, E 133, Army of Occupation Miscellaneous Papers, NARA 1.
The volunteers chaffed under Wool’s strict disciplinary measures. One citizen soldier wrote home from camp at Buena Vista that “Old Granny Wool will not allow us to impose on them in the least . . . if any of our boys should take a piece of bread or lump of sugar from them (the Mexicans) without paying for it he will have them court martialed or punished in some way for it.” Even West Point graduate Abner Doubleday was relieved when his company was given the policing mission in the city, meaning he no longer had to live under the strict discipline Wool enforced in camp.43

American atrocities persisted, however, and soon the Mexican population, originally cooperative, refused to sell supplies to the occupation force. In response, Wool informed the Mexican vice-governor Edward Gonzales, who was the chief Mexican political leader in Saltillo, that the Mexicans needed to keep the markets open to the army or he would order the goods to be seized without payment. On April 9, 1847, Wool ordered a squadron of Dragoons out on a forage-gathering mission. His instructions were clear: offer ranch owners a receipt that they can redeem with the Quartermaster for payment; if they refuse, take the corn without payment. He also reminded the Mexicans that prior to the battle of Buena Vista, many of them had broken their promise to not take up arms against the Americans, and thus he felt little sympathy for their current complaints.44

Wool made good on his threats and the Mexicans eventually complied. When Vice-Governor Gonzalez did not meet Wool’s one-month deadline to recover some

43 John B. Duncan to Alexander M. Wright, January 30, 1847 as cited in Hinton, 209 (quote); Doubleday, 117.

44 Wool to Edward Gonzalez, Mar 18, 1847, in Baylies, 48; Hinton, 219; Wool to Lieut. Carleton, April 10, 1847, Wool Papers, Box 59, V32, NYSL.
stolen property, the general confiscated double the value of the items. When Mexicans continued to resist, he threatened to quarter his men “on the inhabitants,” which quickly convinced them to cooperate. Wool used increasingly harsh measures to force Mexican compliance, despite the continued rhetoric of conciliation. 45

As the summer of 1847 approached, General Wool was quickly losing patience with Mexicans and the entire conciliatory strategy; conciliation and military victory had not convinced the enemy to agree to American demands. Wool informed Taylor on March 30, 1847 that “Unless we compel the city to pay we shall have all our horses, mules, and much other property stolen. Kindness does not appear to have the desired effect on the Mexicans.” 46 By the end of June, Wool was convinced that “…there is very little or no prospect of peace. On the contrary the Mexicans appear more united at this moment than at any former period, and are determined to prosecute the war.” 47 Many of Wool’s subordinates concurred with his assessment. The 19 April issue of the Picket Guard newspaper, which was published by volunteers stationed near Saltillo, criticized the Mexicans for not surrendering and the United States for squandering the opportunities afforded by the military victories, and concluded that “Henceforth, the war is to proceed with vigor.” The army was clearly moving toward a less conciliatory strategy. 48

45 Gregg, Vol 2, 69; Wool to Doniphan, May 6, 1847, Wool Papers, Box 59, V32, NYSL; Hinton 218; Wool to Taylor, April 2, 19, 1847, AGLR, NARA 1; Hinton, 219.

46 Wool to Taylor, Mar 30, 1847, AGLR in Hinton, 220.

47 Wool to Col Samuel R. Curtis, June 25, 1847 as cited in Hinton, 220.

48 “A Month’s Work,” Pickett Guard, April 19, 1847, Independent Mexico in Newspaper, Latin American Collection, UT Austin; See also Chance (ed.) Curtis diary, 185 for a similar assessment of the situation.
Simultaneous with the steps he took to force Mexican cooperation, Wool focused on establishing disciplinary order within his army. He went to great lengths to enforce the established rules on the troops. His letters throughout the rest of the summer of 1847 continually badgered the military governor of Saltillo to close down boarding and gambling houses for soldiers in the city. He did not hesitate to request permission to order a courtmartial on an undisciplined Volunteer, and Taylor granted Wool a relatively free hand in using these disciplinary measures. He even tried appealing to the Volunteers’ sense of honor and decency by issuing proclamations praising their performance in battle, reminding them their tours of duty were nearly up, and asking them to maintain their “good nature for obedience to orders.” Finally, Wool consistently warned that orders to move forward were pending and that they needed to be at the highest state of readiness. As much as Wool wanted this to the true, he likely perceived the reality that Scott’s army had absorbed all of the troops and supplies for the central Mexico invasion that the U.S. government could garner.49

At the end of August, Wool tightened the rules on his army by banning all Fandangos (dances), closing all Tippling houses (bars), and again ordering the closure of gambling houses. He enforced this by arresting three officers who were reported to be at a Fandango during the first week of September. When a Lieutenant was robbed in the city after he and some of his men had left camp the night before, Wool wrote to Colonel

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49 Wool to Col Davis, 2nd Miss. Rgt, June 24; Wool to Maj J.M. Washington, July 8, July 12, Aug 7, 1847, Wool Papers, Box 59, V33, NYSL; Wool to Commanding Officer, Encantada, July 21, 1847, Wool Papers, Box 59, V33, NYSL; Wool to Taylor, Mar 5, 1847, Box 59, V 32, Wool papers, NYSL; Wool Order 260, April 16, 1847, in The Pickett Guard (Saltillo), April 19, 1847; Chance (ed.), Diary of Curtis, p 186; Wool to Hamtramck, Dec 1, 1847, Wool Papers, Box 59, NYSL; Bauer, The Mexican War, 221.
John Francis Hamtramck, a Virginia volunteer officer and the commander of the American camp,

If Lieutenant Moody had been as ambitious to acquire distinction as a soldier, as he has been to render himself disgraceful in the eyes of his countrymen, he would have saved himself from the sad spectacle of a bruised face, and a collar bone broken with the loss of his coat and money . . .

Wool arrested six more volunteer officers on August 8th, 1847. As the guerrilla war heated up, the general struggled to prevent his troops from immediately seeking retribution against nearby Mexicans. At the end of September, upon his request, Taylor granted Wool authority to establish military commissions to carry out sentences on cases involving Mexicans, American soldiers, and/or American citizens. This enabled Wool to enforce more rapid justice throughout Coahuila.\(^{50}\)

Even so, Wool was not able to achieve the high level of order he sought during the summer of 1847. New volunteers from Mississippi, North Carolina, and Virginia replaced the Kentucky, Arkansas, Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois troops in early June 1847, forcing the general to start the process of instilling discipline anew. Colonel Samuel Curtis, a lawyer by trade, and the military governor of Saltillo during May and June 1847, recounted in his diary the constant complaints and grievances brought before him by the Mexicans, and noted that in May, as the rotation of troops took place, the conflict between Mexican civilians and American soldiers intensified. He commented in his journal, “There are so many rogues about the city I am told it is hard to shoot a miss.”

Shortly after Curtis, who was an Ohio volunteer, rotated back to the United States,

\(^{50}\)Wool to Hamtramck, Oct 15, 1847, Wool Papers, Box 59, NYSL; Wool to Taylor, Aug 8, 1847, RG 94, E 133, NARA I; Wool to Bliss, Sept 26, 1847, Wool Papers, Box 63, Order Book, 1847-1858, NYSL; Wool to Bliss (Taylor), Sept 27, 1847, Wool Papers, Box 59, NYSL; Taylor Order Number 109, Sept 29, 1847, Wool Papers, Box 63, NYSL.
Colonel John Francis Hamtramck assumed responsibility for Saltillo. Hamtramck, a Virginia volunteer, was despised by many of his troops for his arrogance and attention to military courtesies, but proved a competent administrator and disciplinarian the likes of Colonel Paine from North Carolina and General Wool himself.\footnote{Colonel Robert Paine from North Carolina liberally applied corporal punishment to his troops. In August, after he erected wooden horses in order to punish his men, there was a large mutiny in the North Carolina camp.} Despite these officers’ efforts, the high turnover of troops, accompanied by many desertions, helped make atrocity and skirmishes with guerrillas a regular occurrence during the summer of 1847. But through consistent efforts, Wool and Hamtramck made progress on army discipline and Mexican resistance by early 1848.\footnote{Baylies, \textit{A Narrative}, 49; Chance (ed.), \textit{Diary of Curtis}, 49.}

Mexican resistance persisted in many forms and guerrillas were without doubt motivated by the American misconduct. It was in April 1847 when Antonio Canales issued his martial law order—as unenforceable as it may have been—that required all Mexicans to fight as guerrillas and offered no quarter to America soldiers. In May, the Mexican Commander at San Luis Potosi compared the Americans to Comanches because of their abusive behavior toward the populace, and threatened military retribution against the U.S. Army. Authorities in Chihuahua also called for guerrilla warfare during May 1847, but made their call contingent upon the receipt of support from Central Mexico, which was not forthcoming.\footnote{Antonio Canales, April 4, 1847, as quoted in Chance (ed.), \textit{Diary of Curtis}, 173-174; Ignacio de Mora Y Villamil, May 10, 1847, in \textit{HED 60, 30th Cong. 1st Sess}, p 1140; Undated proclamation from authorities in Chihuahua(estimated April, 1847), \textit{Wool Papers, Box 28 F 13}, NYSL.}

Captain Abner Doubleday, who commanded an American company charged with occupying Saltillo, was certain that the Mexican governor of the
city, Edward Gonzalez, was secretly funding a band of guerrillas. The soldiers composing the *Pickett Guard* also speculated about Gonzalez’s involvement with the guerrillas, at one point reporting that Wool had arrested the Mexican leader.\(^5^4\)

Probably the largest threat to Wool’s army came from Governor José María Aguirre of Coahuila, who in late July called for a meeting of the Mexican leadership in Monclova to incite resistance. Wool easily prevented this by issuing a harsh proclamation declaring “no quarter” for guerrillas and their supporters, and he sent dragoons to break up the gathering if necessary. The American mounted troops remained engaged for much of the summer breaking up the small bodies of guerrillas that Aguirre motivated to harass the occupation force and Mexican collaborators.\(^5^5\)

As he moved more toward a punitive strategy targeting the elite in Mexican society, Wool maintained benevolence towards those who were cooperative, and while firm, the general was not unreasonable. In June 1847, Wool instructed one of his subordinates to investigate the case of a Mexican rancher who claimed he could only provide 125 units of corn versus the 300 units the Americans had demanded. Wool ordered the captain in charge of the investigation to forgive everything above 125 units if he deemed that the Mexican was telling the truth. Wool also asked the subordinate officer to investigate the same rancher’s accusation that American soldiers, who his mother was quartering free of charge, were damaging the woman’s house and refusing to

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\(^5^5\) Circular issued by John Wool, Army HQ, Buena Vista, July 25, 1847, found in Baylies, *A Narrative of Major General Wool’s Campaign*, 50, AGLR; Hinton, 221; Chance (ed.), *Diary of Curtis*, 119; Doubleday, 120.
pay for repairs. Again, if he was telling the truth the officer was to pay the Mexican for the damage.  

Wool’s enforcement of the law included protection for Mexicans who were victims. When a Mexican woman reported to him that a soldier had stolen her shawl, Wool interrogated the man until he admitted stealing the property, but he told Wool it was subsequently stolen from him when he was out on a mission. Wool determined that the soldier was lying and had sold the property, and ordered him to pay the woman. Wool even used the management of his policy on alcohol, which he perceived as one the main causes of misconduct as a tool of the occupation.

While it was strictly forbidden to sell alcohol to soldiers, Wool did allow a few, specifically identified merchants to sell wine and brandy in the town, but only wholesale. This was presumably so families the Americans favored could buy it for events and celebrations, but it was not to be sold in saloons. On one occasion Wool made an exception and allowed a Mexican family who he held in “great esteem” to sell wine and brandy as long as it was not to American soldiers.

The general used property as one of his most effective tools to manipulate the loyalties of the Mexican elite. He was intent on respecting the Mexican homes in Saltillo and preventing the town from becoming a place of respite from the discipline he enforced in the American camps, as had happened in Matamoros and Monterrey. As such, Wool forbade American officers from keeping private residences in the city, and those without

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56 Wool to Capt Donalson? (name illegible), June 8, 1847, Wool to Capt Rucker, Aug 26, 1847, both all in Wool Papers, Box 59, V33, Centre Division Letterbook, May-Dec 47, NYSL.

57 Wool to Col Curtis, June 14, 1847, Wool to MAJ Washington, Oct 24, 47, both in Wool Papers, Box 59, V33, Centre Division Letterbook, May-Dec 47, NYSL.
duty in the city were, by mid-summer, forbidden from entering at all. On multiple occasions, Wool denied officers’ requests to seize more Mexican homes to support the American administration. In response to one request to evict a Mexican family, Wool sarcastically responded, “every officer in their houses has more quarters that he is entitled to: the houses are three of the largest in Saltillo, yet only furnish quarters for four Commissioned officers.” When Major John Macrae Washington, who briefly served as military governor of Saltillo requested to turn out a Mexican family in order to stand up a hospital in the city for the North Carolina Regiment, Wool denied the request, but instead converted the officer hospital into one for all of the troops.\textsuperscript{58}

The general also took measures to protect the ranches of families who were cooperative in supplying the army. Ranchers were exposed to many dangers including Mexican guerrillas, wayward American soldiers, and Indian attacks. Wool kept patrols and guards posted near the Sánchez Navarro family’s ranches throughout the occupation. Toward the end of his time as commander at Buena Vista, Wool received word that Don Jesus Cabarus, the proprietor of a family who had cooperated with the Americans, was leaving his ranch for fear of attacks on his family from a variety of rogues in the area. The general immediately ordered Colonel Hamtramck, then commander of the base at Buena Vista, to station a “steady, trusty, and sober” noncommissioned officer and three soldiers on the ranch to protect it from being plundered until the family felt safe enough

\textsuperscript{58} Wool to Washington, Oct 10, 1847, Sept 6, 1847, both in Wool Papers, Box 59, V33, NYSL; Harris, 194, 286-290.
to return. The security situation was far from perfect, but Wool provided consistency in the American efforts to respect property rights of cooperative Mexicans.59

Mexicans quickly learned that General Wool was an honest broker and that if they reported atrocities to him he would react. Wool’s papers are littered with correspondences with Mexicans about American discretions ranging from paying rents to killing innocent Mexicans. While some of these were certainly efforts to resist the occupation by exploiting its benevolence, Wool attempted to address the majority that he deemed valid. He would commonly forward these complaints to the military governor of the region concerned and order the incident investigated and guilty soldiers arrested and sent to the camp at Buena Vista for trial. The appeals from Mexicans never stopped pouring into Wool’s headquarters, indicating that the Mexicans believed they might achieve some results. And indeed they did, as Wool’s orders contain numerous examples of Americans being punished for crimes against Mexicans.60

As John Wool prepared to take command of the entire Army of Occupation in October 1847, he issued one final order that was representative of the system he had refined while in command at Buena Vista. José María Aguirre, the former governor of Coahuila was raising guerrilla parties to harass the Americans and collaborationist

59 Wool Order 500, Oct 23, 1847, Wool Papers, Box 63, NYSL; Delay, 398; Harris, 194, 286-290.
60 Wool to Capt Pike, Mar 28, 47, Wool to Col J.L. Roane, Arkansas volunteers, May 4, 1847, both in Wool Papers, Box 59, V32, Letterbook, Army of Chihuahua, July 1846-May 1847, NYSL; Wool to Lt Col Warren, May 24, 1847, Wool to Capt Sherman, Aug 10, 1847, Wool to Capt Rucker, 1st Dragoons, Aug 26, 1847, Wool to Capt Rucker, Sept 4, 1847, Wool to MAJ Lane, Oct 20 47, Wool to COL Webb, Nov 28, 1847, all in Wool Papers, Box 59, V 33, Letter Book, Centre Division, May – Dec 1847, NYSL; Edward Gonzales to Wool, May 25, 1847, Wool Papers, Box 28, F 13 Translation of Spanish Language documents, NYSL; Wool Papers, Box 28 Folder 16 Mexican Claims for Damages, this folder contains approximately 20 Mexican complaints spanning Wool’s time in command at Buena Vista, notably, on February 7, 1847, Wool received three complaints from ranches surrounding Saltillo with detailed list of minor item (doors, fence rails etc) that volunteers had taken from the ranches.
Mexicans. To counter a threat to the cooperative Mexicans at Parras, Wool ordered Major Lane of the Texas mounted volunteers to proceed to Parras to capture Aguirre—Wool had a good source as to his location—and to protect the local population. The general was very specific in his orders to Lane. He told him to give guerrillas no quarter but to “treat all the peaceable Mexicans with kindness and justice, paying a reasonable price for all the supplies your command may need, except in such places as you may be satisfied have protected and aided the Guerrillas.” Once at Parras, Wool instructed Lane to draw all of his corn and beef from the Hacienda Arriva and to pay nothing for it, as Arriva was a notorious supporter of the guerrillas. Wool dedicated the final paragraph of this order to reemphasizing the importance of properly managing the populace, drawing a clear distinction between “men in arms” and those “peaceably following their usual avocation.” “He hopes that at the same time severity is used towards the former, that mildness may mark your intercourse with the latter.” Wool was clearly concerned about sending the Texans to fulfill this mission, but apparently by this point he had confidence that they understood the consequences of mistreating the Mexicans.  

He was wrong, and this group of Texans abused members of the population en route to Parras. Regardless, his experience with the Army of the Centre and as commander of occupied Coahuila taught him valuable lessons about what it would take to control the American troops and the Mexican populace. While he never completely solved the problem of soldier misconduct, he did show significant improvement, and the number of atrocities under Wool’s command was significantly less than under Taylor’s.

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61 Wool to MAJ Lane, Oct 20, 1847, Wool Papers, Box 59, V 33, NYSL.

62 Wool to Hamtramck, Dec 10, 1847, Wool Papers, Box 60, V34, Letterbook, Dec 9 1847-July 18, 1848, NYSL.
It was apparent to the Mexicans that this American commander could be trusted to try to protect those who cooperated, and punish others who supported the enemy.

“MADE TO FEEL THE EVILS OF WAR”

Wool took command of the Army of Occupation on 25 November 1847, although for all intents and purposes he had been in charge since he reported to Monterrey in late October. He came in without Taylor’s political aspirations, which inhibited the enforcement of discipline, but instead with ambitions to gain military glory. While he still clung to hopes of moving forward and threatening the Mexican capital, Wool eventually realized that for him, glory would only come through successful occupation and pacification of the Mexican resistance, and the general pursued this with his typical energy and determination. General Wool wrote to his men in early December 1847:

“Pleasure must give way to duty, our whole duty and nothing but our duty. Obedience, order, discipline and instruction must be rigidly enforced, which the interest, honor and glory of our country imperiously demand.”

Wool took command at an opportune time as Mexico City had just fallen at the end of September, which convinced many Mexicans that resistance to the occupation was no longer feasible. The governor of Nuevo León, Francisco de Paula Morales, returned to Monterrey after the fall of the capital and decided to attempt to work with the Americans. Morales’s return represents a decision made amongst the Mexican elite that

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63 Taylor, GO 132, Nov 25 1847, GO133, Dec 9, 1847, Wool Papers, Box 63, Wool Orders Sept 47-July 48, NYSL. GO 133 was the last order Wool issued under Taylor’s name.
it was better to cooperate—while not totally collaborating—with the Americans, as it gave them a formal means to resist. Guerrillas were still ubiquitous throughout the region, particularly north of Monterrey.\footnote{Quiroga, “Nuevo Leon Durante,” in Vazquez, 354-355.}

Though plentiful, the resistance fighters were not very effective, rarely killing more than one or two U.S. soldiers, typically stragglers or the sick. Even when local numerical superiority was established, the guerillas rarely achieved success due to their inferior weaponry and training. On November 2, 1847, First Lieutenant Reuben B. Campbell and a detachment of twenty one dragoons and three Texas Rangers were en route from Cerralvo to Monterrey when, just south of Agua Fria, they were fired upon from behind. The Americans turned and charged toward the guerrillas and were soon surrounded by a band of Mexicans at least four times their size. American casualties started to mount, and Campbell maneuvered his men into a defensive posture in the heavy chaparral. For thirty minutes the two sides exchanged fire, neither side gaining a decisive advantage. The Americans eventually repositioned into a ravine, which gave them more cover from the Mexican volleys. Shortly thereafter the guerrillas retreated as they realized that superior American muskets and pistols would make further pursuit a costly endeavor. Taken by surprise by a much larger force, the Americans held the field with total casualties of three killed, one missing, and nine wounded, while the Mexicans retreated after five were killed—including the top guerrilla commander in the region, Marco Martinez—and many more wounded. Five days later a company of Texas Rangers found a nearby guerilla camp, killed two more guerrillas, and secured a large group of horses and military equipment. These battles, combined with the major
conventional victories that preceded them, demonstrate the military dominance the U.S. was able to maintain over the Mexicans throughout the entire war.  

Now in command of the Army of Occupation, Wool extended the policies he had perfected in Coahuila to the entire Army of Occupation. During December the general issued a flurry of orders concerning discipline. He issued a clear schedule for the troops’ drill and meals, and tightened up security by enforcing daily inspections and reports. He ordered his subordinate generals to visit their postings, notably those along the Rio Grande, to determine the level of order and discipline. He told them to exclude “as far as practicable” all tippling and gambling houses and to punish all those who sold liquor to American soldiers and teamsters. He reminded his subordinates of Taylor’s order banning fandangos and demanded its enforcement. He issued a stern warning to any merchants who paid tribute to Mexican guerillas for “protection,” emphasizing that Americans, internationals, and Mexicans who did this would be considered hostile by the American army. Those supporting the enemy in this manner would be arrested and their goods seized. In a series of pejorative letters to Colonel John W. Tibbatts, the Commander of the 16th Infantry and military governor of Monterrey, Wool reiterated his demands to shut down troublesome establishments and expel all soldiers, teamsters, and camp followers without passes from the city. To keep soldiers out of Monterrey, Wool

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had a guard posted on the road between the city and the American camp to check
permission slips.66

Wool implemented other measures to lessen offenses against the population. He
issued an order to formalize the escort duty so that the proper numbers, and no more,
were traveling with the trains. He demanded proper accountability of payments made to
Mexicans: if a quartermaster was not present and supplies had to be requisitioned from
the Mexicans, the officer in charge would issue a receipt and then immediately upon
return give a copy to the quartermaster for accountability. Abuses still happened on
occasion and Wool did his best to reimburse Mexicans for their damaged property. In
November 1847, he ordered a party of mounted volunteers to pay $100 for the property
they destroyed on the ranches of the families of Palagio Cabasos and Antonio Flores.
Both of these Mexicans had been issued passes from General Taylor when the American
mail party plundered their property. The volunteers were ordered to report to Wool after
the payment was made for additional punishment. The Texans had reached the limit of
Wool’s patience and on December 10, after hearing reports of atrocities committed under
Major Lane’s command on the citizens of Parras, he ordered this group of Texans
confined to where they could be supervised and no longer sent on remote patrols. From
this point forward, his regular army dragoons would have the lead in the counter-guerrilla
fight.67

66 Wool to Butler, Nov 15, 1847, Wool to Bragg, Nov 21, 26, 1847, Wool to Tibbatts, Nov 22, 28, 1847 all in Wool Papers, Box 59, V33, NYS; Wool GO 513, Nov 26, 47, Wool papers, Box 63, NYS; Wool to Tibbatts, Nov 22, 28, Dec 7, 1847, both in Wool Papers, Box 59, V33, NYS.

67 Wool GO 510, Nov 14, 1847, Wool GO 3, Dec 10 ‘47, both in Wool papers, Box 63, NYS; Wool to COL Webb, Nov 28, 1847, Wool Papers, Box 59, F 33, NYS; Wool to Hamtramck, Dec 10, 47, Dec 18, 1847, both in Wool Papers, Box 60, Volume 34, NYS.
The notable difference between Wool’s command and Taylor’s was not just the increased number of restrictive orders, but in the enforcement. In general, Taylor was harsh on his regulars, but lenient on the volunteers under his command. Wool treated his volunteers with equal if not harsher disciplinary measures. Volunteer officers were held accountable and tried for their misconduct. On October 17, just prior to leaving Buena Vista, Wool had ordered the trials of two volunteer lieutenants and then approved the sentence of loss of rank and two months pay, to which one of the officers replied “you may report and be damned, I am as independent as you are.”

Wool’s efforts to curb volunteer misconduct continued when he arrived at Monterrey. During the final three months of Taylor’s Command (August, September, October), Taylor approved the General Court Martial of one hundred regulars and only forty-five volunteers, thirty-three of whom had come from Wool’s command at Buena Vista. As late as September 24, Taylor sent a volunteer deserter back to the United States for trial instead of court martialing him in Mexico. Wool demonstrated little of Taylor’s sympathy toward the citizen soldiers. On January 2, the new commander of the Army of Occupation approved the court martial of sixty volunteers in a trial held at his former command in Buena Vista. He also ended the practice of remitting sentences after they were passed. On December 10, just two weeks after Taylor relinquished

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68 Wool Order 492, Oct 19, 1847, Wool Letters, Box 63, NYSL.

69 See RG 94, E134, Vol 4, Mexican War Army of Occupation Orders and Special Orders, Jan-Nov 1847, NARA 1.

70 Taylor Special Order 124, Sept 24, 1847, RG 94, E 134, Vol 4, NARA 1; General Order 27, Jan 2, 1848 in Wool Papers, Box 63, NYSL; Wool recommenced the frequent remittance of sentences after the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo was signed.
command, Wool denied a remission request from the Mississippi regiment that was signed by the officers and the soldiers of the unit. He informed the Mississippians that he considered this type of request, which had become the norm under Taylor, as “irregular and highly unmilitary,” particularly when dealing with matters of discipline. Henceforth, all soldiers were to receive equal punishments for their crimes.  

Instilling discipline was an important part of turning around the war in the north, but probably more significant were the measures Wool took toward the Mexican population. Based upon what he had observed while in command at Buena Vista, General Wool determined that the onus of the war needed to be thrust upon the leaders in Mexican society. In addition to his own sentiments, the Secretary of War’s guidance dated October 11, 1847 made it clear that the administration in Washington desired the Army to make the Mexicans bear the “pains of war” in order to encourage their acceptance of peace. Thus, Wool began implementing measures against the upper class in order to force them to deal with the guerrillas. This was a distinct shift in the U.S. strategy to manage the civilian population; neutrality was no longer an option, and Wool demanded and enforced measures to force the Mexican leaders to support efforts against the guerrillas.  

On December 17, 1847, Wool took a critical step in the implementation of the new policy toward Mexican civilians when he issued General Order 11. This order condemned the Mexican guerrillas for acts of “treachery and cruelty” in response to

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71 Wool to Hamtramck, Dec 10, 1847, Wool Papers, Box 60, V 34, NYSL.

72 Marcy to Taylor, Oct 11, 1847, in H Exec Doc 60, 30th Cong, 1st Sess, 1207; Marcy to Scott, Oct 6, 1847, in H Exec Doc 60, 30th Cong, 1st Sess, 1006-1009 (2nd quote).
American conciliatory policies, and accused them of violating laws “sacred in all civilized warfare.” Wool ordered Mexican authorities in Coahuila, Nuevo Leon, and the occupied parts of Tamaulipas to organize police parties to hunt down the guerrillas. Henceforth, if soldiers or merchants were attacked, or if Mexicans refused to give information on nearby guerrilla “haunts or places of abode,” they would be held responsible for the damages done, and would pay a heavy contribution. In effect, Wool was assigning collective responsibility to the Mexicans for all adverse actions that took place near their towns. He also took the opportunity to reiterate that merchants, regardless of their nationality, would be treated as enemies if they paid protection fees to Canales or any other guerillas.73

The next day Wool wrote a letter to Colonel Hamtramck in Saltillo, who by this time had become a respected colleague despite the fact that he was a volunteer, and explained his thought process behind this collective responsibility order:

We cannot protect the inhabitants from their (the guerrillas) depredations. The only way in which they can be reached is to levy contributions on those who harbor or furnish them with supplies, or who encourage them directly or indirectly in their murderous and plundering habits.

Wool continued: “A few examples, I think, will induce the people, especially the rich, to make efforts to break them up.” Wool continued using his dragoons to attack guerrillas, but would now also target those who tolerated them. Yet he noted to Hamtramck that he was not trying to be barbarous, and emphasized on two occasions in the same letter the need to distinguish between those who cooperated and those who supported the enemy. He cited as an example of his efforts to execute the policy fairly his sequestering of the

73 Wool, GO #11, Dec 17, 1847, Wool Papers, Box 63, NYSL.
Texans under Major Lane, since they were unable to control themselves when outside of his immediate supervision.\(^7^4\)

Wool extended the use of military commissions to enforce rapid punishment for crimes against Americans. On January 25, 1848, he empowered the subordinate commanders in charge of the upper and lower district of the Rio Grande, which he had recently created to streamline command and control, to order military commissions. The military commission, authorized under Scott’s General Order 20 issued in February 1847, generally consisted of three to five officers and was used in cases involving Mexicans and Americans. The rapid and private nature of the military commissions, particularly after Wool delegated authority, helped remedy this problem. Hamtramck had requested this authority, and he felt it was critical that he could quickly sentence guilty Mexicans in order to prevent his own soldiers from taking indiscriminate action against the suspected criminals, and probably those unlucky citizens located near them. It was also apparent that Mexicans would not testify against the guerrillas in a public court as they feared the “retaliatory vengeance of the friends of the accused party.”\(^7^5\) The Americans probably punished some innocent Mexicans because of the hasty nature of these trials, but this hard justice contributed to the establishment of a tolerable level of order in the northern states. Josiah Gregg, who was never a fan of Wool’s command, supported this

\(^7^4\) Wool to Hamtramck, Dec 18, 1847, Wool Papers, Box 60, Vol 34, NYSL.

\(^7^5\) Wool GO 25, Jan 25, 1848, Wool Papers, Box 63, NYSL; Hamtramck to Capt Irwin McDowell (Wool), Jan 20, 1848, in The Justin H. Smith Collection, Vol 11, Benson Collection, the University of Texas—Austin. Captain Abner Doubleday, a regular who served in Saltillo, recounted such a case. He had a friendly relationship with the elderly woman who was his neighbor in Saltillo, but the Mexican woman would not discuss the Mexican guerrillas with him because she feared she would meet the fate of one of her fellow Saltillo residents who had been “cut to pieces one dark night by the robbers on suspicion of having been an informer,” Doubleday, 124-125.
assessment in a letter he wrote in late January 1848: “yet I perceive that all those best acquainted with the affair deem that to have been [in] expedient if not impracticable, and that the course taken—a sort of official lynching—was necessary.” Colonel Hamtramck stated it in even stronger terms: “I have not the least hesitation in saying, (& public opinion bears me out in the assertion) that more good effects will result from this immediate & summary execution of justice than could be expected from the presence of a thousand additional troops on the road.”

Wool’s harsh words toward the Mexican population succeeded where Taylor’s had failed largely because he vigorously enforced them. General Order 11 (December 17, 1847), which was made known to Mexicans in broadsides and in newspapers, warned those who “countenance or encourage directly or indirectly” the guerrillas, would be “made to feel the evils of war”; Wool’s orders to his dragoons on patrol were to afford guerrillas “no quarter.” On December 16, Wool ordered the Alcalde of Guadalupe to catch the “robber” who recently struck outside his village, or else a tax would be imposed on his jurisdiction. On January 1, 1847, Wool issued specific orders to Major Braxton Bragg, the commander of the Army camp at Walnut Springs, just outside Monterrey, to send a party of sixty men to the Ranch at Palmina to arrest the owner of the ranch and the band of robbers reported to be there. A merchant had informed the American authorities

76 Gregg, Vol 2, 209 (first quote); Hamtramck to McDowell, Jan 20, 1848, The Justin H. Smith Collection, Vol 11, UT Austin (second quote).

