

THE ROLE OF SAM HOUSTON
IN THE MIER EXPEDITION

by

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A THESIS

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THE ROLE OF SAM HOUSTON
IN THE MIER EXPEDITION

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ABSTRACT

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Purpose

It was the purpose of this study to show the role of Sam Houston, as President of the Republic of Texas, in the Mier expedition. Special attention has been given to (1) the role of Sam Houston in the organization of the expedition; (2) the part played by Sam Houston in the actual operation of the expedition; and (3) the failure of Sam Houston to aid the men of the Mier expedition in securing their rights as prisoners of war and their final release.

Methods

The methods used to obtain data for this study were (1) the examination of narratives and diaries of men who participated in the Mier expedition; (2) the searching of authoritative works on the Mier expedition and connected operations and events; and (3) a visit to the site of the major event of this study, the Battle of Mier in Mier, Mexico.

Findings

From the evidence present in this study the following findings seem to be substantiated:

1. Sam Houston was influenced by the tide of public opinion to call for an expedition against Mexico in 1842.

2. Sam Houston, knowing that the Republic of Texas could not financially sustain an extended operation against Mexico, deliberately limited the objectives of the expedition to merely harrassing the Mexican settlements along the Rio Grande.

3. Many of the men who joined the expedition were not satisfied with the limitations placed upon them by Sam Houston and attempted to extend the expedition.

4. These men were denounced by Sam Houston and their actions disclaimed by him.

5. Sam Houston was trying to avert a war with Mexico which Texas could not afford.

6. In trying to avert a war Sam Houston left the Mier prisoners pretty much to their own resources and, in so doing, failed to carry out his moral obligations to them as soldiers of the Republic of Texas.

Approved:

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CHAPTER I

TEXAS-MEXICO FRONTIER 1842

The Mier expedition was the result of the frustration of the people of Texas with the government's inability to protect its frontiers. The most critically exposed area was in the southwest along the lower reaches of the Colorado River. The settlers in this area had expected Sam Houston to follow an aggressive policy toward the enemies of the republic. Houston, however, followed a vacillating policy that in time brought the people of Texas, in general, and those on the lower Colorado, in particular, to the point of exasperation.

During Houston's first administration a dispute arose over his decision to disband the regular army of the Republic and halt the construction of a navy. The most disappointed group in the Republic was the settlers on the southwestern frontier. Its expectations for relief rose with the election of Mirabeau B. Lamar as Houston's successor. Lamar had several grandiose but unsuccessful schemes for pacifying the frontier and chastising Mexico. Among these was a plan to secure a five million dollar loan from European sources to finance a war against Mexico. The failure of this plan caused their hopes to fall again.

A crisis developed on the southwest frontier due to the inability of the Texas government to provide protection

for its citizens there. This crisis was to remain unresolved until 1842. With the beginning of the year 1842 the southwestern frontier was in a state of chaos as both Texas and Mexico were too weak to exert authority there. Although it was six years since Texas had defeated Santa Anna's army at San Jacinto, Mexico still refused to recognize Texas independence and considered the infant Republic a department of Mexico. The primary reason for Mexico's refusal to recognize Texas independence was political. No political leader in Mexico could afford to admit the loss of Texas without placing his career in jeopardy. Privately many Mexican leaders acknowledged the fact that Texas most probably could not be recovered.

The relations between Texas and Mexico were stalemated both politically and militarily. The Mexican government could not compel Texas to return to the Mexican commonwealth nor could it afford to officially recognize Texas independence. Texas, on the other hand, could not force Mexico to recognize its independence nor prevent Mexican encroachments upon its territorial sovereignty. The people who suffered the most from this situation were the settlers along the Texas-Mexican border.

Since its independence the Republic of Texas had been hard pressed to provide any regular security force to protect the southwestern border of the country. The best it could do was to organize inadequately armed militia units,

rangers and minutemen. These groups were backed up by a few straggly companies of infantry and cavalry composed of volunteers enlisted for three years.¹ These forces proved largely ineffective in protecting the region from encroachments by Indians, bandits, brigands and marauding units of the Mexican army. In addition to these dangers were frequent invasions by the remnants of revolutionary groups which fled Mexico after the periodic upheavals against the established government in that country.

The sparsely populated area stretching from the Colorado River south and west to the Rio Grande lay open and virtually undefended, a situation that invited attack from anyone who felt the strength and the urge to do so. This area was claimed by Texas which had designated the Rio Grande as its legal boundary in 1836. Mexico claimed the entire area including Texas whose western border as a Mexican State had extended only as far as the Nueces River. The strongest force in the disputed area was the Mexican Army which maintained at least nominal control of the area south of the Nueces. It was aided in its effort by groups of armed vaqueros called "defensores." These were recruited by Mexico from both sides of the Rio Grande. Administratively the area was included in the Mexican states of Coahuila and Tamaulipas.

¹ Joseph M. Nance, Attack and Counterattack, 3-6.

The Federalist Wars of 1837-1839 were the result of an attempt by opponents of President Santa Anna to establish an independent republic composed of the northern Mexican states. This republic which was styled the "Republic of the Rio Grande" was to include the states of Coahuila, Tamaulipas, Chihuahua, Sonora, Nuevo Leon, Durango, Zacatecas, the northern territories of Arizona and Nuevo Mexico, Alta California and Baja California.² Texas was also invited by the Federalist leaders to join but it refused. The leaders of the Republic of the Rio Grande were Juan Cardenas, Governor of Tamaulipas, and Colonel Antonio Canales.

There were 281 Texans in the army of the Republic of the Rio Grande during the period of the Federalist Wars of 1837-1839.³ These men were commanded by Colonels Reuben Ross and S. W. Jordan. They were not sponsored by the Republic of Texas in the war but acted on their own volition. When the Republic of the Rio Grande proved to be a failure, the Mexican government held the Republic of Texas responsible for the participation of the Texans in the war. Some of the same men were to be members of the Somervell and Mier expeditions which further gave the Mexican government cause for complaint.

²Hubert H. Bancroft, History of Texas and North Mexican States, II, 276.

³Joseph M. Nance, After San Jacinto, 225.

However, the Republic of Texas disavowed any responsibility for the Texans who had served in the army of the Federalists. It declared that any of its citizens participating in actions against the government of Mexico were private citizens acting in that capacity and not as agents of the Republic of Texas. The Texan government cited as proof the fact that the Texans fighting in the federalist cause had taken an oath of loyalty to the Republic of the Rio Grande which would have been impossible had they been agents of the government of Texas. In spite of these denials, however, Santa Anna maintained that the Republic of Texas had secretly supported the revolution against his government.

Another cause of friction in the southwest resulted from smuggling operations carried on during the Federalist insurrection and afterward by residents of the area, Texans as well as Mexicans.⁴ Smuggling had proved to be extremely profitable because the French navy had blockaded the Mexican Gulf Coast during the Federalist War. To compound the worsening situation there was a complete breakdown of law and order in the area between the Nueces and the Rio Grande which became a haven for outlaws of all sorts. Texas outlaws raided Mexican ranches in the area as far south as the Sal Colorado, forcing many Mexican ranchers to abandon

⁴ Joseph M. Nance, After San Jacinto, 547.

their ranches in the period 1840-1841. From the South Mexican bandits penetrated as far north as the Nueces.⁵ It would take the Texas authorities until 1846 to restore law and order in what had become known as the Nueces Strip.

A further deterioration of the situation on the Texas-Mexico border was brought on by the disastrous outcome of the Santa Fe Expedition of 1841. This expedition had been commissioned by Governor Lamar to reinforce the shadowy claim of the Republic of Texas to the lands east of the Rio Grande. The objectives of the expedition had been to open trade with Santa Fe and give its citizens the opportunity to receive the protection of the Republic of Texas.⁶ The expedition was also to explore the territory between the Texas settlements and Santa Fe. The Santa Fe Expedition was considered by the Texans to be non-military, but the Mexicans thought otherwise. When the Texan expedition reached Santa Fe the Mexican army was ready and waiting for them. The Texans were so weakened by the march across the plains and their exhausting experiences that they were captured without resistance by the Mexican army.⁷ This army under Colonel Salazar took them prisoner and after only a

⁵ Nance, Attack and Counterattack, 280-281.

⁶ Nance, After San Jacinto, 505.

⁷ Ibid.

short delay marched them to Mexico City. During the forced march to Mexico City the Mexicans inflicted many cruelties upon the Texans.⁸ The survivors were finally released in June of 1842.⁹ The gesture of good will in liberating the prisoners failed to impress the frontiersmen in Texas, for they continued to call for action against Mexico.

Along the lower reaches of the Rio Grande the Mexicans continued to send occasional patrols into Texas territory and threaten large scale invasions. These were as much for the purpose of impressing the Mexican people as intimidating the Texans. The Mexican government in 1842 was just emerging from the Federalist upheaval and believed it necessary to prove that the Federalist struggle had left her unscathed. To divert the attention of people in the north away from their domestic troubles the Mexican government declared that it expected to be attacked by a Texan army and attempted to arouse a patriotic response from their own citizens.

The commander of the Mexican Army of the North, General Mariano Arista, issued a call to arms to the people of northern Mexico in the latter part of 1841. He commissioned Captain Jose M. Gonzales to obtain 200 men each from the Third Cavalry Regiment, the Presidial Company of Camargo

⁸George W. Kendall, The Texan Santa Fe Expedition, 524-582.

⁹Ibid., 582.

and the auxiliary forces at La Bahia in preparation for an attack upon Texas. The invasion was scheduled to begin in January of 1842, with its primary objectives being the capture of Corpus Christi, Refugio and Goliad. These plans were later altered so that the army under Gonzalez could carry out its operations in conjunction with an army under General Rafael Vasquez who would attack in the North while Gonzalez attacked in the South. As a result Gonzalez was forced to postpone his entry into Texas until February 1, 1842.¹⁰ His point of departure would be Camargo while Vasquez would start from Lampasas and seize San Antonio.

Prior to this invasion General Arista issued an address to the inhabitants of the Department of Texas from his headquarters at Monterrey. In his address he cited the futility of the efforts of the Texans to maintain their independence. He promised amnesty and protection for all who would refrain from taking up arms against the Mexican troops. He stated that while Mexico held out the olive branch of peace to Texans with one hand she held the sword of justice in the other ready to smite all who might resist her.¹¹

As part of the general preparations for the coming invasion all the Mexican garrisons along the Rio Grande were

¹⁰ Mariano Arista, El General Mariano Arista De Ministro de Guerra, Archivo Historico Militar de Mexico cited in Frederick C. Chabot, Corpus Christi and Lipantitlan, 16.

¹¹ Nance, Attack and Counterattack, 8.

strengthened. However, the reports of these preparations reaching San Antonio were, like those of previous invasions, grossly exaggerated. Texas intelligence reported that General Arista was collecting 15-20 days provisions in the towns along the south bank of the Rio Grande. Reports from Mexico City reaching Texas at this time said that a force of 400-500 Mexican soldiers had left Tamaulipas for Texas and Bexar. An account in the Vera Cruz Censor said the force had left Tampico in February. It was also reported that 2100 auxiliaries, of whom 800 were infantry and 1300 were cavalry, were being organized in Nuevo Leon. A large body of militia was supposed to be assembling at Mier.

The threat of an invasion from Mexico had other serious implications for Texas besides the immediate concern for the security of her borders. The failure to furnish adequate protection for settlers on the frontier tended to discourage immigration from the United States and elsewhere.

This reluctance of colonists to come to Texas was increased by the news of the fate of the Santa Fe expedition. It was believed in European diplomatic circles that Texas had demonstrated her inability to hold the territory she claimed as her own by the failure to establish her authority at Santa Fe. It would be a poor investment for European immigration societies and American financiers to support a government that appeared powerless and bankrupt. Texas' credit was no good and it had no standing army with which

to protect itself. Furthermore Texas' territory was subject to depredations by Indians as well as the Mexican Army.¹²

In Great Britain in particular there were people who were antagonistic to the interests of Texas. These were the Mexican bondholders and speculators in the British colonies who waged an economic campaign against Texas for financial reasons. There were also foreign merchants in England engaged in the Mexican trade who joined the other groups in opposing aid to Texas. On the continent, however, colonization promoters were relatively unaffected by the unfortunate events in Texas and continued energetically to promote immigration to Texas.¹³

The negative effect upon the colonization schemes was the major reason for the concern of the Texas government over the occupation of San Antonio de Bexar by the 500-man army of General Vasquez in March of 1842. The city had been abandoned by a Texan defense force under Captain John C. Hays numbering 100 men prior to Vasquez' entry. Vasquez held San Antonio for two days while he secured needed supplies. At the end of two days he turned his men southward and returned to Mexico. Captain Hays and his men trailed Vasquez as far as the Nueces and then retired without engaging Vasquez' army in combat.¹⁴

¹² Nance, After San Jacinto, 12.

¹³ Ibid., 13.

¹⁴ Nance, Attack and Counterattack, 200.

Further to the South another Mexican force of approximately 207 men under Colonel Valera invaded Texas and penetrated as far north as Villa de Goliad. This phase of the Mexican invasion served little purpose except to further arouse an already alarmed group of settlers in the region of the Nueces. They saw in this raid the intention of Mexico to establish a permanent occupation of the area. The size of the Mexican army was put at 700 by several sources; however, one estimate went as high as 20,000.¹⁵

The most significant effect of the Mexican invasion of March 1842 was to bring tremendous pressure to bear upon President Sam Houston who now was serving his second term as President for some kind of retaliatory action against Mexico. Houston was asked to organize a punitive expedition to march to the Rio Grande and if necessary to permit it to go beyond the river to punish Mexico for the recent invasion. Houston reluctantly sent out a call to arms on March 10. He later explained the reasons for his reluctance in a letter to the editor of the Galveston Advertiser. Houston felt that to prepare sufficiently for an expedition such as the people were demanding would take months, if not years.¹⁶ He conceded, however, that if sufficiently prepared such an

¹⁵Ibid., 42.

¹⁶Houston to the Editor of the Galveston Advertiser, Houston, Texas, March 17, 1842. Writings of Sam Houston, II, 509.

expedition might well penetrate to the gates of Mexico City due to the inferior training and equipment of the Mexican army. Foreign military aid, Houston went on, was not feasible because of the difficulty of coordinating the command of the various foreign contingents. Finally, Houston declared that in his opinion it would be impossible for the Republic to raise the funds necessary for financing an expedition of this type with its poor credit rating among the world's economic powers.

As if in answer to Houston's arguments against a Mexican expedition the Houston Telegraph and Texas Register carried an editorial which declared that the conquest of Mexico should not be the objective of the proposed expedition. The editor wrote that the Texan army should penetrate Mexico as far as the Sierra Madre and carve out a new boundary. Texas should not strike at Mexico's heartland but annoy her and if possible detach some of her territory as punishment for molesting Texas. Texas might then force Mexico to accept a peace settlement on Texas' terms. After this had taken place, Texas could then develop Matamoros as a supply depot for further actions against Mexico if this should prove necessary. Despite the warnings of Sam Houston that the expense of an expedition against Mexico was more than the Republic's treasury could stand, the frontiersmen still demanded such an expedition to satisfy their desire for revenge. The attempt to satisfy their demand by token action failed. Houston then proclaimed a blockade of the Mexican

Gulf Coast ports and announced plans to bring settlers from France, Belgium and Great Britain into the region along the lower reaches of the Rio Grande. Although he signed contracts for these settlements in February and June of 1842, the colonization effort never materialized. The threat of colonization of the lower Rio Grande Valley failed to satisfy the Texans and aroused further the apprehensions of Mexico.

The Mexican commanders of the Army of the North issued ringing appeals to their citizens to defend their frontier in these troubled times. Troops were stationed at strategic locations along the Rio Grande with 2500 in Matamoros alone. The Mexican army had received reports that an army of 400 Texans had assembled at Goliad and that Texas patrols were already penetrating beyond the Nueces. Although these reports proved to be false, the Mexicans were now on the alert. The threat was considered so serious that on June 10 President Santa Anna felt compelled to issue a declaration of his intention to prosecute the war against Texas until victory was achieved.¹⁷

During this period one minor skirmish took place between the armies of Texas and Mexico at Lipantitlan on the Nueces River. A Mexican force under Colonel Canales

¹⁷Nance, Attack and Counterattack, 43.

engaged a Texan army under General Davis. After the two armies exchanged fire for a brief time, the Texans withdrew. This insignificant little skirmish was magnified out of proportion in the light of other events. However, the sixth congress of the Republic of Texas adjourned without appropriating funds for increased security forces on the southwest frontier which gave the people in the southwest the feeling that their danger had been ignored. If their government could not or would not help them, they would help themselves.

CHAPTER II

EVENTS ON THE SOUTHWESTERN FRONTIER, 1842

In the mid-summer of 1842 Texas' southwest frontier lay virtually undefended. The only defense force on the frontier was the 150 rangers commanded by Major John C. Hays.¹ These rangers were charged with the defense of the frontier, suppression of bandits, observation of Mexican activities on the Rio Grande and the prevention of the incursions of Indians and others who might harass the area. The Indian attacks had become so serious that President Houston had transferred the capitol from Austin to Houston. Major Hays' rangers were unequal to their task of protecting the frontier.

As a result of these desperate conditions the southwestern frontier region was rapidly becoming depopulated. Contemporary reports from Austin and San Antonio show how serious conditions had become. Austin had only a small starving population remaining and business had almost stopped. San Antonio was not much better off with its trade virtually at a standstill. It was described by

¹ John Coffee (Jack) Hays was a surveyor by profession who came to Texas in 1837. He was employed by the Republic of Texas to make surveys on the frontier. Appointed Captain of the Texas rangers, he became a noted Indian fighter. In 1849 he moved to California where he died in 1883. Hays County is named in his honor. Handbook of Texas, I, 789.

visitors at the time as a "town of gloomy desolation." Only ten or fifteen Americans remained in the town out of the original population of two hundred or more white settlers.

A group of people residing along the Guadalupe and San Antonio Rivers held a meeting at Victoria to discuss the local situation and exchange ideas as to what could be done about it. These people were seriously concerned about the future as many of their friends and neighbors had already moved east of the Colorado River. They were determined to find some means of protecting themselves against being driven back beyond the Guadalupe and San Antonio Rivers. There was at the time of this Victoria meeting a group of militia encamped on the Guadalupe River numbering between twenty and thirty men commanded by Colonel Ewen Cameron.² Colonel Cameron and his detachment of militia were all that stood between the Mexican army and the lives and property of the frontier settlers of southwest Texas.

The Victoria meeting adopted a declaration stating its objectives and resolutions. The reason for the meeting according to the declaration was the failure of the Republic of Texas to prevent the Mexican raid on San Antonio. The settlers felt that they had only three alternatives: "tame submission" to Mexican terms, the abandonment of their

² Ewen Cameron came to Texas in 1836 as part of a group of Kentucky volunteers. He was in the cattle business until 1842 when he joined a company of Washington County volunteers as a captain. Handbook of Texas, I, 275.

homes and retirement to residences in middle or eastern Texas, or mounting the utmost possible resistance to the invasion of the Mexican army.³ The members of the Victoria meeting further declared that the settlers had given up any hope of receiving aid from their government. Finally they resolved that their exposed position be made known to their fellow citizens and that a committee be appointed to secure aid and concert of action with fellow citizens in other counties. They appointed a committee to address the President as to the reasons for the convention taking the actions that it did and to solicit aid from other parts of the Republic. They extended the gratitude of the Victoria citizens to those who might come to their aid and thanked Captain Cameron and his men for their efforts on behalf of the convention. The convention also asked the Colorado Gazette to publish the proceedings of the meeting.⁴

The call to arms issued by the Victoria meeting brought a large response from the county of Victoria, but very few elsewhere. Major Cameron's militia unit on the Guadalupe consisted of forty to fifty men from Victoria County and the southwest frontier, but this was hardly an adequate force with which to oppose an invading Mexican army.

³ Joseph M. Nance, Attack and Counterattack, 283.

⁴ Ibid., 283-284.

Ewen Cameron had, previous to taking command of the Victoria county militia unit, lived in the states of northern Mexico adjoining the Rio Grande. It is believed that while residing in northern Mexico Cameron became obsessed with the idea of forming a new nation between the Rio Nueces and Rio Panuco. This would include the area donated by the King of Spain to Don Jose' Escandon in 1746, which stretched from the Panuco River just south of present-day Tampico northward to the San Antonio River. Cameron reasoned that since Texas had taken possession of this area down to the Nueces that the southern part should also be occupied by the Republic. If not annexed by Texas, Cameron felt the area should become an independent republic in its own right. This was probably his motive for taking command of the Victoria County militia and later joining the expedition to the southwest.

The reason for the Victoria County citizens accepting his leadership was of a more practical nature than carving out a new nation below the Rio Grande. As a former resident of northern Mexico Cameron had valuable knowledge of the woods and mountain passes in the region south of the Nueces. This knowledge made Ewen Cameron the natural choice to command the Victoria County militia and to make an expedition into the trans-Nueces as well.

The call for action from the settlers in the southwest failed to change President Houston's stand. He still felt that the Republic of Texas was unable financially to

support the kind of sustained campaign that would be necessary to bring tranquility to the southwestern frontier. He rejected the Victoria declaration by saying that, "The appropriation made by the first session of the last congress would not suffice to sustain a single company upon the border."⁵ He further said, "Our difficulties have not been increased, but are only the more manifest because the evils produced by the last are fully disclosed in the poverty of our present condition."⁶

Houston's defense of his stand failed to satisfy his critics and further aroused those who had already begun calling for a punitive expedition against Mexico. The most vociferous in their support of such an expedition to Mexico were the adventurers who had recently arrived in the Republic from the United States. For these men such an expedition offered an opportunity for financial and personal gain. The idea might have been forgotten if they had been its only proponents, but the fact was that the adventurers were not alone. Not only the settlers in the southwestern region but many people in the interior as well felt that action against Mexico could be delayed no longer without jeopardizing the life of the Republic. Houston, himself, realized

⁵Sam Houston to Richard Roman, City of Houston, August 10, 1842, Writings of Sam Houston, III, 145.

⁶Ibid.

that some action would now be necessary if only for political show. The problem, then, was not whether action should be taken, but in what form it should be.

President Houston was convinced that whatever action was taken must be limited in scope. This would be necessary because the congress of the Republic had been so miserly in providing funds for financing any plan to increase the security of the Republic's frontiers. Houston was faced with the dilemma of trying to outfit an expedition against Mexico without money to pay for it. He could not negotiate with Mexico because Mexico still refused to recognize the independence of Texas, nor would Mexico accept the offices of a third party to settle what the Mexican government considered to be purely an internal matter. Texas must do something, but its coffers were empty.

Houston proposed to raise an army to march to the Rio Grande and if necessary to cross into Mexico. The purpose of this campaign was to punish Mexico for her invasions into Texas. Houston's initial plan called for raising nineteen companies of sixty-six men each plus one hundred Lipan Apache and Tonkawa Indians totalling 1,354 men. They would be equipped at their own expense. The only supplies to be furnished by the Republic of Texas would be the army's ammunition. The last and most important point of all was that the Government of Texas would sponsor the campaign into the valley of the Rio Grande. Any spoils

captured by it would be divided among the men and none of it claimed by the Republic of Texas. In such a manner was the Army of the Southwest first conceived.⁷

Houston was undoubtedly influenced in his planning by a proclamation of the Government of the United States. This announcement declared that the United States would expect the members of any Texas force that might fall into the hands of Mexico to be accorded all mercy and kindness due prisoners of war. This demand only applied if the soldiers were regular fighting men of the Republic of Texas serving under its flag. A force of filibusters fighting without the sanction of the Republic of Texas would not be subject to the rules applicable to legitimate prisoners of war.

With this encouragement Houston announced that the army, once it reached the Rio Grande, would make such reprisals against Mexico, "as civilized and honorable warfare will justify in our present relations with our common enemy."⁸ At the same time that Houston had authorized formation of the Army of the Southwest, he announced the formation of another force under Charles A. Warfield to move against the

⁷Houston to William Chisley, New Orleans, Houston, August 15, 1842, Writings of Sam Houston, IV, 134-135.

⁸Concerning the campaign against Mexico City, July 26, 1842. Journals of the House of Representatives, Eighth Congress. 375.

northwestern frontier.⁹ This army was to move toward New Mexico and draw the attention of the Mexican army away from the campaign in the south. The strategy was not only to attack one of Mexico's weakest points but also to launch a reprisal for the Mexican capture and abuse of the members of the Santa Fe expedition.

Warfield was directed to raid New Mexico, levy contributions from Mexican towns in the area and confiscate the property of the Mexican people. In the case of Warfield's men, the spoils were to be split evenly between the Republic and members of the army. Once Warfield had devastated the smaller towns his instructions were to capture Santa Fe and any other large towns he might be able to occupy. At Santa Fe he was to confiscate all Mexican property and then await further instructions from the Texas government. The generally accepted plan of action once Santa Fe was in Texas hands was for Warfield to hold the town until the army of the Southwest had crossed the Rio Grande at which time he and his army would move down the river and join forces with the Army of the Southwest. This plan might have worked if it had been carried out but it never was. Warfield's march was delayed upon the insistence of the American and British ministers who feared it might upset negotiations for release

⁹ Charles A. Warfield, Missourian, had been a resident of New Mexico for some time. He had traveled widely in the Rocky mountain region. He was commissioned by George W. Hockley to raise an expedition against Mexico. Handbook of Texas, II, 863.

Woll's campaign in Texas to coincide with the convening of the Mexican Congress to write a new constitution. Santa Anna himself stated at this time:

My principal attention is directed and fixed on the territory of Texas, which has been usurped to the end of making possible other usurpations. The struggle (that has) commenced is vital to the Republic, and if she conserve the honorable name that she enjoys in the civilized world, it is necessary that employing her energy and consuming her resources, she combat without intermission and at cost of whatever sacrifices until her arms and her rights triumph. The army is preparing for this and on this day, forever memorable in which the national representation (legislature) assembles, it pleases me to make known to you the opinions of my government, the desires of the army and the interest of the people.¹²

The first report of the Mexican intention to invade Texas again reached San Antonio in July. As early as July 2, the army under General Woll¹³ was reported waiting on the Rio Grande for marching orders. The truth was that Woll did not begin his march to San Antonio until August 24. On this date he invaded Texas from the Mexican outpost at

¹²Ibid., 297-298.

¹³Adrian Woll, a French soldier of fortune, had arrived in Baltimore, Maryland in 1816 with letters of introduction to General Winfield Scott. Finding no place in the U.S. Army he joined the Mexican forces. He became a friend of President Santa Anna and an officer in the Mexican Army. He negotiated the armistice in 1844. After the Mexican War he returned to France. He returned to Mexico in 1852 but left again in 1855 after the fall of Santa Anna. He returned to France where he died sometime after the Civil War. Handbook of Texas, II, 927-928.

Presidio del Rio Grande. On September 9, San Antonio citizens learned of his proximity to their city and on September 10, efforts were made to organize some sort of defense. The best that could be done was to organize two groups of volunteers. On September 11, General Woll's army surrounded San Antonio.

General Woll's capture of San Antonio was a demonstration by Mexico that she could still impose her authority on Texas. It was also evidence that Mexico still considered Texas to be her own. To a certain extent it was also a reprisal for the Santa Fe Expedition and even the defeat at San Jacinto. This is quite clear from the text of Woll's message to his troops after crossing the Rio Grande:

You will prove yourself worthy of the mission and of the army to which you belong . . . great fatigue awaits you in traversing the numerous rivers and the vast solitary plains, which separate you from the enemy they protect. By your valor and your firmness you will overcome all these obstacles. You will make yourself great as the desert is vast. In combat you will recollect the injuries committed by ingratitude to Mexican hospitality. After triumph you will remember you are Mexicans . . . be generous . . . do not distrust fortune . . . she will be faithful to justice - victory will crown your heroic efforts and a generous country will reward your worthiness. Soldiers, let us march then upon the enemy.¹⁴

General Woll cut off all communications between the Rio Grande and Bexar. By taking a circuitous route through the wilderness and the foot of the mountains he was able

¹⁴Nance, Attack and Counterattack, 312.

to advance secretly to within three leagues of San Antonio before its citizens ever suspected that such a Mexican expedition had started. Woll entered San Antonio after light resistance from the citizenry, who seeing that this was a force of regular Mexican army units, elected to surrender. Woll captured sixty-seven prisoners as a result of the occupation of San Antonio.¹⁵ Among the prisoners were members of the district court which was in session in San Antonio. Woll used these prisoners to spread rumors throughout the frontier by requiring them to write letters from time to time. They were forced to write that they were receiving satisfactory treatment and that General Woll's army was not the advance party of a larger Mexican Army, but a band of robbers numbering a few hundred men. Meanwhile General Woll prepared to defend the city of San Antonio against an expected Texan counterattack.

The only Texan force in the vicinity was Major John Hays' rangers who kept up a constant surveillance of the activities of the Mexican army in San Antonio. Upon his report, Texans were answering the call to come and rescue San Antonio. A force of 200 Texans under Captain Caldwell¹⁶

¹⁵ Ibid., 323.

¹⁶ Mathew Caldwell came to Texas from Missouri in 1831. He was a signer of the Texas Declaration of Independence. Caldwell became a Captain of a Company in the 1st Regiment of Infantry after the revolutionary war. He was wounded in the Council House fight. He was a Santa Fe prisoner. He died in Gonzales in 1842. Handbook of Texas, I, 268.

was encamped upon Salado Creek about five miles from the city. Caldwell's strategy was to draw Woll outside the city by using Captain Hays' rangers as a reconnoitering force. If unable to draw Woll out of San Antonio, Caldwell would wait for reinforcements.

As part of his preparations for defending San Antonio General Woll sent the sixty-seven prisoners on to Mexico on September 13, 1842. Of all the actions of General Woll, this act was to cause the greatest repercussions later. Before their departure the Bexar prisoners (as they were to become known) were forced to draft a final letter to their countrymen. This letter was an appeal to the Texas army, should they reoccupy San Antonio, (as Woll knew they would) to make no reprisals upon the Mexican populace of San Antonio. The letter read as follows:

To American Officers and Citizens: The undersigned, American prisoners in the hands of the Mexican Army at this place, feel it to be a duty to recommend to all Americans, who may come here after our departure, to treat the Mexican population residing in this place with lenience and kindness. Up to the time of the unfortunate occurrence by which we were made prisoners nothing transpired to prejudice them in our estimation, and since our captivity they have been untiring in their kindness supplying us in the most liberal manner with everything which could induce in the least degree to our comfort.

We . . . hope, therefore, should this place again fall into the hands of the Americans that for our sake the Mexican population here will not be in any way disturbed or injured either in person or in property.¹⁷

¹⁷Nance, Attack and Counterattack, 327.