77 Wool GO 11, Dec 17, 1847, Wool Papers, Box 63, NYSL; Wool’s first “no quarter” order was issued in Aug, 1847 as he was nearing the end of his time at Buena Vista; Wool to MAJ Chevalier, Aug 13, 1847, Wool to Capt. Taylor, Oct 1, 1847, Wool to MAJ Lane, Oct 20, 1847 all in Wool Papers, Box 59, V 33, NYSL; Wool to Butler, Nov 15, 1847, Wool Papers, Box 59, Vol 33, NYSL; Wool to Cap Huratas, 2nd Dragoons, Dec 14, 1847, Wool to Hamtramck, Dec 18, 1847, both in Wool Papers, Box 60, V 34, NYSL.
that he was robbed of $400 by a band of guerrillas at the ranch. If the officer in charge of
the party, upon interviewing the owner and searching the grounds, believed the
accusations, he was to seize all of the rancher’s money and movable property, and burn
the property to the ground. Next, the officer was to proceed to Salinas and arrest the
Alcalde and force the town to pay $1,000 or provide that amount in mules and cattle,
since the guilty ranch fell under the jurisdiction of this city. The American Dragoons
executed the order and returned with mules and one thousand dollars. Guerrillas who
were captured were afforded little mercy. On January 20, 1848, Colonel Hamtramck
publicly executed five Mexicans accused of killing or abetting the murder of three sick
Americans who were discharged and traveling back to the U.S. 78

Wool used the management of taxation and finances as another tool to further
impose the pains of war on the Mexicans. During the occupation of Saltillo, he had
enforced a strict system of taxation that netted eight thousand dollars between June and
December 1847. Expanding the system he used in Saltillo, and responding to Scott’s
November 25 order on taxation, Wool implemented a six percent tax—the exact amount
the Mexican government had used prior to the war—on all merchant goods. Traders
were required to pay the tax at the first city they passed through and they would receive a
pass in return, which would protect them from being charged a double payment at the
next city. Wool specifically targeted silver and gold moving through the occupied

78 Wool to Alcalde of Guadalupe, Dec 16, 1847 in *Wool Papers, Box 28, F3, Orders, 1847-1848, Army of
Occupation Headquarters, NYSL*; Wool to Alcalde of Montemorelas, Dec 30, 1847, *Wool Papers, Box 60,
V34, NYSL*; Wool to Bragg, Jan 1, 1848, *Wool Papers, Box 60, V34*; Bauer, 224; Hamtramck
territories in order to net the largest profit possible. He kept patrols active for all merchants trying to subvert payment by bypassing the cities.79

At the end of December, Wool added to the financial burden on the Mexicans when he ordered a stoppage of rent payments for quarters occupied by the Army. In its place he implemented a real estate tax, and the money collected was used to pay the owners of the homes the army occupied. This system threw the burden of the occupation directly on the wealthy who owned the most real estate. Finally, on January 10, 1848, the general ordered that all revenue beyond the local requirement for governance—a number determined by the U.S. Army—henceforth went into U.S. coffers.80

The Mexicans protested vehemently, making the case that they needed to control their own funds to command authority over their districts, and that Wool could not expect them to be responsible for robberies and attacks in their regions if he did not allow them what they felt was necessary funding to combat the criminal elements. Wool ignored their protests. If they needed more money, the Mexicans should encourage their government to accept the peace terms the U.S. demanded. Wool was true to his word, and once he received news that the treaty was ratified by both governments, which was not until late May 1848, he returned full control over taxes to the Mexican governments.81

79 Wool Order 15, Jan 12, 1848, Wool Papers, Box 63, NYSL; Hinton, 226; Wool to Davenport (Matamoros), Dec 23, 1847, Wool Papers, Box 60, V34, NYSL; Wool GO 25, Dec 30, 1847, Wool Papers, Box 63, NYSL; Wool to Marcy, Feb 26, 1848, Justin Smith Collection, Vol 11, UT Austin.

80 Wool GO 25, Dec 30, 1847, Wool Papers, Box 63, NYSL; Wool, GO 36, Jan 10, 1848, Wool Papers, Box 63, NYSL; Bauer, 225.

81 Jose M. Paras (governor of Nuevo Leon) to Wool, Feb 3, 1848, Wool papers, Box 28 Folder 10 Mem, Reports, etc of Occupation of Monterrey, NYSL; Qurioga, in Vasquez (ed.), 350; Hinton, 229.
Matamoros was the most difficult place to collect the tax because of the active port and proximity to the border, and for the remainder of the War, Colonel William Davenport—the military governor at Matamoros—spent most of his time occupied with implementation of the tax. As with nearly all wars, enforcement on the porous border was an issue, but Davenport bragged in early February that despite the lack of equivalent effort along the rest of the border, he had collected $44,425.82 in duties during the previous month. He argued that targeting the wealthy through trade “is almost the only means we now have of bringing the war to a close.”

Wool was harsh on the Mexicans, but did not tolerate indiscriminate violence or punishment. The Army issued safeguards to loyal Mexicans, and passes that authorized Mexican police forces and trusted travelers to bear arms for security. While individual soldiers occasionally ignored the safeguards, Wool made great efforts to ensure their enforcement, regularly trying and prosecuting violators. The general did not shy away from punishing unruly volunteers. On January 27, 1848, in response to a complaint from a Mexican rancher, Wool charged a group of Texans for disobeying General Orders, requiring them to give a receipt for subsistence they confiscated while on patrol.

82 Davenport to Wool, February 8, 1848, RG 94 Letters Sent, Dep of Matamoros, July 1846-Aug 1847 Vol 8 of 9 PI-17, E 130, NARA 1; Wool to Hamtramck, 21 February, 1848, Wool Papers, Box 60 V34, NYSL; Wool to Jones (AG), Mar 2, 1848, Justin Smith Collection, Vol 11, UT Austin; Marcy to Wool, Mar 2, 1848, May 23, 1848, both in RG 107, E13, NARA 1.

83 Dec 20, 1847, Safeguard to town of Higueras; Jan 3, 48, Safeguard for men to act as a police force in Marin; Jan 19, 1848, Safeguard to Don Pablo Annice of Sabinas; Mar 2, 1848, Permission to bear arms on route to Monterrey; Mar 22, 48, Travel Safeguard, all in Wool Papers, Box 28, F 3; Wool GO 138, May 27, 1848; GO 176, July 17, 1848, Wool Papers, Box 63, Wool Orders, Sept 47- July 48, NYSL.

84 Wool to Col Webb, Jan 27, 1848, Wool Papers, Box 60, Vol 34, NYSL.
Wool protected Mexicans loyal to the Americans, particularly those he relied upon for logistics. When one of his officers accused a member of the Sánchez Navarro family of collusion with the guerrillas—though his accusations may have been accurate—Wool intervened, arguing that this man had suffered more from guerrilla attacks than the Americans, and that Mr. Sánchez was a known rival of the exiled Governor Aguerre, who was the driving force behind the guerrillas in Coahuila.\textsuperscript{85}

Wool consistently chastised his officers when they entered cities without authorization or tried to take up private residences in towns. In late December, Colonel Hamtramck, who was occasionally overzealous in his enforcement of measures against resistant Mexicans and their supporters, proposed moving his entire command into Saltillo. Wool firmly refuted this proposal explaining that this was problematic not only because of the history of discipline problems when soldiers stayed in cities, but also because of the great success the Army had achieved in collecting revenue from the wealthy in Saltillo. Additionally, he feared that if the U.S. alienated this group of wealthy Mexicans, they might relocate to the interior and support the guerrillas.\textsuperscript{86}

Wool also ordered strict adherence to the recognized rules of war so as to draw a clear delineation between the U.S. authority as occupiers and “illegal” guerrillas. In December 1847, when Hamtramck employed a Mr. Ballard and a group of Americans not associated with the Army on a “special mission” and paid Ballard nothing because the American said he would collect from the Mexicans, Wool reacted with vigor. In a tone he rarely used with his trusted subordinate, he ordered Hamtramck to recall Ballard.

\textsuperscript{85} Wool to Hamtramck, Nov 7, 1847, \textit{Wool Papers, Box 59, Vol 33}, NYSL.

\textsuperscript{86} Wool to Washington, Sept 6, 1847, Wool to Hamtramck, Dec 28, 1847, both in \textit{Wool Papers, Box 59, F 33}, NYSL.
immediately and then explained that Hamtramck’s acts sanctioned the “guerrilla system of war.” If Ballard’s men were captured and executed, the United States would have no legitimate complaint against the Mexicans who implemented the punishment. Wool was intent on remaining within the recognized rules of war when dealing with guerrillas, and although not perfectly enforced, his occupation policy was carefully planned and consistent at his level of command.\(^{87}\)

Wool used his management of the Indians to further his policy of delineation between collaborators and the “enemy.” He only offered protection against the Indians to those Mexicans he felt were cooperative with the occupation force. The initial success the U.S. had in appeasing the Indians wore off by the summer of 1847, and attacks on the Mexicans in Durango, Chihuahua, and Coahuila, recommenced. When Colonel Hamtramck in November 1847 reported to Wool that he was sending troops to protect the local ranches, the general requested that Hamtramck limit his efforts to guarding ranchers who had been friendly to the Americans. Without a sizable Mexican force in the region to protect against the Indians, many Mexican ranchers had little choice but to cooperate if they hoped to survive and maintain their land holdings.\(^{88}\)

**WAR AGAINST OURSELVES**

As Wool enforced better discipline on the Army, the number of U.S. soldiers who deserted increased. Bands of deserters, camp followers, and other Americans who had

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\(^{87}\) Wool to Hamtramck, Dec 28, 1847, *Wool Papers, Box 60, Vol 34*, NYSL.

\(^{88}\) Delay, 283; Wool to Hamtramck, Nov 22, 1847, *Wool Papers, Box 59, V 33*, NYSL.
come to Mexico, committed theft and atrocities on the population. This problem became particularly acute as the rotation of twelve-month volunteers took place in May and June 1847. In one instance, a party of deserters from the Texas volunteers went into the town of Lamparas, claimed they were representatives of the U.S. Army, and demanded one thousand dollars, of which they received five hundred. Complaints became more numerous as 1847 passed, and soldiers who came to Mexico in search of military glory instead deserted and settled for plunder. On May 29, 1847, Wool issued one of his first orders to use U.S. military force against these rogue Americans, who he described as bringing “disgrace upon their corps and the army generally.” On February 1847, Wool issued a blanket order to all of his subordinate units to make efforts to apprehend a wayward group of deserters who were committing ravages on the Mexican countryside.

On February 29, he ordered eight Americans soldiers shot to death for deserting, stealing, and murdering Mexicans. By the end of the war Wool was launching as many missions to fight against Americans as he was Mexican guerrillas. In addition to using U.S. troops to capture the rogue bands of Americans, Wool issued safeguards to loyal cities that authorized them to arm themselves for protection against the wayward Americans, Mexican guerrillas and bandits, and Indians. He achieved some level of success with this. In mid-September, the Alcalde of Monclova reported to Wool that he had captured

89 Wool to COL Butler, (Meir) Feb 1, 1848, Wool Papers, Box 60, V34, NYSL.

90 Wool to Lieut Buford, May 29, 1847, Wool Papers, Box 59, V33, NYSL; Wool to Commander at Encantada, July 23, 1847, Wool Papers, Box 59, V33, NYSL (quote); Wool to Butler, Feb 1, 1848, Wool Papers, Box 60, V34, NYSL; Wool GO 67, Feb 26, 1848, Wool Papers, Box 63, NYSL.

91 Wool GO 67, Feb 26, 1848, Wool GO 70 February 29, 1848, Wool GO 72, March 4, 1848 all in Wool Papers, Box 63, NYSL. Four of these sentences were subsequently lessened, but this order makes clear that late in the war, rogue American crimes against Mexicans were a major problem for the U.S. Army.
twenty one deserters and their horses. Wool ordered him to send them under guard to Buena Vista and that the alcalde would be reimbursed for his services. By early 1848, the Army of Occupation and the Mexican elite found themselves in many cases working together against Mexican guerrillas and rogue Americans.

Wool also understood the role expansion of the occupation could play in combating the guerrillas and forcing peace on the Mexicans. Expansion of the occupation would allow him to make good on his promise to the people of Coahuila to protect them from Indian attacks. In February 1848, once Wool was convinced he would not be allowed to attack south, the expansion began in earnest. He issued orders for detachments to move to Parras, Monclova, Victoria, and Masapil, the first two primarily to provide protection against Indians and Americans, and the later two mostly for collection of taxes on the large quantities of gold passing through the region. Wool also kept his dragoons busy patrolling the common guerrilla haunts and holding off the Indians. Finally, he posted guards on the properties of wealthy Mexicans who were loyal suppliers to the U.S. Army. Though late in the conflict, the expansion demonstrated the American resolve to see the occupation to the end and was consistent with the President’s intent to keep the pressure on the Mexicans until the treaty was ratified.

92 Wool to Alcalde of Monclova, Sept 22, 1847, Wool Papers, Box 59, V33, NYSL.

93 Wool to Marcy, Feb 26, 1848, Justin Smith Collection, Vol 11, UT Austin; Wool to Hamtramck, Dec 26, 48, Wool to CPT Hunter, 2nd Dragoons, Feb 20, 1848, both in Wool Papers, Box 60, V 34, NYSL; Gregg, Vol 2, 212; Bauer 225.

94 Baylies, 65; Wool to Hamtramck, Oct 18, 1847, Wool to Hamtramck, 22 Nov 1847, both in Wool Papers, Box 59, V33, NYSL; Gregg, Vol 2, 201; Hinton, 228; Marcy to Wool, May 23, 1848, RG 107, E13, NARA I; Wool to Hamtramck, 22 Nov 1847, Wool Papers, Box 59, V33, NYSL.
Mexican bandits abused merchants and land owners at least as frequently as Americans. Wool noted in several of his letters in late 1847 that there were no recent attacks against his troops, but numerous guerrilla attacks against Mexicans. Inside of the cities, Americans noted that Mexican on Mexican crime often resulted in murder. During December 1847, an American officer recorded in his journal that “Scarcely a night passes in Saltillo without the houses of poor and unprotected windows are broken open, and their slender wardrobes are carried off.”

Mexican historian Miguel A. González Quiroga, writing about Nuevo Leon, recognizes this same phenomenon:

An abundance of documents reveal that these irregular forces did more harm to the civilian population . . . Some of these guerrillas were thieves and freebooters, more interested in stealing from civilians than in combating the well armed convoys of the army of occupation.”

The Mexican bandits helped the U.S. Army win over the cautious support of many Mexicans; the U.S. Army was the lesser, and far more powerful, evil.

While it is difficult to gage the level of attacks on Mexican civilians in the region, it is clear that by early 1848, the frequency had decreased dramatically. The attacks that took place were largely criminal in nature and did not involve American soldiers, with the exception of several bands of deserters. Josiah Gregg recorded in a January 24 letter

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95 Wool to Alcalde of Parras, Oct 6, 1847, Wool Papers, Box 59, V33, NYSL; Wool to Jones, Jan 7, 1848, Justin Smith Collection, UT Austin; (no article title) The American Flag (Matamoros: Fleeson, Peoples & Co), Dec 18, 1848, Independent Mexico in Newspaper, Latin American Collection, UT Austin; Quiroga, “Nuevo Leon,” in Frazier, 297; Quiroga, in Francaviglia (ed.), Dueling Eagles, 97; The American Flag (Matamoros), Dec 18, 1847; Gregg, V1, 335; Doubleday, 123, 127 quote on 123.

from Saltillo that “Although the ravages of war seem to be suspended her the cruel agents of death are still active among us—in the shape of murders and executions.” In a 7 January letter, Wool noted progress in checking the guerrilla threat in the region he commanded, and by January 24 he was confident enough to lower the size of escorts accompanying his trains. Several soldiers noted the great decrease in the guerrilla threat under Wool’s command. One in particular wrote that crime was in fact less than in a U.S. city: “Setting aside the differences in natural custom and language, and the differences between the soldier and citizen, there is perhaps few or indeed fewer collisions than there would be were the same troops quartered in one of our own cities.” Wool made significant progress in checking the guerrillas and convincing many Mexicans to cooperate.98

While historians have argued that by late in the war the Americans had alienated the once friendly population of Northern Mexico, a large body of evidence indicates there was significant compliance with the occupation force.99 In early October, the Mexican alcalde at Parras requested American protection from Indian raids. The month before, governor of Nuevo León, Francisco de Paula Morales, decided to attempt to work with the Americans and returned to Monterrey. Finally, the Sánchez Navaro family continued to cooperate with the Americans until the end of the war.100

97 Gregg, V2, 209.

98 Wool to Jones (AG), Jan 7, 1848, The Justin Smith Collection, Vol 11, UT Austin; Wool to COL Butler, Jan 24, 2848 in Wool Papers, Box 60, Volume 34, NYSL; “The Virginia Regiment,” The Sentinel (Saltillo), April 19, 1848, Independent Newspapers in Mexico, UT Austin (quote); Prieto, 185; see also Newport Daily News, Kentucky, Feb, 1850 in Baylies,61-62 for a similar description of the stability in Saltillo by the end of the war.

99 Paul Foos, A Short Offhand Killing Affair, is the most popular advocate of this argument.
In addition to the collaboration of many powerful Mexicans, Wool never had a shortage of low level informers and collaborators. There was always an abundance of Mexicans who would work for the occupiers for a few dollars. Captain Abner Doubleday recorded in his journal the story of a Mexican outlaw who served as his guide on a sight-seeing trip to Parras in March 1848, guiding him toward friendly cities and avoiding those hostile to the Americans.\(^\text{101}\)

While most cooperative Mexicans were likely motivated by money, their existence in significant numbers demonstrates that the guerrillas were not powerful enough, nor the Army’s atrocities terrible enough, to intimidate or motivate the populace into rejecting the Americans.\(^\text{102}\) Wool recognized how important Mexican disunity was to his success and noted in a letter to a friend late in December 1847 that “Had the Mexicans been united we could not have gained a single victory.”\(^\text{103}\)

Mexicans may not have liked the Americans, and occasional attacks continued on isolated individuals, but overall, by early January most realized that their best option was cooperation. By this time enough of the population was collaborating, thus lessening the fear of post-war retribution and accusations of traitorous behavior. By February 1848, Aguirre was forced to flee to San Louis Potosi, as his support base had been so decimated


\(^{101}\) Doubleday, 128, 131-132.

\(^{102}\) In his orders to patrols, Wool commonly referenced an informer and guide that he would send with them to help identify the guilty villages, see Wool to Capt Huratas (?), Dec 14, 1847; Wool to Braxton Bragg, Jan 1, 1848, both in *Wool Papers, Box 60, V34*, NYSL; Doubleday, 124.; Gregg mockingly notes all of the Mexican police who serve under the American command in Saltillo at the end of the war, Gregg, Vol 2, 214.

\(^{103}\) Wool to John A. Dix, Dec 25, 1847, as cited in Hinton, 224.
in Coahuila, and Canales was applying to Wool for U.S. support in forming an independent nation out of the state of Tamaulipas. These two vital guerrilla leaders had been rendered ineffective. Sensing Canales’s weakness, on February 26, Wool issued a general amnesty to all Mexicans who had supported the enemy. Wool’s intent with the amnesty order was to “draw from him (Canales) his followers.” Wool wrote in a letter on March 13 that fifteen families had returned since the order was issued and were rebuilding their homes between Monterrey and Camargo. With military control of the region well established and the guerrilla leadership driven from the occupied states, the General sought to make peace with the refugee population.104

General John Wool led an imperfect, but largely effective occupation of Northern Mexico. The guerrillas that once threatened the U.S.’s staying power were defeated and only one guerrilla attack took place in the north during January 1848, and none during the rest of the American occupation. The Mexican guerrilla leadership was either driven out of the region, or in Canales’s case, had changed goals and sought allegiance with the Americans. Wool was able to decrease guard forces on trains and Americans in Mexico were traveled on sight-seeing or scientific missions with minimal security. In April, Josiah Gregg commented in his journal on the Mexican man assigned to light the street lights in Saltillo; while an unconventional indicator, the fact that this man had a job and street lights were being lit says something positive about the relative order within the occupied city.

104 Baylies, 50; Wool, Circular, July 25, 1847, AGLR; Hinton, 221, Prieto, 185-186; Canales to Wool, Feb 8, 1848, Wool Papers, Box 28 F3, Spanish Correspondence and Reports, NYSL; GO 66, Feb 26, 1848, Wool Papers, Box 63, NYSL; Wool to Col Butler, as cited in Baylies, 57; Hinton, 228.
The U.S. occupation of Northern Mexico was a success because the Army was able to convince the Mexican elite to cooperate, it enforced enough discipline to avoid complete alienation of Mexican society, and because it possessed clear military superiority over the Mexican resistance. The Americans convinced the Mexicans to cooperate by a combination of economic incentives—positive and negative—and exploiting the elites’ need for social order. Mexican ranchers cooperated because they could make money from the Americans, and because if they did not their ranches would be destroyed, their social stranglehold on their peons would be lost, and they would be forced pay a punitive tax. John Wool was a man of his word, and made good on enough of his promises of protection and punishment to avoid pushing the majority of the population to hatred-inspired resistance at the expense of rational cooperation. By improving discipline within the U.S. ranks, and demonstrating responsiveness to reasonable Mexican requests for justice, Wool did enough to prevent the wholesale alienation of the Mexican population. His job was made easier by the region’s tenuous loyalty to central Mexico and the existing social conflict that led to Mexican banditry against its own people as much as against the foreign invader. The Indian threat made the U.S. military superiority even more important to the ranch owners. Altogether, the U.S. Army provided marginal but tangible improvements in security to the Mexicans, enough to convince them that resistance was not their best course. The Mexicans eventually cooperated, but walked the fine line of resistance so as to remain in honorable stead with their countrymen when the Americans left.

General John Wool’s stern but tireless and consistent leadership was crucial to winning the occupation phase of the Mexican War. Wool may have been disliked by
Mexican administrators and many of his troops, but the severe measures he enforced led to military success, and established relative order that many Mexicans desired from the start. An Arkansas volunteer reflected what many soldiers likely thought of Wool as a leader by the end of the conflict:

Here we see a man whose name, four months prior had not been mentioned but with scorn, now hailed with benedictions, lauded and beloved by every man of the Central Division. . . . It was now seen that the man who only slept six hours out of twenty-four, and used so much discretion and discipline, was the man in time of danger.105

105 Buhoup, 140
Chapter V: Conciliation in Central Mexico (March 1847-October 1847)

The success of the system . . . depends on our powers of conciliation. With steady troops I should not doubt the result; but the great danger lies in the want of that quality . . . The average number of disorders and crimes, always committed by undisciplined men, with inexperienced officers, may destroy the best-concerted plans, by exasperating the inhabitants, and rendering the war, on their part, national, interminable, and desperate.

- Winfield Scott to Secretary of War William Marcy, December 25, 1847

By early 1847 Taylor’s campaign in the north had failed to convince the Mexicans to agree to the United States’ demands and President Polk ordered General Winfield Scott, the commanding officer of the United States Army, to mount a campaign from the Mexican coast to capture the capital and force a peace settlement. The Mexico City Campaign from March to September 1847 consisted of major battles at the coastal city of Veracruz, the mountain pass at Cerro Gordo, and at the capital at Mexico City. In each of the major cities on the route, the United States Army ran an occupation government and managed a potentially hostile population. Scott’s challenge was not only to defeat the Mexican Army, but to prevent the two million Mexicans in the occupied states from uniting in resistance against the American invaders.¹

¹ The combined population of the states of Veracruz, Puebla, and Mexico as per the 1842 census was 2,305,802. Irving W Levinson, Wars Within War: Mexican Guerrillas, Domestic Elites, and the United States of America, 1846-1848 (Fort Worth, Tex: TCU Press, 2005), 18.
To achieve this end, Winfield Scott applied a conciliatory policy toward the Mexican people. This strategy succeeded in winning over enough Mexicans that Scott was able to sever his logistics lines to the coast and rely on the region around Puebla to supply his army. Conciliation was necessary and it enabled Scott to mass his troops for the final conventional attack on the Mexican capital. However, it was not enough to convince the Mexicans in power to succumb to the American demands. This is largely because: (a) discipline problems with the volunteers and some regulars that alienated a portion of the population; (b) Scott’s small army was not able to secure the Mexicans who collaborated; and (c) the Americans underestimated the will of the Mexicans to resist.

**General Winfield Scott and Military Occupation**

General Winfield Scott was an old soldier by the time he led the Mexico City campaign. On March 9, 1847, the day his army landed on the beaches south of Veracruz, Scott was sixty years old and had been a soldier for forty years. He had learned hard lessons about the nature of war through scholarly study and combat experience. An avid reader and self-educated military historian, he studied the Napoleonic wars and traveled to Europe in 1815 and conversed with the officers who had defeated Napoleon. He was fluent in French; the army regulations and field manuals that he authored in 1815 and 1835 were largely translations from French doctrine. His oversized library that traveled with him across Mexico had several works by Baron Antoine-Henri Jomini, a Frenchman and the premier military theorist of Scott’s day. In his biography of Winfield Scott,
Timothy Johnson adeptly describes Scott’s fear of alienating the population along his main supply route, comparing the Veracruz to Mexico City route to Napoleon’s lines into Spain and his retreat from Russia. In Spain and Russia an inflamed population destroyed much of the French Army, which contributed significantly to Napoleon’s downfall.²

![Figure 3: Winfield Scott (National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution)](image)

In addition to his studies of military history, Winfield Scott had combat experience with an enemy employing guerrilla warfare. His inability to defeat the Seminole Indians in the Florida swamps during the Second Seminole War in 1836

² Johnson, *Quest for Military Glory*, 166-169; A similar accounts of Scott’s fear of what happened to Napoleon repeating itself in Mexico are found in Charles Winslow Elliott, *Winfield Scott, The Soldier and the Man* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1937), 90; Scott’s personal library contained a copy of William Francis Patrick Napier’s 3 Vol. *History of the War in the Peninsula and in the South of France, from the Year 1807 to the Year 1814* and there are indications Scott met Napier when he visited France.
reinforced what he had learned from his study of Napoleon’s campaigns. The experience increased his appreciation for the dangers of guerrilla warfare and instilled in him an intense hatred for insurgents. By the end of his time in Florida, Scott seemed to grasp the nature of this form of warfare. He recommended to the Secretary of War in mid-June 1836 the establishment of posts throughout the region, with regular patrols hunting the guerrilla Indians—a similar plan that he would employ against guerrillas in central Mexico eleven years later. From his studies and prior combat experience, Scott understood the importance of the Mexican population’s perception of the U.S. Army. He was also aware of the limitations of his own army and the danger it would face if proper discipline was not enforced.

One half of Scott’s soldiers in Mexico were volunteer troops who had little training and discipline. As these citizen-soldiers rotated in and out of Mexico, he had to retrain each new group. Training volunteers was not an altogether unfamiliar task for Winfield Scott. As a Captain during the War of 1812, he made a name for himself as a trainer and disciplinarian. Scott helped organize the program that transformed the undisciplined American troops at the Buffalo training camp in western New York into a force that could match British regulars on the battlefield. To accomplish this he implemented harsh disciplinary measures. On June 4, 1814, he had four men executed by a firing squad for desertion. A fifth he deemed too young—he was not yet eighteen—to be punished so harshly, so instead Scott had the executioners fire blanks to teach the

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teenager a lesson. Scott’s experience in the War of 1812 taught him the value of discipline and lessons about managing volunteer troops.⁴

Winfield Scott also learned valuable lessons by observing the experience of General Zachary Taylor during his campaign in northern Mexico. Scott had an opportunity to witness the transgressions of the volunteers under Taylor when he traveled to Monterrey in early January 1847. What he saw furthered his preference for regulars over volunteers and influenced his planning for central Mexico. Scott cited the atrocities Taylor’s army committed to justify to Secretary of War William Marcy his desire to take a large percentage of the regulars from Taylor’s army to participate in the invasion of central Mexico. In mid January he wrote Marcy: “Murder, robbery & rape on mothers & daughters, in the presence of the tied up males of the families, have been common all along the Rio Grande.” He continued, “As far as I can learn, not one of the felons has been punished, & very few rebuked—the officers generally, being as much afraid of their men as the poor suffering Mexicans themselves are afraid of the miscreants.”⁵

Winfield Scott’s background prepared him well for the guerrilla war he faced in central Mexico. Scott’s preparation was important, since the population of central Mexico, eight times the size of what Taylor faced in the north, would not allow him to make the same mistakes the U.S. Army made during the initial invasion of Northern Mexico.

⁴ Johnson, Quest for Military Glory, 44-46, 65-66.

⁵ Quote from Scott to Marcy (private), January 16, 1847, Marcy Papers, cited in Elliott, Winfield Scott, 448.
The Road to Mexico

The three major cities the Americans encountered en route to Mexico City (Veracruz, Jalapa, and Puebla) provided Scott’s army with a rehearsal in administering city government prior to reaching the capital. The cities of Veracruz and Jalapa were relatively diminutive compared to Mexico City, having a population of 15,000 and 10,000 respectively, and many of the Mexican people evacuated prior to the Army’s arrival. Puebla was a larger challenge with a population of between 70,000 and 80,000. The initial occupations on the road to Mexico proceeded relatively smoothly, largely because the American Army decisively defeated the Mexicans in battle before occupying the cities, and the Americans demonstrated the consequences of defending the city itself during the brutal bombardment of Veracruz. Veracruz and Jalapa were remotely located from Mexico City, separated by the geographic barrier of the Sierra Madre Oriental Mountains, and Veracruz was a merchant town with a large foreign contingent. Geography and economic factors lessened their ties to the capital and facilitated the American mission of convincing the Mexicans to cooperate with the invading army.

American military superiority also played a large role in persuading many Mexicans to cooperate with the invaders. Historians have criticized Winfield Scott for orchestrating the brutal bombardment of Veracruz that preceded the city’s capitulation.6

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6 Irving Levinson harshly criticizes Scott’s decision to bomb the city and to refuse the Mexican request to evacuate civilians, a request that he received two days before the city capitulated. Levinson, Wars within
Yet the message that the bombardment sent to the Mexican populace—that the Americans were the superior force, and they were not afraid to use military might to enforce their will—was valuable to quelling Mexican resistance throughout the campaign. Scott did not want to destroy Veracruz, but he knew that if his army remained in the coastal lowland into the hot season starting in April it might be ravaged by the “vomito” or yellow fever, as had the Spanish army that invaded Mexico in 1829. Furthermore, Scott had intelligence indicating that Santa Anna was rebuilding his army and moving to break the siege. In fact, the Mexican general would reach his hacienda at El Encero, approximately fifty miles from Veracruz, with seven thousand troops by April 5.

The Americans had the superior force at Veracruz, but Mexican politics also helped Scott achieve this military victory. It was just prior to the siege that the “Polkos Rebellion” in the capital between the National Guards (polkos) and the liberal

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7 See Scott to Marcy, Mar 22 and Mar 23, 1847, Letters Received by the Secretary of War, Oct 1846-Sept 1847, Microfilm role M221 #142, NARA 1; Scott to Marcy, Oct 27, 1847, 30th Cong., 1st Sess., Ho. Ex. Doc. 59, 681.

8 Scott’s journal indicates he believed Mexican reinforcements were imminent. Rumors of up to five thousand men forming behind the siege lines were noted by several other U.S. soldiers in their journals and letters as well; Scott, Memoirs, V 2, 427; See J.J. Oswandel, Notes on the Mexican War, 1846, 1847, 1848, (Philadelphia, Rev. Ed., 1885), 77.

9 Santa Anna, after his defeat at Buena Vista, returned to the capital, added troops to the remains of his army and promptly left for the coast, see Bauer, The Mexican War, 261; Santa Anna’s actions after the surrender of the city support the idea that he was moving rapidly to try to relieve the siege. His letter of April 19th indicated his disgust with Morales for not holding out until he could arrive to break the siege. He had the military commanders who surrendered at Veracruz thrown in jail at San Carlos Perote after Scott had paroled them. See Justin H. Smith, ed. “Letters of General Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna Relating to the War Between the United States and Mexico, 1846-1848” Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1917 (1920), 421.
administration of Valentín Gómez Farías transpired, inhibiting the government’s ability to more rapidly reinforce Veracruz. This internal disorder among the central government prevented the Mexico City National Guard, who were considered some of the best soldiers in the Mexican army, from moving to defend Veracruz. Political rivalry continually inhibited Mexican military operations.¹⁰

The unintended side effect of the bombardment of Veracruz was that it facilitated Scott’s occupation of the remainder of central Mexico, and added credibility to his threats against resistance. Subsequently, Jalapa and Puebla fell without a fight. The Mexican authorities in both cities initiated the surrender of their city, rejecting the minority who sought to resist, and thus avoided the fate of Veracruz.¹¹ During the battles around the capital, the Mexican army evacuated when the Americans were in artillery range of the central, historic portion of the city. While many Mexicans present at Veracruz were angered and motivated for revenge, the larger strategic effect of the destruction of the city, combined with the victory at Cerro Gordo just nineteen days later, was the psychological impact it had on the Mexicans.¹²


¹² This assertion is supported by the actions of the elite at Jalapa and Puebla who surrendered without a fight. However, some Mexicans were angered by the bombardment of Veracruz and motivated to resist. A Mexican present during the siege recorded that the brave soldiers who defended the city “in the extremity of their grief pressing their dear wives to the bosoms, on receiving a delirious blessing from an aged mother, would only exclaim, “Vengeance, O God!”” Alcarez, The Other Side, 192.
The Battle of Cerro Gordo immediately preceded the occupation of the nearby city of Jalapa. The battle broke Jalapa’s will to resist, similarly to the way that the bombardment of Veracruz had broken the will of the Veracruzians. Upon hearing that the Americans had taken Veracruz, the Mexican Commanding General, Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna, having recently returned from the Battle of Buena Vista in the north, raised a new Mexican force to meet the Americans. He rapidly moved east from the capital and established a defensive position along the American route at a mountain pass called Cerro Gordo, located forty-five miles northwest of Veracruz, and just east of the city of Jalapa. On April 17 and 18, 1847 the American army routed the Mexican force and then occupied the nearby city of Jalapa. They immediately pushed a smaller group of troops over the Sierra Madre Oriental Mountains and occupied the nearly deserted fortress city of Perote. Both cities capitulated without a fight.

Scott paroled the captured Mexicans after the battle at Veracruz and Cerro Gordo (near Jalapa). He did this for several reasons. First, he did not have the capacity to run a large prison facility, and second he hoped this would motivate them to either participate in or tolerate the U.S. occupation. He allowed the Mexicans to march away under full colors and the officers to retain their weapons. Scott issued a stern warning not to rejoin the fight against the Americans or they would be tried and executed. While this policy of parole may seem naive, as many Mexicans perceived it at the time, it was consistent with

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Scott’s policy of conciliation.\textsuperscript{14} It was also in accord with the military protocol of that era since the garrison had surrendered without having to be stormed.

The next major obstacle on Scott’s route to Mexico City was the city of Puebla, which was the second largest city the Americans would occupy. Established by the Spanish as a religious center, Puebla seemed to the U.S. soldiers to have a church on every corner, and in fact contained over sixty churches and a powerful clergy. Poblanos were known for their martial spirit, and the region was the focal point of many of the nation’s tumultuous revolts prior to the war.\textsuperscript{15} Puebla was the home of several of central Mexico’s productive cotton factories, but the war had temporarily halted production and placed many lower-class Mexicans out of work, meaning that there was a large pool of potential soldiers to resist the invading army.\textsuperscript{16} Always independent minded, the city administration had lost faith in Santa Anna’s army, had heard about the battles at Veracruz and Cerro Gordo, and also about the American policy of respect for the Church and private property, and thus decided to reconcile with Scott as the American army approached.\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{14} D. Manuel Robles, the Mexican chief military engineer in the city commented on the oddity of being paroled: “The commissioners could never imagine, that the conditions which, instead of leaving the officers and troops prisoners in the enemy’s hands, would set them at liberty, by giving their word not to take up arms until duly exchanged, was to be imposed as a disgraceful oath not to serve their country” quoted in Alcarez, The Other Side, 194.

\textsuperscript{15} Richard Bruce Winders, “Puebla’s Forgotten Heroes,” \textit{Military History of the West} 24, no. 1 (Spring 1994) 2-3; Puebla would also be the location of the famous battle on the fifth of May and the location where the initial revolt of the Mexican revolution took place.

\textsuperscript{16} Ballentine, \textit{Autobiography}, 232; Zeh, \textit{An Immigrant Soldier in the Mexican War}, 51.

The American demonstration of military prowess helped make the population of these cities initially compliant, but Scott’s conciliatory policy, which included overtures to the Mexican elite, also contributed significantly to the pacification of these three cities, particularly Puebla.

Map 3: Scott’s Campaign in Central Mexico.

A Policy of Conciliation

The U.S. Army in central Mexico, like that under John Wool in the north, learned from General Zachary Taylor’s struggles with the population during the early phase of the war. The American army was too small—only 10,000 troops when it landed at Veracruz and dipping to 7,000 when volunteers rotated out of the country in May 1847—to militarily defeat a truly inspired resistance by the population in central Mexico. In a
letter to Secretary of War Marcy prior to the invasion, Scott wrote: “The government, or interior people of Mexico, seem, in war, to present us this dilemma: ‘If you come with few, we will overwhelm you; if you come with many, you will overwhelm yourselves.’”

Scott feared a Mexican transition to guerrilla war, or “national war” as he called it. Thus from the beginning of the campaign he employed a conciliatory strategy toward the Mexican population that focused on courting the Church and emphasizing respect for Mexican rights and the establishment of stable military governments in the major cities.

Recognizing the power that the Catholic Church wielded in Mexico and the existing conflict between church and state, both the American President and General Scott implemented measures to court the support of the Mexican clergy. Before the invasion, Polk met with several leaders of the Catholic Church in the United States to find ways to reach out to the Mexican Church. The President commissioned two Jesuits to travel to Mexico to reassure the clergy of the security of their religion. The priests had little success: one returned early because of sickness and the second was killed by bandits in northern Mexico. Polk had more success when he commissioned Moses Beach, an expansionist-minded publisher of the New York Sun, to travel to Mexico to open a dialogue with the government and to ensure the Church that the United States was on its side.

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19 Quaife (ed.), Diary of Polk, VI 408-409, V3, 104; Bauer, The Mexican War, 85.

Scott also went to great lengths to win over the Catholic Church. In each of the occupied cities, he had his troops salute priests, requested the clergy hold special services for his soldiers, and made his entire staff attend Sunday mass in full dress uniform. A Mexican priest conducting one of the services in Veracruz was so impressed at the general’s attendance that he had Scott lead the procession around the cathedral carrying a large lighted candle. Considering the level of anti-Catholic sentiments in the United States in the 1840s and Scott’s presidential aspirations, this act demonstrated the importance he placed on earning the support of the clergy.\footnote{Eisenhower, \textit{So Far from God}, 267; Elliott, \textit{Winfield Scott}, 461-462.} Courting the Church continued throughout the campaign. After the battle of Cerro Gordo and the occupation of Jalapa, Scott and his staff attended the Catholic funeral of a local Mexican general who died in the battle.\footnote{Smith, \textit{The War with Mexico}, V2, 224.} The personal example set by American officers respecting the Church in Central Mexico is a contrast to the actions of Taylor’s command in the north, where conciliatory words were not followed with actions.

The imperative of Church support became evident to several soldiers when they entered Puebla in mid May 1847. One commented in a letter home about the throngs of “coldly courteous” citizens who “hovered around our little band in dark and portentous gloom.”\footnote{First quote from Worth to Scott, May 15, 1847, second quote from H. Judge Moore, \textit{Scott’s Campaign in Mexico} (Charlestown, SC: J.B. Nixon, 1849), both in George Winston Smith & Charles Judah, \textit{Chronicles of the Gringos, The U.S. Army in the Mexican War, 1846-1848}, (Albuquerque: The University of New Mexico Press, 1968), 227-228.} Captain E. Kirby Smith wrote to his wife that “The courtesy which we are showing to these officials is certainly good policy, for if we can only get the clergy on
our side peace must soon ensue. Their influence, which is unbounded, can alone control the lower orders in this densely populated district.”

Scott’s conciliatory measures toward the Church were aided by the existing animosity between the Church and the Mexican government. Nicolas Trist, while negotiating with the Mexicans in August 1847, made the insightful observation that the Mexican Church, once it realized the Americans were not bent on its destruction, desired an American takeover to bring back the stability it once prospered under during the Spanish colonial era. Trist wrote of the clergy, “they rejoice at the idea of coming under a government which maintains quiet and good order, and above all respects church property instead of subjecting it to contributions & forced loans . . .” In truth, it seems the Church reflected Mexican society as a whole in that it did not present a united front of resistance or cooperation towards the Americans. Instead, clergy were more likely to support their local interests. In the countryside, priests commonly fought as guerrillas or inspired resistance, but in the cities the clergy were more concerned about preserving their property and authority. Overall, the American chain of command’s efforts, combined with the Mexican Church’s fear of their own government’s intentions, kept

24 E. Kirby Smith, To Mexico with Scott, 168.
27 Padre Caledonio Domeco Jarauta was the most infamous priest-guerrilla chief in central Mexico.
enough of the clergy neutral and cooperative to the American efforts to prevent a religion-inspired insurgency.

A second part of Scott’s conciliatory policy was to ensure that his army was capable of conducting the campaign as he envisioned it, which meant minimizing actions that might alienate the population and push them toward guerrilla warfare. His first step towards achieving this end was selecting and training the most disciplined troops possible for the campaign. He selected over seven thousand combat-tested troops from Taylor’s army, including nearly all four thousand of Taylor’s regulars.28 He left the notoriously guilty units behind. During his visit to Matamoros in January 1847, Scott witnessed the excesses of the 3rd Ohio Volunteers. When the time came to launch the invasion force, Scott left the 3rd Ohio to maintain the garrison there, much to the chagrin of its commander.29 The rest of his force was made up of new volunteers whom Scott had no choice but to take. He did make efforts to ensure they had a foundation of training in order to avoid the problems Taylor had with raw volunteers committing atrocities. While they waited on Lobos Island for logistics and transportation, Scott simulated the Buffalo training camp of 1814 by drilling the green soldiers relentlessly and issuing his first orders on proper treatment of Mexican civilians.30

28 Bauer, 244; Timothy D Johnson, A Gallant Little Army: The Mexico City Campaign (Lawrence, Kan: University Press of Kansas, 2007), 17. Taylor commented in a letter to Scott that these volunteers were “now in respectable discipline,” Taylor to Scott, Jan 15, 1847, H Ex Doc 56, 30th Cong, 1st Sess, 348.

29 Chance (ed.), Mexico Under Fire, 20-21, 92; Foos, A Short, Offhand Killing Affair, 125; in a similar circumstance, Scott left a Louisiana volunteer regiment to maintain the garrison at Tampico against its commander’s will. The Louisiana volunteers were notoriously racist and disrespectful toward the Mexican population, see COL Lewis G. DeRussy to Scott, Feb 27, 1847, Army of Occupation miscellaneous papers RG 94, E 133, Box 8 of 16, NARA 1.

30 John Reese Kenly, Memoirs of a Maryland Volunteer. War with Mexico, in the Years 1846-7-8 (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & co, 1873), 245; Hackenburg, Pennsylvania in the War with Mexico, 18.
The most important of these orders was General Order Number 20, in which Scott declared martial law over all of the occupied territory. Issued on February 19, 1847 at Tampico, Scott republished General Order Number 20 at Veracruz, Jalapa, and Mexico City. The order gave the commander legal authority to try American soldiers and Mexicans for crimes committed in the occupied regions but not covered under the Articles of War. These included murder, robbery, assault, rape, theft, and the desecration of churches or private property. There was no precedent for the establishment of martial law in U.S. history and some leaders resisted this action. Secretary of War Marcy called it an extreme measure and, according to Scott, General Taylor initially ignored the order, calling it “another of Scott’s lessons.” But Scott considered this policy one of his most important initiatives in Mexico and later wrote that “without it, I could not have maintained the discipline and honor of the army, or have reached the capital of Mexico . . . it has been admitted by all that the order worked like a charm; that it conciliated the Mexicans.”

To enforce the order, Scott mandated that military commissions made up of officers try and sentence soldiers immediately for their crimes. The military commission resembled a court martial in that it was created by order of the commander of the local regiment, corps, or garrison. The commission was to consist of three officers.

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31 Scott, *Memoirs*, V2, 394-395; After the war, the U.S. Army Provost Martial published *General Order 20* in a training packet on Military Government. A revision of the training packet published in 1960 claimed *General Order 20* “was the forerunner to various proclamations and orders which had the desired effect of conciliating the inhabitants and conserving the interests of the army and of the United States government,” *Training Packet 58*, p 3.

Regulars and volunteers were tried separately: regulars by regular officers, and volunteers by volunteers. Capital crimes and trials of officers were reserved for the authority of a General Officer or Colonel commanding a separate department.\textsuperscript{33}

The system of military commissions proved effective because it allowed rapid and public justice for crimes against the Mexicans. Yet it also had its problems, especially among the volunteers, since the officers charged with determining guilt and punishments were elected by their troops. On April 1, 1847 in Veracruz, Colonel G.T.M. Davis, an Illinois volunteer, oversaw the trials of volunteers and was determined to prevent the politics that was inherently a part of the system from affecting the equal distribution of justice. But Davis was disappointed when volunteers from Pennsylvania and Georgia only received a one-month imprisonment and forfeiture of pay for the same offense that Illinois volunteers had received three months. Davis was, however, satisfied that justice had been done for the offended inhabitant: the money collected was paid to the victim of the crime. In another case goods that were stolen, which valued approximately $300, were returned.

Davis also oversaw the trial of Isaac Kirk, a free black man working as a teamster, who was accused of raping a Mexican woman. Kirk was sentenced to death for the offense.\textsuperscript{34} Nine days later Scott had Kirk publicly hanged. The order of execution stated that the punishment be enforced outside the city walls so the public could witness it, and

\textsuperscript{33} *TP* 58, 17; United States and Abner Riviere Hetzel, *Military laws of the United States* (George Templeman, 1846), 117.

that notice was to be published in Spanish as well as English.\textsuperscript{35} Scott intended to display to both his soldiers and the Mexican people that his army would not abuse the population.

To inform the Mexicans of their rights under the occupation, Scott had all of his important orders translated and distributed to the local populace. Many orders were also published in the \textit{American Star} newspaper, a publication whose staff established operations in Mexico and followed the army throughout the campaign. Scott used these papers as a propaganda tool, and after occupying a new city, published court martial proceedings on the front pages of the paper to demonstrate to the Mexicans the good order that he was determined to enforce. For example, after the occupation of Puebla, the first American paper published in the city contained the details of recent courts-martial displayed on the front two pages. The command sentenced the guilty soldiers harshly, including forfeiture of all pay, having them carry thirty pounds on their back for one month, or wear an iron yoke with three prongs for an extended period of time, sometimes for the rest of their wartime service.\textsuperscript{36} After Puebla was occupied several Mexicans were tried for inducing Americans to desert. One was found guilty and his punishment was execution by firing squad, but the other two were found innocent by the court martial, demonstrating that there was fairness in the justice system.\textsuperscript{37}

General Order 20 was not the only disciplinary mandate Scott published. When reports of American soldiers committing criminal acts on Mexicans reached the

\textsuperscript{35} Scott, GO 101, April 9, 1847, RG 94, NARA 1.

\textsuperscript{36} \textit{American Star no. 2}, July 1, 1847, (Puebla, Mexico, Peoples, Barnard & Callahan), found in Independent Mexico in Newspapers, the 19\textsuperscript{th} Century, Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, U of Texas, Austin, Reel 19.

\textsuperscript{37} Scott, GO #126, May 28, 1847, RG 94, NARA 1; Johnson, \textit{A Gallant Little Army}, 136.
Commanding General in late March 1847, just after Veracruz was secured, he responded by issuing General Order 87. Published on 1 April, it chastised the army for committing abuses and appealed to the soldiers’ good conscience to police each other. It restricted the troops to their camps, unless given a pass by an officer, and reiterated the army would pay for all food and supplies. In response to accusations of American soldiers stealing from the Mexican population after the Battle of Cerro Gordo, Scott issued General Order 128 in which he warned “the General in Chief would infinitely prefer that the few who commit such outrages, should desert at once, and fight against us—then it would be easy to shoot them down, or to capture and hang them.” The rest of the document echoed much of the language of previous orders and added a requirement for officers to call roll at every halt during a march and three times a day in garrison.

The regular officers who typically acted as military governors in the cities strictly enforced Scott’s mandates. In response to crimes inflicted on Mexicans in Jalapa during the weeks after Cerro Gordo, the military governor, Colonel Thomas Childs, ordered a military commission. The worst offenders, three regulars and two volunteers, were each sentenced to receive fifty lashes for robbery. Childs presided over the punishment while seated on horseback. When the first few lashes were laid on rather gently, Childs had the soldier delivering the punishment thrown in the guard house; the rest of the lashings were laid on hard and slow. The regulars’ heads were then shaved and they were paraded

38 Scott, GO 87, April 1, 1847, RG 94, NARA I.
39 Scott, GO 128, 30 April, 1847, RG 94, Winfield Scott General Orders, NARA I.
through town to the tune of “rogues march”; the volunteers were sent back to their units after they were whipped.\textsuperscript{40}

In addition to using newspapers as a means to disseminate information and propaganda, Scott published “Proclamations.” On April 11, 1847, as the army prepared to move inland from Veracruz, the general issued a document titled \textit{Proclamation to the Mexican People}, in which he emphasized that the war was with the misguided Mexican government, not the people, and expressed respect for their church and culture. The \textit{Proclamation} highlighted that the army was strictly disciplined, referencing the execution of the American teamster that was conveniently timed the day before it was published. Scott assured the Mexicans that “Cash will be paid for everything this army may take or purchase, and protection will be given to all sellers,” and he invited the Mexicans to open their markets to the Americans. Finally, aiming to calm the natural resistance to foreign rule, he stressed that this was a temporary occupation, not an effort to conquer and occupy Mexico.\textsuperscript{41}

Almost immediately after the U.S. troops arrived, the Mexicans opened their markets and prospered from American soldiers’ dollars. The increase in demand led to an increase in prices as the weeks passed, in reaction to which the alcalde (city mayor) in Jalapa implemented price limits on food goods.\textsuperscript{42} George Wilkins Kendall of the New Orleans \textit{Picayune} wrote of Jalapa on May 6, 1847, “Col. Childs is governor of the city,

\begin{footnotes}
\item[40] Peskin (ed.), \textit{Volunteers: The Mexican War Journals of Private Richard Coulter and Sergeant Thomas Barclay}, 89, 97-98.
\item[41] Scott, Proclamation to the Mexican people, April 11, 1847, Mexican War Orders and Special Orders, RG 94, NARA 1.
\end{footnotes}
and a New England village is hardly more orderly and quiet than is this same Jalapa.”

Kendall was prone to exaggeration and biased to the American cause; it is more accurate to describe the behavior of the Jalapans as friendly and pragmatic under extreme circumstances—their army had just been routed and a neighboring city bombarded into submission.

Scott’s order to pay for all goods the Americans acquired from the Mexicans was imperfectly enforced, yet on the whole effective. The Mexicans brought goods to the U.S. soldiers in all of the occupied cities, and the Americans could purchase a dozen eggs for around fifty cents and a chicken for $1.50. In Veracruz the military governor, Colonel Henry Wilson, resisted efforts to move a portion of his garrison further inland because he had such a good relationship with the merchants in the city. When pressured, Wilson replied that the Mexicans brought his troops in Veracruz vegetables and eggs and he might not have that at a different location.

Security in the occupied cities was never perfect, and it remained dangerous to travel alone at night throughout the occupation, but it was not bad enough to prevent soldiers from pursuing leisure activities. They attended bull fights and visited the nearby ancient pyramid ruins at Cholula. Many American soldiers were reading copies of William Prescott’s *Conquest of Mexico* and were anxious to visit the places where the

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43 George Wilkins Kendall, *Dispatches from the Mexican War*, 234.

44 Hill, 94; Johnson, *A Gallant Little Army*, 58.

45 Wilson to Jones (AG), June 19, 21, 1847, AGLR, microfilm reel 366 W 1847, NARA 1, W515.
first conqueror of the Halls of Montezuma, Hernán Cortés, met his allies and enemies.\textsuperscript{46} The Mexican women in the interior cities commonly caught the soldiers’ attention. One noted that the women eventually warmed up to the Americans; “just their husbands, brothers, and fathers hated us.”\textsuperscript{47} To celebrate the Fourth of July, the military government in Puebla rented a large ballroom and the July 1\textsuperscript{st} edition of The American Star newspaper advertised that fifty Mexican women had already signed up to attend the event.\textsuperscript{48}

A final conciliatory measure Scott employed was to relieve the Mexicans from government taxes. When President Polk pushed Scott to collect the cost of the war from the Mexicans, he initially ignored the order. In his memoirs, the general explained:

> All Mexicans at first, regarded us as infidels and robbers. Hence there was not among them a farmer, miller, or dealer in subsistence, who would not have destroyed whatever property he could not remove beyond our reach sooner than allow it to be seized without compensation.”\textsuperscript{49}

In the occupied cities a moderate tax of twelve and a half cents was placed on twelve ounces of bread and every pound of meat, and six and a half cents on a quart of milk. These funds were used to run the city government.\textsuperscript{50}


\textsuperscript{47} Zeh, An Immigrant Soldier in the Mexican War, 46.

\textsuperscript{48} The American Star, July 1, 1847, Reel 19, Independent Mexico in Newspapers, BLAC.

\textsuperscript{49} Smith, The War with Mexico, V2, 552; LT Marsen Rudolph Patrick, Record of Subsistence, US Army at Veracruz, 4\textsuperscript{th} Quarter, 1847, in The Ralph G. Newman Collection, 1841-1848, Military History Institute, Carlisle, PA (MHI); Taylor also ignored Polk’s order in the north. The ability of Generals to ignore orders from the President was a product of poor and delayed communications between Mexico and Washington.

\textsuperscript{50} Worth, GO 6, April 1, 1847, Ho Ex Doc 60, 30\textsuperscript{th} Cong, 1\textsuperscript{st} Sess, p 934.
Scott’s strategy for managing the Mexican population was not all niceties and, in his April 11 *Proclamation*, he warned that the conciliatory carrot would be backed up with a dangerous stick. The General made clear that his was the superior military force in the country and that if the people cooperated he would provide for their security. Anticipating a guerrilla threat, he informed those not belonging to the Mexican army who attacked Americans that they acted in violation of the laws of war and would be “punished with rigor.” Lastly, he told the Mexicans he would hold local authorities accountable if they did not seize perpetrators of crimes against his army and turn them over to the Americans.51 There is little evidence that this later policy of collective responsibility was aggressively applied until after the seizure of Mexico City, when the counter-guerrilla war became the top priority. However, the American army certainly possessed the capacity to “punish” the Mexicans at will. The American ability to defeat the Mexicans in conventional battle and in smaller engagements was unchallenged throughout the central Mexico campaign.

The peaceful surrender of Puebla is probably the best example of the success of Scott’s conciliatory strategy. After the American victory at Cerro Gordo, and in response to an attempt by the Mexican government to sell off Church land, the Ayuntamiento refused to support Santa Anna and asked him to leave the town with his forces. While negotiations for the surrender of the city were underway, the Bishop of Puebla requested a second *Proclamation to the Mexican People* that guaranteed the security of the Church and discredited Santa Anna. The Catholic clergy and many elite simply wanted stability

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51 Scott, Proclamation to the Mexican people, April 11, 1847, Mexican War Orders and Special Orders, RG 94, NARA 1.
and guarantees for the security of their property. Encouraged by his close advisor, Lieutenant Colonel Ethan Allen Hitchcock, General Scott seized this opportunity for positive propaganda.\textsuperscript{52}

In his May 11, 1847 message to the Mexican people, Scott tried to discredit the Mexican papers that were advertising American excesses, replying that “we have not profaned your temples, nor abused your women, nor seized your property, as they would have you believe” and appealed to them to ask the clergy and civil authorities in the towns already occupied. Scott addressed the guerrilla parties directly: “such cut-throats,” he said “... will but force upon us the hard necessity of retaliation.”\textsuperscript{53} On May 15, 1847, Brigadier General James Worth’s division marched into Puebla uncontested. Worth reported to Scott that he exhausted his third edition of the \textit{Proclamation} and was overwhelmed by the number of natives coming to his door for more copies.\textsuperscript{54}

\textit{Administering the Cities}

While the American Army’s occupation of the three main cities en route to the capital (Veracruz, Jalapa, and Puebla) varied based upon their differing sizes, geographic locations, and method of occupation, they all shared several characteristics. A military governor was assigned immediately after occupation, and in all three he was a regular

\textsuperscript{52} London Times, July 15, 1847; Hitchcock, \textit{Fifty Years}, 255; Smith, \textit{The War With Mexico}, V2, 65, 358.

\textsuperscript{53} Scott, \textit{The General-in-chief of the Armies of the United States of America, To the Mexican People}, May 11, 1847, in TP 58, 30-32.

\textsuperscript{54} Elliott, \textit{Winfield Scott}, 484.
with vast military experience. Colonel (Brevet) Henry Wilson at Veracruz was an 1814 West Point graduate and former commander of a battalion of the 1st Infantry under Taylor’s army in the north; Colonel Thomas Childs at Jalapa then Puebla was an 1814 West Point graduate with combat experience under Scott during the War of 1812; and General William Worth at Veracruz then Puebla was an aide to Winfield Scott during the War of 1812 and a former Commandant at West Point.

The military governors all made efforts to isolate volunteers from the population in order to avoid inspiring resistance if undisciplined troops committed atrocities. At Veracruz and Jalapa, both cities with populations of less than 15,000, the American command stationed the volunteers several miles outside of the population center and implemented a pass system to regulate visits to the city. Since Puebla was much larger than Veracruz or Jalapa, the soldiers were garrisoned in public buildings including the bull ring and later several grand monasteries. This arrangement invariably led to disagreements and sometimes violence between the soldiers and Mexican occupants. One Indiana volunteer recalled having to pull out a knife and threaten one of the monks in the monastery where he was quartered in order to get the keys to the room he desired. Conversely, some of the regular officers lived in family homes and established lasting relationships with the Mexicans with whom they quartered.55

The military governors made efforts to employ Mexicans in city governments, police forces, and important municipal functions. After the bombardment of Veracruz, Worth hired about two hundred Mexicans to work cleaning up the city, and within a week

several American soldiers noted that Mexicans were returning to the town and beginning to interact freely with the occupation force. Most of the shops in the occupied cities reopened within a day or two of the occupation. The military government forbade the sale of liquor to U.S. soldiers, but authorized several liquor vendors who, for a fee of approximately fifty dollars per month, could sell wholesale, but only to Mexicans. The Army ordered new uniforms for every soldier from a Mexican merchant in Puebla—a major investment in the local economy.\(^56\)

Scott ordered that Mexican police forces be established in the occupied cities. These forces were small, in Veracruz and Jalapa around fifty to one hundred personnel, and were unarmed. The Mexican police performed many of the stationary public security duties inside of the city, while the Americans generally defended the walls and regularly patrolled the streets.\(^57\)

The Americans permitted the civil authorities to remain in place and govern only Mexican affairs. The role of the Mexican government varied among the three cities.

When the Americans first occupied Veracruz, Scott instructed Worth not to disturb the

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\(^{57}\) Scott, GO 75, March 28, 1847, RG 94, NARA I; Worth GO 3, Mar 30, 1847, Ho Ex Doc 60, 30th Cong, 1st Sess, pp. 932, 934; Captain John R.B. Gardenier to Col Henry Wilson, May 3, July 16, 1847, Wilson Papers, BLY; Aug 1, 1847, “State of the Police Guard in the City.” RG 94, E133, Box 12, *Letter Received by Colonel Childs, Civil and Military Governor of Puebla,* NARA 1; E.H. Barton, Board of Public Health to Wilson, June 5, 1847, Wilson Papers, BLY; Hill, *Diary,* 95.
ordinary function of the Civil Magistracy. In time though, the U.S. Army assumed the
majority of government functions. In all of the cities, the Alcalde (Mexican governor)
resigned not long after the occupation began, forcing the Americans to find a substitute.
For at least a part of the occupation of Veracruz, an American lieutenant colonel actually
filled this position.\textsuperscript{58}

The military governors lived in fear of guerrilla attacks after the U.S. Army left
their location and moved toward the capital. Scott had made the deliberate decision to
assume risk by leaving a small force to garrison each of these cities, as he felt he needed
a maximum number of soldiers at the front. Despite his fears, on May 3, 1847, Colonel
Wilson in Veracruz had to reduce his guard on duty from eighty-one to fifty-eight
Americans because of sickness. Captain John R.B. Gardenier, a regular and West Point
graduate, was charged with leading the city guard. He eventually gave up on manning all
of the city entrances and implemented a smaller guard unit with a ready force on call
sleeping with their arms.\textsuperscript{59}

Jalapa was the friendliest city the Americans occupied. The municipal authorities
echoed to their people Scott’s demands for order and threatened the city inhabitants with
punishment for disobeying the laws laid down by the military government. In particular,
they reinforced the prohibition on selling alcohol to the Americans.\textsuperscript{60} They cooperated
with the U.S. Army in the hospitals, which were temporarily overwhelmed by the influx

\textsuperscript{58} Worth Order #5, April 1, 1847, Ho Ex Doc 60, 30\textsuperscript{th} Cong, 1\textsuperscript{st} Sess, 934.
\textsuperscript{59} Capt John Gardenier to Wilson, May 3, July 16, 1847, Wilson papers, BLY.
\textsuperscript{60} Ayuntamiento to Military Governor, April 18, April 19, 1847, Jalapa Ayuntamiento Papers, BLY.
of Americans and Mexicans injured during the Battle of Cerro Gordo. There were 368 wounded Americans that needed medical aid after the battle, and the Jalapans helped.\footnote{Angel De Ochoa letter dated October 13, 1847, Jalapa Ayuntamiento Papers, BLY; Casualty figures from Bauer, The Mexican War, 268.}

In contrast to Jalapa, Puebla—geographically closer to the capital and a historically independent, militaristic society—was not as friendly to the invaders. Merchants still prospered off of the army, and set up their stands directly in front of the American housing, which on occasion caused problems as the food quality was questionable. The elite and church leaders interacted with the military government, but the people of Puebla on the whole remained at arm’s length.\footnote{LT John Dodd acted as the adjutant to the military governor in Puebla and notes good relations with merchants who prospered during the occupation, and notes interacting with the Mexican upper class at balls, John W. Dodd Letters, Dec 28, 1847, p 148, Jan 25, 1848, p. 166, Ohio Historical Society (hereafter OHS), Columbus, OH; Peskins, Volunteers, July 10, July 16, 125-127.} The city remained dangerous for soldiers who ventured out on their own, and reports of American soldiers being assassinated were common. To prevent these incidents, on July 9, Scott ordered the men not to leave their quarters without a sidearm and a pass from their commander.\footnote{Scott GO 206, July 9, 1847, TP-58, 41; McCaffrey, War Letters of Lieutenant Theodore Laidley, June 3, Oct 16, 1847, pp 93,109. Oswandel, 225; Peskins, Volunteers, July 10, 1847, 126.}

The Mexican population along the route to the capital largely cooperated with the Americans at first. In time, however, the Mexicans would mount a guerrilla resistance effort, but Scott’s conciliatory strategy stunted the growth of guerrilla parties during the early occupation. Probably the best example of Mexican cooperation is the collaboration of a part of the population that made up what the Americans referred to as the Mexican spy company.
The Mexican Spy Company

As Scott prepared at Puebla to attack the capital during June, July, and August 1847, guerrillas outside of the cities started to gain momentum. During this period, the U.S. command initiated an important part of its counter-guerrilla effort: the creation of the Mexican spy company. Colonel Ethan Allen Hitchcock, Scott’s adjutant general and intelligence coordinator, hired a group of Mexican “robbers” to work for the U.S. Army as spies, guides, and messengers. Their leader was an infamous criminal in central Mexico named Manuel Dominguez. The Mexican spy company provided the U.S. Army in central Mexico with critical intelligence for the attack on the capital. More importantly though, they guided several key raids against guerrilla camps and carried messages over the dangerous Mexican roads.64

Taking a lesson from their experience fighting Indians, American officers used indigenous spies throughout the war, but Hitchcock’s experience with the Mexican spy company was unique in its scale and level of success. The association began shortly after the army took control of Puebla. While the Americans were first establishing order in the town, the Mexican authorities pointed out Dominguez as a robber and requested that the Americans arrest him. Worth complied and the alleged criminal was thrown in jail. Several days later, Worth interviewed the outlaw and was impressed with his intelligence, so he asked Dominguez to work for the United States. When Scott moved to Puebla shortly after, Worth sent Dominguez to Colonel Hitchcock, who spoke Spanish and managed all of Scott’s covert operations. Hitchcock took an immediate liking to the man

and started employing him to carry important messages over the guerrilla- and criminal-infested roads. By the end of June 1847, Dominguez had earned Hitchcock’s trust and the Colonel asked him to see how many other Mexicans he could recruit to work for the Americans.\(^{65}\)

According to Hitchcock, Dominguez was a clever man who had gotten caught up in the intrigue of central Mexico during the tumultuous years prior to the U.S. invasion. He began his career as a bandit after he was robbed by a Mexican army officer while traveling between Veracruz and Puebla. Disgusted at the authorities’ abuse of power, he and a band of friends began patrolling the roads and forcing payments themselves. In time, the regular travelers began to pay him as an escort throughout the region. He resided in Puebla when he was not working the roads, and prior to the American occupation, the regular authorities had been afraid to arrest him.\(^{66}\)

In order to help Dominguez recruit other Mexicans, Hitchcock had him rearrested, thrown in prison, and then released several days later. After his release, Dominguez provided a list of twelve individuals for his spy band, all of whom had been confined for extended periods of time on charges of robbery but had never been tried. Scott approved the release of the twelve provided they were not charged with murder or rape. This band of thirteen made up the first spy company which would eventually grow as large as two

\(^{65}\) Hitchcock, *Fifty Years*, 263-264.