The ultimate fate of the Bexar prisoners was recorded for posterity by the man who was United States Minister to Mexico at the time, General Waddy Thompson. According to his account five men escaped, one was released by Santa Anna, three were released through the intercession of General Thompson himself, one was released through the intercession of General Andrew Jackson, two were killed at Hacienda Salado, eight died in prison in Mexico, three escaped from Mexico and thirty-eight were released from Perote. Six prisoners were presumed to have died in Mexico but positive proof could not be obtained.¹⁸

At about the time that Woll dispatched the Bexar prisoners to Mexico he sent Colonel Seguin and Captain Herrera with the presidial and defensor forces of Bexar to reconnoiter the road leading from San Antonio down the Guadalupe river to Gonzales. Seguin and Herrera reported that they encountered no hostile forces west of the Guadalupe. The report of Seguin and Herrera was probably the primary reason that General Woll decided to accept the challenge by Captain Caldwell. Woll also knew that another Mexican army had left Matamoros on August 26. This force commanded by Gonzales was under orders to march to Victoria and from there to whichever point necessary to link up with Woll. Gonzales'

¹⁸ Thomas Jefferson Green, Journal of the Texian Expedition Against Mier, 448.

army never reached Victoria due to high water, but Woll did not know it and in the final analysis it did not make any difference.

By September 18 General Woll felt that he had accomplished his mission and began preparations for the return march to Mexico. He decided to give Caldwell battle only to give his soldiers a chance to gain a little glory. This would be their last chance, as his orders called for his mission to be terminated in thirty days which meant that with an early departure from San Antonio his soldiers would have a little extra time. A fight with the Texan army would occupy his troops; and should they win, such a victory would enhance his prestige.¹⁹

On the morning of the eighteenth Captain Hays and his rangers made their move and in so doing baited Captain Caldwell's trap. Woll accepted the challenge, marched his army out of San Antonio preceded by his cavalry and proceeded to try to storm the Texans' position. The Texans repulsed every attack. Every time the Mexican infantry came within range of the sharpshooting Texans their ranks were so thinned that they were forced to give way. The shells of the Mexican artillery fell harmlessly into the trees above the Texan position. It was in the middle of this conflict that one incident occurred that was to make an

¹⁹Nance, Attack and Counterattack, 329.

indelible imprint upon the minds of those Texans who witnessed it.

Into the midst of the battle between General Woll's and Captain Caldwell's forces came fifty-three men under Captain Dawson.²⁰ The Mexicans saw that Dawson's men were to their rear and immediately turned on them. Dawson was too close to the Mexicans to make a safe retreat and had no alternative but to face the Mexican charge. They did not attempt to reach Caldwell's army as they were unaware how near it was to their own position. That the sad fate of Dawson's men was unnecessary was borne out by a later observer who declared:

He could have taken the main road and undoubtedly have reached the Salado bottom in safety unobserved by the enemy. But that 'dare me devil, don't care' which is characteristic of Texans led these brave spirits to the slaughter. Some of his men spoke of retreating. Dawson raised his rifle and stated that he would shoot the first man who said shoot or surrender.²¹

The Mexicans brought a cannon to bear on Dawson's men. The cannon fired point blank and cut the Texans down at a rapid rate. Seeing that the situation was hopeless, Dawson decided to surrender. He raised the white flag, but

²⁰ Nicholas Mosby Dawson came to Texas from Tennessee in 1834. He participated in the Battle of San Jacinto in 1836. When General Woll captured San Antonio in 1842, Dawson organized a company of volunteers and hurried to the front. Handbook of Texas, I, 472.

²¹ Harvey Alexander Adams, Journal of the Expedition to the Southwest, I, 2-3.

the Mexicans continued to fire. Dawson's own men also failed to cease fire because they were unaware of their commander's intentions. Thirty-six Texans were killed and fifteen were captured before General Woll ordered his soldiers to cease fire. Unfortunately Woll's order came a little late. However, Caldwell had no men killed and only ten wounded. Woll had one hundred and four killed and one hundred and fifty wounded. There was little victory or glory in such results. Consequently, on September 20th, General Woll withdrew from San Antonio and began marching his troops back to Mexico.

The capture of San Antonio by Woll coupled with the Dawson Massacre renewed the cry in Texas for some sort of reprisal for such cruel action as that of General Woll. Sam Houston, who had hoped the clamor might die away after the defeat of his bill to finance an expedition to the southwest, saw his hopes dashed by General Woll. He knew that some action would have to be taken. Ironically it was Mexico and not his political enemies at home that had finally forced Houston to act.

CHAPTER III

THE SOMERVELL EXPEDITION

Upon receiving intelligence that another Mexican invasion force had captured San Antonio, many of the families who had remained on the southwestern frontier fled from their homes leaving behind them fields of unharvested corn and cotton. In spite of the uncertainty and panic, committees of public safety and vigilance were organized and soon small groups of mounted men could be observed making their way toward San Antonio to drive out the hated pelados.¹

Upon hearing of the developments in San Antonio, President Houston ordered the militia of Matagorda, Victoria, Brazoria, Fort Bend, Austin, Washington, Colorado, Fayette, Gonzales and Bastrop counties to go to its rescue. The idea was that these contingents could harass the Mexican forces around San Antonio until an army of sufficient size to recapture the city could be organized. According to the instructions of Houston, "If the enemy should evacuate and fall back the troops are authorized and required to pursue them to any point in the Republic, or in Mexico and chastise the marauders

¹Pelados was an expression for a ragged fellow, usually a peon.

for their audacity."² Troops from the counties of Harris, Montgomery, Brazos, Robertson and Milam were held in reserve and all militiamen in the republic were put on alert. General Alexander Somervell³ of Matagorda was ordered to San Antonio to take overall command of the militiamen and volunteers assembling there.

Vice-President Edward Burleson astensibly went to San Antonio on his own responsibility to take command of the Texan army. He was very popular with the frontiersmen of Texas and would have undoubtedly been a popular leader. However, Sam Houston did not want a popular leader for his army as much as he wanted one who could be counted on to follow orders. For this reason he appointed Somervell commander of the soon-to-be formed Army of the Southwest. General Burleson upon hearing of his superior's action dutifully retired from the scene. Houston's election of Somervell instead of Burleson caused much ill

²Houston to Morgan C. Hamilton, City of Houston, September 20, 1842, Writings of Sam Houston, III, 162.

³Alexander Somervell, a native of Maryland, moved to Texas in 1832. He engaged in the mercantile business in San Felipe. He was elected major in the first regiment of Texas volunteers and fought at San Jacinto. He was secretary of war in David G. Burnet's Cabinet and elected Brig. General in 1839. Handbook of Texas, III, 636-637.

feeling among the groups that were to make up the expedition to the southwest.⁴

That the mood of Texas at this time was for war was evidenced by an editorial in the Houston Morning Star on September 17, 1842:

"To arms!" should be shouted throughout the Republic, and every man who can shoulder a rifle should hasten to the aid of our western citizens. One bold and decisive blow at this juncture may completely defeat the contemplated campaign of Santa Anna."⁵

Outrageous optimism on the part of some proponents of the expedition was reflected by an editorial in the Houston Telegraph and Texas Register:

An army of a thousand Texans could sweep the whole country from Chihuahua to the coast. Intelligent gentlemen who have visited Chihuahua, say that it could easily be captured by five hundred or eight hundred Texans, and that a contribution of \$200,000 specie could be levied and collected with ease. From Monterrey and Saltillo \$100,000 could be levied also, and a proportionate sum from other towns. In the valley of the Rio Grande thousands of horses, cattle, sheep and goats could be gathered and driven into the settlements. Thus could we extort from Mexico an amount of property greater and more valuable than the whole products of Texas have been for the last five years. Our citizens could not engage in a more lucrative business than in carrying on an

⁴ Edward Burleson came to Texas in 1836 from North Carolina. He established himself as a leader and statesman. He was a member of the conventions of 1832 and 1833 and of the convention of 1835 and fought at San Jacinto. He was popular on the frontier and was elected to positions of leadership, including Vice-President of the Republic of Texas in 1841. Handbook of Texas, I, 219.

⁵Houston Morning Star, September 18, 1852.

offensive war with Mexico. The army now in the field will be augmented by bands of adventurous youth . . . and we trust it will not turn back until it has exorted from the Mexican provinces an ample indemnity for all the losses that Texas has sustained during the last seven years.⁶

Whereas the clamor for an expedition against Mexico was inspired by patriotism and greed in the east, on the frontier it was prompted by a sense of dire necessity. The people of the southwest felt a keen sense of insecurity. Women and children stood alone against the rigors of frontier life while their men marched off to fight. This circumstance interrupted agricultural production which in its turn brought financial difficulty to the frontier people. In the space of eight months, the Texans of the frontier had been called to arms on five different occasions to repulse forces threatening them; twice it had been the Indians and three times it had been Mexican invasions. All of this had left the southwestern frontier in a state of exhaustion.

Men converged upon San Antonio from all parts of Texas and some came from the United States. A vivid description of these men who came to Bexar to offer their services to the Republic was given by William A. "Big Foot" Wallace who was among those present:

A motley mixed up crew we were you may be certain-broken-down politicians from the 'old

⁶Houston Telegraph and Texas Register, October 5, 1842.

states' that somehow had gotten on the wrong side of the fence, and had been left out in the cold, renegades and refugees from justice, that had 'left their country for their country's good' and adventurers of all sorts, ready for anything or any enterprise that afforded a reasonable prospect of excitement and plunder. Daredevils they were all, and afraid of nothing under the sun except a (due-bill or a baliff) and if they had been managed with skill and judgement, would undoubtedly have accomplished all that was expected from the expedition.⁷

These were the men whom General Somervell had been commissioned to lead to Mexico. Somervell arrived in San Antonio on November 4, a month after he had received instructions as to what was expected of himself and his army from President Houston:

Executive Department, Washington, 3rd, October 1842, TO: Brigadier General A. Somervell, Sir: Your official communications from San Felipe under date of 29th ultimo, reached me late last night. I seize the first moment to communicate my orders. You will proceed to the most eligible point on the South Western Frontier of Texas and concentrate with the force now under your command, all troops who may submit to your orders, and if you can advance with a prospect of success into the enemy's territory, you will do so forthwith. You are at liberty to take one or two pieces of ordinance now at Gonzales. For my part I have little confidence in cannon on a march; they will do on a retreat, where the forces are nearly equal, but they embarrass the advance of an army; and if pressed hard on a retreat, the great aversion that troops have to leave the artillery may induce delay, and embarrass all the movements of the army. Our greatest reliance will be upon light troops, and the celerity of our movements. Hence the necessity of discipline and subordination. You

⁷ John C. DuVall, Adventures of Big Foot Wallace, 159-160.

will therefore receive no troops into service, but such as will be subordinate to your orders and the rules of war.

You will receive no troops into your command but such as will march across the Rio Grande under your orders if required to do so. If you cross the Rio Grande you must suffer no surprise, but be always on the alert. Let your arms be inspected night and morning, and your scouts always on the lookout.

You will be controlled by the rules of the most civilized warfare, and you will find the advantage of exercising great humanity towards the common people, in battle let the enemy feel the fierceness of just resentment and retribution.

The orders of the government of the 15th ult. having been disregarded by those who have gone to Bexar, in never having reported or communicated with the Department of War, the Executive will not recognize their conduct, and you alone will be held responsible to the government and sustained by its resources, you will report as often as possible your operations.

You may rely upon the gallant Hays and his companions and I desire that you should obtain his services and cooperation, and assure him and all the brave and subordinate men in the field, that the hopes of the country and the confidence of the Executive point to them as objects of constant solicitude. Insubordination and a disregard of command will bring ruin and disgrace upon our arms. God speed you. I have the honor to be your obedient servant, Sam Houston.⁸

Somervell began organizing his army by ordering the various detachments in and around San Antonio to concentrate at the mission San Jose for the purpose of setting up a permanent organization. The newly organized

⁸Sam Houston to General Alexander Somervell, Writings of Sam Houston, III, 170-171.

force was to be made up of two regiments of 600 men each.

There was an element of division in the ranks with many of the militiamen desiring to return home while some of the volunteers wanted to march to the Rio Grande and beyond if necessary. Such a division was to plague Somervell's army from the beginning. Some of this dissension was caused by the long delay in the arrival of Somervell himself to which was now added the time needed to organize the army and make preparations for the march. Some of the men who had been in San Antonio since the evacuation of General Woll were still angry that they had not been permitted to either win a decisive victory over Woll or to pursue him. Additional discontent arose due to General Somervell's conduct during the two weeks he made his headquarters in San Antonio. Somervell accepted the hospitality of some of the same Mexican families who had extended their hospitality to General Woll before him. Somervell was also criticized for attending nightly fandangoes and dancing with black-eyed senoritas, activities which were forbidden by some of the militia units in his command.

These were small matters compared with the real threat to Somervell's command which was the desire of some of his officers to command the expedition themselves. They were dissatisfied with Somervell's performance and felt that there was "indifference and lack of interest"

on his part toward the operation.⁹ There was also the fact that many of Somervell's men openly expressed their preference for General Edward Burleson as commander of the army. Such dissension was to pervade the expedition from San Antonio to Laredo. Later some of these men would accuse Somervell of failure to carry out the spirit if not the letter of his orders. Included among these men would be the leaders of the Mier phase of the expedition. One of the most common reasons given by members of the Mier expedition for refusing to return with Somervell was their dissatisfaction with his conduct of the expedition up to that time. In fairness to Somervell it must also be noted that others felt him to be competent and "an officer of courage and ability".¹⁰

The group which objected most to Somervell's delays was the draftees. They felt that they had been called out for nothing more than a show of force and, as a result, began to desert. The seriousness of this problem intensified when the "northers" and rains came, as many of the men did not have sufficient clothing, blankets, or even shoes. As the men grew more rebellious and disorderly under these conditions, it became clear that a move one way or another would have to be made soon.

⁹ William Preston Stapp, Prisoners of Perote, 20.

¹⁰ Ibid.

On October 16, Secretary of War Hamilton dispatched a letter to Somervell:

It is a matter of surprise as well as regret, that no reports have been received of you relative to your progress and movements, when (opportunities) daily are offered you by men leaving your encampment for their homes. This department is ignorant, except for rumor from men in camp of their condition for service--the quantity of supplies on hand or the prospect of procuring them.

It has been represented that the whole number of men in camp will not exceed six hundred; and that a part of them will not report in-as-much as they do not understand clearly the character of your orders--that they are not disposed voluntarily to join the expedition or the force; and further that of both ammunition and provisions are insufficient. I am under the necessity of making the inquiry whether these rumors be true, because you have failed to keep the department informed of the state of things. Your orders were to neither muster into service nor issue supplies of any kind to any but those who reported with a firm resolve to cross the Rio Grande if required to do so.

It was expected that those who were anxious to enter the enemies' territory were prepared to march immediately upon their organization which should have been completed when they reported themselves. Those who were not disposed to join the expedition should have departed instantly for their homes. It was not the design of the Government to keep an undisciplined and disorganized army stationed on the frontier merely for the purpose of consuming the little substance remaining of a population already nearly reduced to starvation.

Your communication of the 7th inst. has just been received; but it affords no information as to the number of men at your encampment. How are they supplied? When you can probably take up the line of march, or whether it will be practicable with the force which you are likely to have at your command, to carry out at this advanced season of the year, the objects contemplated. It is, you will see the necessity of prompt and energetic

movement. If it is not, why it is hoped that you will see the propriety of disbanding the troops at once. They have now been on the frontier six weeks, and seemingly as little prepared for the march as when they first arrived.¹¹

The Army of the Southwest was also hampered by the attitude of the citizens of San Antonio. The people of the city had been more willing to furnish munitions to General Woll than they were to give them to the Texan army. When the munitions were requested by the Texans, the citizens demanded an exorbitant price in silver which so aroused the militia from Montgomery County that most of them left with only Lieutenant Colonel Joseph L. Bennett, the commander, and seventy men remaining. General Somervell refused to requisition the people of San Antonio for the munitions which caused more grumbling. The men believed the supplies, which had been left behind by Woll, were ample for all of their needs.