\(^{66}\) Hitchcock, *Fifty Years*, 335-336.
hundred. Dominguez claimed he could recruit up to two thousand Mexicans if the Americans desired.67

The army leadership in central Mexico valued the spy company’s service. Hitchcock paid each member $20 a month as opposed to $8 a month most American volunteer privates earned.68 While these relatively high wages inspired resentment among many U.S. soldiers, to Hitchcock this seemed like a good deal since “Each man counts, in fact, two for us, for if we did not employ them the enemy would; so that one detached from the enemy and transferred to us makes a difference of two in our favor.”69

Scott’s accounts for the war indicate that Hitchcock paid $1,023 in July 1847 for the various services of the spy company and by January 1848 the amount had increased to $3,500.70

The American association with this band of criminals may have alienated other elements of the Mexican population. Dominguez’s company showed little mercy when they made contact with Mexican guerrillas and likely continued many of their nefarious pre-war activities. On January 6, they attempted to execute forty Mexican lancers who surrendered to them, but were stopped by the Americans in their party.71

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68 The average U.S. Volunteer soldier only earned between $7 and $8 a month during the war, John W. Dodd to wife, May 3, 1847, Dodd Letters, OHS.
69 Hitchcock, Fifty Years, 265.
70 Lieutenant General Scott, S. Ex Doc 34, 34th Cong, 3rd Sess, 21-22 also see Caruso, 152; After the war, Hitchcock coordinated for Dominguez and eight members of his family to relocate to New Orleans and applied to Congress for a pension for his loyal service, Hitchcock, Fifty Years, 344.
Daniel Harvey Hill recorded that when the spy company passed through a town where U.S. troops were garrisoned, “the citizens were very much alarmed and shut up their houses.” An American merchant in Mexico employed as Scott’s translator refused to travel with Dominguez for fear the band would rob him en route. There were clear disadvantages to paying Mexican criminals, but the American leadership felt the spy company’s advantages far outweighed its disadvantages. General Scott, Colonel Hitchcock, and General Joseph Lane relied on the service this group provided and attribute great credit to the work of Dominguez’s band.

The Limits of Conciliation

While conciliation worked well inside of the cities, the small size of the American army in central Mexico made it impossible to maintain a presence along the routes and in smaller population centers. Security within the cities, and guerrillas outside, was the standard in central Mexico by the second half of 1847. This was partially a result of the Army’s own actions. Soldiers commonly violated Scott’s mandates on respecting the population when moving between towns and distant from their command authorities. Enforcement of good discipline required strong leadership throughout the organization.

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72 Hughes and Johnson (eds.), Daniel H. Hill Diary 171.
74 Hitchcock, Fifty years, 340-341; Anderson, Artillery Officer, 266; Scott to Marcy, January 13, 1848, Ho Ex Doc 56, 257; Joseph Lane, Report of Brigadier General Joseph Lane, March 2, 1848, 30th, 2nd Sess., Ho Ex Doc 1, 95-96.
and volunteer officers, who were elected by their subordinates, often did not control their unit’s behavior when they were separated from the army central command. The level of discipline within the army varied from unit to unit based upon the quality of the leadership.

In Jalapa just days after the U.S. Army entered the city, the *Ayuntamiento* (city government) filed specific complaints against the Americans including accounts of armed soldiers entering the city, pillaging homes and shooting unarmed Mexicans.\(^{75}\) In the days after the conclusion of the battle of Cerro Gordo on April 18, soldiers freely shot cows and stole chickens from the nearby ranches. The volunteers living in camps surrounding the city chaffed under disciplinary measures, particularly when they suffered cold rainy nights without tents and little food. On May 1, a group of Pennsylvania volunteers staged a small mutiny after their Colonel ignored their pleas for food. Subsequently, “A charge was made upon all the market greasers.”\(^{76}\)

As soldiers moved between cities, offensive actions were committed on the Mexicans. One particular instance speaks tellingly of the challenges the high command had with misconduct throughout the army. Colonel Henry L. Kinney, a resourceful logistician under Scott’s command, contracted with one of Santa Anna’s ranches located five miles southeast of Jalapa for mules and cattle to supply the army as it moved inland. Kinney was a Texan who had established the original trading post at Corpus Christi, had served as a logistician under Taylor in the north, and presumably had much experience in

\(^{75}\) Ayuntamiento to Military Governor, April 22, 25, 26, 1847, *Jalapa Ayuntamiento Papers*, BLY.

commerce with Mexicans. A Spanish agent named Nicolas Dorich was responsible for transferring the animals to the army and was located at the village of Boca Potraza waiting for the Americans. When the first division under General John A. Quitman passed through, Potraza sold beef to the unit and was treated with respect. When General Robert Patterson’s division came through, however, the volunteers attacked the agent, stole the $500 he had received from Kinney, forced him to provide liquor to the men, and then chased him off into the woods. Kinney reported to the American high command that “in consequence of this, the people have lost confidence they had previously, and have gone into the woods.”  This incident demonstrated the challenges Scott faced with the makeup of his force and the disparity between the volunteer units dependent upon the leadership. Both Quitman and Patterson’s divisions were made up entirely of volunteers, yet in this instance, one was far more disciplined than the other.

Discipline remained a challenge throughout the campaign. One factor working counter to Scott’s efforts was the lateness of pay. Commanders were reliant on the traveling paymaster to pay their soldiers. Paymasters were commonly delayed, leaving soldiers with little cash to purchase comfort items from the Mexican economy and encouraging criminal acts.  Frederick Zeh, a German immigrant who enlisted late in the war as a regular, noted that one of his fellow soldiers, who he referred to as Kessler,

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77 Johnson, A Gallant Little Army, 64; H.L. Kinney letter, no date, HED 60, 30th Cong, 1st Sess, 938; George Wilkins Kendall, Dispatches from the Mexican War (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999), 195.

78 Benjamin Larned to Colonel Henry Wilson, July 27, 1847, Henry Wilson Papers, 1829-1858, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University; The Pennsylvania volunteer J. Jacob Oswandel complained in July, 1847 that he had only been paid two months pay, $17.75 total, for his eight months service thus far and was robbed by a South Carolina volunteer leaving him broke. Oswandel, Notes on the Mexican War, 1846, 1847, 1848, (Philadelphia, Rev. Ed., 1885), 228, 238.
refused to serve any longer because of “inadequate provisioning with no extenuating circumstances; second, breach of contract in the matter of remuneration, which was supposedly due every two months and was now four months in arrears.” Kessler was bucked and raised by a rope tied around his thumbs in the center of the courtyard, but still refused to return to duty. Only when the back pay arrived did Kessler rejoin his unit.  

Many volunteers resisted authority because they disagreed with the policy of respecting the Catholic Church. Reflective of the anti-Catholic sentiment in the United States during the 1840s, these soldiers were harshly critical of the “Church of Rome” and blamed it for the “backwardness” of Mexican society. One recorded in his journal if anything can reconcile one to the injustice of carrying the war into the interior of Mexico, it would be the benefit that might possibly result, by showing the Mexicans the grievous inferiority of vigorous action which the deadening influence of this system has produced.  

When Colonel Thomas Childs, the first military governor of Jalapa, allowed religious processions through the city and ordered his soldiers to kneel and bow their heads as they passed, many regulars complied, but the volunteers present disregarded the “absurd order.”

**Mexican Resistance**

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81 Ballentine, 212-213.
By early summer, 1847, the guerrilla threat to the American army was formidable. Despite Scott’s best efforts to conciliate the populace and persuade the Mexican soldiers to obey the terms of their parole, the United States had too few troops in Mexico to extend its influence beyond the major population centers, especially before the Mexican Army had been destroyed. Furthermore, U.S. soldiers committed many hostile acts on the Mexican population, despite Scott’s best efforts to discipline the troops. The Mexican government was also considering using guerrillas to resist, despite their fear of the threat this form of warfare posed to the country’s social order. On April 28, 1847, after its army was routed at Cerro Gordo, the Mexican government sanctioned the use of partisan warfare by issuing a decree that called for a light corps of guerrillas to wage war against the Americans. The government was unable to fund the decree, which limited its effectiveness, but it did provide motivation and recruiting authority to several leaders.82 One recruiting message published in Mexico City read, “The conduct of the enemy, contrary both to humanity and natural rights, authorizes us to pursue him without pity. War without pity, unto death! will be the motto of the guerilla warfare of vengeance.”83

A perceptive volunteer described the makeup of the guerrillas as a mix of former soldiers and bandits. Many were well equipped and mounted and led by former officers, but the rest he accused of being “the most wretched and desperate ruffians in the country.” It was rumored among American soldiers that each band had its own priest that

82 Levinson, 34-35; Smith War with Mexico, V2, 421.

83 Marian Salas, Proclamation, April 21, 1847, H. Ex Doc 60, 30th Cong., 1st Sess., 951-952; Emphasis in the original document.
made them swear to pursue the Americans to their death.\textsuperscript{84} Indeed, while some were motivated by nationalism, or rather anti-Americanism, many Mexican guerrillas desired only to plunder the U.S. supply trains and merchants under American escort. Occasionally their efforts paid off. On June 7, 1847, guerrillas captured twenty-four of the 128 wagons that were part of Colonel James MacIntosh’s convoy at Paso de Ovejas, just twenty-five miles northwest of Veracruz.\textsuperscript{85} It took a total force of 1,345 Americans to clear the pass. Early successes motivated many Mexicans to join the criminal elements that already existed in central Mexico and for the next four months the U.S. Army would suffer greatly over this route.\textsuperscript{86}

Partisans took advantage of their knowledge of the terrain and staged at choke points to attack the convoys carrying large amounts of specie and equipment moving to reinforce Scott’s army. The eastern region between Perote and Veracruz was particularly well suited for guerrilla warfare with its many gullies, washes, and heavy chaparral along the sides of the roads.\textsuperscript{87} A soldier serving in this region claimed, “we would rather face ten of the regular Mexican army than one of these outlawed guerrillas.”\textsuperscript{88} In mid-June,

\textsuperscript{84} Oswandel, Notes, 215-216.


\textsuperscript{86} Levinson, Wars within War, 82; Smith, The War with Mexico, V2, 171.

\textsuperscript{87} U.S. commanders consistently complained about their inability to maneuver against the guerrillas because of the heavy chaparral along the roads in the low land east of Jalapa. See F.T. Lally to Adjutant General, Aug 27, 1847, 30\textsuperscript{th} Cong., 1\textsuperscript{st} Sess., S Ex Doc 1, 485; Lane, Joseph. Autobiography of Joseph Lane, recorded by Bancroft, 1878, Property of Bancroft Library, 28; Kenly, Memoirs, 312.

\textsuperscript{88} Oswandel, Notes, 216.
General George Cadwallader, who commanded one of the convoys that attempted to move through this region, estimated it would take 5,000 troops, at least 2,000 of which were mounted, to maintain open communications. Colonel Henry Wilson would not permit a convoy of less than one thousand troops to move inland from Veracruz during June, July, and August of 1847. 89

In August, the guerrillas launched a string of successful attacks on a train led by Major Folloit Lally as his force of one thousand volunteers traveled from Veracruz to Jalapa. Lally reported four major contacts and sustained 105 American casualties—twenty-two killed, seventy-one wounded, and twelve missing. While Lally survived the operation without losing any of his sixty-four wagons, the reinforcements sent to assist him from Veracruz were not as fortunate. 90 These three companies under the command of Captain J. M. Wells left Veracruz on August 13 and never made it past the National Bridge where Mexican artillery pieces placed on high ground inflicted forty casualties on the two-hundred-man force and captured all but one of their wagons. 91 Finally, on September 9, under the competent leadership of Colonel George W. Hughes, a well organized force of infantry, dragoons, and artillery composed of ten companies in total (around 1,000 troops), took and occupied the fort at Puenta nacional overlooking the National Bridge. While driven from the key terrain, the guerrillas kept the American

89 Cadwallader to Jones (AG), June 13, 1847; Wilson to Jones (AG), June 19, 1847, Cadwallader to Jones (AG), July 20, 1847, all in AGLR, microfilm reel 366W, 1847, NARA 1, W486, W515, W564; William B. Taliaferro journal, August 26, 1847, The Aztec Club Historical Papers, Box 35, Military History Institute (MHI), Carlisle, PA.

90 F.T. Lally to Adjutant General, Aug 27, 1847, 30th Cong., 1st Sess., S Ex Doc 1, 482-485, 495.

91 Brook, Complete History, 454, Smith, War with Mexico, 172.
garrison at *Puerta Nacional* in a state of siege, constantly exposing them to sniper fire for the next two months. Volunteer Major John R. Kenly, in his journal entry of September 29 compared *Puente Nacional* to an overturned bee hive: “and instead of bees, guerillas were the occupants; . . . swarms of exasperated Mexicans, who, maddened by the loss of their capital, threw themselves on the line of Scott’s communications.”

![Image: The National Bridge](image)

**Figure 4: The National Bridge**

Mexicans also resisted in other non-violent ways. While the authorities inside of the occupied cities overtly cooperated, they were not mere pawns of the military governors. In response to General Order 128, which held the local Mexican authorities responsible for attacks on American trains, the Mexican authorities in Jalapa pointed out

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to General Scott that they had no way to enforce law and order outside of the city, and it was unfair to hold the city residents responsible. Their police force was small and not allowed to carry firearms, and they felt it unfair for the Americans to hold them responsible for the roads outside of the city limits.94

Another form of resistance was refusal to serve in leadership positions under the occupation. When the first alcalde of Jalapa expressed his desire to retire from service at the beginning of May 1847, the military governor, Colonel Thomas Childs, agreed but reminded him that the law stated he had to call together a group of citizens to elect a replacement. The meeting was held a week later under American supervision. Getting someone to serve was not as easy as calling the meeting. The first official the city authorities elected claimed he could not perform the duties because he did not have time since he had another occupation. The second claimed that he was not eligible because he was not a legitimate resident of the city, and the third claimed that he already held another important appointment. The job of chief collaborator was clearly not sought after. To resolve the situation, Childs ordered the latter two elected officials to share the duties.95

The Ayuntamiento also defied American authority by maintaining a dialogue with the exiled Mexican state governor of Veracruz, Jaun de Soto. When he discovered this, Childs ordered the Mexicans in a cordial, yet forceful tone to turn over the correspondences. After this May 21 request for the communications was ignored, he

94 Ayuntamiento to Gen Scott, May 1, 1847, Jalapa Ayuntamiento Papers, BLY.
95 Childs to Sayago (Alcalde), May 2; Ayuntamiento Announcement, May 6; Vincent to Sayago, 7 May; Childs to Sayago, 8 May 1847, Jalapa Ayuntamiento Papers, BLY.
wrote the Ayuntamiento ordering them to comply or else “I shall be complied to take such steps for the security of this town against internal intrigue as will be disagreeable to me and to the inhabitants of Jalapa and especially the municipal authority.”⁹⁶ Despite Childs’s best efforts, the Mexican authorities would remain in contact with the exiled Veracruz governor throughout most of the occupation. The Mexicans’ pragmatic desire to play both sides in the conflict is understandable, as the occupation was from the start advertised as temporary. The Mexican collaborators’ fears that the Americans would desert them would become reality in June when Scott pulled the garrison at Jalapa forward to support the attack on Mexico City.

Once his army was established in Puebla and reinforcements arrived, Winfield Scott made the controversial decision to cut his supply lines with Veracruz by pulling forward the garrison at Jalapa and smaller outposts along the supply route. He was aware of the vulnerability of his extended lines and wary of the growing guerrilla war. Additionally, by pulling the garrison at Jalapa forward, he maximized the number of troops he could concentrate on the capital. The nearly eleven-thousand-man army would rely on the Mexican population for sustenance until November.⁹⁷ This decision, which could have left his army stranded in the middle of Mexico, was a calculated risk. The choice was an indicator of Scott’s confidence in his relationship with the Mexicans, and of how short he was on manpower.

⁹⁶ Childs to Jalapa ayuntamiento, May 21, May 25, 1847, Jalapa Ayuntamiento Papers, BLY.

The real losers as a result of Scott’s decision were the Mexicans who had collaborated, and who were reliant on the Americans for protection from the guerrillas. The population of Jalapa was the most vulnerable. When the U.S. Army garrison left Jalapa in mid-June, the citizens agreed to continue to care for a number of wounded soldiers who could not make the trip. When it became apparent that guerrilla parties were prowling about the town, the authorities had the sick Americans arrested in order to prevent them from falling into the hands of guerrillas. The Alcalde’s efforts were without effect, as the guerrillas entered on October 14, discovered the Americans, and took them into custody. They took the sick Americans from the Jalapans, but eventually paroled them as long as they swore not to fight again. The guerrillas did not treat many of the Mexican collaborators with similar mercy. A Frenchman who passed through Jalapa during the American absence reported that robbers and guerrillas plundered those who had been friendly to the occupation force and supplied them with goods.

*The Failure of Conciliation: The Siege of Puebla*

Resistance within the Mexican population reached a peak in Puebla in the immediate aftermath of the fall of Mexico City. Puebla was peacefully occupied by the Americans in May 1847 because of the Church leadership’s political power and

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98 Ballentine, 215-16; Ayuntamiento Letters dated June 12, June 15, Oct 14, Oct 14, 1847, Jalapa Ayuntamiento Papers, BLY.

99 Kenly, 327.

100 Kenly, 325-326.
pragmatic desire to save the beautiful city from the destruction witnessed in Veracruz. Unlike Jalapa, however, the population was overtly hostile toward the Americans from the start of the occupation, and a large guerrilla force under the command of the Mexican General Joaquín Rea lurked in the countryside around the city. Rea was an old soldier who had served as a guerrilla during the Mexican War for Independence (1810-1821). He organized groups of guerrillas and tried to enforce a set of rules on them, but had little success with the diverse and unruly bands.  

When the American army moved out of Puebla to attack Mexico City, Scott left behind only a small garrison of four hundred able-bodied Americans, part of a Mexican spy company, and 1,800 sick under the command of Colonel Thomas Childs. Shortly after the army departed, Rea’s force moved in and was joined by a large number of disgruntled Mexicans willing to fight the invaders. The truce around Mexico City delayed activity until September 13, when word was received in Puebla that fighting at the capital had recommenced. At this time, thousands of guerrillas moved into Puebla and attacked Mexicans who had too willingly collaborated. The guerrillas plundered shops that had supported the Americans, and shaved the heads and chopped off the ears of several women who had become too close with American soldiers. On September 22, the remnants of Santa Anna’s army that had been forced out of the capital joined the siege, giving the Mexicans a greater than two to one advantage, and more than two-thirds of the American force was the sick from the hospitals.


102 Winders, “Puebla’s Forgotten Heroes,” 8, 13; Johnson, *A Gallant Little Army*, 248; McCaffrey (ed.), *Letters of Theodore Laidley*, 105. The exact numbers of Mexicans in the guerrilla and conventional force is unclear, but estimates range as high as 5,000 guerrillas and another 4,000 regulars. Childs cited the number
The siege of Puebla may have been the most desperate moment a major American force faced in Mexico, and the fall of the city might have cut off Scott’s army in the capital and inspired more Mexicans to engage in guerrilla warfare; but instead, superior discipline and equipment—notably artillery—led to an American victory. Under the leadership of Colonel Thomas Childs and several competent subordinates, the garrison held off the Mexicans for a month until reinforcements broke the siege. Anticipating the attack, Childs had ordered the force to consolidate on three defensible positions: Fort Guadalupe and Fort Loretto on the northern edge of the city, a plaza that contained the Cathedral de San José, and a stone government building called the Cuartel. From these positions the Americans utilized their artillery and well-timed counterattacks to fight off numerous Mexican charges. Childs also credited the Mexican Spy Company for providing “accurate information of the movements of the enemy, and the designs of the citizens.” 103

On October 11, after nearly a month of fighting, American reinforcements traveling from Veracruz under the leadership of the volunteer Colonel Joseph Lane arrived and broke the siege. The victory had been costly: Childs’s garrison sustained nineteen killed and fifty-one wounded. The Mexican population suffered even worse. In the confusion of the battle to regain control of the city from 11 to 13 October, the Poblanos were abused by both Mexican guerrillas and Americans. An American officer at 8,000. Thomas Childs, “Official Report of Colonel Childs,” Oct 13, 1847, in Flag of Freedom, Jan 15, 1848, (Puebla, Mexico: Krister and Company) found in Independent Mexico in Newspapers, the 19th Century, Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, U of Texas, Austin, Reel 21, p. 333. 103 Childs, “Official Report of Colonel Childs,” Flag of Freedom, p 333, 335 (quote); Winders, “Puebla’s Forgotten Heroes,” 8-21.
expressed his sympathy for the civilians caught in the middle: “in every respect they suffered more than we—their own soldiers robbed and plundered as well as our own—many citizens found themselves reduced from affluent circumstances to poverty in a night’s time.”\footnote{Childs, “Official Report of the Seige of Puebla,” Flag of Freedom, pp. 333, 335 (quote); Winders, “Puebla’s Forgotten Heroes,” 8-21. Laidley, 109 (quote); Dodd Papers, OHS, 112.}

The siege of Puebla ultimately failed and the Americans quickly reasserted their authority in Puebla and for the remainder of the war maintained a much larger garrison there. Poblanos largely recognized that further armed resistance was counterproductive. Shortly after the siege ended, the city Prefect ordered an assembly to address the people’s concerns. He argued that “it is not patriotism, but rather an assault on morality to ambush the enemy. Peaceful citizens are not concerned with war, neither should this happen in the city.”\footnote{Prefect of Puebla to the inhabitants, Oct 14, 1847, quoted in Sandoval, “Puebla Durante La Invasión Norteamericana,” 414.} The siege was an important victory for the American occupation force over the guerrillas, and would mark the beginning of the decline of the guerrilla forces in central Mexico.

Not all cities in central Mexico contained the underlying hostility evident in Puebla. The different sentiments toward the American Army seen in the occupied cities demonstrated the great disparity and regional power structure in Mexico during this era. Generally speaking, the closer the city was to the capital, the more hostile its population was toward the Americans. In Jalapa, the people welcomed the Americans on their arrival, cared for their sick, and tried to protect the American invalids from the guerrillas when Scott pulled the Army forward to attack the capital. The population of Veracruz
also put up little resistance. The economic boom these cities experienced as a result of Scott’s policy of paying for all goods also helped assuage Mexican pride at being occupied. The diminutive population and major battles before the seizure of these two cities may also have influenced their desire to resist the occupation force.

Winfield Scott employed a strategy of conciliation during 1847 in central Mexico because he recognized the nature of the war into which his army was entering, and the potential to lose the campaign to guerrilla resistance if he antagonized the populace. His study of European wars, in particular the Napoleonic experience in Spain, and his observation of the difficulties General Zachary Taylor had in northern Mexico, convinced him of the importance of appealing to the sentiments of the populace during the central Mexico Campaign. His combat experience, notably the War of 1812 and the Second Seminole War, prepared him for dealing with the challenges he faced with a largely volunteer army and an enemy utilizing guerrilla tactics. His strategy for managing the Mexican population and military government was well thought out prior to beginning the campaign.

Scott’s strategy of conciliation in Mexico succeeded in getting his army safely to Mexico City and allowing it to focus on the more dangerous conventional threat posed by General Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna and the Mexican army. Competent administration of the major population centers, combined with the clear military superiority of the American forces, convinced many Mexicans that cooperation with the invading army was their best option. But as witnessed in Puebla and with the guerrilla attacks outside of the cities, Mexicans retained the will to resist. The temporary nature of the occupation made it difficult to convince many Mexicans to support the invasion force wholeheartedly, and
city governments pragmatically cooperated but attempted to maintain good standing with exiled Mexican leaders who were still intent on resistance. Those who collaborated too overtly commonly paid a price when the Americans left.

Scott’s conciliation of the Mexican population was a necessary element to achieving the United States’ desired solution in Mexico, but was not sufficient to end the war. Conciliation did not achieve the American strategic objective of convincing the Mexicans that further resistance was futile, and that they should agree to the American terms for peace. After the Mexican capital fell on September 14, 1847, the Mexican government simply displaced to Querétaro where they continued to inspire resistance and plea for foreign assistance. Scott’s strategy of achieving decisive military victory accompanied by conciliatory overtures toward the population failed to achieve the overall strategic objectives. This was partially because the plan was imperfectly implemented; more specifically, because of criminal acts committed against the Mexican populace by Scott’s force. Second, the small size of the U.S. Army made the mission a difficult one from the beginning by forcing the Americans to parole many Mexicans who would later fight against them again, and because it could not always remain in place to protect collaborators. Equally important was the Mexican will to resist, which remained strong even after the capital fell, and was something the Americans consistently underestimated. The Americans could control the cities with relative ease, but the countryside remained a battle zone throughout most of 1847. Conciliation was important, but it would take a change in the overall approach to the occupation to convince the Mexicans to agree to the American terms and end the war.
Chapter VI: Pacification in Mexico City

We are not ignorant of our duties as Mexicans and as public officials, and nothing shall stop us from fulfilling them. We shall adopt measures which are in the interest of this populace, which has been led through ill-fortune into its suffering, whenever it is within our power to do so.

—Manuel Reyes y Veramendi to Antonio López de Santa Anna, Mexico City, September 16, 1847

On August 5, 1847, General Winfield Scott’s army marched out of Pueblo toward the capital. After defeating the Mexican army on the outskirts of the city, the General chose not to enter Mexico City immediately, but to attempt to negotiate a Mexican surrender. He intended to maintain the Mexican government in place so he would have someone with whom to negotiate the President’s demands. Additionally, he hoped to avoid the pillaging that inevitably accompanied an attack on a city. Scott understood that the support or neutrality of the people in the capital with a population of over 200,000 was critical to his success.¹

The Mexican General, Santa Anna, had no intention of agreeing to the American demands and used this pause to reinforce his defenses. Nineteen days later, Scott recognized he had been deceived, and after a series of dramatic battles, took the city. The Mexican army evacuated after its outposts at Molino Del Rey and Chapultepec were

captured and the American artillery moved into range of the historic capital’s center. This decision, which was likely influenced by the previous bombardment of Veracruz, spared Mexico City from destruction. Santa Anna led the Mexican army, which consisted of about five thousand infantry and four thousand cavalry, in retreat from Mexico City to the village of Guadalupe Hidalgo, and then on to Puebla where the force would further disintegrate after a month long, failed siege of the city. The rest of the Mexican government displaced to Querétaro, a city located about 170 miles northwest of the capital, where they continued to coordinate resistance. The war was not over, but the seizure of Mexico City was the final major force-on-force battle.

Between September 14, 1847 and February 2, 1848 the Mexicans held out and continued to attempt to thwart the United States’ plans to annex the northern half of their country, or at least lessen the American demands. Pacifying Mexico City, the largest city in Mexico and its capital was a critical part of convincing the Mexicans that a “national” resistance would fail. The Americans would use the occupation of the capital to exploit Mexican political rivalries, and play upon the possibility that they would annex all of Mexico in order to increase pressure to end the war on the moderato-dominated government in Querétaro.
Resistance in the Capital

--“It will adopt the extremes of heroic resolve before it will consent to such disgrace and such opprobrium.”

During the dramatic months following the fall of Mexico City, the preservation of honor was a theme that dominated the speeches of the Mexican politicians arguing for and against signing a treaty. Lobbying in favor of a treaty with the Americans, the Mexican Minister of Foreign Relations, Luis de la Rosa argued that if the U.S. was demanding dishonorable conditions of peace, he would resist at all cost, “But this extremity has not yet arrived, and the government must say in frankness at this time, that up to this period the invader has not demanded any conditions for peace which would be disgraceful to the Republic.” Alternatively, the prominent Mexican politician Manual Crescencio Rejón argued during the treaty ratification process that by accepting the agreement, “the very nationhood of the republic will be undermined,” and that it would simply encourage the rapidly growing United States to further “press against our nation.” Both Rosa and Rejón recognized that the Mexican government, in order to survive in the aftermath of the war, had to present the image that they were fighting hard to gain the best possible peace under the circumstances. Without honor in the eyes of the majority of the people, their government would not last long in the tumultuous political environment that characterized nineteenth-century Mexico.

2 Manuel Crescencio Rejón, April 17, 1848, in Robinson, The View from Chapultepec, 96.


In addition to the need to preserve their honor, there were several other prominent motivations for the Mexicans to resist. Many held out hope until the end that a foreign government would intervene on the Mexican side. Multiple sources reported that as late as December 1847, Mexican leaders were applying to the British and French for support. José María Luis Mora, the Mexican minister to Britain, apparently on his own initiative, offered to sell California to Britain in November 1847. Others were encouraged by the early successes achieved by the Mexican guerrillas, and still others by the resistance to the war within the American population and their Congress. If they could hold out and make the war painful enough for the Americans, maybe Mexico could retain its honor and much of its territory that the Americans were now occupying.

The Americans certainly recognized that foreign intervention was a possibility. Nicolas Trist, the American diplomat representing Polk in Mexico during peace negotiations, explained in one of his letters to the Secretary of State that early during the peace negotiations several groups were actively seeking support from the French in the form of a French monarch for Mexico. Secretary of State James Buchanan echoed this sentiment at a dinner held in December 1847 in Washington D.C.: “The great obstacle to peace with Mexico at this moment is the hope on her part of a powerful European

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intervention in her favor . . .”\(^8\) Despite Mexican efforts, the government could never inspire enough confidence in their nation’s military ability to gain the interest of a foreign sponsor.\(^9\) The situation in Britain—focused elsewhere and unwilling to cross its major trading partner, the United States, and France—ambitious but too weak to mount a major overseas war—further mitigated the Mexican chances at receiving foreign aid.

Foreign assistance did not come, but many Mexicans never gave up hope in the guerrillas’ ability to wear down the American will. After the Mexican government authorized individual citizens to raise guerrilla parties in April 1847, the guerrillas effectively shut down the American supply lines during the summer of that year.\(^10\) In Puebla, Colonel Thomas Childs suffered through a month-long siege from September to October when nearly four thousand guerrillas surrounded the city.\(^11\) The prominent Mexican statesmen Mariano Otero, Carlos María de Bustamante, and Manuel Crescencion Rejón argued for continued guerrilla resistance. The latter two, when they were junior politicians, had witnessed the success of guerrillas in the Mexican war for independence. Bustamante, in a book written during the Mexican-America War, argued that the United States had forgotten its own history, when North American rebels used protracted guerrilla warfare to defeat the British and gain independence.\(^12\)

\(^8\) “The American Star, Mexico City,” March 3, 1848, Benson Collection, Reel 74, p 371.

\(^9\) This interpretation is based upon the author’s wide research and David Pletcher’s excellent diplomatic history of this era in U.S. history, The Diplomacy of Annexation, 5, 597.

\(^10\) Cadwalader to Jones (AG), June 13, 1847; Wilson to Jones (AG), June 19, 1847, Cadwallader to Jones (AG), July 20, 1847, all in AGLR, microfilm Reel 366W, 1847, NARA 1, W486, W515, W564.


\(^12\) Robinson, The View from Chapultepec, 51, 91, 71, 74.
Those who supported continued resistance could also cite opposition to the war that existed in the American Congress as evidence of progress. Senators Daniel Webster, Thomas Corwin, and Henry Clay led the Whig efforts to end the war. The most prominent and potentially damaging blow to the American cause came when, in November 1847, Whig Senator Henry Clay, in an effort to reassert himself as a presidential candidate, proposed a “No Territory” solution to the Mexican War. Following the lead of Webster and Corwin, Clay advocated that Congress take control of the war, define a clear end state, and force the President to adopt these stated objectives. He recommended taking no Mexican territory on the grounds that the war was unjust from the beginning. A series of anti-war rallies in Louisville, Cincinnati, Philadelphia, New York, and Trenton adopted Clay’s “No Territory” solution.  

Some of this resistance to the occupation of Central Mexico even pervaded the officer corps. On September 17 in Mexico City, Brigadier General Persifor Smith recommended withdrawing from central Mexico and defending the regions of the north that Polk desired, since the fall of the capital had not immediately brought peace. Scott threatened Smith with charges of treason if he continued to advocate this course.

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Word of the dissention in Congress rapidly made its way to Mexico. The papers in Mexico published Clay’s damaging speech. Nicolas Trist complained that Clay’s speech had encouraged the Mexican government to hold out at a time when he felt he was on the verge of succeeding in achieving the administration’s goals. Soldiers in Mexico expressed frustration at the “miserable, scheming, shuffling demagogues” in Congress, and one explained to his wife that Mr. Clay and Mr. Corwin’s speeches “are all printed in Spanish, hawked about the streets of every city and town in Mexico.” Mexican politicians heard and took hope. Mariano Otero never accepted the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo and cited the opposition to the war present in the U.S. government as slow progress, but progress nonetheless.

Measures were taken by the papers and the military government to negate the effect of American politics on Mexican hopes for a voluntary withdrawal. The American Star, a newspaper established in Mexico by two newspapermen from New Orleans, pointed out that despite some opposition, Americans were still “thronging around the war.” Furthermore, for every article advertising political opposition to the war, there was another that pushed for the “All Mexico” option, meaning the U.S. would annex the

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15 The American papers published the speech but immediately rendered harsh criticism on it and similar rhetoric that called for an end to the war short of the administration’s land demands.

16 Trist to Buchanan, No 25, Dec 29, 1847 in Manning (ed.) Diplomatic Correspondence, 1028.

17 John W. Dodd to wife, Jan 26, 1847, John W. Dodd Papers, MSS 512, Ohio Historical Society (hereafter OHS), Columbus, OH (quotes); Daniel Harvey Hill, A Fighter from Way Back: The Mexican War Diary of Lt. Daniel Harvey Hill, 4th Artillery, USA, Nathaniel Cheairs Hughes Jr. and Timothy D. Johnson (eds.), (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 2002), 167.

18 Robinson, The View from Chapultepec, 2.
entire country. And while the American papers in Mexico had a tendency to exaggerate in favor of the Polk administration’s policies, the opposition in the United States never gained enough support to empower Congress to limit the war effort.

Yet on September 14, 1847, the day the Mexican capital fell, much of the Mexican government that displaced to Querétaro still possessed the will to resist. Some hoped for complete expulsion of the invader, while others simply for better terms of peace than what the Americans were offering. The first step toward defeating this resistance was to quell it in the occupied capital.

The Occupation of Mexico City

Defeating resistance in Mexico City was a critical first step to convincing the Mexicans of the futility of further resistance. On September 14, 1847, after the Mexican army withdrew from the city, the Americans marched unopposed into the central square and began the occupation. All was not quiet, however, and as the U.S. Army raised the stars and stripes over the central plaza, Mexicans on top of the buildings surrounding the square opened fire. Urban guerrilla-style attacks like this commenced around the city, some by criminals recently freed from prison, but others by Mexican patriots intent on resisting the occupation. General Quitman, the recently-appointed civil and military

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19 “The American Star” Mexico City, Dec 24, 1847, Benson Collection, Reel 72, 163-164 (quote); “Flag of Freedom,” Puebla, Mexico, Dec 22 1847, Benson Collection, Reel 21, 225.

20 This interpretation reflects Schroeder, Mr. Polk’s War.
governor, reacted by ordering the clearing of every building from which fire came.\textsuperscript{21} Scott authorized the use of extreme force, while at the same time appealing to the local Mexican authorities for their assistance. His men used artillery at close range, leveling several buildings to neutralize lone snipers, and Scott issued a warning through the Mexican \textit{ayuntamiento} and the clergy that if the violence did not stop in three hours “he will proceed with all rigor against the guilty, permitting their goods and property to be sacked, and razing the block in which are situated the houses from which the American troops are fired upon.”\textsuperscript{22} The \textit{Ayuntamiento} got Scott’s message and issued a proclamation pleading with the population to stop resisting:

\begin{quote}
when fortune deserted us, when the army abandoned the capital, it became clear that further hostilities on our part, instead of helping the country, would be imprudent, . . . The duty of the unarmed inhabitants of the capital is to conduct themselves in a moderate and peaceful manner.
\end{quote}

American firepower prevailed, and the violence died down in twenty-four hours; over the next week the army restored order. American patrols remained active in the belligerent parts of the city, arresting all who were armed.\textsuperscript{23}

The tit-for-tat fighting in the streets in the aftermath of the occupation of Mexico City opened the door for volunteers and regulars to commit atrocities on Mexicans, primarily theft and murder of innocent civilians. Lieutenant Daniel H. Hill, a regular officer involved in quelling the violence, estimated that over two hundred U.S. soldiers

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{21} Davis, \textit{Autobiography}, 240; Hill, \textit{Diary}, 135; Bauer, \textit{The Mexican War}, 322, Bauer claimed there were 30,000 prisoners released.
\item \textsuperscript{22} Hitchcock, \textit{Fifty Years}, 305; Davis, \textit{Autobiography}, 240; Scott to \textit{ayuntamiento}, Sept 14, 1847, quoted in Smith, \textit{The War with Mexico}, V2, 420.
\end{itemize}
were killed in the uprising, and many more Mexicans “as we repeatedly fired on the mob with grape and canister.” Hill accused some soldiers of pretending to hear shots fired from wealthy-looking homes in order to plunder and sack them. In time, though, normalcy returned to the city and the leadership regained control of the soldiers.24

Unlike in Puebla, where the clergy led the peaceful handover, in the capital the clergy initially instigated resistance. On Sunday morning, September 19, the American authorities noticed that there were no church bells ringing in the city. They quickly surmised that the church leaders had ordered all of the churches to remain closed and were advertising to the people that the Americans were suppressing their Catholic faith. Quitman responded by calling a meeting of the clergy and warning them that if the churches were not opened immediately he would remove the American flags, which symbolized protection, from their entrances and expose them to “the vicissitudes and spoliations incident to a state of war.” The clergy heeded the message and Sunday worship began shortly thereafter.25

The Mexicans also resisted by continually appealing to Catholics in the U.S. Army to change sides and support their religious brethren in Mexico. By now, Scott was familiar with this tactic. On September 22, 1847, he issued General Order 296, which reminded the soldiers of the fate of the traitors who had been captured at Churubusco. The so-called San Patricios Battalion (Saint Patrick’s) of deserters was composed of over two hundred Americans, many of whom were recent foreign immigrants to the United States. Fifty were executed and fifteen received fifty lashes and were branded with the

24 Hill, Diary, 128-129.
letter D before being drummed out of the service on September 12, as the American army sat poised to take Mexico City. Winfield Scott demonstrated his commitment to the laws of war by lessening the punishment of the group’s leader, John Riley, because he had deserted before the declaration of war. Under the Articles of War, the army could punish a deserter in a time of peace with no more than whipping and branding, which is what Riley received in lieu of a death sentence.26

To appease the clergy, who shortly concluded that cooperation was their best option, Scott authorized the initial release of a large number of prisoners of war in Mexico City. In November, Archbishop Manuel Posada y Garduño appealed to Scott to free more prisoners. Scott initially refused because of the repeated evidence that those paroled earlier in the campaign had rejoined the army and again fought against the Americans. Finally, on December 22, Scott, the ayuntamiento, and the bishop reached an agreement and the Americans released five hundred prisoners. In exchange, the Catholic leaders issued an oath to the former soldiers to prevent them from engaging in future hostilities against the occupation force. Scott hoped that tying religious significance to their parole agreement would discourage further resistance.27

A tense situation existed in the capital for several weeks after the American occupation began. The army was greatly outnumbered by Mexicans capable of armed

26 Scott, GO 296, Sept 22, 1847, RG 94, E134, NARA I; While there are many accounts of the San Patricios, Robert Miller’s Shamrock and Sword is generally considered the best source, Robert Ryal Miller, Shamrock and Sword: The Saint Patrick’s Battalion in the U.S.-Mexican War (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1989).

27 Scott, Memoirs, V 2, 540-546; 30th Cong., 1st Sess., H. Ex Doc 56, 244-247 contains a series of letters between Gen Scott and the archbishop of Mexico City, working through details of the release and conciliation of the people; see also Miller, Shamrock and Sword, 122. Miller’s account cites the Mexican newspaper El Monitor Republicano and his source and closely parallels Scott’s account of the negotiations.
resistance. Lieutenant Hill complained that while he was in charge of the prison guard, despite his best efforts, more than two thousand Mexicans escaped because he did not have enough troops to cover the many tunnels and secret passageways that ran in and out of the city prison. In addition, Hill feared an uprising among the large population. In Puebla, guerrillas entered the city and pressured the authorities into cooperating in an attack that placed the small American garrison under siege from September 13 until it was relieved on October 13. If Puebla fell, Hill felt that the many Mexicans opposed to the occupation in the capital would rise up in a similar fashion and overwhelm the Americans. As it was, the American pickets were fired on every night, and soldiers who wandered off alone were frequently killed.\(^{28}\)

The Americans wasted little time implementing what by this time were well-rehearsed tactics of the occupation and they quickly achieved stability in the city. Officers inflicted harsh and public punishment on Mexicans and Americans who broke the commander’s mandates. The *American Star* published the court proceedings on the front page in both Spanish and English in order to advertise the good discipline in Scott’s army. Officers implemented regular public drilling and roll call, which also contributed to the return of discipline and relative normalcy to the city.\(^{29}\) The American leadership initially housed the majority of the soldiers in public buildings including the city bull ring (temporarily), a shut-down tobacco factory, and the university dormitories; or they stayed

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\(^{29}\) *American Star*, Mexico City, September 23, 1847, Benson Collection, Reel 72, p 333; Hill, *Diary*, 135.
in the large convents or monasteries that had empty rooms available. A larger number of regulars than Scott desired quartered on the population, though usually in houses that had been vacated prior to the American occupation. In time, however, the American leadership would push the majority of the soldiers out of private homes and into vacant public buildings.

The three regular divisions and the volunteer division were each assigned a part of the city and one major gate to occupy and defend, while the cavalry brigade was tasked to provide a six-man detachment to each of the divisions to act as couriers. Two weeks after the occupation began, Scott standardized a system of duty officers to run the occupation forces. He ordered that each regiment assign a Captain or Subaltern of the Day, who would inspect quarters and the mess for order and cleanliness, parade the regimental guards, and order roll calls at unexpected periods. Each Division was to assign a field officer of the day who acted as the tactical commander for the division area. This major or lieutenant colonel commanded the pickets which consisted of one third of each regiment. Finally, a general officer of the day was assigned as Scott’s representative and would oversee the entire garrison, preserving the internal order and the external defense. This included inspecting the pickets and organizing patrols for missions outside the perimeter of the city.


31 Scott, GO 289, Sept 18, 1847, RG 94, VOL 41 ½ Headquarters of the Army, Orders and Special Orders, NARA 1; Zeh, An Immigrant Soldier, 50-51; Hill, Diary, 139; Kirkham, Journal, 74, 84.

32 Scott, GO 298, September 24, 1847, RG 94, Vol 41 ½, NARA 1.
General Quitman, the civil and military governor of the city, handled the civil-military relations. As with the previous city occupations, Quitman opted to keep many of the local officials in office. Using the existing city government helped the Americans quickly bring the city back to a tranquil state. Quitman gathered a staff of six officers from his division who were augmented by two secretaries, two interpreters, and two clerks to run the military government, and also eventually appointed a lieutenant governor to fulfill the day-to-day duties of the office of military governor.\textsuperscript{33} The most important position in the organization proved to be the military secretary, a position filled by Captain George T.M. Davis. Davis performed many of the routine tasks of the occupation government, including hearing and settling many of the Mexican complaints during the first few days of the occupation. Referencing the Mexican government in the city, he recorded that after the initial uprising was quelled the civil authorities “exhibited a spirit more resigned to the inevitable” and desired to cooperate with the Americans “in restoring and preserving entire tranquility.”\textsuperscript{34}

The role of the ayuntamiento was limited and clearly subordinate to the Americans. They were charged early on with increasing the size of the Mexican police force by six hundred men to make up for the attrition of the force during the battle for the city and those who refused to serve under the Americans. They ayuntamiento also oversaw the trials of Mexican-on-Mexican crimes.\textsuperscript{35}

\textsuperscript{33} Baker II, “Mexico City,” 46-47.
\textsuperscript{34} Davis, Autobiography, 242, 246, (quote on 242).
\textsuperscript{35} Davis, Autobiography, 246.
A significant difference in this occupation compared to other cities in Mexico was that Scott assessed a $150,000 indemnity upon the city, something he felt justified to do within the laws of war, and as a response to Polk’s continued prodding to make the war pay for itself. Twenty thousand dollars of this fund were dedicated to the establishment of a hospital for the sick and wounded Americans; $90,000 went toward purchasing a blanket and two pairs of shoes for each soldier; and $40,000 was held for other military purposes, which included $2,000 that immediately went to Quitman for secret service purposes.\(^{36}\) The military government tasked the *ayuntamiento* with raising these funds. In order to accomplish this, Scott authorized the Mexican leaders to assume all tax collecting powers within the city, including those formerly held by the federal government. This included the unpopular *alcabalas*, the tax charged on goods—mostly farm produce—as they entered the city gates. American shipments were excluded. The Mexicans were also allowed to manage the post office and sell what was left over of the captured government tobacco after the American army took a two-month supply for its soldiers.\(^{37}\) Quitman required the *ayuntamiento* to report its financial expenditures at least weekly to the military government.\(^{38}\)

The American efforts at conciliation in the capital included efforts to demonstrate the benefits of the occupation government. Quitman issued orders to clean out the *alameda* (the central park) and the Americans hired close to a thousand Mexican women

\(^{36}\) Ibid.

\(^{37}\) The government-run tobacco monopoly was shut down because the Americans planned to open the country up for the sale of American tobacco.

to make the uniforms and shoes for the army. Scott again issued strongly worded orders about respecting the Catholic churches, and attended services to demonstrate his support of this institution. Quitman’s administration performed several random acts of kindness that may have won over some of the upper class in the capital. When the wife of the Mexican General Mendoza appealed to him to parole her husband because her children were sick and dying, he complied and also handed her a ten dollar gold coin to help her immediately. In a similar instance, in early October, a Mexican priest came to Quitman with a request to force the Mexico City ayuntamiento to pay the legal monthly stipend to the wife of the deceased Mexican General Vasques, who was killed at Cerro Gordo. Vasques’s wife was sick and because she was not being paid, could no longer afford her prescriptions. In turn, Quitman had his military secretary confront the Mexico City ayuntamiento, who legally controlled the funds for this type of pension, and chastised them for denying this sick woman her due. Davis threatened that if they allowed this outrage to continue, “if there be no other resort, (it) will be remedied by the officers of the United States Army.” The ayuntamiento—having its honor publicly questioned—immediately paid the pension. Quitman, a lawyer and politician prior to volunteering to serve in Mexico, was a logical choice to soothe the apprehensions of the Mexican population.

The occupation force perfected the use of newspapers for propaganda by the time the capital was occupied. The American Star was a more professionally-produced paper

39 Ibid., Sept 23, Sept 25, 1847.
40 Ibid., Sept 25, 1847; Scott, GO 297, Sept 24, 1847, RG 94, Vol 41 ½, NARA 1.
than many of its counterparts in the north, and left out many (though not all) of the blatant racist insults against the Mexicans that the early editions of publications in Matamoros and Saltillo contained. *The American Star*—which was run by the same editors who organized the Veracruz *Eagle*, and *The American Star* in Jalapa and Puebla—published the American message in English and Spanish. The September 23, 1847 issue of *The Star*—after its full page of courts-martial proceedings—contained an article clearly aimed at convincing the Mexicans that cooperation was their best option. First the author expressed his satisfaction that the shops in Mexico City were all opening and normalcy was returning; next he highlighted that three large groups of reinforcements were en route to the city and that the American soldiers injured were healing well; finally he claimed that General Taylor had just received large reinforcements as well, and would soon march on San Luis Potosi, which was not true but did reflect what many soldiers thought should happen.\(^{42}\) When, during the first week of the occupation, a court found a Mexican “not guilty” of trying to incite rebellion, Scott approved the court’s finding but ordered the article not to be published, seemingly because it did not fit the message he was trying to send at that moment.\(^{43}\) The paper clearly served well the purposes of Scott’s military government.

The Mexican and American papers commonly fought a war of words. In early December when the Americans began expansion of the occupation, *The Star* published an editorial from the *Mexican Independente*, a Mexican paper in San Luis Potosi that argued the United States could not effectively occupy the entire country because of the great

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\(^{42}\) Ibid., 335.

\(^{43}\) Baker III, “Mexico City,” 91.
distances, and the ease with which guerrillas could attack Americans along the roads. *The Star* countered that the United States would in fact have enough troops as forty thousand were currently en route and Americans were volunteering for service faster than the government could process them—a clear exaggeration, but one that served the military government’s purpose well. In addition, both sides’ papers regularly published accusations of atrocities committed by the other.

The strict discipline Scott imposed upon his army may have been the most important element of the successful occupation of Mexico City. In reaction, however, desertion—primarily by immigrants in the regular army—continued to plague the occupation force. The San Patricios Battalion of American deserters, which had been largely destroyed during the battle for Mexico City, reformed in Querétaro out of American turncoats, and grew to two companies of 114 men (228 in total) by March 1848. The Americans responded to continued desertion problems by ordering courts-martial of deserters and arresting Mexican agents accused of tempting deserters. A council of war tried four of these agents in January 1848 for “enticing, persuading and endeavoring to induce enlisted soldiers of the American army to desert the American service and join the Mexican Army.” Three were found guilty. The first received a sentence of hard labor for the remainder of the war, and the second one month of hard labor. Both had aided desertions in minor ways including, in the lesser case, providing a disguise. The third, Manuel Sanzeda, who had specifically solicited a private to desert,

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was sentenced to be shot, but Scott later lessened his sentence because he deemed the evidence questionable.\textsuperscript{46} Despite these efforts, desertion was a reality that plagued the U.S. Army throughout the war.

\textit{Puros and Social Revolution}

After the Mexican army evacuated the capital, the Mexico City \textit{ayuntamiento} remained and was under the \textit{moderato} political party leadership of Manuel Reyes y Veramendi. This governing body found itself in the same precarious situation that the previous governments under the American occupation had experienced. It ultimately chose cooperation, bowing to the American military superiority in order to best protect its people. The \textit{ayuntamiento} was pressured to cooperate by many elite families in the city, who wanted protection of their property. For example, on September 15, the governing body received reports from the barrio of Santa Anna that bands of Mexican criminals were robbing and murdering the wealthy locals.\textsuperscript{47}

The \textit{ayuntamiento}’s cooperation was of course controversial, and no one criticized them more than Santa Anna. In response to his criticisms, the \textit{ayuntamiento} replied,

\begin{quote}
We are not ignorant of our duties as Mexicans and as public officials, and nothing shall stop us from fulfilling them. We shall adopt measures which are in the interest of this populace, which has been led through ill-fortune into its suffering, whenever it is within our power to do so.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{46} Miller, \textit{Shamrock and Sword}, 125.

\textsuperscript{47} Berge, “A Mexican Dilemma,” 239-240.
One such measure was to reconstitute the Mexican police force that worked closely with its American counterpart to enforce order. The ayuntamiento also expanded its jurisdiction to cover the entire Federal District of Mexico—it had previously only governed the city limits—as the district’s government had disappeared with Santa Anna.\footnote{Manuel Reyes y Veramendi to Antonio López de Santa Anna, Mexico, D.F., Sept 16, 1847 in Berge, “A Mexican Dilemma,” 237, 239.}

Veramendi played his cards carefully, knowing that the occupation was likely temporary and that he would have to reconcile with the Mexican politicians who continued to resist after the capital had fallen. His animosity toward the Americans was exacerbated by Scott’s increasing financial demands, which included feeding the thousands of prisoners the Americans held briefly as a result of the battle for Mexico City, and the $150,000 “contribution.” The ayuntamiento was slow in paying, and was forced to take a loan at a fifteen percent rate to meet this demand, which ultimately contributed to Mexico’s post-war financial problems. Veramendi and the other moderato politicians became increasingly resistant to American demands as time progressed. They continued to communicate closely and obey orders given by the exiled Mexican government, and pressured the Mexican courts to punish those who cooperated too closely with the Americans. There is also evidence that they encouraged the Mexican newspaper, El Monitor Republicano, to publish articles accusing the Americans of breaking their promise to protect the populace by allowing American soldiers to commit atrocities on city residents. Some of these accusations were true, but similar to the American papers published in Mexico they tended to be one-sided and contained many
exaggerations to meet their political objectives. The _ayuntamiento_ would exceed the limit of American tolerance in late October when, in the process of executing its duty to find public places for newly-arrived American soldiers, it issued a poorly coordinated list of quarters to Major General Robert Paterson and his 4,000 American reinforcements who had just arrived. The list contained buildings that were already occupied by Americans or were so dilapidated, that upon inspection, commanders deemed them unhealthy for occupants.

In an effort to neuter the _moderato_-led _ayuntamiento_, Scott threw his weight behind their political rival party, the _puros_, in the annual elections scheduled to take place in December. First, he advertised the injustice of the traditional _alcabalas_ tax that targeted the lower and middle class merchants, and that the _ayuntamiento_ was enforcing to meet the American financial demands. Second, he leveraged the American papers to criminalize the _moderato_ government. Finally, on order of the government in Querétaro, the _moderatos_ hurt their own chances by boycotting the election, then in what amounted to a major political blunder, attempted to schedule their own election a few days after the official, American-sanctioned tally. The American-sanctioned election went forward and by the end of December, the _moderatos_ were ousted, and the _puro_ party had taken control of the government that now controlled the entire district of Mexico. The _puros_ were, as a party, more radical and resistant to the occupation, yet in this case, pragmatism ruled the day, and in an effort to implement their agenda for post-war Mexico, _puros_ under their leader Suarez Iriarte proved much more pliant to Scott’s demands. The _moderato-

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dominated government in Querétaro soon felt the pressure of having their archrivals implementing policy in the entire District of Mexico. 50

The struggle for power between the military government and the Mexico City ayuntamiento subsided after the puros took over. While the ayuntamiento initially had a semblance of authority, the Americans eventually oversaw most of the day-to-day affairs, and were clearly in charge. After the army spread about the city and the military government got organized, the role of the Mexicans in city government decreased. They still handled some taxation—particularly when collecting to meet American financial demands—and settled most disputes among Mexicans, but their role in large functions such as policing was minimized. The Mexican police played a part in the early occupation, but the presence of the Americans largely undermined their authority, and the American military government regularly received complaints from the Mexicans that their police and other civil servants were being ignored and harassed by American soldiers. 51

During the first week of January 1848 major reforms were implemented to the police system in Mexico City. The American force was expanded to 455 specially selected soldiers, while the Mexican force was reduced to 100 members to be used only as guards at important Mexican sites. The force was divided into five eighty-man

50 Berge, “A Mexican Dilemma,” 242-244. Baker II, “Mexico City” 229-234; The puros upon assuming power immediately issued a document titled “instructions” that detailed their plan for reform. It included a self-sufficient state of “Tenochtitlan” (the pre-Spanish-conquest name for Mexico City), creation of “true democracy” by the establishment of a trial by jury system and an end to special privilege or fueros (particularly for clergy and military), reorganization taxes that ended alcabalas and replaced them with a property tax that all citizens were subject to. The document also hinted at a “confederation” with the United States. Baker III, “Mexico City,” 214-217.

companies and each company placed in charge of one of the city’s four districts. The fifth company served in the region around the national palace. Brigadier General Persifor F. Smith, who took over as military governor from Quitman in October, selected the lieutenants he wanted in charge of each company by name, and told the divisions that “the best men must be selected” to fill the rest of the force. The soldiers received additional pay: privates 12 cents, corporals 25 cents, and sergeants 50 cents per day.52

Captain Giles Porter, a regular and class of 1818 West Point graduate, was placed in charge of the force and immediately made several logical suggestions to improve security in the city. These included prohibiting the sale of alcohol to enlisted personnel and teamsters after reveille, and issuing licenses so that only certain vendors could sell alcohol at all. He also pressed for reforms in the teamster system that would militarize their organization in an effort to better control this unruly group and prevent American soldiers from leaving the army after their first term in order to enjoy the better life of a teamster. Finally, Porter requested that other patrols in the city be suspended so that only his police force interacted with the populace in this official capacity.53 Several of these recommendations, notably those on alcohol restrictions, were eventually implemented.

The American monopoly on police duties was one indication that the U.S. Army was incrementally taking more control of the administration of the Mexican capital. By

52 Capt Giles Porter to BG PF Smith, Jan 5, Jan 28, 1848, RG 94, E130, Vol 9 of 9, “Mexico City Letters Sent, Jan-May 1848,” NARA 1; BG P.F. Smith to Scott, Dec 12, 1847, RG 94, E 133, Box 1 of 16, “Army of Occupation Miscellaneous Papers,” NARA 1; BG P.F. Smith, GO 1, Dec 17, 1847, “Brig Gen Persifor F. Smith, Aug 17, 1846-June2, 1848,” RG 94, E134, Vol 20 of 23, NARA 1 (quote); there were also four soldiers designated secret police and one head of secret police.

53 Capt Giles Porter to BG PF Smith, Jan 5, 1848, RG 94, E130 Vol 9 of 9, Mexico City, Letters Sent, Jan-May 1848, NARA 1.
doing so, Winfield Scott was able to achieve better security within the city and thus able to prevent guerrilla resistance from growing. Unfortunately for the Mexicans, this subjugation would make it harder to take over after the American occupation ended.

While stability seemed to be established in the capital by December 1848, the Mexican newspaper reports of American atrocities during the early months in Mexico City were not totally unfounded. Discipline improved over time, but there were still incidents that bred animosity between the American army and the population. Yet most of these incidents were more punitive rather than unsolicited or racially motivated atrocities as historians have sometimes characterized them.\textsuperscript{54} For example, a newspaper in Mexico carried a story from a letter written to the editor of one such conflict between Mexicans and American soldiers that occurred on Sunday, October 17. In this incident, a group of soldiers on their way to a bull fight in the capital were fired upon from the roofs of houses. The soldiers immediately entered houses and “cut down” those they found inside and—presumably to make a point—threw a number of Mexicans found on the roofs down into the street. Several suffered from broken legs and arms as a result.

Sniper fire from the roofs of buildings in the city was a constant bane to the occupation force, so when they could determine where it came from, the Americans reacted with rapid and harsh measures.\textsuperscript{55}

\textsuperscript{54} For example David A. Clary refers to the American behavior in Mexico City during this time in the following manner: “The rapacity of the volunteers caused general outrages because of the widespread looting, the murder of civilians, hundreds of rapes, and nearly universal drunkenness on stolen liquor” but supports this with little evidence from Central Mexico. David A. Clary, \textit{Eagles and Empire: The United States, Mexico, and the Struggle for a Continent} (Bantam, 2009), 379.

\textsuperscript{55} “Flag of Freedom” Puebla, Mexico, October 27, 1847, (Puebla: Kritser and Company), \textit{Independent Mexico in Newspapers}, BLAC, University of Texas, Austin, Reel 21, p. 198.
Another more extreme incident took place in late December 1847 after a Texas Ranger wandered into what was considered a lower-class part of the city on his own and was attacked by a crowd bearing knives. The Texan’s horse dragged him out and he died eight hours later, presumably leaving him time enough to describe the incident and location to his fellow Rangers. That night a group of Texans returned to this part of the city and a large, primarily one-sided firefight erupted. When the city patrol arrived, the Rangers addressed them and explained the situation, after which the patrol joined in. Rip Ford, a Texas Ranger who served in close proximity to Texas Ranger leader Jack Hays in Mexico, reported that more than eighty Mexicans died in the incident. Scott was furious at the string of incidents surrounding the Rangers during the month they were in the capital, and afterwards kept them employed outside of this populated area.56 In both of these cases the Americans clearly overreacted and likely caused much animosity amongst the populace; still it is not appropriate to refer to the American excesses as one-sided atrocities committed unsolicited against Mexicans. Throughout the first three months of the American stay in Mexico City there was at least one American soldier, and frequently three or four, killed each day by Mexican knives.57

The military governments in the cities were able to achieve relative stability, enough so that many Mexicans were willing to remain neutral or collaborate. Despite the


57 References one or several soldier being killed a day are in many of the accounts from American participants in Mexico City including Hill, *Diary*, 135; Ballentine, *Autobiography*, 272-273; Kirkham, *Journal*, 68; Zeh, *Notes*, 48; Ford, *Rip Ford’s Texas*, 83; Richard McSherry, *El Puchero: Or, A Mixed Dish from Mexico* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, Grambo, 1850), 149. See also Scott, GO 296, Sept 22, 1847.
ayuntamiento’s prohibition against public celebrations, which was likely an effort to resist the appearance of stability the Americans sought, the Mexicans celebrated All Saints Day on October 31, 1847, just a month and a half after the fall of the capital. One American soldier noted “the streets are crowded with a gay throng today and stands loaded with toys and sweet-meats crowd the Portales and the Plaza.”