There has been some speculation that Somervell's delay in taking up the march was due to bad weather and high water. This may be true in part, but there was also the fact that the men of the Army of the Southwest were scattered over a wide area around San Antonio. Somervell was also unwise in his selection of officers. He combined Captain Hays' spy company with a detachment under Captain

¹¹ M. C. Hamilton to Brig. Gen. Alexander Somervell, November 9, 1842, Writings of Sam Houston, III, 193-194.

Bogart, which caused much jealousy between them. Hays had a smaller group than Bogart but held the senior commission so he was given command of the combined units with instructions to assign an equal number of men from each unit on every mission. In Hays' absence the combined units would be commanded by Captain Bogart;¹² this might have worked except that the instructions were violated several times by Somervell himself.

The first movement of the army was to the nearest point on the Medina River where it would await the arrival of cannon from Gonzales. After waiting another two weeks for the cannon, Somervell decided to leave it behind. It was doubtful that the cannon could have been carried had it reached the army on schedule. The delay involved in waiting for the cannon served to irritate the troops even more. Up to this point they doubted whether the Republic of Texas was really serious about the expedition to the southwest.

The Mexicans took the Texan movement quite seriously. The Army of the North voiced great concern for

¹²Samuel A. Bogart fought in the battle of New Orleans and the Black Hawk War in Illinois. He came to Texas in 1839. He served under John C. Hays. He represented Harris County in the second legislature (1847-1848). He was a member of the Know-Nothing party and endorsed Sam Houston's stand against secession. He died near McKinney on March 11, 1861. Handbook of Texas, I, 181.

the safety of the northern Mexican settlements. General Reyes, commander of the Army of the North, appealed to the Mexicans along the Rio Grande to rise up and defend the Mexican territory against Texan vandalism. He promised his superiors in Mexico City that should Texas send an army into Mexico it would be severely punished. Reyes then moved his headquarters to Pase de Aguilo and stationed troops along the Nueces and Rio Grande Rivers to watch for the enemy. General Woll was ordered to position himself at Lampasas. The immediate response of the Mexican army to the Texan threat was to watch and wait.¹³

Somervell left the Medina on November 18 following the El Camino Real from San Antonio to Laredo. The army's morale had improved because of the departure of most of those who were most critical of the organization of the expedition. The problem for the army now was to decide just where to attack the Mexicans first. General Somervell's original plan called for an attack upon the outpost of San Fernando de Rosas thirty-eight miles west and slightly north of General Reyes' headquarters at Presidio del Rio Grande. Somervell's intelligence sources had reported that Reyes had 800 men at San Fernando and Vasquez had 200 at Morelos. His sources further reported that 300 troops were stationed at Matamoros, 100 at the mouth of

¹³Nance, Attack and Counterattack, 481-482.

of the Rio Grande and 100 at Brazos Santiago.¹⁴

As a result of this information Somervell decided not to attack San Fernando because he lacked sufficient manpower. It was decided that under the circumstances the most favorable point of attack was Laredo. President Houston concurred that the attack against Presidio was unfeasible but suggested another alternative in a letter to Somervell dated November 23.

If you advance to the Rio Grande you have not indicated the point on which you design making an impression. It seems to me that unless your information is much better than mine, the Presidio is much out of the way. It may, however, be proper, as I do not know your particular object, further than to distress the enemy to the greatest extent possible. It appears to me that Camargo would be the point at which you would be least expected, and where the greatest impression could be made on the country. The most efficient force of the enemy will be at the Presidio. You will find the Cherokees, and the warriors associated with them, the most efficient and dangerous that you could encounter on the other side of the Rio Grande. They are located in the neighborhood of Presidio.

The suggestions of spies, touching the abundance of supplies in the neighborhood of the Presidio, or on any part of the Rio Grande, I would not rely upon; and less at that point than any other. The fact of Woll's army having been mustered and sustained there for a time, and falling back again after the Campaign at that point, is my reason for discrediting their report. Supplies have never been considered

¹⁴ Report of Brig. Gen. A. Somervell to the Hon. G. W. Hill, Secretary of War and Marine in Texas Congress, Journals of the Ninth Congress of the Republic of Texas. Appendix 70-71. Diary of Joseph D. McCutcheon.

abundant anywhere on that river. But in relation to these subjects your opportunities for information are better than mine; and I regret exceedingly that you have not been more circumstantial on your details of information. I had no idea that the season would have been permitted to advance so far before active operations would have been commenced; or if it had been impracticable to accomplish anything it would have been proper that the men should have returned to their homes and left unconsumed the subsistence, that would have been available to sustain a smaller force, which might have been useful as well as necessary. Unless men are marshalled to cross the Rio Grande, and with that knowledge and determination, the design as well as the wishes of the government will not be carried out. The orders upon this subject have been explanatory as well as positive.¹⁵

Whether Houston's letter had any influence upon Somervell is not clear, but in any event it was decided the Texan point of attack would be Laredo.

Four days after leaving the Medina the Army of the Southwest found itself forced to make its way through a bog which proved to be several miles long. This caused severe damage to some of the horses of the army. Somervell reported:

The horses were so materially injured by their exertions to pass through this continuous deep and tenacious mass that they were ever afterward unable throughout the campaign, to make those quick marches essential to the accomplishment of the object of the campaign.¹⁶

¹⁵Houston to General Alexander Somervell, Washington, November 23, 1842, Writings of Sam Houston, III, 201-202.

¹⁶George Lord, Mier Reminiscences. Signed Affidavit, 2.

Despite some difficulties the Army of the Southwest stayed together until it reached Laredo, but this should not be to the credit of General Somervell. He permitted dissension among his officers to continue and seemingly did everything he could to impede the progress of the expedition and discourage the men without being conspicuous about it.

The march to Laredo was plagued throughout by misfortune and unfavorable conditions. Crossing the Nueces the Army of the Southwest was confronted by high water forcing them to build a bridge which caused further delays. At this point there occurred an incident that was to justify a charge of bad faith not only against General Somervell but also against the President of the Republic as well. A member of the expedition overheard an exchange between General Somervell and some of his subordinate officers. General Somervell was heard to declare that he had received a dispatch from President Houston bidding him to break up the expedition at any cost. Somervell then asked his captains, "What is to be done?"¹⁷ He was answered by Colonel Cooke¹⁸ who said:

¹⁷Ibid., 2.

¹⁸ William G. Cooke, a Virginian, came to Texas in 1835 and continued in the service of the Republic until 1837. He re-enlisted in 1839 receiving a commission as quartermaster-general of the Republic. He was a member of the civil branch of the Santa Fe Expedition. Later appointed adjutant-general of the militia, Cooke served until 1847. Handbook of Texas, I, 406.

abandoned the city, the Army of the Southwest entered Laredo on December 8, 1842.

After conferring briefly with the Mexican authorities in Laredo Somervell marched his army one and a half miles north of the city to encamp. The troops were greatly disappointed by this move as they had expected to march across the river into Mexico. When the order to cross the river was not given, the troops began to have doubts again and morale sank to a new low. Some of them contended that Somervell's refusal to order the army across the river was due to the influence of Colonel Cooke, who it was feared was plotting to take command of the army for himself.

Aside from the suspicions of Cooke the majority of the men agreed that Somervell was passing up a great opportunity by not crossing the Rio Grande immediately. As one of them expressed it, "The main road down the Rio Grande was on the west side, and the crossing at Laredo. Why did the General not cross the river at that point and take the main road, was the inquiry in everyone's mouth."²²

One group of five men went with General Green across the river to the town of Galveston and planted the Texas flag there in the name of the Republic. They demanded that the townspeople give them five mules. Upon

²² Thomas Jefferson Green, Journal of the Texian Expedition Against Mier, 55.

receiving the mules they recrossed the river and returned to camp. Their reason for these acts was that they felt failure to cross the Rio Grande would be a disgrace "upon our Country and upon ourselves."²³ Green later claimed that Colonel Bravo and some of his troops were in Galveston at the time of his crossing

Many of the others in the expedition recorded sentiments similar to those of General Green in their diaries and journals. They claimed that a majority of the soldiers in the army of the Southwest favored going into Mexico at least as a symbolic gesture. Failure to set foot on Mexican soil would be an unequal response to the previous action of Mexico. The majority of the men of the Army of the Southwest felt they must have at least this much to show the people back home or be considered failures. To them, success of the mission seemed to rest on an invasion of Mexico no matter how effective.

Each man had his own personal motives and there were almost as many of these as troops on the muster rolls. Some of them like Ewen Cameron felt that the sovereignty of Texas should extend to the Rio Grande and beyond. Others like William S. Fisher were veterans of the Federalist

²³Ibid., 56.

wars and had old scores to settle with the Mexicans.²⁴ There were men like Dr. Brenham²⁵ who had been on the Santa Fe Expedition and desired revenge for the hardships imposed upon them during their captivity. Finally there were those like General Green who felt the honor of Texas could be avenged only by attacking the enemy on his home ground. Regardless of their personal motivation they felt it necessary for the Army of the Southwest to cross to the south bank of the Rio Grande before their campaign could be considered a success.

Such discontent was undoubtedly the underlying cause of the plunder of Laredo. The objectives of the expedition, as one member expressed them, were:

. . . . to meet the enemy and exchange a few shots to achieve something that would at least erase the stigma caused by the recent inroads of the Mexicans and avenge in some manner the cruelty practiced upon her citizens; also to capture citizens of Mexico to give in exchange for those taken by General Woll at San Antonio.²⁶

²⁴ William S. Fisher came to Texas in 1834 from Virginia. He participated in the Battle of San Jacinto in 1836. He was Secretary of War from December 1836 to November 1837. He was appointed lieutenant colonel of a frontier cavalry regiment in 1837. He participated in the Council House Fight in 1840. In 1840 he led a company of 200 men to join the Army of the Republic of the Rio Grande. He was a Captain in the Somervell Expedition. He died in Jackson County in 1845. Handbook of Texas, I, 603.

²⁵ Richard F. Brenham came to Texas from Kentucky in 1836. He was one of the leaders of the Santa Fe Expedition in 1841. He was captured with the rest and released in 1842. Handbook of Texas, I, 213.

²⁶ Harvey Alexander Adams, Expedition Against the Southwest, 1842 and 1843, I, 45-46.

That the seizing of plunder was pre-planned is denied by all the writers who recorded the affair. The record of the Army of the Southwest was damaged by the plunder of Laredo. Upon the entry of the Army of the Southwest into Laredo requisitions had been made and duly filled. On the following day, a group of Texan soldiers entered the City of Laredo and demanded more supplies. The Alcalde said that if the soldiers would make out regular requisitions, he would proceed to tax all the citizens according to what they had. Many of the men were not willing to wait this tedious operation and instead went into houses and stores and forcibly took as many things as they could lay their hands on. They broke down doors, opened boxes and trunks, and took blankets wherever they could find them, "even from the beds of women leaving them to weep the fate of their unhappy lot."²⁷

The men found the location of the commissary stores and ransacked them. There was such a mad stampede into the commissary store that it was surprising that none of the men were seriously hurt. From the commissary the Texans took large quantities of shuck cigarettes.

The pillage continued until the middle of the afternoon when the men were ordered back to camp under guard. The men were then ordered to deposit in a pile

²⁷Green, Journal of the Texian Expedition Against Mier, 57.

whatever they had taken. They gave up such articles as saddles, blankets, soap, candles, flour, sugar, pelonca, books, baby clothing, bedding, pillows, cushions and cigarettes, which were returned to the people at Laredo.

There were charges and countercharges made by officials who later tried to fix blame for the Laredo incident. Sam Houston accused General Green of leading the troops. Green pleaded innocent and placed the blame on the frustration of the men.

Most of the men had been away from their homes for three months; they had been promised time after time to be led against the enemy; they had been promised that when they reached the Rio Grande they should have all necessary supplies.

The men saw plainly that their three months toil was to be swallowed up in the glory of getting a view of the Rio Grande, and then making a hasty and disgraceful flight back home, and without provisions to take them there. Under this state of things a portion of them entered the town, and took, among absolute necessities, many articles of a useless character.²⁸

The ransacking of Laredo is an indication of the dissatisfaction with General Somervell's conduct of the expedition. Only sixty men are said to have taken part in the affair, but they were secretly supported by a larger number who refrained from participation in the pillaging.

Following the plunder of Laredo the Army of the Southwest withdrew some distance farther from the city.

²⁸Ibid., 58.

On the next day armed rancheros appeared on the opposite bank of the Rio Grande, but no action was initiated by either side. His men became so agitated that General Somervell decided to let the men determine their own fate. He ordered all who wished to cross the Rio Grande to form on one hill and those who wished to return home on another. He promised them that if enough men desired to cross the Rio Grande he would continue to carry on the campaign. Many of the men were reported to have protested making a decision at that time but 540 men voted for a continuation of the expedition and 200 voted to return home. The re-organization caused by allowing these men to leave the army caused further delay.

Green contends in his account that if Somervell had immediately crossed the Rio Grande instead of delaying, "he would have taken every town down to Reynosa, and created such universal panic in that country as to have caused the enemy to evacuate Matamoros and fall back on Tampico, leaving the former city entirely exposed."²⁹ Whether he was correct or not, certainly the delay did not favor the Texan army. The decision to put the question of crossing the Rio Grande up to the men shows great indecision on the part of the army's commander.

The men who elected to stay with the expedition and cross into Mexico were required to sign a pledge.

²⁹Ibid.

We the undersigned agree to cross the Rio Grande for the purpose of waging war on Mexico. We also agree to be governed strictly by the rules and articles of the government of the armies of this Republic, and especially to abstain from depredations on the property or disturbing the person of unarmed citizens. And that all offenses of this kind shall be punished as the articles of war direct. All property captured from the enemy shall be equally distributed between the officers and the soldiers. The commanding General shall make requisitions and give orders for whatever supplies be required by the army. We also pledge ourselves to sustain the officers in all their efforts to enforce orders and the rules and regulations of the service generally."³⁰

According to one account Colonel Cooke resigned his command at this time. His reason was that:

He was unwilling to remain in the responsible office . . . when such insubordination as he had witnessed was sanctioned by his superiors; he declared that he had witnessed General Somervell laughing with indifference at the disobedience of his own orders, and that success could not attend an expedition thus conducted.³¹

General Somervell decided to proceed down the Rio Grande along the east bank to a point opposite the town of Guerrero, a short distance from Laredo. Somervell planned to cross the river at this point and occupy the town of Guerrero. It was there that the Army of the Southwest first confronted the Mexican Army, but Somervell

³⁰Copy in State Department (Texas) Department of State Little Book, Home Letters, II (1842-1846), 69-71.

³¹Memucan Hunt to Francis J. Moore, Jr., Editor of the Houston Telegraph dated Bexar January 8, 1843, Morning Star Houston, January 17, 1843.

refused to give battle. The challenging force were 300 Mexican Defensores³² under the command of Colonel Canales. After sunset, on the same day, Canales and his men withdrew.

Early on the morning of December 15th the Alcalde of Guerrero appeared before the Texan army and agreed to place the town at the disposal of the Army of the Southwest and to comply with any requisition its commander might make, provided there was no looting or pillage of the town. General Somervell submitted a requisition to him but the failure of the city to fill it satisfactorily led to his further demand for \$5,000 instead of the goods. The Alcalde could only produce \$381 which Somervell refused resulting in frustration for the Texan soldiers that they had gotten nothing.

Surely, argued they, if the interpretation the Mexicans themselves had practically asserted in Texas (for a victorious enemy over a vanquished one) were to be carried out, not a pound of provisions, a cent of treasure, or bill of goods to be found within range of our conquest, but were legitimate spoils.³³

Indeed the situation was so acute with "such universal confusion and discontent that it was late and with difficulty that discipline was sufficiently restored

³²Defensores, Mexican rural defense force.