Another recorded that the Mexican women, who feared the northern “barbarians” at first were by late November “seen walking arm in arm with our soldiers, one speaking Spanish and the other English by conveying their ideas principally by sign.”

Soldiers felt safe enough to venture in groups to bull fights, operas, and historic sites on the outskirts of the city. In mid-November, even Scott ventured out with some of his officers to revisit the battlefield at Churubusco, and the bypassed Mexican position at El Peñon. As the Mexicans continued to hold out, several lieutenants considered bringing their wives to Mexico. While there was crime in the population centers, and American soldiers were occasionally stabbed in dark alleys, multiple educated soldiers in Mexico noted that those killed frequently exposed themselves by wandering into dangerous parts of the city while they were intoxicated. Several soldiers compared the

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58 Hill, Diary, 139.

59 Diary of Robert Hagan, December 1, 1847, Center for American History, The University of Texas, Austin, 72-73; A similar quote about the “softer sex walking in the street with confidence” appeared in The American Star, (Mexico City), September 28, 1848.

60 Kirkham, 80-81, 84; John Lowe to his wife, April 17, 1848, “John W. Lowe Letters,” Dayton and Montgomery County Public Library, Dayton, Ohio; for other examples of soldiers traveling to see the tourist sights in Mexico see Keenly, 380, 388; Scott, Memoirs, 2: 457-458.

61 Childs to Scott, Jan 4, 1848, Child’s, Thomas, Letters Jan -April 1848 when acting as Military Governor of Puebla, M 1597 Brough House Books, Reel 2 of 3, Property of the University of North Carolina (UNC); Ballentine, Autobiography, 268, 272-273.
security situation to that in an American city: there were bad parts where crime was common, but overall the city was safe. Piercy Doyle, the British chargé d’affaires who traveled through the occupied cities noted that the Americans “behaved very well” and that despite the “rough character” of many of the American volunteers, “General Scott has made severe examples, which seems to have had a most salutary effect.”

Several Mexicans noted the increased stability the American military government provided in the cities. The prominent Mexican politician Maren Otero, in what was admittedly a politically motivated argument, published an essay that commented on the occupation policy. He claimed that “the United States Army has not endured the republic in the same spirit in which armies in the past have marched through conquered countries, spreading terror and death everywhere, robbing or destroying property, violating the women, . . .” Otero continued that the U.S. had indeed relieved the Mexicans from much of the “disorder and pillage of which they have been the victims for so many years.”

Gutiérrez de Estrada, another respected Mexican, noted that the Americans provided better security of property than the Mexican government had ever done. Finally, another Mexican author recollected: “The churches remained open and frequented, as usual; and the church, thanks to the talent and good policy of the most illustrious Sr.

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62 Piercy Doyle, Jan 13, 1848, Dispatches to Palmerson, as cited in Baker III, “Mexico City,” 77; see also Justin H. Smith, “American Rule in Mexico” American Historical Review 23, Jan 1918, 301.

63 Mario Otero, Considerations Relating to the Political and Social Situation of the Mexican Republic in the Year of 1847, in Cecil Robinson(translator and editor), A View from Chapultec, Mexican Writers on the Mexican-American War (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1989), 17.

64 J.M. Gutiérrez de Estrada, México en 1840 y en 1847, as quoted in Smith, “American Rule” 301.
Archbishop of Cesarea, K. Juan Manuel Irisarri, maintained her rights and was respected.⁶⁵

The effect of achieving relative security and stability in Mexico City was critical to the success of the American mission in Mexico. First, by establishing a secure environment in this city of over 200,000 residents, the army removed a large potential pool of supporters for the guerrillas. Stability also enabled the Americans to focus on the next phase of their occupation strategy, which would encompass expansion and taxation to increase the pressure on the Mexicans to agree to the American peace terms.

Second, by allowing the puros to implement social reforms and expand their power throughout the district of Mexico, the Americans increased pressure to end the war on the moderatos political party that dominated the government in Querétaro. The longer the puros were allowed to implement their agenda—which included empowering the indigenous population, removing the political and legal privileges of the army and clergy, and imposing a federal system where the states held most of the power—the more difficult it would be to reverse these measures. Of even greater concern to the moderatos though, were the puro overtures to the Americans to annex all of Mexico—an offer that many Americans believed the Polk administration should have taken. Stability in the capital added significantly to the mounting pressure on the Mexican government to end the war.

⁶⁵ Ramón Alcaraz, The Other Side, or, Notes for the History of the War Between Mexico and the United States (New York: J. Wiley, 1850), 417-432.
Chapter VII: Bearing the Burdens of War: Central Mexico, September 1847 – June 1848

The policy of levying upon the enemy contributions in every form consistently with the laws of nations, which it may be practicable for our military commanders to adopt, should, in my judgment, be rigidly enforced, and orders to this effect have accordingly been given.

—President James K Polk, Third Annual Message, December 6, 1847

So much terror has been impressed upon them, at thus having the war brought to their own homes, that I am inclined to believe they will give us no more trouble.

—Report of Brigadier General Joseph Lane, October 22, 1847

Shortly after the fall of Mexico City, the senior American leadership implemented a major change in the occupation strategy. Conciliation had helped get Scott to Mexico City and stabilize the capital, but the general realized that he could no longer ignore his superior’s guidance, and that conciliation was not going to win the war. Elements of the “velvet glove” strategy would continue, but Scott now came on board with policies that President Polk had been pushing from the beginning by making the Mexicans pay for the cost of the occupation, and leveraging this financial burden to pressure the Mexicans to end the war.

In a series of speeches and letters between October and December 1847, the Polk administration made clear that it sought to force peace upon the Mexicans by making
them “feel the burdens of the war.” The primary tool of this strategy was a heavy tax on the Mexicans that would fund the cost of the occupation until the Mexicans agreed to the American demands. This was to be accompanied by a major expansion of the area the U.S. Army occupied. President Polk was convinced that some were resisting peace because of the “pecuniary benefits” they received from the American policy of paying for goods and services. Polk’s tax plan would increase the pressure on the country’s leadership to accept his peace terms by cutting into the revenue required by the Mexicans to run their government and continue resistance, and by inducing the Mexican people, particularly the wealthy who would suffer under the tax, to pressure their leaders to end the war. This policy also had objectives on the home front: Polk hoped that by lessening the cost of the war he would undermine the anti-war contingent in the United States. Closely related to the taxation policy were several other measures to facilitate the collection of the revenue and to directly pressure the Mexicans to agree to peace.

This policy differed relatively little in its objective from the early guidance that Polk had issued to Scott and Taylor about forcing the Mexicans to pay for the war. Both generals initially decided not to implement the seizure of sustenance, housing, and taxation because of the effect this might have on their conciliatory strategy. Now that

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they were in control of the capital and the Mexican army was for the most part disbanded, their philosophy toward taxation changed.

Winfield Scott’s goal during this phase of the war was no different than the previous phases, or nearly any war for that matter: to break the will of the enemy resistance before his own nation lost its will to secure victory. Conciliation had gotten him to the capital, but in order to convince the Mexicans to agree to the American demands for peace, he decided to increase the pressure while at the same time—through close coordination with the American negotiator Nicholas Trist—provide the Mexican leadership a way out that could preserve a degree of honor in the face of their countrymen. Nicholas Trist continually reminded the Mexicans that they could end the conflict by simply accepting the generous terms he had to offer, which included a payment for the land the United States desired. *The American Star* newspaper reiterated this message in English and Spanish when it advertised the expansion and taxation policy. The December 2 issue of *The Star* noted, “Mexico has no right to complain of this—for she can, at any moment, have a different policy pursued towards her. It lies with her . . . to bring this war to a close.”

The first step in implementing this strategy was to increase the size of the American occupation force in central Mexico. The intent of this buildup was to demonstrate to the Mexicans the American resolve to finish the war, and to provide Scott with the troops necessary to defeat the guerrilla resistance along the major routes and

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expand the occupation. The Secretary of War ordered new troops to central Mexico, eventually bringing Scott’s force to 24,816. The Americans reasoned that defeating the guerrillas would break the will of many Mexicans, and open up the major routes to international trade, which the Americans would then tax in order to help fund the occupation. The army also expanded the occupation and took control of the major revenue-producing cities surrounding the capital, the most important target being the city of Pachuca because of its proximity to the large mines at Real del Monte.

Scott’s subordinate commanders were, by the nature of distances and delayed communications, given a high level of responsibility on how they implemented this strategy. Having competent leaders at critical subordinate outposts—notably Colonel Thomas Childs in Puebla and Colonel George W. Hughes in Jalapa—was vital to the successful implementation of these policies, and Scott chose these men carefully.

Fundamental elements of the conciliation strategy continued. Respect for the church, fair treatment of the populace, and paying for food products remained in effect, and the Army punished soldiers harshly when they mistreated the population until the end of the war. However, these conciliatory tactics were now accompanied by measures meant to make the people of Mexico “bear a considerable part of the burden of the war,” so as to convince them to accept the U.S. terms and stop fighting. They would “as a means to peace, . . . be made to feel its evils.”

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5 Scott to Marcy, Feb 2, 1848, HED 60, 30th Cong, 1st Sess, 1082.
6 Marcy to Scott, Dec 14, 1847 (first quote), Marcy to Scott, Oct 6, 1847 (second quote), both in HED 60, 30th Cong, 1st Sess, 1037, 1007.
Out Fighting Guerrillas

The guerrilla war in Central Mexico provided hope to many Mexicans as a last resort to defeat the American invasion force. In order to break the Mexican will to resist, the Americans had to demonstrate that guerrilla warfare could not succeed in persuading them to lessen their demands. By the time Winfield Scott had seized Mexico City, large guerrilla parties had cut his supply lines. Ultimately, the Americans needed to break the guerrillas’ momentum in order to reestablish supply and communication lines to the coast, to open the trade routes so international merchants could be taxed, and most significantly, to break the will of the Mexicans still resisting peace.  

In September 1847, after Scott took the capital, the Secretary of War transferred two brigades—2,957 troops in total—from Taylor’s force in the north to central Mexico to help Scott reopen his lines. This was the start of the planned 15,000 additional troops that the Polk administration planned to send to central Mexico. One of these regiments was commanded by Brigadier General Joseph Lane, a volunteer officer from Indiana who had distinguished himself during the Battle of Buena Vista in February of that same year. All of the U.S. commanders targeted guerrillas during the period between October 1847 and March 1848, but Lane’s brigade is notable for the success it achieved, the expansive area it covered, and the brutality it inflicted on the Mexicans.

7 Marcy to Scott, Oct 6, 1847, both in 30th Cong, 1st Sess, HED 60, 1005-1006.
8 Bauer, The Mexican War, 328.
Joseph Lane grew up in Kentucky, on the Ohio River, which was still frontier country in the early nineteenth century. His father fought with William Henry Harrison against the Indians under Tecumseh and their British allies during the War of 1812. Young Joseph left home and started out on his own in Indiana when he was only fourteen and eventually became a prominent leader in the new state. A natural leader, he served several terms in the state House of Representatives and the Senate, the first of which when he was just twenty-one years old. When the Mexican War began, he resigned from his position in the state Senate and offered his services to the Indiana volunteers where he was elected colonel, and then quickly promoted to brigadier general. Lane was forty-five years old when he left Indiana for Mexico. His life on the frontier, where Indian attacks were a daily reality and every man was trained to ride a horse and shoot a gun, prepared him for military service in Mexico. Lane excelled in Mexico not because of his study and experience, but rather his leadership, instinct, and aggressiveness.

Lane was popular with his men because he brought victories. He drove them relentlessly on the march and his unit became renowned for the great distances it covered in short periods of time. He showed little sympathy for the sick or weaker men and several dropped dead in the heat while marching or were left behind and preyed upon by the guerrillas. In addition to his ability to move troops rapidly in response to intelligence, Lane succeeded because of the simplicity of his planning. He never


informed his subordinates of his plans until they absolutely had to know and would launch his force at a moment’s notice. Lane made intelligence a personal priority, used Dominquez and the spy company extensively, and regularly ran his own sources. He bonded with the Texas Rangers, in particular their leader, Colonel John (Jack) Hays, as they both excelled at this unconventional form of warfare. The Rangers accompanied him on every raid between November 1847 and March 1848.\(^\text{11}\)

The primary adversary Lane and the Rangers faced in central Mexico between October and December 1847 was the Mexican General Joaquín Rea. Rea was an old soldier who had served under José María Morelos, one of the primary peasant guerrilla leaders during the early phases of the Mexican War for Independence (1810-1821).\(^\text{12}\) Rea commanded 4,000 guerrillas when he held the U.S. forces in Puebla under siege from September 13 - October 13, 1847.\(^\text{13}\) The guerrilla general continued to resist the American occupation as late as March 1848, refusing to obey the armistice after the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo was signed. However, he could rarely maintain over a few hundred guerrillas after the crushing defeats Lane inflicted on him in October and November 1847, and ultimately had little effect on the outcome of the war.\(^\text{14}\)


\(^{13}\) Bauer, *The Mexican War*, 329.

\(^{14}\) Thomas Childs letters, March 3 and March 27, 1848, *Child's, Thomas, Letters Jan -April 1848 when acting as Military Governor of Puebla*, M 1597 Brough House Books, Reel 2 of 3, Property of the University of North Carolina(UNC). The last record of Rea trying to raise guerrillas the author found was Child’s March 3 letter to Colonel Gorman of the Indiana volunteers. Child’s mentions that Rea remained a threat because he opposed the peace in his March 27 letter to the Governor of Puebla.
General Lane’s first task after arriving at Veracruz in early September was to move as rapidly as possible to Puebla to break the siege that Santa Anna and Rea had emplaced on that city. Scott’s Army was tied up gaining control of Mexico City and the roads between the Capital and Puebla were too soft for wagons until November. Inside Puebla, approximately 500 Pennsylvania volunteers and 1,500 sick soldiers under the Command of Colonel Thomas Childs held the Mexican force off for a month but were nearing the end of their supplies.15

Lane arrived in the valley of Puebla on October 9, 1847, subsequent to fighting his way through the guerrilla-infested route from Veracruz. After picking up additional reinforcements at Jalapa and Perote, his units reached a peak of 3,300 troops including a company of Texas Rangers under the command of Captain Samuel Walker and three other companies of volunteer mounted rifles.16 Lane sent Mexican spies out the night of October 8 and offered them a large amount of cash to identify where Santa Anna’s force was located.17

Upon hearing of Lane’s approach, Santa Anna broke off approximately 3,500 Mexican troops from the siege of Puebla and moved them east to ambush Lane’s relief force. The Mexican forces were plagued by factionalism. The Puebla National Guard under Santa Anna’s command immediately began deserting as they feared this was a


16 Smith, *The War with Mexico*, 176-177, 425-426. Brackett, *General Lane’s Brigade*, 89, Lane’s unit before Huamantla consisted a regiment of Ohio Volunteers, a Regiment of Indiana Volunteers, 4 Companies of PA volunteers, a Company of Texas Rangers, 2 Companies of Louisiana Cavalry, 1 Company of Georgia cavalry, two regular infantry Battalions, and five pieces of artillery.

liberal-motivated scheme to get them away from the city. Others, notably bandits less
dedicated to the cause deserted when they heard about the size of Lane’s force. Sensing
that his unit was falling apart, the Mexican general ordered all but 1,000 lancers to return
to Puebla, while he led the rest toward the city of Huamantla.\footnote{Smith, \textit{The War in Mexico}, V2, 425.}

Lane’s spies reported back to him that Santa Anna was moving toward Huamantla
and the General immediately redirected his force. Walker’s Rangers and the other three
companies of mounted riflemen under his command moved ahead of the main force as a
reconnaissance element. Walker identified a small body of Mexicans moving into the
city from about three miles away and charged ahead opening a large gap between his
reconnaissance force on horseback and Lane’s main body on foot. They surprised the
Mexican scouts and forced them to retreat from Huamantla. Feeling they had secured the
town, Walker’s men spread out looking for weapons and ammunition caches, and to
plunder. Just then the Mexican main body of lancers counterattacked in conjunction with
partisans firing from the windows of houses. They routed Walker’s disorganized cavalry,
killed thirteen Americans, and wounded eleven more. Walker was among the dead.\footnote{Lane to Adjutant General, 30\textsuperscript{th} Cong., 1\textsuperscript{st} Sess., S. Exec Doc 1, 477-479. Brackett, \textit{General Lane’s Brigade}, 87-94; Daniel Harvey Hill, \textit{A Fighter from Way Back: The Mexican War Diary of Lt. Daniel Harvey Hill, 4th Artillery, USA}, Nathaniel Cheaires Hughes Jr. and Timothy Johnson (eds.) (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 2002), 162.}

When the main American element finally caught up it immediately pressed into
the town and pushed the Mexican horsemen out, relieving the battered Texas Rangers.
Angered at the heavy losses, including the beloved Walker, and aware of the population’s
complicity—firing from the houses and aiding Mexican troops—Lane cut his men loose
on the town. The angry bands of soldiers broke into shops and homes, with their priority being the liquor stores. They killed civilians and combatants who resisted and robbed indiscriminately. Many, though not all, of the combatants who surrendered were executed. One American that was present wrote home that the entire event “made [me] for the first time, ashamed of my country.”

After breaking the siege of Puebla on October 13, Lane sought to maintain the momentum by attacking the guerrilla headquarters at Atlixco, located approximately twenty miles southwest of Puebla. On October 18 he marched a force of 1,500 men towards the city. Lane’s forces engaged Rea’s lancers approximately six miles outside of the town. The Mexicans fought a delaying action but their forces faltered against the superior weaponry carried by the American infantry. As the Mexicans broke ranks and fled, angry Texas Rangers and U.S. dragoons—who made a commitment after Walker’s death at Huamantla to take no prisoners—mercilessly cut them down and shot them at close range.

After the running gunfight, the surviving Mexicans retreated within the walls of Atlixco, took up positions in houses and churches, and fired at the Americans outside. It was dark by this time, and Lane was uncomfortable following the guerrillas into the

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Brackett, *General Lane’s Brigade*, 93; John W. Dodd to wife, May 3, 1847, John W. Dodd Papers, MSS 512, Ohio Historical Society, Columbus, OH.

21 Brackett, *General Lane’s Brigade*, 93-94. Brackett reported taking a “great many prisoners who had concealed themselves in the houses” and later conversing with some of them. Several other accounts report the killing of innocent civilians. Smith and Judah (ed.), *Chronicles of the Gringos*, 271 (quote).


unfamiliar town. After consulting with his officers and considering the state of his exhausted men, the General decided not to enter the city infested with Mexican insurgents at night. Instead he positioned his artillery on a hill overlooking Atlixco and bombarded the populated areas for forty-five minutes until all of the fire from the city ceased. Upon entering the walls the alcalde (city governor) greeted the Americans and begged them to spare the city. He informed them that General Rea and his forces had fled during the bombardment. The U.S. forces spent the night in the city and in the morning gathered and destroyed all of the arms and ammunition they could find. There were some minor excesses committed on the town, but this time Lane did his best to control the troops.24

In his official report on the Battle of Atlixco, General Lane claimed there were 219 Mexicans wounded and 319 killed compared to one U.S. soldier killed and one wounded. The reports of those involved seem to confirm the devastating defeat Lane inflicted on the Mexicans. Several of the volunteers involved were shocked at the scene as they traveled back across the battlefield en route to Puebla. One noted “For miles on either side (of) the road the ground was covered with dead and dying Mexicans . . . most of them were shot dead through the head or nearly beheaded with swords, telling of the unerring aim of our Mounted Riflemen.”25 Lane concluded his report to the Secretary of

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War by claiming that “So much terror has been impressed upon them, at thus having the war brought to their own homes, that I am inclined to believe they will give us no more trouble.”

Through the operations at Huamantla and Atlixco, Lane made his intent to spread terror among those who did not cooperate clear. The actions of Lane and his volunteers likely alienated some Mexicans to the American cause, reversing positive gains Scott had made in the region. Other towns, however, took note of what the Americans were capable of towards those who supported the guerrillas.

Between October 29 and December 5, Lane and the Texas Rangers launched four major attacks against Mexican guerrilla bases. By the end of November he had destroyed or scattered the large guerrilla parties between Mexico City and Perote, and effectively reopened the route in that part of the country. The major turning point in regaining control of the region occurred between November 22 and 24 when Lane captured another large guerrilla base located at Izúcar de Matamoros fifty-four miles south of Puebla, and defeated Mexican General Rea in a major engagement. After an early morning surprise attack, the general estimated that between four hundred and six hundred Mexican combatants fled the town in a disorganized panic. Twenty-one American prisoners were freed and a massive store of military equipment, including three pieces of artillery and five hundred muskets, was captured. U.S. soldiers took Mexican sabers and other

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26 Lane Report, Oct 22, 1848, Ex Doc 1, 480-481.

military equipment for personal use or souvenirs, but Lane and Hays closely monitored how the small body of Americans treated cooperative civilians.28

The disparity between the American military capabilities and that of the Mexican guerrillas was apparent throughout Lane’s campaign. Even when the guerrillas caught Lane’s troops unprepared, the Americans prevailed. During the return march from Izúcar de Matamoros, the U.S. forces became strung out over the road as a result of fatigue from the previous day’s movement and the extra four wagons of captured equipment in tow. As they neared the pass at Galaxra their Mexican scout came rushing towards the lead elements of the formation pursued by two hundred Mexican lancers. Hays formed about

28 Lane to Adjutant General, Dec 1, 1847, 30th Cong., 1st Sess., H. Ex Doc 1, 86; Brackett, General Lane’s Brigade, 188-189; Ford, Rip Ford’s Texas, 78.
forty of his Texas Rangers in the front and charged the lancers, forcing them to retire back across the ridge of the mountain from which they emerged. When the Rangers pursued them over the crest, General Rea, at the head of five hundred mounted troops, counterattacked. In response, Hays ordered his men to retreat to the covering fire of the American main body. General Lane had ordered his artillery to the front and brought the troops together in time to fire several volleys at the charging Mexicans. The lancers’ formation broke under the heavy fire and they were forced to retreat. The battle ended as the American horses were too fatigued to pursue.\textsuperscript{29} Lane was received back in Puebla as a hero and one volunteer recounted, “In the period of sixty hours, General Lane had traveled one hundred and twenty miles, fought and defeated the Mexicans twice, broke up their depots, and so discouraged them that they abandoned Izúcar de Matamoros and Atlixco.”\textsuperscript{30}

In the region between Perote and Mexico City, Lane had great success breaking up large parties of guerillas that could affect American supply trains. The counter-guerrilla effort east of Perote and the Sierra Madre Oriental mountains, however, was more difficult because of the broken terrain. In early October, Scott initiated the efforts to retake control of the roads along the entire route to Veracruz. The base at Jalapa was reestablished and a general officer placed in charge at both Puebla and Jalapa.\textsuperscript{31} Scott relieved Colonel Henry Wilson as military governor of Veracruz in mid-December after

\textsuperscript{29} Lane to Adjutant General, Dec 1, 1847, 30\textsuperscript{th} Cong., 1\textsuperscript{st} Sess., H. Ex Doc 1, 86; Brackett, \textit{General Lane’s Brigade}, 88-89, 190-193; Ford, \textit{Rip Ford’s Texas}, 78-79.

\textsuperscript{30} Brackett, \textit{General Lane’s Brigade}, 193.

\textsuperscript{31} Col Childs remained in command of Puebla for the majority of the war despite his rank of Colonel. Childs was, however, a regular officer, a West Point Graduated, with 33 years of service.
the War Department expressed disapproval of Wilson’s energy in dealing with the guerrillas. The Colonel’s panicky letters about his predicament, and his apparent fear of the guerrilla threat likely contributed to his removal.\(^{32}\)

By this time approximately 5,000 additional troops had arrived in central Mexico, and Scott used them to establish several posts between Veracruz and Jalapa, each containing 500 to 750 men. There would eventually be enough posts so that there was a substantial body of U.S. troops approximately every twenty-five miles along the entire route to Mexico City. At Jalapa he ordered the numbers increased from 750 to 1,200 and at Puebla from 1,200 to 2,000 men. The intent of these bases was to rid the region of guerrillas and to escort trains along the route. For this purpose, Scott tried to place at least one troop of cavalry at each post, and two at Jalapa and Puebla. The commanding general reiterated one of his themes of the campaign at the end of the circular that mandated these deployments. He had heard rumors of outrages being committed by some of the new volunteers arriving in the county, and he reminded the army that this type of behavior would not be tolerated: “No officer or man, under my orders, shall be allowed to dishonor me, the army and the United States, with impunity.”\(^ {33}\)

By November successful counter-guerrilla raids commenced in the region East of the Sierra Madre Orientals. In early November, Pennsylvania volunteer Colonel Francis M. Wynkoop, with a company of Texas Rangers based at Perote, launched a successful raid, capturing an entire guerrilla party at their base in Halcomola, including the Mexican


\(^{33}\) Scott to Marcy, Oct 13, 1847, HED 56, 30\(^{\text{th}}\) Cong., 1\(^{\text{st}}\) Sess., 218. There would eventually be several more of these posts established at Ojo de Agua and Rio Frio as well.
Colonel Juan Clímaco Rebolledo and three junior Mexican officers who had been paroled early in the war. Two weeks later in Jalapa, Colonel George W. Hughes had two of the captured officers shot for violating their parole. Hughes, commander of the Maryland Volunteers, who completed four years at West Point in 1827 but then turned down a commission, had just taken command of the city two days prior. The execution was likely an effort to make a statement about the level of discipline and order he would impose. On the 23rd Hughes also had two American teamsters hanged for killing a Mexican boy.  

In addition to the counter-guerrilla raids, Scott’s policy of collective responsibility, as directed in April 1847, was applied with greater rigor than during the earlier phase of the occupation. In November 1847, Colonel Frank M. Wynkoop, the commander of the U.S. garrison at Jalapa, applied the order when he fined each member of the Mexican ayuntamiento 22.02 pesos to pay for a stolen trunk. In conjunction with the enforcement of this order, safeguards were issued to smaller cities where American troops could not be present. These authorized the Mexican authorities in the towns to arm themselves against guerrillas and American deserters.

34 Bauer, The Mexican War, 334; Keenly, 365; Smith, War with Mexico, V2, 423; Capt John Lowe to wife, Dec 3, 1847, John Williamson Lowe Papers, Dayton and Montgomery County Library (DML), Dayton Collection, Dayton Ohio.


36 Colonel Thomas Childs, “Safeguard given to the Village of San Martin, 22 January, 1848,” in Smith, “American Rule in Mexico,” 295-296; Col Childs to the President of the Junta de [Fomento] (village name illegible), dated 10 January 1848, Childs Letters, UNC; Hill, Diary, 139.
As Scott’s frustration with the guerrillas and the Mexican peace delegation increased, he instituted harsher measures toward the guerrillas. On December 12, 1847, Scott issued General Order 372, which refused the right of quarter to guerrillas. The order read that

no quarter will be given to known murderers or robbers, whether called guerilleros or rancheros, and whether serving under Mexican commissions or not. They are equally pests to unguarded Mexicans, foreigners, and small parties of Americans, and ought to be exterminated.

If captured, insurgents were to be “momentarily held as prisoners—that is, not put to death without due solemnity.” Those captured were tried by a council of not less than three officers, and if found guilty sentenced to either death or up to fifty lashes.\(^{37}\) While not quite advocating the immediate execution of Mexican guerrillas—as Brigadier General John E. Wool had done after taking over from Taylor in the north—Scott’s “no quarter” order sent a message to his counter-guerrilla troops that they had a relatively free hand.

Scott’s passion seems to have gotten the better of him when he issued this order, and the inhumanity of the “no quarter” order stimulated opposition in the American press after the war. Scott defended his decision in his autobiography by emphasizing that the guerrillas were offered a trial and citing international law: “it is a universal right of war, not to give quarter to an enemy that puts to death all who fall into his hands.”\(^{38}\) Scott’s analysis of the laws of war was technically accurate, and generally Mexican guerrillas did not take U.S. prisoners. Yet some guerrillas did in fact take prisoners, and by including

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\(^{37}\) Scott, GO 372, December 12, 1847, RG 94, NARA I.

\(^{38}\) Scott, *Memoirs* V2, 433.
those guerrillas serving under Mexican commissions, Scott was in clear violation of the laws of war. 39 More significantly, this order likely had the adverse effect of motivating guerrillas to fight more tenaciously as capture was not an alternative. The twenty-year-old José María Roa Bárcena witnessed the shooting in Jalapa of the two Mexican officers who violated their parole and recorded later in his history of the conflict that the sight of the bloody corpses “filled the people with sorrow and at the same time inflamed them with rage.” 40 Ultimately Scott’s “no quarter” order contributed little to the success of the occupation.

The Mexican guerrilla effort, while subdued, continued. On January 3 the largest supply train to date left Veracruz under the command of Lieutenant Colonel D.H. Miles. It spread over nine miles and was under-protected, with only 150 of the 1,300 soldiers assigned to guard it on horseback. 41 A large body of Mexican guerrillas attacked isolated portions of the train and stole 280 pack mules. Miles reported one mounted company was “cut up” in the combat and had to call for reinforcements and artillery to get through

39 The Mexican Guerrilla General Joaquín Rea did take at least 21 Americans prisoners. General Joseph Lane freed them during the raid on Chulula on Oct 18, 1847, see Oswandel, Notes on the Mexican War, 363. For the international law he was most likely referring to see Emmerich de Vattel, The Law of Nations; or, Principles of the Law of Nature, Applied to the Conduct and Affairs of Nations and Sovereigns. (Philadelphia, T. & J.W. Johnson & Co., 1863), 348, Book III, Chap VIII, para 141. Henry Halleck in his work on International Law written after the Mexican War discusses both the lawfulness of guerrillas if commissioned by the state, but also argues that if their acts are unlawful, then they can be treated as criminals and “may be punished the same as free-booters and banditti.” Halleck used Scott’s actions in Mexico as an example of legal execution of guerrillas; Henry Wager Halleck, International Law, Or, Rules Regulating the Intercourse of States in Peace, 1861, 386-387.

40 Roa Bárcena, Recuerdos de la Invasión Norteamericana, translated in Robinson, The View from Chapultepec, 42.

41 Bauer, The Mexican War, 335; Smith, The War With Mexico, VII, 422.
the dangerous region. One American volunteer officer found amusement in the fact that this train was hit by guerrillas while the previous one had passed unmolested, because the majority of the goods were owned by a British merchant who had bragged to the Americans about his friendship with the guerrillas and the security they promised him when he passed through the region.

Scott did not find the event as amusing since several of his letters were lost when the mule train was attacked. In response, he ordered Lane—who by this time had relocated to Mexico City to plan a strike against the Mexican government at Querétaro—to “scour the country and drive the guerrillas from the roads.” Reports had been mounting of a large body of guerrillas forming at the city of Orizaba, located approximately fifty miles South of Jalapa. Orizaba became Lane’s next target. He had additional motivation to move southeast from the capital as one of his spies had reported the location of Santa Anna in Tehuacan, a city en route to Orizaba.

With about 350 men including four companies of Hays’ Rangers, Lane left Mexico City on January 18, 1848. To maintain secrecy, the men moved entirely at night, including one forty-five mile trek, and spent the days hidden in haciendas while holding the inhabitants in custody. The evening before their approach to Santa Anna’s hideout, the party stumbled upon a coach with an armed escort of eight men, which Lane allowed

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42 Mile to Marshal, Jan 5, 1848, 30th Cong., 1st Sess., H. Ex Doc 56, 259; Miles did not specify what “cut up” meant and reported no casualty figures.