³³Stapp, Prisoners of Perote, 30.

to parade a guard."³⁴ This was undoubtedly the primary reason that Somervell decided he should proceed no further down the river. Furthermore General Somervell concluded that it would be unsound strategy and possibly disastrous to remain upon the Rio Grande any longer. As Somervell saw it, Mexican forces concentrated at San Fernando to the North and Matamoros to the South made further operations on the Rio Grande militarily unfeasible. This was especially true in view of the fact that discipline had deteriorated so badly and control of the men had become so marginal.

Having made his decision, General Somervell issued an order on December 19th stating that troops of the Army of the Southwest would take up the march at 10 A.M. for the junction of the Rio Frio and the Nueces River, thence proceed to Gonzales where the army would be officially disbanded. This order provoked a hostile reaction from some of the troops who felt cheated because they had not, as yet, acquired any material profit from the expedition. They wanted to continue to raid the Mexican towns along the river. Others felt they had not gotten revenge against Mexico for the raids into Texas. There were still others who were curious as to the reasons for General Somervell's reluctance to push on.

³⁴Nance, Attack and Counterattack, 558.

One historian has concluded that another crisis arose at this time because, "general problems had never been solved and there is reason to believe that the administration never expected them to be solved. Very little energy had been shown by the commanding officer in prosecuting the campaign."³⁵ This authority has gone so far as to pronounce the expedition a purely political maneuver to placate demands by the western frontiersmen for some sort of action against Mexico and to demonstrate the unfeasibility of operation against that country while the government of Texas was unable to provide adequate support for such an operation.

The Army of the Southwest was in its final stage and the result of this crisis would be the Mier expedition. It is at this point that some historians would draw the line between the Somervell phase and the Mier phase and declare each a separate campaign. These historians have said the men who pushed on to Mier divested themselves of the protection of their government. They have accepted the position of President Houston that those who elected to continue the expedition without Somervell as their commander were automatically deserters when they marched on Mier.

³⁵ Sterling Hendricks, "Narrative of the Somervell Expedition", Southwestern Historical Quarterly. XXIII (1919-1920). 135.

That Somervell and one hundred men returned home is a fact. To the three hundred men who stayed on the Rio Grande to continue operations against Mexico, he gave his permission. This is attested to by several of the men who chose to remain on the Rio Grande, one of whom was George Lord who relates:

While we encamped at the Texas side of the Rio Grande opposite the town of Guerrero, Mexico a party of men gathered around the camp of Captain Cameron and engaged in discussing the enterprise as to crossing the Rio Grande for the avowed purpose of whipping the Mexican forces under the command of General Ampudia and capturing Mexican prisoners to exchange for the San Antonio prisoners who were then in the hands of the enemy. General Somervell was asked his permission to execute this enterprising yet hazardous undertaking. The General's reply was, "I give you my permission to go and take the boats that belong to my command and I only wish that I could go, but circumstances prevent me from going with you."³⁶

With these words Somervell departed leaving with the men who stayed behind his apparent sanction of the operation upon which they were about to undertake. In this manner Somervell put the seal of the Republic of Texas on an action that its chief executive would later disavow and whose participants he would call bandits and filibusters.

³⁶ George Lord, Reminiscences of the Mier Expedition,

CHAPTER IV

THE BATTLE OF MIER AND ITS AFTERMATH

The men who chose to continue the campaign against Mexico had to reorganize. Colonel William S. Fisher was elected to be commander of the army and Thomas J. Green was chosen to be his deputy.¹ Both of them had always favored the continuance of the expedition and Fisher was particularly suited to command it, having fought in the Federalist Wars of 1838-1839 as a member of the army of the Republic of the Rio Grande.

Colonel Green commanded the flotilla of flatboats acquired at Laredo and Guerrero as it moved down the Rio Grande in conjunction with the land army. With a solid red banner fluttering from his flagship Green's flotilla captured and burned several boats along the way. It also captured and disarmed a band of Karankawa Indians. The flatboats were beached and abandoned when the army reached a point opposite Mier.

¹ Thomas Jefferson Green came to Texas from Florida in 1832. He organized the Texas Land Company but abandoned the project to serve in the Texas army. He was commissioned Brigadier-General and returned to the United States to recruit volunteers. He represented Bexar County in the House of Representatives and in the Senate of the Second Congress. After escaping from Perote he returned to Velasco and represented Brazoria County in the Eighth Congress. He moved to California and sponsored the bill creating the University of California. He returned to North Carolina and died there in 1863. Handbook of Texas, I, 728.

Fisher's command reached a point seven miles from the city of Mier on December 21, 1842. Ben McCulloch² was sent ahead to determine the state of affairs in Mier. He reported that Colonel Canales and his Presidial forces had already evacuated the city but that fresh troops were expected back at any moment. On the basis of this information Colonel Fisher decided to enter the city immediately before it could be reinforced. Furthermore, he had only enough supplies for a few more days and he wanted to replenish them in case his small army had to make a hasty retreat northward.

Another group decided to return home at this time rather than continue with the expedition. A number of them took a route which led them opposite Mier while the resulting battle was in progress. Harvey Adams who was with this detachment recalled hearing the sounds of

²James (Ben) McCulloch came to Texas from Tennessee and joined Sam Houston's army in 1836. He participated in the Battle of San Jacinto. Elected to Congress in 1839 he continued his military activities. He participated in the Plum Creek Fight and the Somervell Expedition. He served as a scout for John C. Hays' rangers. He served in the first legislature of Texas and led a spy company of rangers under Zachary Taylor in the Mexican War. He went to California in 1852. In 1853 he was appointed United States Marshall. He helped settle the Mormon trouble in 1857. McCulloch was commissioned a Brigadier-General in the Confederate Army in 1861. He was killed in the Battle of Elk Horn in 1862. Jack W. Cunn, "Ben McCulloch: A Big Captain," Southwestern Historical Quarterly LVIII, No. 1, 1-21.

the battle and gave his report of their reaction:

I suppose it to have been about ten or eleven o'clock in the day our ears were greeted with the sound of cannon, which convinced us we had wandered in the wilderness and got opposite Mier. Certainly not more than one day's travel from the place. We knew the battle had opened with the Mexicans and our boys.

Our boys were wild with joy and wanted the Captain to go to their relief and after some reflection and consultation with the guides about his incapacity in leading us in such a wild goose chase took the lead himself and took up the march in the opposite direction with our backs to the river.³

The belief that Fisher intended to return home himself after securing provisions was the reason given for some of the men leaving the main army prior to the Battle of Mier. A member of Ben McCulloch's scouting party said that Fisher informed them that they were free to leave as the rest of the army would be going home shortly. If this was the real intention of Colonel Fisher why the attack on Mier?

In 1842 Mier, Tamaulipas, Mexico was the second richest town on the Rio Grande. By the standards of the day only Matamoros outranked Mier in terms of wealth. Mier was one of the best defended towns on the Rio Grande as well. Its buildings were flat-roofed with walls of breast height extending from the roofs. These were originally used as defenses during Indian attacks. The

³Harvey Alexander Adams, Journal of the Southwestern Army, 70.

town was built on the side of a hill and commanded one of the more important forts on the Rio Grande known as Paso del Cantaro. In December of 1842 Mier had a population of 6,000 to 8,000 inhabitants, including a few people of American birth. The most significant physical feature in the area aside from the Rio Grande was the Rio Alcantro which flowed to the west of the town.⁴

On December 22 Colonel Fisher ordered his men to cross the Rio Grande to enter Mier but to remember, "that they were upon an honorable service, and not one of pillage, and that their country would look to them for a soldier-like discharge of that service." He further reminded them that the recent plundering of Laredo had had serious repercussions. Such incidents made a soldier unfit to perform his duties and created in him a burning

⁴In 1842 Mier, Tamaulipas, Mexico was the second richest town on the Rio Grande. By the standards of the day only Matamoros outranked Mier in terms of wealth. Mier was one of the best defended towns on the Rio Grande as well. Its buildings were flat-roofed with walls of breast height extending from the roofs. These were originally used as defenses during Indian attacks. The town was built on the side of a hill and commanded one of the more important forts on the Rio Grande known as Paso del Cantaro. In December of 1842 Mier had a population of 6,000 to 8,000 inhabitants, including a few people of American birth. The most significant physical feature in the area aside from the Rio Grande was the Rio Alcantro which flowed to the west of the town. Thomas W. Bell, Mier Expedition, 87, and George Lord, Mier Reminiscences, Typescript A. Archives of the State of Texas, State Library, Austin, Texas.

desire to return home. After concluding his address Colonel Fisher led his troops into Mier.⁵

Fisher's men were well received by the Alcalde and citizens of Mier. The Texans marched into the plaza and maintained good discipline while Fisher and Green conferred with the Mexican officials. The Mexicans were informed that the army wanted to requisition certain necessities from the townspeople and upon receipt of the goods their army would withdraw. When the Alcalde agreed to comply with the request of the Texan officers, Green made out a requisition which read:

The alcalde of Mier will forthwith furnish and deliver at headquarters upon the Rio Grande the following requisition for the use of the army, to wit: All the government stores of every kind, including cannon, small fire-arms, powder, lead, munitions of war of every kind, tobacco, etc.; also 5 days' rations for 1200 men, to wit: 40 sacks of flour of 6 arrobas each, 1200 lbs sugar, 600 lbs coffee, 200 pairs of strong coarse shoes, 100 pair of pantaloons, and 100 blankets.⁶

Upon receipt of the requisition the Alcalde proceeded to call upon the citizens to fill the order according to what they had. When the requisition was nearly filled, the Texans realized that they had no means of transporting the supplies back to their camp. They were

⁵Green, Journal of the Texas Expedition Against Mier, 74-75.

⁶Ibid., 75-76.

forced to return to camp without the supplies but were reassured by the promise of the people of Mier to deliver the supplies to their camp the next morning. To insure their honesty the Texans took the Alcalde to their camp as a hostage for the supplies.

When they arrived back at the Texan camp the Alcalde asked permission to speak to the commanding general. He had not yet realized that he had already seen the whole Texan army in Mier and not a vanguard of a much larger invasion force. He promised once again that the requisition would be filled on the next day. All the next day the Texans waited in vain for the townspeople of Mier to bring their supplies. Two days later a prisoner was brought in who informed Colonel Fisher that the people of Mier had loaded several wagons with supplies and started them down river to the Texan camp on the morning of December 23 as promised. The wagons were stopped before they reached their destination by units of the regular Mexican Army numbering 700 men under General Pedro Ampudia. The Mexicans had stationed themselves about two miles down river on the south bank to prevent any Texan advance southeastward from Mier.

Colonel Fisher called a council of war in which it was decided to cross the river and attack Ampudia's army. The crossing of the army was almost completed when the first contact was made with the Mexican army by Captain

Baker's spy company. They had two men Samuel H. Walker and Patrick Lusk captured but sent word to Fisher that they would hold their position until relieved.

The prisoners, Walker and Lusk, were taken back to the headquarters of General Ampudia who had retreated to Mier after the clash. Walker informed Ampudia that the Texan army was some three hundred strong whereupon Ampudia declared, "they surely have not the audacity to pursue and attack me in town,"⁷ whereupon Walker replied that the Texans would pursue and attack Ampudia in hell if necessary.

When the Texans discovered that the Mexicans had retreated to Mier, their first impulse was to pursue them into town immediately. This reaction was due in part to the fact that five Texans had been taken captive by the Mexicans. The army actually began marching toward Mier but halted about one mile outside the city after a brief exchange of fire with Mexican sentries. By midnight of the 25th the Texan army had taken up positions on a high hill on the east bank of the Rio Alcantro opposite Mier.

The situation of the Texan army at this time was summed up by General Green who described it as follows in his journal:

⁷Ibid., 76-80

The Rio Alcantro is a small but rapid stream about sixty yards in width, which forms a semi-circle upon the east side of Mier, the city being built in the curve. The position which our troops occupied was upon a high hill, difficult of descent and between the upper and lower crossings of the river. Here it was necessary to feel our way with great caution and profound silence. The night being dark and drizzling with rain, the troops were ordered to sit and protect their arms from the damp until more could⁸ be learned of the position of the enemy.

Two scouts were sent out to draw the fire of the Mexican pickets and divert their attention while Colonel Green made his way along the bluff of the Rio Alcantro toward the lower crossing. On reaching the lower crossing Green discovered a body of Mexican cavalry there, whereupon he returned to the top of the bluff and secured permission to lead an attack on them. He proposed that under covering fire from Captain Baker's spy company he would search for another point of crossing between those two occupied by the Mexican cavalry.

When Green reached the river he signaled Baker to begin the attack. The Mexicans erroneously believed they were facing the Texan main force and gave only a brief volley in return. Green slipped down the river and found another suitable crossing which he marked with a red bandana and returned to the main force. During this brief

⁸Green, Journal, 82.

encounter Captain Joseph Berry fell down an embankment and suffered a broken thigh. He was rescued by a detail sent back from camp under the command of Dr. J. J. Sinnickson⁹ and moved to an abandoned house nearby where he remained until the battle of Mier began.

After receiving Green's report as to the location of another point of crossing Colonel Fisher moved the army up river to that place and ordered it to cross the river immediately. The right wing was the first to cross and made contact with the Mexican pickets before the rest of the army had crossed the river. After a volley of about one hundred shots the Mexican pickets retreated. The Mexican cavalry commanded by Colonel Ramires had been ordered to charge the Texans but for some reason it failed to carry out its orders. While the Texans were occupied with this brief skirmish, the Alcalde of Mier made good his escape.¹⁰

Once across the Rio Alcantro the objective of the Texan army was the Military Square in the center of Mier. Colonel Fisher and Colonel Green felt that this was the stronghold of Ampudia's army. From where the Texans crossed the Rio Alcantro it was only fifty yards to the outskirts of the city.

⁹John J. Sinnickson was a physician of Brazoria County. He came to Texas originally from New Jersey. He was released by Santa Anna at the request of the United States Minister. Ibid., 95.

¹⁰Ibid., 86.

Colonel Green led a reconnaissance party into Mier where it discovered that two field pieces were positioned directly in front of the Texans' route to the main plaza. However, the Mexicans had not yet completed preparations necessary for using the artillery. When Colonel Fisher was informed of the situation he ordered the right wing under Colonel Green to advance up the street upon which the cannon was placed. The right wing executed the required maneuver and then opened fire on the Mexican troops at the other end of the street.¹¹

The left wing also came under intense fire at about the same time as the right wing had exposed its position by exchanging fire with Mexican infantry stationed on the housetops. However, the main objective of the Texans at this point became a place of refuge as a drizzling rain began to fall. The Texans broke contact and south to protect their arms and repair those damaged as their rifles were of a type easily damaged by moisture.

The right wing was directed to occupy a row of houses upon the side of the street most menaced by the Mexican artillery which it accomplished by breaking down the corner doors and opening breaches in the dividing walls. As the Texas right wing was now within fifty yards of the Mexican artillery position, it attempted to open a

¹¹Ibid., 86-90.

breach in the wall of the occupied building which would neutralize the Mexican artillery. The Mexicans chose this time to concentrate their artillery on them, which aided the Texans in opening the breach. Once the breach was completed the Texans concentrated their fire on the artillery position with devastating effect (55 out of 60 were hit).¹²

The left wing of the Texan army had been directed to occupy the opposite row of houses. It seized the buildings and breached the walls also, putting them within fifty yards of the enemy. The Mexican artillery men, now caught in a crossfire between the two wings of the Texan army, were nearly all killed or wounded except for their commander, Captain Castro.

The Mexican army had been pushed back to the Military Plaza with heavy losses while the Texans had suffered only one killed and two wounded. The Texan commanders had achieved much more than they had anticipated on this first day of operations, but they had gone about as far as they could go as there was now only about one hour of daylight left.¹³

At dawn the Mexican artillery position still lay silent and unoccupied while the Mexican soldiers had taken

¹²Ibid., 91.