43 Kenly, Memoirs, 379.

44 Marshal to Scott, Jan 6, 1848, 30th Cong., 1st Sess., H. Ex Doc 56, 258-259.

45 Lane, Autobiography, 36; REPORT OF BRIGADIER GENERAL LANE, Feb 10, 1848, 30th Cong., 2nd Sess., S. Ex. Doc. 1, 89.
to proceed when the owner produced a legitimate pass from a U.S. brigadier general. In one of his efforts to protect the populace, Scott had ordered that passes would be honored with the maximum punishment of death to those who violated the mandate.\textsuperscript{46} Lane would not cross General Scott.

The Americans reached Tehuacan in the early morning hours, and while a portion of the force surrounded the city, the main body rushed the plaza anticipating a fight. It was clear that a large body of troops had been present recently and had fled. The alcalde informed Lane that Santa Anna received warning from a messenger who the general was able to identify as one of the men he had released just hours before. While Santa Anna fled at the last moment, the expedition was rewarded with the capture of all of his and Madam Santa Anna’s rich baggage.\textsuperscript{47} The men plundered the Mexican general’s baggage, but Lane handed the lady’s belongings over to the alcalde, making him sign a receipt.\textsuperscript{48}

After a night at Tehuacan, where the Americans treated the town’s people with respect since they had surrendered the town and willingly sold them supplies, Lane’s force moved east toward Orizaba and Córdoba. As the formation neared the city, a delegation from Orizaba’s church and city leaders met them and offered to surrender the city provided their property was respected and Lane would investigate recent robberies by guerrillas. In an effort to spare their city the fate suffered by Huamantla and Atlixco,

\textsuperscript{46} Rip Ford Papers, The Center for American History, The University of Texas, Austin, 450; Report of BG Lane, Feb 10, 1848, 30\textsuperscript{th} Cong, 2nd Sess, HED 1, 89-90; Brackett, \textit{General Lane’s Brigade}, 236.

\textsuperscript{47} Lane Report, Feb 10, 1848, S. Ex. Doc. 130\textsuperscript{th} Cong., 2\textsuperscript{nd} Sess, 91.

\textsuperscript{48} Brackett, \textit{General Lane’s Brigade}, 240.
the Orizaba leadership had bribed the guerrillas to leave prior to the Americans’ arrival.\textsuperscript{49} Lane accepted the offer and his force peacefully occupied the city. Upon the occupation of Orizaba, Lane instituted martial law in accordance with General Order 20. He assigned Major William H. Polk, who commanded the mounted rifles in Lane’s force, as military and civil governor of the city. The city of Córdoba, located twenty miles to the east, sent an offer of surrender under similar terms several days later. Lane reported at the end of the expedition:

> Along the whole route from Puebla to Tehuacan and Córdoba, and from Córdoba to Puebla—a route hitherto untrodden by American forces, and heretofore notoriously hostile—no resistance was offered to a body of only 350 mounted men, without artillery, and with but a very limited supply of ammunition. Every town sent out its deputies to assure us a peaceable reception, and every necessity for the command was promptly furnished.\textsuperscript{50}

General Lane’s counter-guerrilla party occupied Córdoba and Orizaba for a week until they received word that an occupation force under Colonel James Bankhead was inbound from Veracruz.\textsuperscript{51}

Lane met little resistance during his return toward the capital. The twenty-three-day mission was a remarkable display of endurance and reinforced the futility of the Mexican attempt to win a guerrilla conflict. Lane moved with ease about the country with major towns surrendering to his relatively small force. The terror inflicted early in the campaign and the knowledge that their property would be respected under U.S. command diminished the Mexican will to resist. Lane insisted that his men demonstrate

\textsuperscript{49} Lane Report, Feb 10, 1848, S. Ex. Doc. 130\textsuperscript{th} Cong., 2\textsuperscript{nd} Sess., 91.

\textsuperscript{50} Lane Report, Feb 10, 1848, S. Ex. Doc. 130\textsuperscript{th} Cong., 2\textsuperscript{nd} Sess., 92.

\textsuperscript{51} Lane Report, Feb 10, 1848, S. Ex. Doc. 130\textsuperscript{th} Cong., 2\textsuperscript{nd} Sess., 92-93.
restraint toward the Mexican population during this phase of the war. During the march he arrested two Texas Rangers who were caught robbing a mule train. They were disarmed and placed under guard until they returned to Puebla where they were tried and punished. 52

There were other indicators that the guerrillas were losing faith. At the end of November 1847, Major John Reese Kenly of the Maryland volunteers recorded that over one hundred former Mexican officers had come in to Jalapa to have their names registered as being paroled, and that they renounced the local Veracruz state leadership that continued to resist. Early that month, at the outpost at Puenta Nacional in central Veracruz state, a delegation of former Mexican officers now fighting with Padre Caledonio Domeco Jarauta’s band came to the Americans under a white flag. Jarauta was the most effective guerrilla chief in the region east of Perote, though his loyalty to the Mexican government was tenuous. Once inside the fort, the officers offered that Jarauta and his unit would surrender if the Americans guaranteed they would not be punished. Major Kenly was present and recorded in his diary

They told us that the guerillas were tired of the war, as there appeared to be no national resistance to our arms; that they had been fighting us for months without any result, and they could see none as long as we could continue to send additional troops into the field; that the country was being devastated to no purpose, and that the capital having fallen, they could find nothing to encourage them in the future.

While Colonel Hughes at first agreed, he was overruled when Major General Robert Patterson arrived and took command of the fort. Patterson swore he would hang Jarauta

52 Lane Report, Feb 10, 1848, S. Ex. Doc. 130th Cong., 2nd Sess., 92-93.
if he got his hands on the notorious criminal. While this story is difficult to verify, it is notable that American soldiers perceived dissention within the Mexican guerrillas.53

Lane launched one final attack on the priest turned guerrilla chief, Padre Jarauta, who remained an elusive but destructive target throughout the war. American pressure had forced Jarauta to move his base of operations north to Zacualtipan, approximately 140 miles from Mexico City, but his party continued to move south and prey upon vulnerable trains.54 On February 17 Lane left Mexico City with 250 Texas Rangers, 130 dragoons, and Dominguez’s spy company and marched 120 miles over three days and surprised the guerrilla base.55 While casualty reports vary, there were approximately fifty Mexicans killed or wounded and forty captured. Several of the captured guerrilla leaders and American deserters who were caught at Zacualtipan were later hanged after a trial in Mexico City.56 Only one U.S. soldier was killed and five were wounded. Jarauta escaped but as General Butler, Scott’s replacement as of February 19 reported, “The severe lesson taught the guerrillas on this occasion will go a long way to prevent the future assemblage of these lawless robbers.”57

The Battle of Zacualtipan represented well the American policy towards civilians during the counter-guerrilla campaign. On his approach to the town, Lane almost


54 Scott to the Sec War, Jan 13, 1848, 30th Cong., 1st Sess., Ho Ex Doc 56, 257; Lane, Autobiography, 50-51.

55 One Texas Ranger reported: “but for Colt’s six shooters, we could not have held our own . . . This certainly is the most effective fire-arm in use.” Report of Major Truet, March 2, 1848, 30th Cong., 2nd Sess., S. Ex. Doc. 1, 103.

56 Oswandel, Notes, 508-509.

57 Butler to Adjutant General, March 3, 1848, 30th Cong., 2nd Sess., S Ex Doc 1, 95.
attacked a group of civilians on its perimeter, but did not when he discovered they were unarmed. During the combat, Lane did not take prisoners on one side of the town while Hays took fifty on the opposite—during battle prisoners were taken at the commander’s discretion.  During the fighting a thatched roof on one of the buildings caught on fire and started to spread. After the shooting stopped, Americans and Mexicans worked side by side to put the fire out and saved much of the town from destruction. All the while, some Texas Rangers plundered the empty houses in the town that were supposedly occupied by guerrillas. During the return march, Lane stopped Rangers who were stealing from an innocent hacienda owner where the group had rested for a night. Overall, efforts were made to protect the innocent population, but many were invariably affected by the actions of individual soldiers in the chaos of battle.

The volunteers were inconsistent in their treatment of the population largely dependent upon the quality of the commander. Conversely, the regulars treated the population better because of the superior discipline within their units. In late July 1847, Captain Charles F Ruff, a 1838 West Point graduate, led a counter-guerrilla raid at the town of San Juan de Los Slanos, located between Puebla and Perote. Ruff reported

58 Lane, Autobiography, 55.


60 Oswandel, Notes, 509; Robert L. Bodson, “A Description of the United States Occupation of Mexico as reported by American Newspapers Published in Vera Cruz, Puebla, and Mexico City; Sept 14, 1847, to July 13, 1848.” (Ph.D. Dissertation, Ball State University, 1970), 182.

61 Ford, Rip Ford’s Texas, 98.

having to fight through the town and burning several houses after clearing them of guerrillas. He was careful to respect non-combatants, though, and reported

when by forcing a house women and children fell into our possession, they were conducted with exceeding tenderness and care to the church in our rear and left in safety near the altar . . . not an unarmed man, not a woman or a child was injured during the assault or insulted subsequently.  

One must of course question how many houses were burned and the effect this ultimately had on the civilian population. Yet by the later months of 1847 and early 1848, Mexican towns seemed to understand the repercussions of housing guerrillas, and most did not do so voluntarily.

Mexicans who rejected the guerrillas had a reasonable degree of certainty that their homes would not be attacked by the Americans. On January 22, 1848 an expedition of regulars under Colonel Jones Withers entered the town of Tulancingo, fifty miles northeast of Mexico City, because of reports that the town was sheltering the famous guerrilla Padre Jarauta. Upon entering the town the Mexicans informed them the guerrilla chief had fled with his three-hundred-man force three hours earlier. Withers interrogated the leadership as to why it allowed these “outlaws” to stay there, knowing General Scott had declared that all those aiding guerrillas would be punished harshly. The Mexicans insisted that Jarauta was too powerful for them to restrain and informed the Americans that the guerrilla body had released forty prisoners and committed excesses on their town and that they were glad to see them go. Withers initially decided to punish the town by demanding a $10,000 dollar fine, but after a night of dining and

conversation with the Mexicans, declared them innocent and left the town in peace. 64

The American counter-guerrilla campaign during the later phases of the war was not simply the application of scorched-earth tactics. While imperfect because of discipline problems that were never entirely overcome, it contained a level of discrimination often overlooked.

By mid-January 1848 the U.S. Army had gained control of their supply lines to the coast, and most of the large guerrilla parties were broken up or pushed away from the main route. Lane’s aggressive guerrilla raids preempted any major revolt the guerrillas under Rea or Jarauta may have attempted to mount. American trains and international merchants moved with relative ease along the route between Veracruz and Mexico City. Lieutenant Daniel Harvey Hill, a prolific artilleryman and West Point graduate, noted in his diary on December 20 that a train of nearly 1,000 wagons arrived in Mexico City with no harassment from insurgents. He felt the Mexicans saw the guerrillas as little more than thieves, and he anticipated few attacks from them for the rest of the war. 65 Colonel Childs reported on February 3, 1848 that there were no longer any Mexican troops near Puebla, only “robbers . . . committing depredations.” 66

After November 1847, there were only two large guerrilla attacks, on January 5, 1848 and February 18, 1848, both in the state of Veracruz. During the latter, two hundred Mexican lancers blocked ninety U.S. dragoons escorting a train between

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64 Hill, Diary, 164-166.
65 Ibid., 152.
66 Childs to Jones (AG), Feb, 3, 1848, Childs Letters, UNC.
Veracruz and Orizaba. Otherwise, there were little more than scattered harassing attacks conducted by small parties of less than thirty men, and most had criminal intent.

The guerrillas in central Mexico had little strategic impact on the outcome of the war. While some Mexican leaders saw great potential in the guerrilla effort, the results did not measure up to expectations. The American counter-guerrilla efforts never completely defeated the partisans in central Mexico, but they drove them back enough so that supply trains and international merchants moved with relative ease along the route between Veracruz and Mexico City. The guerrillas never inflicted enough casualties on the U.S. Army to undermine the American public support.

The guerrillas failed because of the American military superiority and because of their own disjointed efforts. The Mexican populace was, for the most part, pragmatic. Caught in the middle of vociferous Mexican guerrillas and American invaders who were racist and occasionally abusive, many decided which side to support based purely on their survival instinct. Since both sides offended the population, it is not accurate to classify the Mexican peasants as either pro-American or nationalist. They simple chose the best course to ensure the health of their families and economic survival. For this reason, military superiority was important.

Furthermore, most of the Mexican guerrillas fought for regional issues or their own social advancement rather than in coordination with national objectives. Many Mexican leaders did not support the guerrilla efforts, feared the power these local militias

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67 For January 3 attack reference notes 45, 46, and 47; for February 18 attack see Levinson, Wars, 86.

68 This interpretation is similar to that found in Timothy D Johnson, A Gallant Little Army: The Mexico City Campaign (Lawrence, Kan: University Press of Kansas, 2007), see 252-253.
gained during the conflict, and resented the criminal nature of many of the bands. By November, Mexicans were commonly joining American trains for protection from criminal guerrillas along the route to Veracruz.\textsuperscript{69}

The elusive Padre Jarauta was as much of a threat to the Mexican government as to the Americans. After the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo was signed, he allied his party with General Mariano Paredes and initiated a rebellion to overthrow the government that had made peace. The Mexican government, in an effort to prevent disorder in the aftermath of the war, swiftly cracked down on this effort. The resistance failed, and Jaruata was captured and shot as a traitor in July 1848.\textsuperscript{70}

\textit{Making them Bear the Burdens of War: Expansion and Taxation}

In late November 1847, Scott began implementing the taxation policy the Polk administration had continually called for since the beginning of the war. Scott conducted thorough research to determine the most efficient and lucrative method of collecting the tax. He initiated the program on November 25 with the clearly and publicly stated intention of raising revenue to pay for the occupation until the Mexicans agreed to the American terms for peace. Scott’s first measure was to ban the exportation of gold bars or ingots, as his research indicated this would bankrupt the Mexican mints and devalue the gold and silver. He also altered the taxation system by banning the tax on gold and

\textsuperscript{69} Colonel Thomas Childs, “Safeguard given to the Village of San Martin, 22 January, 1848,” in Smith, “American Rule in Mexico,” 295-296; Col Childs to the President of the Junta de [Fomento] \textit{(village name illegible)}, dated 10 January 1848, Childs Letters, UNC; Hill, Diary, 139.

\textsuperscript{70} Miller, \textit{Shamrock and Swords}, 135-136; Smith, \textit{War with Mexico}, 423.
silver in the interior of the country; it was now only to be taxed when it left Mexico, and the levy was set at 5%. Scott implemented these reforms because he believed that the Mexican government’s taxation policy, which charged the precious metals multiple times, totaling approximately 9%, led producers to smuggle the metals in order to subvert the levies.  

Scott quickly realized the challenge of taxing the precious metals when they arrived at the ports, and on January 5, he revised his order. Thereafter, gold and silver would go directly from the mines to the assay office, where an American officer would collect the dues for the value, production, melting, and assaying. The bars or ingots would then proceed to the mint, where American agents would collect the dues on this process. This tax, while overall almost fifty percent less on the producer than the Mexican government had collected before the war, had the potential to bring large pecuniary benefits to the Americans.

Scott focused the tax program on the upper-class Mexicans, since they were the most capable of bringing the war to an end. He also feared how a universal tax might enflame the masses. To target the state government’s revenue and pacify the lower classes, Scott banned the collection of the alcabalas, which was a tax collected at state borders and city gates on “animals, goods, and commodities,” and banned the lottery tax altogether, as lotteries were no longer allowed. Former state-run monopolies (playing cards, tobacco, stamp paper) were sold off to the highest bidder with payment going to

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71 “Memoir on the exportation of the precious metals; transmitted by General Scott”, in HED 56, 30th Cong, 1st Sess, 241-243; GO 358, Nov 25, 1847 and GO 362, Dec 2, 1847, both in TP-58, 60-62.

72 Scott, GO 8, Jan 5, 1848, HED 56, 30th Cong, 1st Sess, 256-257.
fund the occupation.\textsuperscript{73} After banning the government’s primary sources of revenue, Scott charged each state a tax quadruple the amount paid to the Mexican government in 1843 and threatened that if the tax went unpaid, state “functionaries will be seized and imprisoned, and their property seized and used for the occupation.” If still unpaid the rest was to be seized from the wealthy inhabitants.

This was not to be an unorganized theft of Mexican funds, but according to Polk and Scott, the exercise of an occupying power’s right to collect a contribution under the laws of civilized nations.\textsuperscript{74} The Americans would no longer pay rents on quarters for the soldiers. Scott ordered that all American soldiers arriving in the country were to be quartered in public places that would be assigned by the Mexican authorities, and if these were not satisfactory, the army would seize quarters and pay no rent. However, Scott’s desire to give “the least distress practicable to the unoffending inhabitants,” combined with many of the officers’ desires to live in the comfortable homes in the cities, meant that rent was still frequently paid to families friendly to the American cause.

The underlying principle of conciliation toward the cooperative parts of the population remained in place, and all goods were paid for and discipline remained high.\textsuperscript{75} Additionally, Scott did not intend to seize what he called the “ordinary state or city revenues” for fear that this would destroy the Mexican regional governments and lead to

\textsuperscript{73} Scott GO 376, Dec 15, 1847, HED 56, 240-241. Scott banned the \textit{alcabalas} at the same time he instigated the removal of the \textit{moderato} government in Mexico City.

\textsuperscript{74} Polk regularly referred to the legality of their taxation plan. See Polk, “Third Annual Message,,” 549; For the international law he was probably referring to see Emmerich de Vattel, \textit{The Law of Nations; or, Principles of the Law of Nature, Applied to the Conduct and Affairs or Nations and Sovereigns.} (Philadelphia, T. & J.W. Johnson & Co., 1863), CH IX, Para 160, 165, pp. 364, 366.

\textsuperscript{75} Scott GO 358, Nov 25, 1847, TP-58, 61; Thomas M. Davies, “Assessments During the Mexican War,” \textit{New Mexico Historical Review} 41, no. 3 (July 1966), 211-212.
anarchy. Yet in reality, during his reorganization of the tax system, Scott had removed many of the typical taxes the cities and states required to function, notably the *alcabalas*. He left it up to them to impose other taxes—pending the local military governor’s approval—to fund their operations.

The enforcement of the taxes was challenging for the brief period that it was in effect; ultimately, not much was collected compared to what Scott had hoped. A conflict that arose surrounding the mint in Pachuca during January and February 1848 demonstrates this point well. Scott appointed Major John L. Gardner as superintendent of assessments during the second week of January with the primary responsibility of overseeing the collection of the tax in the District of Mexico. Shortly thereafter, the director of the Rio Del Monte mint in Pachuca refused to pay the tax on the gold and silver his plant minted. The director argued that he had recently paid his taxes to the Mexican government prior to Scott’s tax revision, and had documentation to prove this. Gardner, after consultation with Scott, forgave the tax for that month because “enforcement of this claim would have the effect to drive off the silver to other quarters” and this act would “obviate all future inconveniences of this sort.” However, in early March, when Gardner suspected that another mint director was being dishonest and in reality still paying taxes to the Mexican government, he had the plant shut down for six

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77 Childs to *Prefect* of Puebla, Jan 27, 1848, *Childs Letters*, UNC. In this letter Childs is criticizing the *prefect* for his complaints about not having enough revenue to upkeep the city and his police force. Childs tells him to tax the wealthy, who are “rolling in luxury.”

78 Gardner to Scott, Jan 29, 1848, RG 94, Encl 132 (1 of 2) Superintendent of Assessments for Mexico City, John Garner, Letters Sent, Jan-Feb 1848, NARA 1.
days. Cases like this were few and far between, though, because Scott and Gardner realized that closing the mints meant collecting no tax at all, and enforcing multiple shutdowns would overstretch the American forces. The Americans treated the mints on a case-by-case basis, and fair policy was generally applied.

In Puebla, Colonel Childs had a significantly more difficult mission than in the capital. With only around 2,000 permanent troops and a population of over 60,000, Childs was forced to rely on the Mexican *ayuntamiento* to collect the revenue. While *ayuntamiento* seemingly desired to cooperate, resistance in the region consistently reminded them that the Americans were a temporary fixture. Furthermore, the *prefect*’s decision to support the Americans was undermined to a degree by occasional American mistreatment of the population. Lane’s volunteers and Texas Rangers passed in and out of the city from October to December and occasionally abused the Mexicans. While Childs and Lane attempted to work together to run an efficient occupation, there was clearly animosity between Childs, the West Point colonel with thirty three years of service, and Lane, the volunteer general, who had great success against the guerrillas, but regularly struggled to control his men.

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80 Childs to Scott, Jan 11, 1847, *Child’s, Thomas, Letters Jan -April 1848 when acting as Military Governor of Puebla*, M 1597 Brough House Books, Reel 2 of 3, Property of the University of North Carolina.

81 El Prefecto de esta Capital y su departamento, a sus Habitantes (14 de octubre de 1847), as quoted in Alician Tecuanhuey Sandoval “Puebla Durante la Invasion Norteamericana,” Vazquez (ed.), 414.

82 Childs to Scott, *Childs Letters*, UNC; Prefect of Puebla to Scott, Dec 12, 1847, Childs to Scott, Dec 10, 13, 1847, Lane to Scott, Dec 14, 1847, all in *Army of Occupation Miscellaneous Papers*, RG 94, E 133, Box 8 of 16, NARA 1; Hill, *Diary*, Hughes and Johnson (ed.), 152, 162, 171, 172. Hill, a West Point
Childs forced the majority of the responsibility for running the city on the Mexican *prefect*, and worked hard to hold him accountable. The Mexican responsibilities included policing, maintenance of the public facilities, and collection of taxes. These authorities continually walked the fine line between collaboration and resistance, doing enough to appease the Americans, but being careful not to alienate themselves from the populace after the war. They resisted in small ways, such as ignoring orders to perform menial tasks like repairing street lights and keeping roads in serviceable condition.\(^{83}\)

Childs occasionally lost patience with the Mexican non-violent resistance. When the Mexican leaders complained that the city did not have any money, Childs scolded them because Puebla was a wealthy city with “thousands rolling in luxury,” but the government resisted taxing the wealthy.\(^{84}\) In late January the *prefect* complained that he could not make the payments the Americans demanded and continued to pay his police force. Then, on a separate occasion, he begged the military governor not to hang two captured guerrillas inside of the city. Childs replied on February 7 by accusing the Puebla government of “open hostility . . . which will in a few days compel me to change the pacific disposition that I have heretofore observed in all my relations to the civil authority of this city.” On a separate occasion around this same time, Childs ordered an elected notary out of the city because he was not cooperating with the occupation force.\(^{85}\)

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\(^{83}\) Childs to Prefect of Puebla, Jan 9, Jan 11, Jan 27, 1848, *Child’s Letters*, Brough House Books, UNC.

\(^{84}\) Ibid., Jan 27, 1848.

\(^{85}\) Ibid., Feb 4, Feb 7, 1848.
Armed resistance still flared up in parts of the city as well. During the first week of January, three weeks after Lane and most of his volunteers moved to Mexico City, Childs had to disrupt a plot between General Rea—the evasive guerrilla leader still lurking in the region—and a druggist inside Puebla named Don Manual Perez. The conspirators planned to assassinate Childs and incite a revolt to reclaim control of Puebla. American spies informed the military government, and shortly thereafter, Perez and his clan were chased out of the city. Small guerrilla parties of twenty to thirty men continued raiding the outskirts of Puebla several times a month through the end of the war. Most of these raids were criminal in nature rather than government sponsored, but they were still disruptive and prevented efficient governance.

Collection of the tax was a challenge in Puebla because of the relatively small American force and resistant Mexican government. To better track the Mexican government’s financial dealings, Colonel Childs established in late December a Mexican-led Chamber of Commerce. This produced slightly better results, but the Mexicans frequently ignored the Chamber’s authority, and overall, no more than a few thousand dollars was ever collected in Puebla.

Despite these challenges and lackluster tax collection, Childs’s administration succeeded in maintaining good order in Puebla and even issued several safeguards allowing surrounding towns to arm themselves against guerrillas and American

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86 Flag of Freedom, Puebla, Mexico, Jan 5, Jan 8, 1848, found in Independent Mexico in Newspapers, BLAC, Reel 21, 232.

87 Lowe to his wife, Dec 14, Lowe Letters, DML; Childs to Jones (AG), Feb 3, 1848, Childs Letters, Brough House Books, UNC.

88 Childs to Prefect of Puebla, Jan 16, 1848, Child’s Letters, Brough House Books UNC.
deserters. On January 25 1847, Lieutenant John Dodd, the adjutant of the Indiana
volunteers in Puebla, wrote to his wife that “Puebla grows more pleasant as the people
gain confidence in our ability to hold it and almost every business house in town is open
night and day. The streets are thronged with men of business, slaves, pleasure seekers
and the curious . . .”

The situation in Jalapa mirrored Puebla, except that the relations between the
populace and the Americans were friendlier. Jalapa’s population was only around
10,000, and with over a one thousand-man occupation force, the Americans could exert
greater influence than those in Puebla. Under the firm hand of Colonel George W.
Hughes, the military governor after November 1847, the interior of the city was well
controlled. Jalapa’s streets were heavily patrolled primarily by Americans with
augmentation from a small Mexican police force. At the end of October 1847, shortly
after the Americans reoccupied Jalapa, the entire Mexican police force was relieved for
“disagreeable incidents.” The Americans largely took over this duty, but then gradually
returned responsibility back to the Mexicans and eventually went as far as to allow the
Mexican police to carry firearms. Hughes enforced strict discipline on his men,
executing two Americans and two Mexicans for crimes immediately after he took

89 Childs to Village of Amogauque (illegible), Feb 4, 1848, Childs to Gov of Puebla, Feb 7, 1848, both in
Childs Letters, UNC; Smith, War with Mexico, V2, 220, 456-457.

90 Dodd Papers, OHS, January, 25, 1846, p. 166.

91 George W. Hughes completed the four year curriculum at West Point in 1827 but did not take a
commission and instead was employed as a topographic engineer until he stepped forward to lead the
command and on another occasion sentenced four men to thirty lashes, had their heads shaved, and drummed them out of the army for robbing a Mexican residence.\textsuperscript{92}

Hughes was cordial with the Jalapa city government and allowed them to manage nearly all local concerns. When Scott decided that rents were no longer to be paid, Hughes questioned the order as he feared it would undermine the good relations he had with the Mexican population in Jalapa. Scott replied that the mandate was “a well considered act,” but then in his typical manner, gave his subordinate some leeway by writing that the order “should be made to operate as equally as the nature of the case will admit.” It is unclear how strictly Hughes enforced this order, but it is clear that Scott left room for his trusted subordinate officers to interpret his mandates.\textsuperscript{93}

Soldiers’ accounts indicate that Jalapa was the friendliest city in central Mexico during this phase of the war. Bull fights and balls occurred regularly and an American traveling circus came through the town at the end of January. As opposed to Puebla, the garrison was large enough in proportion to the city to run constant patrols on the roads for several miles outside of the town. Yet there is little indication that Hughes had success implementing the taxation mandates, and guerrillas remained active in other parts of the state of Veracruz. Trains still traveled with mounted escorts of around one hundred men through the end of the war.\textsuperscript{94}

\textsuperscript{92} Scott to Hughes, Jan 22, 1848, RG 94, E 133, “Letters Received, Misc Letters from officers in the War with Mexico,” NARA 1; Angel Ochoa, Oct 30, 1847, Jalapa Ayuntamiento Papers, BLY; Smith, War with Mexico, V2, 224; Smith and Judah, Chronicles, 393.

\textsuperscript{93} Scott to Hughes, Jan 22, 1848, RG 94, E 133, “Letters Received, Misc Letters from officers in the War with Mexico,” NARA 1; Angel Ochoa, Oct 30, 1847, Jalapa Ayuntamiento Papers, BLY; Levinson, Wars within War, 76.

\textsuperscript{94} Kenly, Memoirs, 364, 368,370-37376, 381-383; Hill, Diary, 177; Smith, War with Mexico, 225.
Another method Polk attempted in order to gather revenue and apply pressure on the Mexicans was opening up trade to international merchants, and then requiring them to pay a tax upon entering and leaving Mexico. During March 1847, Polk ordered all occupied ports to be open for trade and for the occupation force to collect taxes. To further enforce the tax the U.S. Navy secured the west coast ports of Guaymas and Mazatlán by November 1847, and took control of the customs collection at these ports. Scott promised to provide enough troops to garrison these cities in time, but was unable to do so before the war ended, and the meager garrisons the Navy could provide had little time to collect much revenue. The major effect of shutting down these ports was to deny the Mexican government the revenue they might have gotten from a tax on these important facilities and to send the message that the American expansion of the occupation was taking effect.95

In the end the taxation policy only collected $3,935,676; hardly the twelve million that Scott had hoped for in the first year.96 A large part of this came from collecting on international trade, which started in March 1847. During the short time the taxation policy was in effect, the Americans did not have enough troops to enforce Scott’s tax on the states or on the producers of precious metals. Many of the mines were also owned by foreigners who did not respect the American authority and whom the United States did not want to offend. Finally, Mexican resistance in many of the occupied cities prevented efficient tax collection. Only in the district of Mexico did the Americans achieve a level


96 Scott, *Memoir*, 553.
of success, collecting $400,000 of the $668,332 tax assessed, likely because of the large number of troops present in this region and the highly cooperative ayuntamiento.97

The larger effect of the tax was the psychological impact on the Mexicans. The Americans were clearly committed to enforcing the levy, and in time might have the forces in the country to do so. The taxation benefitted the common merchant at the expense of the upper class.

Targeting the upper class’s strength played upon their fear of social revolution in Mexico, especially since revolutionary plots were already brewing several different parts of the country. The American garrisons in Cuernavaca, Puebla, and Jalapa received requests for assistance from indigenous tribes who were planning uprisings to reclaim formerly communal land from large hacienda owners.98 By January 1848, indigenous communities were taking over land from hacienda owners in Veracruz, Zacatecas, Durango, and the State of Mexico, and the Mexicans actually sent fifty national guard troops to quell uprisings in several villages in the mountainous region of northern Puebla. The most famous uprising initiated during this time period was in Yucatan. In what became known as the Caste War, a conflict that would rage for three years began in July

97 Davies, “Assessments,” 211-212; Smith, War with Mexico, V2, 265; Statistics from Scott to Marcy, Feb 2, 1848, HED 60, 30 Cong, 1st Sess, 1081.

98 Colonel Newman S. Clarke to Army HQ, Mar 6, 1848, RG 94, E 130, Vol 6 of 9, Cuernavaca letters sent Feb-May, 1848, NARA 1; Childs to Indian tribes of Oajaca, Jan 29, 1848, in Childs Letter, Brough House Books, UNC.
1847. Scott used the upper class’s fear of social disorder as leverage to increase pressure on the Mexican leadership to capitulate to American demands.100

The influx of U.S. soldiers into Mexico during late 1847 and early 1848 reinforced the message of the American commitment to finishing the war by expanding the occupation. American troops occupied Orizaba and Cordoba in Veracruz state, and Lerma, Toluca, Puchuca, and Cuernavaca in Mexico. Scott reported that he had 24,816 troops under his command by the beginning of February and the American newspapers advertised “Still They Come,” and “shortly the number will be increased to FIFTY THOUSAND.”101 Many Americans thought the occupation would continue indefinitely and lead to annexation. American officers met in Mexico City at least three times to discuss building a railroad from Veracruz to Mexico City to increase the efficiency of trade.102

The occupation of the outlying cities in early 1848 went smoothly. The populations at these locations generally accepted the American troops who extended the fair hand of Scott’s policy. After leading the occupation of Cuernavaca, Colonel Newman S. Clarke reported that his brigade was greeted hospitably and the alcaldes from

99 Levinson, Wars within War, 77-79.

100 Daniel Harvey Hill, a perceptive Lieutenant in the U.S. Army, describes lucidly Scott’s strategy in his journal. See Hill, Diary, 144.