¹³Ibid., 93.

positions on the housetops confronting the Texans. From their vantage point they raked the Texans with musket fire, and for the first time the Texans began to sustain serious casualties. Colonel Green ordered only the best shots in the army to return the Mexicans' fire and put the rest of the soldiers to work constructing holes in the roof tops of the houses they were occupying.

Fisher and Green were already planning their next move. The army would make simultaneous moves toward the plaza with the right wing moving upon the Alcalde's office and the left wing occupying a house next to its present position so it could provide covering fire. This house was held by such a large force of Mexicans that it would have to be attacked from several different directions. Colonel Green and Captain Reese decided that more wall breaches were necessary to protect Texan troops if they occupied more elevated positions.¹⁴

At this time another tragic episode in the Battle of Mier took place. The Texans guarding the injured Captain Joe Berry were forced to make a dash of six hundred yards to the Texan lines on the Mexican side of the Rio Alcantro. Up to this time the guards had been limited in their actions to observation of the battle. As their position had now become menaced by a troop of Mexican

¹⁴Green, Journal, 91.

cavalry, they opened fire on the cavalry and forced its withdrawal after inflicting eleven or so casualties upon them. The cavalry soon returned with reinforcements and a field piece, leaving the Texans no choice but to attempt to break through the Mexican lines to reach the main body of the Texan army across the river.

The guard charged the Mexican cavalry and actually broke through the Mexican line, but they had three hundred more yards to go before reaching the Rio Alcantro and safety. The Texans were overtaken half way to the river by the Mexican cavalry and had to defend themselves with their rifle butts as their muskets were empty and there was no time to reload. Five of the guards were killed, three were captured, and two made it safely across the Rio Alcantro. Captain Berry was bayoneted and killed in his bed by the Mexicans. Following this incident the Mexican cavalry commenced a victory celebration by shooting their guns and prancing before the Texan army.¹⁵

While the Mexican cavalry celebrated its victory some of the Mexican troops charged the northern side of the Texan position which was under the personal command of Colonel Fisher. The Mexicans were forced to withdraw, but not before they had inflicted significant casualties upon the Texans. Colonel Fisher was one of these, having the ball of his right thumb cut off by a Mexican musket ball.

¹⁵Ibid., 92.

Until then the Mexican artillery positions had been unmanned because their artillery company had suffered heavy casualties. To prevent the seizure of the field pieces by the Texans, the Mexican troops lassoed the field pieces and dragged them to less exposed positions. Captain Cameron and his men however seized this opportunity to occupy a yard to the rear of the buildings held by the Texans. Cameron then went to Colonel Fisher personally and requested reinforcements to hold the courtyard. For Colonel Fisher this proved to be a difficult decision. He was enduring physical suffering from his hand wound, and several other officers were pressing requests of their own for reinforcements at this same time. The situation was finally brought under control when Colonel Green jumped upon a table and demanded order. While Green attributed the indecision of Fisher to his wound, others contended that Fisher had been hesitant in making the necessary decisions all day. One member of the army recorded that:

During the whole day Colonel Fisher was very inactive, he appeared to be perfectly stupid. When he was asked what was best to do would give an evasive answer, he was asked frequently to let the men charge out and repulse the several charges of the enemy although the order was given by Captain Cameron.¹⁶

¹⁶Diary of James A. Glasscock, 89. Some of the words have been omitted from this typescript which is in the Archives of the State of Texas in Austin, Texas.

Whatever the cause of Fisher's confusion, Green restored order and dispatched reinforcements to Cameron while the rest of the force was ordered to defend the buildings it already held.

The Texans were now surprised to see Dr. J. J. Sinnickson (who had just been captured with the guard of Captain Berry) coming to their lines under a white flag. He explained that after interrogation by General Ampudia he was to give the following message to Colonel Fisher:

. . . that he must surrender with his whole force in five minutes or I will cause them all to be put to the sword, and give no quarter . . . that if he will cause his troops to lay down their arms, and surrender in that time, their lives shall be spared, with all humanity and deference due them as prisoners of war; and furthermore, I will exercise my influence with the supreme government to prevent their being marched to the city of Mexico, but to have them retained east of the mountains until they are released or exchanged.¹⁷

Fisher, according to Sinnickson, took a few minutes to consider as if he was in the process of making up his mind and then went over to Ryan and Cameron. He then called a council of the officers during which time a group of Mexican officers entered the Texas lines. They approached Fisher and embraced him as they had known him before during the Federalist Wars. One of these men was Padre De Lire, the priest of Camargo, who had administered

¹⁷Green, Journal, 474.

the last rites to Fisher when he lay near death with small pox during the Federalist conflict.

The Mexican officers assured Fisher that the terms of Ampudia would be scrupulously observed and Father De Lire pledged the honor of the Holy Mother Church to the observation of the terms of surrender. The padre pleaded with Fisher saying, "My dear son, do not throw yourself away."¹⁸ While this discussion was in progress the Mexican infantry had moved up from the west to within a few yards of the buildings occupied by the Texans. Colonel Green ordered the lead soldier shot and then shot two more himself which halted the infantry's advance. Green then attempted to shoot the Mexican officers conferring with Fisher in order to prevent them from returning to their own lines with the information they now possessed as to the condition of the Texan army but was prevented from doing so by Captain William Ryan and Colonel Fisher.

Green then requested permission to take the officers prisoner and march them to the Texan camp across the Rio Grande but this was also refused. Captain Reese came forward and made a similar request which was likewise denied. The Mexican officers were allowed to return to their lines after having granted the Texans one hour to decide whether or not to accept Ampudia's surrender terms.

¹⁸Green, Journal, 98.

The first impulse of the Texans was to continue the fight. However, after the departure of the Mexican officers some of them began to consider accepting the offer. Green, Ryan and Cameron were for fighting it out. Most of the wounded men urged, "never surrender,"¹⁹ and others asked to be shot rather than be allowed to fall into the hands of the Mexicans. At this point a council of officers was called and alternatives to surrender were discussed.

The members of this council were Green, Cameron, Ryan, Reese, Pearson, Buster, Doctor Brenham and Judge Gibson. Green presented a plan of escape to this group which called for marching the army back to the point where it had crossed the Rio Alcantro and then marching down the river to its confluence with the Rio Grande. From that point they would march up the Rio Grande to the Texan camp on the north bank. Green estimated that Texan casualties on such a march would be no more than fifty and probably less than twenty.²⁰ The Texans would be protected from the Mexican cavalry by the right bank of the Rio Alcantro and they would have nothing to fear from the Mexican infantry because the country was too broken and so ideally suited to the Texan rifles. This plan was not adopted.

¹⁹Green, Journal, 100-101.

²⁰Ibid., 103 and Bell, Narrative of the Mier Expedition, 3.

As Colonel Green refused to accompany Colonel Fisher to General Ampudia's headquarters to discuss the surrender terms, Fisher met with Ampudia alone. During the time that Fisher was absent from his command his army made preparations for continuing the fight. Upon his return the army was formed into companies and Fisher then addressed his men. He informed them of the terms of surrender and concluded his statement with the following remarks:

I have known General Ampudia for years-- know him to be an honourable man, and will vouch for his carrying them out; that if you are willing to accept these terms, you will march into the public square and give up your arms, or prepare for battle in five minutes; that in any view of the case, your situation is a gloomy one, for you cannot fight your way out of this place to the Rio Grande short of a loss of two-thirds or perhaps the whole; but if you are determined to fight I will be with you, and sell my life as dear as possible.²¹

Approximately half of the Texas troops started toward the square to lay down their arms while those who remained behind heaped insults upon them with such cries as "Go!" "I hope you may never enjoy the sight of your country and liberty again!" and "Go, you cowards! and rot in chains and slavery."²² Colonel Green had to be restrained from firing into the marchers who quietly passed

²¹Green, Journal, 102-103.

²²Ibid., 103.

before him to their fate. Frustrated, Green smashed his rifle on the pavement.

Colonel Green walked to the square and asked to be taken to General Ampudia personally. Upon meeting him Green handed over his empty sword belt and informed the General that he had opposed the surrender but had been overruled by his comrades and was now prepared for prison or death. Ampudia replied that he appreciated the feelings of brave men, that Green's fate was a result of the fortunes of war. He offered his house and his friendship to Green and made him consider himself a guest of the General. He told Green not to hesitate to call upon him for any service in his power. Green thanked the general and then turned to view the Texan rifles piled in the plaza of Mier.²³

Two men, Privates Chalk and St. Clair, hid themselves behind a pile of cane stacked in the building they were defending and slipped out of town in the night. Though St. Clair sprained his ankle, the two made their way safely back to the Texan camp on the north bank of the Rio Grande and warned the camp guard. Even though warned, they remained on the river until the arrival of the Mexican cavalry sent out to bring them in. With the arrival of the cavalry the Texans broke camp and retreated

²³Ibid., 104-105.

northward towards the Nueces. Two of the rear guard, Major Bonnell and Private Hicks, were captured and returned to the site of their camp on the Rio Grande. Hicks managed to escape but Major Bonnell was shot.²⁴

The Texans were placed in three small dirty rooms after their surrender with approximately one hundred men in each room. The officers and staff were given parole and permitted to walk freely about the town. Green records that he visited the men on several occasions, including the wounded who were housed in the church. There were also some Mexican wounded in the church. Green said he counted 136 Mexican soldiers lying in the church and all were suffering from head wounds which Green said attested to the marksmanship of the Texas riflemen. The Texans had 261 men engaged in the Battle of Mier and suffered 10 killed and 23 wounded. Reports from the Mexican defense minister about the number of Mexican troops in the battle and the number killed vary. Ampudia claimed 1700 men participated on the Mexican side. Texan sources put the number at 2340. Ampudia, however, did not include Canales' 800 Defensores. As to casualties the reports are even more hazy. Green puts the Mexican losses at 800 killed and wounded. Other reports vary in their estimates from 800 to 850.²⁵

²⁴ Ibid., 115.

²⁵ Green, Journal, 107-108.

Following the surrender, Colonels Fisher and Green were summoned to General Ampudia's headquarters to sign the Articles of Capitulation which were being drawn up by Colonel Canales when they arrived. The Texans joined the general in partaking of coffee and chocolate while waiting for him to finish. Colonel Green relates that the adjutant of the Mexican army lay on the floor of the headquarters writhing in the agony of death. General Ampudia cried as he informed them that "there is my son, the hope of the army, the pride of the service. He has a death-shot through the kidneys, and must soon die."²⁶ Green replied that, "it was the fate of war and the brave in all ranks share our sympathy."²⁷ When Colonel Canales finished writing out the Articles of Capitulation he passed them to General Ampudia who signed them first. They read as follows:

Agreeable to the conference I had with General William S. Fisher, I have decided to grant,

1st. That all who will give up their arms will be treated with the consideration which is in accordance with the magnanimous Mexican nation.

2nd. That conformably to the petition which the said General Fisher had made to me, all persons belonging to the Santa Fe Expedition will receive the same treatment and guarantees as the rest.

²⁶Ibid., 105-106.

²⁷Ibid., 106-107.

3rd. All who desire to avail themselves of these terms will enter the square and there deliver up their arms.²⁸

Green reported that when the interpreter read the articles to the Texas officers the first article was changed to read, "with all the honor and consideration of prisoners of war,"²⁹ rather than as the article actually was written. Had they known the exact wording they would have refused to sign it until it was altered to read as it was translated.

The following evening Colonel Fisher penned the following note to General Ampudia:

Sir, The forces which, through the chances of war, I now surrender to you, are composed of the most valiant and intelligent citizens of Texas. They have contended manfully against your superior force, and have yielded only when it was deemed folly longer to contend.

Your well-established character as a brave and magnanimous officer is a certain guarantee to me that they will be treated as brave men deserve to be.³⁰

The final judgement on the Battle of Mier is aptly rendered by two participants, General Green and Private George Lord. Green stated that,

. . . the battle of Mier in its moral and political consequences to our country was a glorious triumph. It was there that the

²⁸Ibid., 106.

²⁹William S. Fisher to Pedro de Ampudia. Ibid., 107.

³⁰Green, Journal, 110.

people of Texas demonstrated the entire practicability of conquering and holding the rich valley against immense odds. It was there that the people of Texas pursued and fought them nine to one, killing treble their own numbers, and proving themselves invincible to everything but duplicity and treachery; and it was there that the Texian made the sound of his rifle and death synonymous terms throughout Mexico.³¹

Lord commented,

The established fact though some have tried to dim the lustre and tarnish the laurels won by the band of patriots that the battle of Mier was by far the best fought battle of the Texan Revolution, the only one fought on Mexican soil and the last gun fired by Texans for Texan Independence.³²

It is obvious from these accounts that the men who fought at Mier never considered themselves to be freebooters, but soldiers in the military forces of the Republic of Texas. It is evident that they never expected their government and their country to disown them as it would later do.

³¹Ibid., 111.

³²George Lord, Reminiscences, 134.

CHAPTER V

THE OFFICERS MARCH

All of the Texan prisoners were marched from Mier to Matamoros beginning on December 31. At Matamoros the Mexican leaders decided to send Colonels Fisher and Green and their staff officers ahead to Monterrey as hostages for the good behavior of their men. Fisher and green informed the Mexican commander that while they would prefer to stay with their men they would comply with the order.

Prior to their departure from Matamoros, Fisher and Green penned the following letter to their men:

Fellow Prisoners, It has fallen to our lot to become the captives of the nation with which we are at war. This is the fortune of that policy; and though our condition is incident to these privations, let us bear up under them with the fortitude of men. Let us nerve our souls in the impregnable armour which lightens the weary limb, and which the steel of our enemy cannot penetrate. That immortal spirit will make us superior to our condition, and triumph over our misfortunes. Recollect that the best nations of the world have battled with each other, and the best men have been in like condition with ourselves. Indulge, therefore, all reasonable hope in the magnanimity of our enemy, and in that justice which is the all prevailing providence of God.

Today, countrymen, it is the pleasure of our captors that we should be parted, and sent on in advance to the capital. A long and weary journey lies before us. The gloom of the prison and the fatigue of this thousand miles of space we embrace as pleasures in

comparison to this cruel separation with you,
who have nobly battled for your country
and shared every danger.¹

Before leaving Matamoros the Texan officers were forced by General Ampudia to warn their men of the consequences of any attempt to escape, because he had been informed such an attempt was being considered. However, when Cameron asked Colonel Fisher how he felt about an escape attempt Fisher replied that he should "use his own judgement."² Colonel Green declared that "as they regarded my friendship, their own condition, and the honour of their country, to let no opportunity slip in overpowering their guards and getting home, and to do so regardless of any consequence to myself."³

On their way to Monterrey, the only bad treatment received by the officers' party was at the town of Caidereta near Monterrey. There they were given no bedding because they refused to exhibit themselves to the townspeople. When the officers' party arrived in Monterrey, Colonel Green penned a final note to General Ampudia which referred to the incident as follows:

Having safely arrived thus far on our way to the capital, we desire to express to you our sincere thanks for the generous

¹Thomas Jefferson Green, Journal of the Texian Expedition Against Mier, 127-218.

²Ibid., 127-129.

³Ibid., 130.

courtesies which, mainly through your kindness, we have met upon the road. At Caidereta only have we been treated in a different manner, and this, we understand, has been induced by Colonel Canales. Of that treatment we do not complain; but when the colonel makes himself the HERO OF MIER, we feel much humiliation in the imputation that we surrender to him. We scorn such a reflection for that gentleman had an opportunity at Guerrero, with three hundred troops, to meet fifty of us and declined it. Colonel Fisher and officers joined me in the hope that General Ampudia entertains a better opinion of their gallantry than to believe that such a thing could be possible to surrender to him who once deceived Texans.

We further desire to tender through you, to Colonel Savriego, officers, and troops, who have thus far accompanied us, our heartfelt thanks for their soldier-like conduct and many kindnesses.⁴

The stay of the Texan officers in Monterrey appears to have been a very pleasurable one as Colonel Green's journal is full of accounts of their social activities. On January 28 the officers were moved to Saltillo where they arrived on the 30th. There they found six Texans who had been captured prior to the battle of Mier. Three had been captured by General Woll at San Antonio and the other three at the Battle of Salado. One of these men, George Van Ness, was taken along with the Mier officers as an interpreter and the other five

⁴Thomas Jefferson Green to Pedro de Ampudia, January 23, 1843, Ibid., 130.

remained in Saltillo until the arrival of the enlisted men of the Mier group and were then marched with them to Mexico City.

On February 6 the officers' party took up the march to Mexico City again with the next stop at San Luis Potosi. However, the enlistees caught up with their officers briefly at Hacienda Salado and were allowed to visit their commanders. They told Fisher and Green of their new plan of escape at midnight. Colonel Fisher opposed the plan but told Captain Cameron once again, "to use his own good sense in the matter."⁵ Colonel Green favored the idea but advised them to wait until dawn as it would be easier to get the horses and then keep to the road for a fast escape. Captain Reese was against the plan because he felt that the Texans were too deep into Mexico.

The officers' party left Hacienda Salado ten minutes before sunrise and were three quarters of a mile away when the Battle of the Rescue began.⁶ Shortly after the battle began, a messenger arrived at the place where the officers' party had halted and delivered the order from Colonel Barragan to have the officers shot. However, Captain Romano, commander of the guard detail refused to

⁵Ibid., 146.

⁶Ibid.

execute these orders.

On the 20th of February the officers arrived in San Luis Potosi, where they were permitted to write to the governor about their treatment. They complained that they were being treated like common criminals and not as prisoners of war. They protested about being locked up in a bare cell, denied refreshments, subjected to a quadrupled and noisy guard detail, denied privacy, and provided with an extremely small allowance. These protests met with some success as the treatment of the officers thereafter improved somewhat.

One of the worst situations the officers had to endure on the remainder of the march was experienced at Arroyo Saco. What occurred here is described in a letter from Fisher and Green to the command of the escort force taking them to Mexico City.

We have been placed in a miserable barn, where the dust and vermin are insufferable, and we take this means of requesting the gracious privilege of sleeping upon the pavement in the open court. We have not time now to remonstrate against conduct which is in such flagrant violation of the articles of capitulation and of every principle of civilized warfare.⁷

When the officers' party reached the Valley of Mexico on March 15, it was taken to the suburban town of Tacubaya. Here they first learned of Santa Anna's original

⁷ Colonels Fisher and Green to Colonel of the Guards at Arroyo Saco, Ibid., 267.

order to have all prisoners taken at Mier shot. This order had been issued after the recapture of the prisoners who escaped at Hacienda Salado. At the same time they learned of the letter of President Sam Houston to President Santa Anna in which he declared, "that though the Mier men had entered Mexico against his orders, and without the authority of law, yet he begged mercy for them."⁸ Further evidence of Houston's denial of responsibility for the Mier prisoners was given in his letter of January, 1844 to the United States House of Representatives. In this letter Houston opposed a bill for the relief of Captain William G. Cooke, one of the Mier officers.

The Executive regrets to find himself under the necessity of withholding his assent from the bill for the relief of William G. Cooke, late acting quartermaster general. The reason which impel him to do so are, as he conceives, of the most forcible character.

In the first place, the government never promised those who should participate in the late campaign to the Rio Grande anything more than authority to march, such ammunition and arms as could be furnished, and the spoils acquired from the enemy, according to the laws of civilized warfare. This fact is shown by the accompanying note from the secretary of war and marine, which is intended to form a part of this message, and the published declarations of the Executive himself. In an address to the people of Texas, dated July, 1842, and published in the newspapers of the day, the Executive remarked, in reference to the contemplated expedition, that, "the

⁸Green, Journal, 478.

government will promise nothing but the authority to march, and such supplies of ammunition as may be needful for the campaign. They must look to the Valley of the Rio Grande for remuneration. The government will claim no portion of the spoils: they will be divided among the victors. The flag of Texas will accompany the expedition.

From this it will be perceived that the government was guarded against incurring any pecuniary responsibilities on account of the campaign . . . For this reason they were authorized to cross the Rio Grande, "and make such reprisals upon Mexico as civilized and honorable warfare would justify in the relations then existing with the common enemy." The Executive knew full well at that period, as he does now, that the means of the country could not sustain the expense of the expedition, and hence he based his call to the citizen-soldiers of the Republic upon what he believed to be their patriotic desire and readiness to engage in the undertaking; and because he knew the inability of the country to pay them for their services, he plainly told them they must look, "for remuneration to the Valley of the Rio Grande."

. . . It is just that all should be regarded on the same footing, and the claims of no one preferred to those of all the rest. The widows and orphans of the brave and unfortunate decimated have not petitioned congress for pay or relief, etc.⁹

This letter was cited by Green as further proof of Sam Houston's desire to absolve himself of any responsibility for the Mier expedition.

When the Mier officers were visited by the British minister, Mr. Packenham, he was asked by Colonels Fisher

⁹Green, Journal, 478-480.

and Green to intercede with Santa Anna for the release of the members of the Mier prisoners who were British subjects. Packenham promised to do what he could for these men but he cautioned them that it would be difficult because the men had voluntarily taken up arms against Mexico. Green told Packenham that he felt that the men had become residents of the Republic of Texas and under those circumstances had to obey the laws of the Republic which required them to bear arms in her defense or relinquish certain governmental benefits which they enjoyed at the pleasure of the Republic. Packenham then repeated his promise to do whatever he could to help those of the Mier prisoners who were British subjects and later did secure the release of four of them.¹⁰

On March 18 the Mier officers were marched from Tacubaya to their final place of imprisonment at the Castle of Perote. During the march the officers learned that General Waddy Thompson, the United States Minister to Mexico, had received the Articles of Capitulation signed by Colonel Fisher and General Ampudia at Mier so they requested him to transmit a copy to the Mexican Minister of War. It was at this time that they learned that the guarantees contained in the articles had been misrepresented by General Ampudia and disregarded by the Mexican government.

¹⁰ Green, Journal, 218-220; 445.

When they arrived at Perote, they joined the men taken prisoner by Woll at San Antonio who were also imprisoned there. Shortly after their arrival the Mier officers were put in irons and informed that they would have to go to work. They then lodged this protest with their captors:

We have been ordered out by your officers to perform unusual and degrading labor. In the name of our country and the whole civilized world, we, as officers, solemnly protest against the imposition of this degradation.

We furthermore respectfully protest, that, even were we willing tamely to submit to such a disgrace, for the honour of our country we never would.¹¹

Governor-General Durand answered that he was acting in accordance with orders from his government and would transmit the officers' protest to his superiors.

While Green spent some time penning letters to prominent personages both in Texas and the United States describing the condition of the Mier men and asking aid in their behalf, most of his time was spent in formulating and executing a plan of escape.¹² On July 2, Green and fifteen others dug through the wall of their cell block with chisels and crawled through it to freedom.

¹¹Green, Journal, 253.

¹²Green, Journal, 258-295.

Once outside the castle they paired off, splitting two weeks' rations which they had collected and each pair went on its own way. It had previously been planned to split up because smaller groups would be easier concealed when necessary. Of these sixteen men only three returned safely to Texas.

CHAPTER VI

THE ENLISTED MEN ESCAPE IN THE BATTLE OF THE RESCUE

At three o'clock in the afternoon of the day they surrendered, the enlisted men of the Mier Expedition were ordered out of their quarters in Mier and marched to the square. After being disarmed they were ordered against the walls of the courtyard. The entrance was then closed and the Mexican troops formed in front of their prisoners in two ranks, one a pace behind the other. There ensued an ominous silence broken only by the prisoners discussing the meaning of the formation. After one hour of waiting and wondering the prisoners were marched back to their prison.

There was a rumor prevalent among them that the Texans had been condemned to death by Santa Anna and this was the reason they had been marched into the square and stood against the wall. According to this rumor the execution had been prevented by the intervention of General Ampudia who countermanded the order on his own authority.

After being imprisoned at Mier for six days they were again assembled and ordered to begin marching to Matamoros. They were guarded by a force which was described by one of the prisoners as including "six hundred infantry, two hundred cavalry with two six-pounders commanded by

General Ampudia."¹ According to Stapp, the ragged Texans were formed into platoons for the march. "On either flank were formed columns of infantry and outside of these files of cavalry the Mexican general and staff, and in the rear, the other piece of ordinance, similarly manned, closed up the cavalcade."² Upon arriving at the town of Camargo the prisoners were paraded around the town plaza several times for the benefit of the local citizenry and one prisoner reported that people came from twenty miles away to view the "espantosos Tejanos."³

Starting the next day the Texans were marched another fifty miles down river to the town of Nuevo Reynosa where they were met by officials of the town. The officials conducted them into town where there was an atmosphere of fiesta with bands of Indian boys dancing around the square. "Ladies cheered from the housetops, men shouted, Indians yelled."⁴ Even the church bells were rung in salute to the conquerors. Here Dr. Shepherd of the prisoners was given a horse and money by a priest whose life he was suppose to have saved at the Battle of Mier.

On January 9, the prisoners reached Matamoros where they were again greeted by the spirit of fiesta. Crowds

¹William Preston Stapp, Prisoners of Perote, 30.

²Ibid., 40.

³Ibid.

⁴Thomas W. Bell, Mier Expedition, 22.

came out from town to greet the Mexican army which they saluted as the "Heroes of Mier" and to hiss and heap abuse on the prisoners. The streets were filled with spectators and the windows of the buildings decorated with fancy goods and Mexican beauties. Lines of soldiers were formed on either side of the street to prevent the prisoners from escaping. As usual the prisoners were conducted to the main square of the town around which they marched three times before they were taken to their quarters. The United States Consul visited them as did many other Americans residing in the town. By order of General Ampudia only Americans were allowed to visit them.

At Matamoros General Ampudia turned custody of his prisoners over to another officer for the march to Monterrey, and the Mier prisoners received the first notice of the intention of the Mexican government to march them to Mexico City. On January 14 they set out for Monterrey, escorted by General Canales and a guard of 500 men, of which 400 were infantry and rest cavalry, and one cannon and a squad of artillerymen. These men were raw recruits which the Texans felt was the reason for the harsh treatment they received on the road to Monterrey.⁵

After completing two hundred miles of the distance to Monterrey the Mier prisoners reached the village of

⁵Stapp, Prisoners of Perote, 45.

Sacata where it was decided to make a break for freedom. As the men felt that every mile they advanced into Mexico increased the difficulty of escape, it had been decided to make the attempt at the first encampment that offered an advantageous situation.⁶

The encampment at Sacata seemed to fill these requirements:

The cavalry were picketed in equal numbers, on the left and in the rear of our pen. The infantry . . . guarded the right and front . . . extending from the gates . . . some one hundred and fifty yards to the six-pounder, which, loaded and pointed at the only outlet and surrounded by artillerymen.⁷

The command of the attack was to be given by Captain Ewen Cameron by saying the single word "draw." When the Mexicans bearing the prisoner's food entered the corral Cameron declared, "Draw your ration." With this cry Cameron halted the escape attempt before it began. The excuse given by Cameron was that a few of the men in his company had appealed to him to postpone the break for freedom.

The Mier prisoners were particularly well-treated at the town of Caidereta. The prisoners were shown the greatest consideration and speeches were made praising Mexico by town officials. It was here that the people

⁶Ibid., 47-48.

⁷Ibid., 48-49.

prevailed upon General Canales to remove the prisoners from the dark quarters into which they had been placed and to transfer them to more agreeable quarters. The Texans were aided and abetted by a certain Dr. Bullock who obtained food and tobacco for them and showed great concern for their welfare.

After two days, the march for Monterrey was resumed. They were met far in advance of their entry into Monterrey by crowds of people from the city. Once in the city the Mier prisoners seemed to find life in Monterrey to be very agreeable as they were given better provisions and even some clothing.⁸

At Monterrey the prisoners' escort was transferred from the command of General Canales to that of Colonel Barragan.⁹ This was a welcome change as Canales had fought against the Texans at Mier and was not well liked by them. Colonel Barragan, However, was generally better liked and considered to be more humane in his treatment of the prisoners as well as more sensitive to their condition. The guard that was organized to take the Texans on to Saltillo and San Luis Potosi was made up of fresh conscripts who were poorly trained and lacked any esprit de corps.¹⁰

⁸ Ibid., 49-54.

⁹ Israel Canfield, Diary, 173-174.

¹⁰ Stapp, Prisoners of Perote, 54.

After three days the march was resumed, and after making thirty miles the prisoners were halted at Rancho Rinconada which appeared to be favorable for an escape attempt. They were held in the center court of three connected courts while the front one was occupied by the infantry and the rear court by the cavalry. The prisoners decided to make their break at dawn when the cavalry would be making preparations some distance away and the infantry could be disarmed before the cavalry could react. However, in the morning the soldiers took precautions which made it apparent that they had been betrayed. The identity of the informer was never positively determined, but the prime suspect was a former Negro slave named Sawney who was attached to the Mexican army. He had gained access to the prisoners and won the confidence of some of them because of his professions of sympathy for their condition.

On February 10, the Mier prisoners arrived at Hacienda Salado where conditions were again favorable for escape. Most of the prisoners felt that this would be their last chance to escape, as hereafter they would be too far into the interior of Mexico for any chance of success. Captain Cameron was again chosen to give the signal and was in charge of the attempt. Again it seemed that Colonel Barragan had been forewarned of the Texan plans because he took the precaution of doubling the guard but this time

his precautions were not enough to dissuade the prisoners from carrying out their plan.

After waiting only a few minutes Captain Cameron gave the signal for action by removing his hat and shouting "Now boys, we go it!"¹¹ The prisoners dashed through the doorway to the courtyard and seized the muskets which were stacked there and quickly dispersed the Mexican soldiers killing two and wounding several others. Most of the guards and their officers fled to the protection of nearby buildings while others fled to the plain. Several Texans had been killed by a group of Mexicans who were firing from behind the wall of the courtyard but most of the Mexican rifles were empty and their ammunition boxes were filled with other things besides ammunition. During this "Battle of the Rescue" the Negro Sawney made good his escape to the dismay of the prisoners who wished to make him pay for informing the Mexicans of the plan of escape on the two previous occasions.¹²

As a result of the escape the Texans had acquired substantial booty which included some one hundred and sixty muskets and carbines, a dozen swords and pistols, three mule loads of ammunition, one hundred mules and horses, provisions and \$1,400 cash. With as much of the spoils as

¹¹Ibid., 57-58.

¹²Ibid., 58-59.

they could adequately handle the Texans began marching northward.

They had not gone far upon the road from Hacienda Salado when they encountered Colonel Barragan, himself, and a few cavalrymen. Barragan tried to persuade his former prisoners of the impossibility of their escaping from Mexico. Though he failed to change their minds, they released him unharmed. He trailed the escapees for several days and kept the Mexican authorities informed of the Texans' whereabouts for some time following their escape and the ill-fated march through the mountains of Coahuila.

CHAPTER VII

RECAPTURE AND THE MARCH TO MEXICO CITY

The Mier prisoners began their flight to the Rio Grande in high spirits and covered seventy miles the first day. About half of the men were mounted although some of them were riding double. After having made some twenty additional miles the Texans approached a ranch where they were met by the bristling lances and carbines of the Mexican cavalry; they then turned northward. It seemed that no matter which way they went they were confronted by the campfires of the pursuing Mexican army.¹

After losing two men due to separation from the main body during a night march, the prisoners hired a Mexican guide. The guide led the Texans in a westerly direction and eventually reached the Monclova road. It was on this road that the Texans met an American who informed them that Colonel Barragan had spread the word of the Texans' escape to every ranch and town within a radius of two hundred miles north and east of Hacienda Salado. The alarm had been sounded throughout the countryside and the Texans had made it thus far only because the Mexican forces were still largely unorganized. The American offered to help the prisoners escape and told them that if they should be

¹Stapp, Prisoners of Perote, 60.

recaptured they would be given no quarter by the Mexicans.