101 Scott to Marcy, Feb 2, 1848, HED 60, 30th Cong, 1st Sess, 1082; The American Star, Dec 9, 1847, Independent Mexico in Newspapers, BLAC, Reel 72, 156.

102 “The Railroad,” The American Star, Mexico City, Dec 3, 1847, Independent Mexico in Newspapers, BLAC, Reel 72, p 140; LT Thomas Williams to John R. Williams, Dec 27, 1847 in Smith and Judah (ed.), Chronicles of the Gringos, 418; When in mid-November 1847, Major John Reese Keenly met with General Quitman, an old family friend who was leaving Mexico, Quitman told him he thought they would meet again in another year in Mexico when he returned. See Keenly, Memoirs, 364.
villages in the forty miles surrounding the city all came to the city and seemed favorable to the U.S. mission. A soldier in Clarke’s unit wrote to his family that “our entry was made peaceably, and to the great satisfaction of the citizens, who were amazed to find that the ‘Americanos’ were not such savage barbarians as their cowardly rulers had represented us to be.” 103 The other occupied cities reacted in a similar manner. 104 While the U.S. Army was still too small to provide security to much of the population, they succeeded in securing these cities without resistance, and presenting the image of a rapidly expanding force.

Finally, rumors persisted in the papers that Scott was planning an expedition to dislodge the Mexican government in Querétaro, and the Polk administration encouraged him to do so if negotiators did not make rapid progress toward peace. The ease of the U.S. Army’s expansion and word of a planned expedition to Querétaro added pressure on the Mexican leaders to end the war. 105


**Peace at Last**

Between November 19 and November 1847, the representatives of seven Mexican states met in a closed-door session at Querétaro and six of the seven agreed to work for peace; San Luis Potosi held out. While all agreed that they preferred further resistance, none could offer the resources to raise an army. It is important to note that this was only six of the twenty-three Mexican states, and resistance to peace was still strong elsewhere. On January 30, Juan N. Almonte, a prominent politician and Santa Anna supporter, argued forcefully in Querétaro that the Mexicans should continue to delay, pointing to the Whig majority in the U.S. House of Representatives and the Polk administration’s continued complaints about the cost of the war as evidence that the Americans would soon lessen their demands.  

The last major Mexican push to break off negotiations and continue the war came from the city of San Luis Potosi, which was never occupied by the Americans. Claiming to have the support of the states of Guanajuato, Zacatecas, and Durango, on January 12, 1848, the government of San Luis Potosi declared a *pronunciamiento* against the supreme government in Querétaro because it had failed to “meet the expectations of the country” in its efforts to resist the invaders. The rebel assembly swore to continue the war with its entire means until the Americans respected the Mexican republic.

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While many admired their enthusiasm, the state leaders of San Luis Potosi did not represent the majority of Mexicans, and they had little military might to back their decree. In response to the *pronunciamento*, Luis de la Rosa, the Mexican Minister of the Foreign Relations, explained in a document written for the Mexican Congress that while all of the states wanted to continue, further resistance might lead the invaders to total conquest of the country. Under the circumstances, “profound calculation and thought are essential in those who look to the best interests of the people in the administration of public affairs.” Rosa emphasized that the government had done all that it could to feed and clothe the army, but it had no money because the ports were blocked, the tobacco rent was gone, states were not paying their taxes, and commerce was paralyzed. He went on to emphasize that Mexican honor could still be maintained, because “up to this period the invader has not demanded any conditions for peace which would be disgraceful to the Republic.” Throughout this document, Rosa emphasized the need for pragmatism and unity, and most importantly “putting an end to the calamities of a bloody and disastrous contest.”\(^\text{108}\)

Manuel de la Peña y Peña, the acting President at the time of the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, perhaps best explained why the Mexicans agreed to the treaty on February 2, 1848 in his address during the ratification process. The American management of the occupation was clearly a major contributing factor. Citing President Polk’s December 7 “Third Annual Address,” Peña y Peña argued “that it was not possible to hope that in this matter the United States would modify its demands . . . the

government of the United States has declared to its Congress that without the cession of these territories it will continue the war.” American military superiority influenced his opinion. While he did not doubt that Mexico could continue to resist, he questioned the nation’s ability to reclaim the lands already lost. Finally, Peña y Peña feared the Americans might in time demand more, “especially in view of the facts that the capital was lost and the army . . . was disbanded.” He concluded by noting that the Americans had not stoked the fires of Mexican nationalism by abusing the population. Social disorder loomed large in Peña y Peña’s mind: “Already we have seen too much of social disorganization, insecurity among our people, danger along the highways, paralysis of all the branches of public warfare, and general misery.” Peña y Peña’s comments reflected the fear of his social class as indigenous-led revolutions gained power around the country, liberal Puros passed legislation in the district of Mexico, and the more conservative moderato upper class was paralyzed by the American occupation and taxation.

The Moderatos running the exiled government at Querétaro feared that the Americans would expand their demands, specifically that they would attempt to annex the entire country. Their rivals, the Puros, sought annexation; then, with the American military backing, they hoped to “fix” Mexico’s broken democracy. On January 30, the Puros invited Scott and his staff to an elaborate banquet at the ruins of a historic chapel just outside of the capital. During the event, they toasted his administration and inferred that they would support an American takeover of Mexico, at least until the power of the


110 Ibid., 112.
Mexican army and the Catholic church were destroyed—two of the Puros’ main political objectives. Scott deferred and quickly changed the subject to his hope for a rapid conclusion of a treaty.\textsuperscript{111}

The final element the Americans used to convince the Mexicans to accept their peace terms was a well synchronized political and military strategy. Nicolas Trist and Winfield Scott worked in a close partnership throughout the occupation to pressure the Mexicans in Querétaro. Trist believed in the Moderato government and diligently continued negotiations despite having been recalled by the Polk administration in mid-November. He viewed the relationship between the Moderatos and the Puros as a case of good versus evil, referring to the Moderatos as the “peace party” and the Puros as the “war party.” By this time, the Moderatos were resolved on negotiating for peace, but feared a major uprising upon news of a treaty that gave up so much Mexican territory. Before they could agree to anything, the Mexican government needed to convince the populace they had maintained Mexican honor and forced the Americans to make concessions.

Trist was frustrated with the resistance to the war in the American Congress and with Polk and now Scott’s policy “to push the war vigorously” until the treaty was signed and ratified. On December 29 he wrote to Secretary of State James Buchanan that Henry Clay’s recent speech against the war and Polk’s presidential message that called for punishment of the Mexicans for continued resistance, “at this critical instant may be attended with consequences similar to those produced by the appearance of Bulow and

\textsuperscript{111} Hitchcock, \textit{Fifty Years}, 309, 314; \textit{The American Star}, Mexico City, Feb 1, 1848, \textit{Independent Mexico in Newspapers}, BLAC, Reel 72; Baker II, “Mexico City,” 222-223.
Trist feared that the Mexicans would interpret the opposition to the war in the U.S. Congress as evidence that the Mexican resistance was having an effect. Second, he feared that Polk and Scott’s policies, intended to make the Mexican people feel the pains of war, would drive former neutral Mexicans into the resistance camp, thus making it more difficult for the Moderatos in Querétaro to sign the treaty and maintain hopes of their own political survival.

Trist received his recall notice from Polk on November 15. The President recalled Trist from Mexico because he was wary of the increasingly close relationship between Trist and Scott, and frustrated by the lack of progress in the negotiations. With Scott’s encouragement, Trist ignored the recall because he felt that he was nearing an agreement and feared the consequence of cutting off the political negotiations.

On January 26 the Mexican commission came to Trist with an offer of peace that accepted the boundaries the Americans proposed if the U.S. Army would agree to withdraw from Mexico City, give back all taxes to the Mexicans, and pay $300,000 or $400,000 immediately. The Mexicans were facing a series of uprisings, the most recent and threatening being the San Luis Potosi pronunciamiento, and needed funds and peace to rebuild their army and reconsolidate the country. The government in Querétaro anticipated more uprisings when news of the treaty became public and wanted an army that could immediately react. Trist refused and left the talks, informing the Mexicans that

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112 Trist to Buchanan, Dec 6, Dec 29, 1847 in Manning (ed.), *Diplomatic Correspondence*, 1028; Polk, *Third Annual Message*, Richardson (ed.), 545, Polk wrote “In such an event it may become proper for our commanding generals in the field to give encouragement and assurances of protection to the friends of peace in Mexico.”

113 José María Roa Bárdena, *Recuerdos De La Invasión Norte-Americana, 1846-1848*: Por Un Jóven De Entónces (México: J. Buxó, 1883), 604; Pletcher, *Diplomatic Correspondence*, 547-549.
negotiations would be officially terminated on February 1 when he left the country, thereby leaving a window of a few days for the Mexicans to revise their proposal. In this maneuver, Trist leveraged the fact that he had been recalled over two months ago to increase pressure on the Mexicans. Furthermore, after the duplicity the Americans had witnessed during the negotiations prior to the Battles for Mexico City, Trist and Scott knew better than to make an advanced payment or agree to an armistice while the Mexicans vied for a better position from which to negotiate. Orders from the Polk administration to continue the expansion and taxation until the treaty was ratified further stiffened their stance to the Mexican proposal.

Scott made the final move that pushed the Mexicans to their breaking point. In a conversation with the British ambassador Percy W. Doyle, during these intense days, Doyle recorded Scott explaining “that hitherto he had been able to delay sending troops into the interior of the Country, but as a fresh reinforcement had now arrived under Brigadier General Thomas Marshall, he should be compelled to do so.” Specifically, the Moderato government would be the target: “his orders were most peremptory to march upon Querétaro and not to allow the general government an opportunity of establishing itself in any other point of the republic.” This is a slight exaggeration on Scott’s part, as his orders did not in fact specify Querétaro as a target, but simply that he expand the occupation, collect taxes to fund the American effort, and deprive the Mexican government funding. Finally, as a carrot to accompany this harsh warning, Doyle

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114 Rives, 605, 607; Both Wool and Lane had made proposals to Scott to mount expeditions against Querétaro.

115 Doyle to Palmerson, Feb 1, 1848, No 13, in George Lockhart Rives, The United States and Mexico, 1821-1848; (New York: C. Scribner’s Sons, 1913), 610.
recorded “General Scott has hitherto invariably expressed to me his determination to
maintain the present government of this country against all revolutionary movements.”
Scott and Trist used Doyle to relay these back-door messages—a threat, but also an
indication that the Americans would guarantee protection for the new government—to
the Mexican commission. On February 1, the *Moderato* government in Queretaro agreed
to the American terms and signed the peace treaty.\(^ {116}\)

The resolve that Polk and Scott demonstrated in expanding the occupation and
implementing heavy taxation clearly influenced the Mexicans to agree to the American
terms. The majority of Mexicans in positions of authority were convinced that the
Americans would continue the expansion and taxation indefinitely unless they
surrendered. When the Mexican negotiators penned their argument to Luis de la Rosa,
the acting Mexican Secretary of State, for agreeing to the peace terms they included “the
extreme scantiness of resources to which the government finds itself reduced” and “the
probability that the United States may prove every day more exacting and more
exaggerated in their demands.”\(^ {117}\) The situation could only get worse for the Mexicans
and would soon be fatal for the *Moderatos* if they did not yield.

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\(^ {116}\) No official transcript of the peace negotiations was kept. This account of the confusing negotiations
surrounding the signing of the treaty is based upon Trist to Buchanan, Dec 6, Dec 29, Jan 12, Jan 25, 1847,
in Manning (ed.), *Diplomatic Correspondence*, 998, 1028-1030, 1032-1033. Doyle to Palmerson, Feb 1,
1848, No 13, in Rives, *The United States and Mexico*, 603-613, quotes on 610; Pletcher, *The Diplomacy of
Mexican War*, 384; The Americans did provide some weapons to the Mexicans as they exited the country
to help bolster the government against the threat of another *pronunciamiento*. See Levinson, *Wars Within
War*, 98-99.

\(^ {117}\) Bernardo Couto (armistice commissioner) to Rosa, Jan 29, 1848 in Roa Barcana, *Recuerdos*, 602; see
also Rivas, *The United States and Mexico*, 612.
On February 17, 1848, the Moderatos made a masterful political move that neutered the Puro ayuntamiento in Mexico City. The Moderatos exploited the American favor they had garnered by signing the treaty by sending a delegation to Mexico City to negotiate an armistice, to lift the heavy tax Scott had imposed, and to withdraw American support for the Puros running the city. General William Butler, who had recently replaced Scott in command in mid-February, understood that he had little need for the collaborationist Puros and recognized the Moderatos dominated the Mexican government in Querétaro. He agreed to the armistice on March 6, and ended much of the taxation, although it continued at the mines, ports, and borders until the treaty was ratified.\footnote{Butler also permitted a new Mexican election in accordance with their established laws. The immediate ousting of the Puros from the Mexico City government after the treaty was signed is evidence that Americans had little loyalty to the Puros despite their collaboration. They were a tool to increase pressure on what Scott perceived to be the real government in Mexico: the Moderatos in Querétaro.}

After the American evacuation, the Puro leader Suarez Iriarte was arrested and accused of treason and was tried before the Mexican Chamber of Deputies.\footnote{Iriarte justified his actions during the occupation as measures to insure the security and fair}

\footnote{Col William Davenport, the military governor at Matamoros collected duties on goods crossing the border until the treaty was ratified, and then immediately transitioned to collecting a tariff on Mexican goods entering the United States. He reported collecting $8,553.30 in May, 1848. Davenport to Secretary of War, June 6, Davenport to B.S. Welk, July 5, 1848, both in RG 94, E 130, Vol 7 of 9, Letter Sent, Dep of Matamoros, July 1846-Aug 1847, NARA 1.}

\footnote{Berge, “A Mexican Dilemma,” 250-251.}

\footnote{He was tried before the Chamber of Deputies in response to his argument that he had been a congressional deputy while first alcalde, and thus had the right to be tried by this body his peers. Berge, 253.}
treatment of the Mexican citizens. He cited as evidence that under his leadership the Americans reformed the judicial system to end public floggings of Mexicans, and general law and order had returned to the city. Iriarte argued that his actions prevented the much-feared breakdown of high society in the capital. Iriarte lost his plea, and though he never went before the courts for sentencing, he was imprisoned for several months until he became sick, and was released only when he was dying.\footnote{Berge, “A Mexican Dilemma,” 255.}

The Mexicans eventually agreed to peace for several reasons, most of which are related to the management of the military occupation. The U.S. Army’s success against the Mexican guerrillas demonstrated to the Mexicans that this form of resistance would not succeed over the short term. The Americans convinced the Mexican leadership that they were determined to remain for as long as it would take to achieve the peace they desired, and continued the expansion and taxation to increasingly cripple the Mexicans’ ability to resist. They had stabilized the major population centers and were denying the Mexican government much of the revenue it needed to operate. With indigenous revolts flaring in multiple states, and other regions considering independence or attempting a pronunciamiento to replace the central government, the Moderatos needed to rid themselves of the Americans so they could deal with these internal problems. Finally, during the peace negotiations, Scott leveraged the Puros’ desire for the American annexation of all of Mexico to increase pressure on the Moderatos to act.

Without careful management of the military occupation, including crushing the guerrilla resistance, there was a reasonable chance that Mexico would disintegrate as a nation, or that the Americans would be forced to make a much larger commitment to
achieve their strategic objective. The army and the Polk administration’s execution of this phase of the war was critical to achieving the outcome the Americans desired.
Conclusion

The American military occupation of Mexico played a critical role in ending the Mexican-American War. By applying an artful combination of conciliation toward the occupied population and political and military pressure on the Mexican elite, the U.S. Army convinced the Mexicans that agreement to the American peace terms was their only option. Preexisting social and political conflicts in Mexico, combined with the fact that many of their own people were willingly cooperating with the Americans, helped convince the Mexican elite that they could not fight a long war. Consistent American military victory made a large contribution by making violent resistance seem hopeless, and, in turn, drawing much of the population away from the guerrillas. Finally, the U.S. leadership demonstrated flexibility by adapting its strategy late in the war in order to place the burden of the occupation on the Mexican elite and demonstrate that it was committed to expanding the occupation until the Mexicans agreed to their demands.

The key elements to the American victory during the occupation of Mexico were the sound and flexible strategy that the Polk administration and the American military commanders formulated, the competent execution of that strategy by a relatively professional corps of army officers, and the consistent military superiority that the Americans maintained throughout the conflict. The occupation strategy, first of conciliation, then a combination of coercion and co-opting the elite, exploited the weaknesses of the Mexican nation and forced them to accept the American peace terms.
This strategy was well planned and based upon American military experience and study of past wars. Specifically, Winfield Scott’s knowledge and vast combat experience helped him formulate a plan to keep much of the Mexican population neutral throughout the occupation. By employing a policy of respect for the Mexican culture and its institutions, and sound military government in occupied cities, the Americans kept much of the population neutral or cooperative toward the U.S. Army.

During the second half of 1847, the American strategy demonstrated flexibility by shifting to a more aggressive approach toward the population. The American leadership aimed to make the Mexicans bear the financial cost of the occupation while continuing to respect their rights and culture. By doubling the number of U.S. forces in Mexico, expanding the occupation, and implementing a heavy tax on the population—focused on the elite—the Americans sent a strong message that they were committed to continuing the effort until they achieved their strategic objectives. These aggressive American initiatives, combined with mounting pressure from indigenous rebellions and regional political powers, convinced the Mexican government to agree to the American terms for peace.

President James K. Polk proved to be a competent wartime commander. He adhered to the formula recently identified by political scientist Eliot Cohen for successful political leadership in wartime: hands on and constantly driving his generals toward the desired political end state. At the same time, slow communications between the army in Mexico and Washington, D.C. limited Polk’s ability to influence the strategy and allowed

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his generals a certain level of flexibility. Polk, a Democrat, was a fierce partisan politician and no friend of his Whig-party generals, but this animosity was offset by the warm relationship that Nicholas Trist, Polk’s designated representative in Mexico, and General Winfield Scott developed during the peace negotiations. Trist and Scott worked well together in convincing the Mexicans to agree: Trist holding out the carrot, and Scott threatening with the stick.

Leadership at all levels of the American army mattered, and competent subordinate commanders executed the occupation duties well enough to stabilize all of the occupied cities and overcome the guerrilla threat to the supply routes. Competent commanders like General John Wool in Monterrey, Colonel Thomas Childs in Puebla, and Colonel George Hughes in Jalapa kept control of the population centers in the face of persistent Mexican resistance. Mexican city governments did not readily and consistently cooperate, often conspiring to support political and armed resistance to the occupation. The American military governors had to consistently assert their authority to keep Mexican resistance at bay and maintain stability and security in the cities.

The guerrillas were never defeated, but their efforts were frustrated and the initiative remained on the side of the American counter-guerrilla forces. Aggressive counter-guerrilla raids, the establishment of outposts along resupply routes, and cooperative Mexican forces enabled the Americans to keep their supply lines open and prevent the resistance from undermining the will of the occupation force and the American public. American military superiority was never really challenged during the Mexican War and the counter-guerrilla forces prevented the guerrillas from mounting a campaign that could have had strategic significance.
The major strategic effect of the guerrillas was instead to increase pressure on the Mexican government to end the war. Guerrillas fought mostly for local reasons. While in the regions the Americans occupied these partisans were largely impotent; the large portion of the country the Americans were not able to take control of was plagued by armed bands fighting for local power. Antonio Canales, the major guerrilla leader in the north, was an advocate of federalism and flirted with declaring independence for the state of Tamaulipas. Padre Caledonio Domeco Jarauta, the elusive and at times dangerous guerrilla leader in central Mexico, was no friend of the central administration, and was executed by the Mexicans shortly after the war for participating in a plan to overthrow the government.

The guerrilla war also contributed to the changed relationship between the two nations in the aftermath of the war. Mexicans may have been the ultimate pragmatists, cooperating with the Americans because they knew it was their best chance of survival, but just because they did it does not mean they liked it. Many Mexicans developed antipathy toward the United States because of the humiliating position in which the war had placed their country and the excesses associated with the guerrilla war. American soldiers also commonly expressed disgust at the violent acts that accompanied the partisan fighting. The passion the guerrilla war solicited was certainly not easily

2 See José María Roa Bárcena, Memories of the North American Invasion, translated in Cecil Robinson, ed., The View from Chapultepec: Mexican Writers on the Mexican-American War (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1989), 40–43. José María Roa Bárcena was only twenty years old during the war, and after witnessing the execution of two Mexican officers for breaking their parole and fighting with guerrillas he recorded “And now the very appearance of these two filled the people with sorrow and at the same time inflamed them with rage.”

3 For example see Brackett, General Lane’s Brigade, 148. Kenly, Memoirs, 318. Kenly wrote of his experience countering the guerrillas, “In fact, there was a busy time about the National Bridge, and the kind of warfare waged on both sides was entirely opposite to all my feelings. This was uncongenial work to me.
forgotten in the aftermath of the conflict. The Americans had great disdain for the guerrillas and moral qualms about some of their own actions, and many Mexicans developed a deep-seeded hatred for the occupiers.

Historiographic Points

Historians commonly portray the military occupation of Mexico as successful because of Winfield Scott’s conciliatory policy, and the general understanding of the occupation has been simplified by this assertion. While the conciliatory policies toward the population and the church were necessary, they were not sufficient to end the war. The Mexicans as a group never ceased resisting, both politically at the national and local level, and militarily through guerrilla attacks. In the end, the United States had to transition to a harder war strategy to convince the Mexicans to capitulate. This included a heavy tax, expansion of the occupation, and an increase in the size of the occupation force. These measures, while never fully implemented, had a psychological effect on the Mexicans necessary to convince them to end the war.

Another historiographic issue that has been overplayed, particularly in the last twenty years, is the role that racism and atrocity played in the Mexican War. Paul Foos makes the argument in his popular work on the Mexican War that the U.S. Army’s abusive treatment of the Mexican population turned what might have been a cooperative

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The system inaugurated against us was the apology for our course; but it never met with the approval of my judgment, and at the earliest opportunity I made known my sentiments with regard to it.”
populace into one set on resistance to the foreign occupation. \(^4\) This is true in parts of northern Mexico early in the war, but Foos discounts the reforms implemented under John Wool and Winfield Scott during 1847. \(^5\) In central Mexico in particular, where the majority of the population resided—eight times that of the northern states—the behavior of American soldiers was much more controlled. Winfield Scott went to great lengths to mitigate the excesses committed by American soldiers, and had better success than Taylor did in the north at preventing conduct that offended the populace.

The intent is not to deny that many ranches and small villages in areas suspected of supporting guerrillas were burned, and surely many innocent civilians were affected. Yet in the cities, where the majority of the population resided, the interaction with the populace was much more cordial. The American relationship with the Mexican population was never perfect, but one would be hard pressed to find a war where civilian causalities and atrocities did not occur. The actions of American soldiers did not completely alienate the Mexican populace and inflame resistance enough to have a major strategic impact on the outcome of the war.

The official policy of conciliation toward the Mexican population was clear to all soldiers, and punishment for pillaging or otherwise disrespecting the Mexicans was


\(^5\) Bruce Winder’s in his review of Foos’s work makes the valid point that Foos relies on the accounts of atrocities committed by regulars as reported by volunteers and vice versa, and in the process “he fails to consider the animosity that existed between the two corps that caused them to damn one another as each struggled to be seen as the legitimate defender of the republic.” Winders also points out that the three volunteer regiments that Foos bases a large part of his thesis on all came from big cities (New Orleans, New York City, and Boston), and “were actually the exception to the rule rather than the norm for raising volunteers in the agrarian American society of the 1840s.” See Richard B. Winders review of Paul Foos *A Short Offhand Killing Affair* in *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, July, 2003, 133-135.
publicly enforced. The leadership continually reiterated respect for the civilian population and forbade pillaging. Scott’s General Order number 128, issued in April 1847 could not have been more clear: “the General in Chief would infinitely prefer that the few who commit such outrages, should desert at once, and fight against us—then it would be easy to shoot them down, or to capture and hang them.” Some might cite this type of order as evidence of continued offenses, but they would be missing the central point. This was not the German army in World War II, where atrocity was ordered, such that even men of conscience committed heinous acts. This was not the ravaging of the Palatinate by the French army in 1688, where the official policy ordered by King Louis XIV and his military advisors was to burn every village and town in order to punish the Germans. In war, nothing encourages atrocity like an official sanction, and that did not occur during the Mexican-American War.

Racism did play a role in the conflict, but its effect is too often overplayed. Race made atrocity easier to justify for the individual soldier and raised the American public’s tolerance for such acts. However, atrocities and harsh punishments such as the pillage of a town were nearly always punitive or driven by revenge rather than racism. The “rape

6 Scott, GO 128, 30 April, 1847, RG 94, Winfield Scott General Orders, NARA I.

7 For a good example of ordinary German reservists committing brutal executions of Jewish women and children under official orders see Christopher R. Browning, Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland (New York: HarperCollins, 1992).

8 For a good description of the political rational behind the devastation of the Palatinate see John A. Lynn, “A Brutal Necessity?,” Ch 3 in Mark Grimsley and Clifford J. Rogers (eds.), Civilians in the Path of War, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), 79-110.

9 As the war progressed, heinous acts that were reported in the press did eventually solicit resistance to the war among the American public. The best work on public opposition to the war in the United States is John H Schroeder, Mr. Polk’s War: American Opposition and Dissent, 1846-1848 (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1973).
of Huamantla” in central Mexico occurred not because the Americans were racist toward the Mexicans, but because they were angry that Samuel Walker and twelve other Texas Rangers had been killed by the townspeople and Mexican lancers. Passion commonly drives atrocities in war, and the Mexican War was no different.

The counter-guerrilla war in Mexico was not a scorched-earth campaign. A level of restraint and discriminate application of force existed throughout most of the war. The hatred between Texans and Mexicans was real, and the overzealous burning of villages near guerrilla attacks happened on occasion, but after the early months of the war, the American forces were better controlled and more times than not demonstrated restraint. If a village was burned during the late months of the war, it was a calculated decision by a commander to set an example. Crimes were perpetrated by American criminals and Mexican bandits taking advantage of the lack of governing authority in some regions. However, most Mexicans understood the difference between the official policy enforced by the U.S. Army and these criminal elements. The Americans authorized several Mexican villages to arm themselves and arrest American deserters who arrived at their villages, and during the counter-guerrilla campaign, many villages expelled guerrillas and willingly surrendered to the U.S. Army as it approached.10

In the end, Mexicans cooperated because the Americans had more to offer than the Mexican government and guerrillas. If town authorities forced partisans to leave and surrendered to the Americans, the town’s homes would not be plundered and burned;

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10 For an example of a safeguard that allowed a Mexican village to arm itself see Smith, War with Mexico, Vol II, p 220, 456-467; references to these safeguards are found throughout the official correspondence and newspapers. See Flag of Freedom, (Puebla), Dec 31, 1847; Childs to Army HQ, March 6, April 4, 1848 in Child’s Letters, Brough house books, UNC; Wool Papers, Box 20, New York State Archives, Albany, contains numerous safeguards Wool issued to villages the Americans could not occupy.
Conversely, its citizens would be paid for their goods. The guerrillas, who had no financial support from their government or a foreign supplier, were forced to extract their supplies from the Mexican population. Since they were unable to demonstrate results and score significant victories against the Americans, the Mexican populace became increasingly reluctant to cooperate with the resistance. Furthermore, many of the Mexican guerrillas, particularly the longer the war went on, were motivated more by plunder and reward than by nationalism, which pushed more Mexicans into cooperation with the occupation force.

A Case Study for War

As a historian and a soldier I proceed with great caution when offering history as a guide for future military operations. That being said, the military occupation of Mexico clearly demonstrated the utility of some measures in war, and the future certainly holds more cases of military occupation that can benefit from its study. The intent is not to argue that the Mexican War experience provides a template for how nations should conduct future military occupations. One must use caution in relying too heavily on one case study when conducting a study of a type of military operations; surrounding conditions vary significantly in every war.

Historian Michael Howard, in an essay titled “The Use and Abuse of Military History,” insightfully assesses how military history should be approached by those seeking to apply its lessons. In short, Howard recommends study in width, depth, and context. By width he means looking at multiple cases of a particular type of operation
over time to discover discontinuities and common traits. A broad study of military history can inform political and military leaders on different options, and make them aware of potential pitfalls in any military operation. By depth Howard means examining more than just official histories, but also exploring diaries, letters, and novels to better appreciate the complexity and chaos of war. Finally, studying in context means to attempt to gain some understanding of the complex web of circumstances that affected the outcome of a conflict.\textsuperscript{11} The American military occupation of Mexico is just one event that can contribute to our understanding of the complexities of military occupation, and this dissertation provides a new level of depth and context to this case study.

The American experience in the Mexican War contains many lessons, among the most important being the criticality of understanding the enemy’s fears, needs, and desires, and then formulating an appropriate strategy to exploit the opposition’s weaknesses. The Americans did many things right in Mexico, but they also did many things wrong, and in a tougher environment might have failed because of these mistakes. Fortunately for the United States, Mexican society was isolated from external support and its internal rifts were relatively easy to exploit. That being said, the United States government and military deserve credit for recognizing the enemy’s vulnerabilities and applying an appropriate strategy, and then demonstrating the flexibility to adapt that strategy as the situation dictated.

In addition to the significance of the proper formulation of strategy, this case study demonstrates the importance of the implementation of that strategy by a competent

force. The U.S. Army in Mexico had some major flaws, but ultimately had a professional enough corps of officers to execute the proper policies. Despite its faults, the American military was by far the more disciplined and professional force in the Mexican-American War. The army struggled early on when untrained and unprofessional American troops flooded the northern Mexican states, but once it was able to gain its footing, professionalism within the regular force, and in some cases among volunteers, contributed to the competent implementation of the occupation strategy. Maintenance of discipline within the army started at the top with generals Winfield Scott and John Wool, and reverberated through the largely West Point-trained officer corps in the regular army, and the regular army had the lead in most of the important occupational tasks.

The importance of maintaining military superiority during the occupation phase of the war is a clear lesson learned from this study, and dominance in combat helped the army paper over its faults. Superior weaponry, training, combat experience, and motivation contributed to making the U.S. Army vastly superior in nearly all facets of the type of war fought in Mexico. Even when units were caught off guard by numerically superior guerrillas, they were for the most part able to fight their way out and inflict more casualties on the Mexicans than they sustained. Without the ability to score consistent military victories, or even string two small victories together, the Mexican cause was a difficult one.

In conclusion, the military occupation of Mexico was a dreadful phase of a terrible war between neighboring nations. The legacy of hatred still lingers today surrounding the conflict. Many innocent Mexicans found themselves caught between a racist and expansionist invading force, and a Mexican nation plagued by racial and social
conflict, whose soldiers were commonly forced to fight or motivated by plunder.

American soldiers went to Mexico seeking glory and to perform what most felt was their duty, and then commonly found themselves in morally ambiguous situations fighting a guerrilla enemy who faded away from “respectable” battle. One hopes that studies of this type of war have the effect of informing political leaders of the horrors of war to better prepare them when contemplating engaging in this type of endeavor. When the decision is made to go to war is made, one hopes that an understanding of military history will help bring the conflict to a just and rapid close.
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BLAC       Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas, Austin
CAH        Center for American History, University of Texas, Austin
DML        Dayton and Montgomery County Library, Dayton, Ohio
LC         Library of Congress, Manuscripts Section, Washington, D.C.
LL         The Lilly Library, University of Indiana, Bloomington, IN
NARA 1     National Archives and Records Administration, Washington D.C.
NOHC       New Orleans Historical Collection, New Orleans
NYSL       New York State Library, Albany, New York
OHS        Ohio Historical Society, Columbus, Ohio
UNC        University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, NC
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