The Texans decided to continue their flight bypassing several ranches along their route for fear of soldiers being present. They sent their guide on to one ranch to procure food for them, but he was seized by soldiers. The following night the officers held a council to decide what their next move should be. They decided to go against the advice of Colonel Green and leave the main road to seek protection in the mountains. Although the majority of the men favored keeping to the road, they gave in to the minority who threatened to take to the hills if the council decided to stay on the road. Such a separation, it was felt, would be disastrous for everyone; therefore the entire group took to the mountains even though the barren precipices of Coahuila could provide them with neither food nor water.²

On the morning of February 14 the Texans began their trek through the rugged peaks of Coahuila where due to the lack of water it became impossible to make much progress. Searching for water, the men began to wander far and wide. Those who became separated from the main party were recaptured by the Mexican army. The main group of 70 under Captain Cameron kept to a northerly course.

²Thomas W. Bell, Mier Expedition Narrative, 30.

On the 18th they stumbled into a camp of the Mexican army thinking it to be a friendly camp and were also captured.³

One hundred and eighty men had started out and one hundred were recaptured in a week's time. Thirty four were recaptured later and joined the main party at Paso Benado, their place of imprisonment.⁴ Only four men were able to escape as a result of the Battle of the Rescue. The rest were killed or could not be accounted for.

One of the prisoners described the condition of the Texans at the time of their recapture in his diary:

All half-naked--some barefooted, and others with an odd shoe and sandle--legs torn and lacerated by rocks and brambles--our hair and beards matted and bushy shading profiles cut down by hunger and suffering to the pallid pinched and sharpened expression of death--eyes sunk into the very beds of their sockets, and sparkling with fitful light, half frenzied, half-ferocious.⁵

³Ibid., 31.

⁴Captain Pearson with eleven men became separated from the main body while searching for water. Alexander and Thompson were separated from this group. Pearson and his group were captured by a squad of Mexican Cavalry. These two joined Major Oldham's party. Of the seven men of Oldham's party only Oldham and Alexander made it safely to San Antonio. Claudius Buster and John Toops were separated from the main body on Feb. 17. After marching 3 or 4 days toward the Rio Grande they reached the San Juan River. They were captured at this point, sent to Laredo and then to Guerrero. Then they were sent to Monterrey and Saltillo and rejoined some of the prisoners after three months at San Luis Potosi. This group rejoined the main body later at Tacubaya. Houston Wade, Notes and Fragments of the Mier Expedition, 33-39, 82-83.

⁵Stapp, Prisoners of Perote, 67.

Upon receiving the report of the escape of the Mier prisoners President Santa Anna issued orders that every Texan recaptured should be shot. These orders were not executed by the Mexican commander Mexia whose army recaptured the prisoners. This kindness on the part of the general was not forgotten by his captives, for one wrote in his diary, "Recollect ye Texans, there are not many officers under Santa Anna would disobey an order."⁶

On March 1, the Texans were back again in Saltillo where they were confined until March 22. When they were marched once again to Hacienda Salado the prisoners were under the command of a regular army unit under a Colonel Ortiz.⁷ A rain storm broke upon the Hacienda and the prisoners were once more huddled into the corral from which they had made their break for freedom. Soon after they arrived, an officer of the Mexican army entered the corral and began reading a pronouncement from the supreme government of Mexico that reduced the execution of all recaptured prisoners to the execution of every tenth man to be decided by lot.⁸

Following the reading of Santa Anna's pronouncement the prisoners were ordered to fall back into the shed of

⁶ Israel Canfield, Diary, 180.

⁷ Ibid., 180

⁸ Thomas W. Bell, Mier Expedition Narrative, 38.

the corral where they were placed under heavy guard. A Mexican soldier soon entered the corral with a bench and an earthen crock placing the bench in front of the officer-in-charge and the crock upon it. 174 beans (which corresponded to the number of prisoners) were placed in the crock of which seventeen beans were black and the rest were white. A handkerchief was placed over the crock to conceal the beans. A list of the names of the prisoners in the order in which they were recaptured was handed to the officer-in-charge. The first of the prisoners to draw was Captain Cameron who drew a white bean. As each man drew his name was recorded along with the color of the bean he had drawn. This went on until all the black beans were drawn.⁹ By the time all the black beans had been drawn seventy-five percent of the total number had been drawn. The men who drew black beans were taken outside the corral and their shackles removed. Some of their luckier comrades were permitted to bid them final farewells. A priest was sent to the condemned men to administer the last rites to any who wished to have them. Other than private prayers, no praying was permitted. X

At dusk the condemned men were escorted from the corral by two files of infantry, each file numbering about twenty men. The seventeen unfortunates were led to the east wall of Hacienda Salado where they were blindfolded

⁹Stapp, Prisoners of Perote, 72-73.

and forced to their knees facing their executioners. The men were executed in two groups, the first group consisted of nine men and the second of eight. One man who only received a flesh wound played dead until nightfall when he made his escape. He travelled for several weeks before hunger and thirst drove him to surrender himself; whereupon he was taken to Saltillo and shot in the public plaza.¹⁰

The next day the remaining prisoners were ordered to resume their march to San Luis Potosi. The first overnight rest was at Hacienda San Juan where four of the prisoners were baptized into the Catholic faith. William P. Stapp in his journal comments at this point upon the growing influence of catholicism on the Mier prisoners following their capture.¹¹ During this period the Texans averaged twenty to thirty miles per day.¹²

In San Luis Potosi five of the prisoners died from illness and exhaustion. Here the prisoners were reunited with those of their group who had remained behind at Hacienda Salado at the time of the escape. The march to Mexico City began again on April 10. The guard had been reinforced with a strong body of infantry and a contingent

¹⁰ Houston Wade, Notes and Fragments of the Mier Expedition, 150-152.

¹¹ Thomas W. Bell., Mier Expedition Narrative, 40.

¹² Stapp, Prisoner of Perote, 74-83.

of raw recruits. Tula and Huehuetoca were the next towns on the Texan's route. At Huehuetoca Captain Cameron was separated from the party and detained on April 25 when the prisoners departed the place. A few hours after the prisoners had left Captain Cameron was executed by firing squad. Captain Cameron had been the leader of the escape at Hacienda Salado. No reason can be found for his summary execution other than personal animosity on the part of President Santa Anna.

On the same day as the execution of Cameron the Texans were incarcerated in the convent at Santiago, where all were curious as to the experiences of the Texans and sympathetic to their condition. They sent out large quantities of clothing and other supplies which was very much appreciated by the Texans.

The Texans were not so happy when they were informed that they would be required to perform labor for the Mexican government. The prisoners felt that this was a violation of the rules of war concerning the treatment of prisoners of war. Work clothes were presented to the Texans which they refused. The next day, however, they reconsidered and accepted the clothes. Nevertheless they were still opposed to performing forced labor. They were visited at this time by the United States Minister who was informed of the demands of the Mexicans. The minister advised them to accept the clothes and to do the work. The Texans accepted

the clothes after being told they would be forced to wear them if they did not do so voluntarily, at the point of a bayonet.¹³

The prisoners were next marched to Tacubaya which was the favorite residence of President Santa Anna. The Texans were told that they were to be put to work paving a road leading from Mexico City to President Santa Anna's residence. This was a task that the prisoners resolved to perform as carelessly and inefficiently as possible. After two months only one hundred yards of road were paved plus a few other scattered patches here and there.

At Tacubaya Dr. Sinnickson was released through the efforts of the American minister. As Sinnickson was the one who had borne the white flag to the Texan army at Mier, William P. Stapp held him in some way responsible for the surrender. This was not true, but Stapp and others felt that Sinnickson had exerted some kind of pressure on Fisher to get him to surrender. Sinnickson claimed that he only conveyed Ampudia's message. He felt that the Texans' situation was unfavorable. He did not know that Ampudia was lying and was prepared to withdraw if the surrender terms were not accepted. It seems that the Mexican officers and not Sinnickson exerted more influence on Fisher. The officers evidently felt this way for none of them criticized

¹³Ibid., 83-84.

Sinnickson, not even the vociferous Colonel Green. The rank and file, however, were not privy to the council of officers and felt that Fisher would never have considered surrender had not Sinnickson appeared with the white flag and conveyed the false information from General Ampudia. The prisoners remained at Tacubaya only five more days after Dr. Sinnickson's release. At that time they were removed to their last place of confinement, the Castle of Perote.¹⁴

¹⁴Stapp, Prisoners of Perote, 101-102.

CHAPTER VIII

IMPRISONMENT AT PEROTE

On September 21, 1843, the last of the Mier prisoners entered the Castle of Perote. The majority would be there for almost one year and although some of them would manage to escape from the castle, most of them would be recaptured. On March 25, 1844, sixteen more of the Mier prisoners would effect an escape from Perote, nine of whom would make good their escape, while seven would be recaptured by the Mexicans.¹

Among the group remaining at Perote was Colonel Fisher who stayed at the castle until all of the Mier prisoners were released. He refused to participate in any of the escapes because he felt his place was with his men. During the period of confinement at Perote the release of many of the men was secured by the ministers of both the United States and Great Britain.

On March 26 a letter arrived at Perote from Colonel Green notifying the prisoners that the Congress of the Republic of Texas had appropriated \$15,000 for their relief in the previous December and another \$15,000 for them the following February. This was encouraging and further lifted

¹Thomas J. Green, Journal of the Texian Expedition Against Mier, 450.

their morale which was already improved because of the release of the Bexar prisoners on March 23.²

However, the Mier prisoners experienced a bitter disappointment on June 13, when their expected release was not forthcoming. It had been hoped by the men that Santa Anna might grant their release at this time in celebration of his birthday. A letter was sent soon thereafter to the Minister of Great Britain composed by a committee of five men (headed by Colonel Fisher) who felt that their own government had forsaken them.

The letter of the Mier prisoners to the British minister at Mexico City described the attitude of the Mier prisoners in these words,

The undersigned, a committee of prisoners now confined in the Castle of Perote, believing that we are abandoned by our own government, have only the alternative left of appealing to the minister of her Britannic majesty at the court of Mexico to interfere with a view of putting a termination to our suffering and imprisonment. The evidence upon which our opinion is based, that we are surrendered by our government, are, first, the letter to your predecessor by the Executive of Texas, denouncing the Mier Expedition as a lawless band of adventurers, unsanctioned by the authorities of the country whence it came, and therefore unentitled to the consideration and protection which, by civilized usage and of right, belong to prisoners of war. Secondly, his withholding the means appropriated by Congress for our relief, when well appraised of our destitute and unfortunate situation. Thirdly, his entire neglect to make any exertion on our behalf, either by way of mitigating our hard fate

²William P. Stapp, Prisoners of Perote, 127.

or procuring our release. The only anxiety, within the knowledge of the undersigned, evinced by President Houston for the Texian prisoners, is to be found in the letter above referred to, which resulted in the melancholy, tragic scene at the Ranch Salado, where were executed in cold blood seventeen as brave men as ever enlisted in the holy³ cause and under the sacred banner of liberty.³

The lot of the Mier prisoners in the Castle of Perote was probably not as bad as the committee pictured it to the British minister. The men who worked in the carpenter shop were actually paid for their labor at the rate of \$7.50 per month. When on August 1, 1844 the rate was reduced to \$4.50 the workers refused to work. As a result the prisoners were chained together in pairs and put to work packing sand.⁴

In general, however, the conditions were unnecessarily harsh. For this reason the prisoners nursed a great resentment toward those who they felt were responsible for their misery and also toward those who seemed unconcerned over their plight.

Five prisoners were released on August 22, but the release of the remaining prisoners did not finally come until September 16, 1844.⁵ The Mexican commander never

³Thomas Jefferson Green, Journal of the Texian Expedition Against Mier, 461-462.

⁴Glasscock Diary II, 235; also Thomas W. Bell, Mier Expedition Narrative, 93.

⁵Bell, Mier Expedition Narrative. 75.

informed the Texans that they were to be released until the appointed day. A description of the scene at Perote Castle at the time of the Mier prisoners' release is recorded by Thomas Bell in his narrative.

At three o'clock in the afternoon the Mier prisoners were paraded in double file in the center of the central square of Castle Perote. One-half hour later they took the oath of parole not to take up arms against the government of Mexico again during the war. The oath was taken and signed by each man individually. Each was given one dollar to get him from Perote to Vera Cruz. Each was furnished a passport. An order was issued to Mexican citizens enjoining it upon them to treat the liberated Texans as friends and fellow-citizens.⁶

At five o'clock in the afternoon the last of the members of the Mier Expedition, consisting of one hundred and ten men, were formed by rank and file.⁷ The regular troops of the garrison were paraded and gave the prisoners a parting cheer. Both Mexicans and Texans shouted "Viva el Presidente de la Republica de Mexicana."⁸

One hundred and ten men left the Castle of Perote of the original number of 263 who had crossed the Rio Grande in 1842. Eighty four men had perished from one cause or another while in Mexico, besides those who had been killed at Mier and at Hacienda Salado. This total also excludes

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Green, Journal, 477.

⁸ Bell, Mier Expedition Narrative, 76.

those executed at Hacienda Salado.

Those released by order of Santa Anna on September 16 made their way to Vera Cruz with the exception of a few who either remained in Mexico or followed another route to Texas. Most of the prisoners arrived in Vera Cruz on October 5. On October 5 they sailed from Vera Cruz. They arrived in New Orleans on October 22 and made their way back to Texas.⁹

⁹Bell, Mier Expedition Narrative, 76.

CHAPTER IX

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

From the accounts and reports which the members of the Mier expedition left to posterity it is evident that they disagreed with Sam Houston's evaluation of their Mexican invasion. The Mier men felt that they were obeying the orders of their commander-in-chief as they interpreted those orders. General Somervell had been a very weak commander and the majority of those who chose to join in the attack on Mier felt he had not only bungled the entire campaign but had failed to achieve the ultimate objectives for which the expedition had been organized.

Whether the real objectives of the expedition to the southwest as conceived by President Houston were attained is open to question. That Somervell intended that the radical stated objectives would not be attained seems indisputable. Whether he had received secret instructions from Sam Houston ordering him to see to it that the expedition was limited cannot be positively proven. These facts, however, do seem clear. First, the expedition to the southwest did have orders to march to the Rio Grande and cross it if necessary in order to harass and chastise Mexico for her depredations on the citizens of Texas. Second, the expedition was to proceed down the Rio Grande as far as Matamoros if possible before returning home.

Third, the men of the Army of the Southwest were told to look to the Valley of the Rio Grande for remuneration for services rendered. Fourth, General Somervell's efforts to curb the zeal of his men for revenge on the Mexicans failed and as a result he subsequently gave up and withdrew from the expedition. Fifth, General Somervell while disclaiming responsibility did give his expressed permission to certain of his subordinates to continue the expedition pursuant to a satisfactory conclusion at their own risk. X

In view of the above facts it would seem that the Mier prisoners were justified in claiming the rights and treatments due them as prisoners of war. It follows then that as prisoners of war the Mier prisoners were still members of the armed forces of the Republic of Texas and the President of the Republic had no right to publicly disavow responsibility for them.

It is understandable that President Houston would want to spare the Republic of Texas a war with Mexico. This could have been avoided however, without condoning the treatment of the Mier prisoners as common criminals and renegades. In fairness to Houston it must be pointed out here that he most certainly had little knowledge if any of the Mier prisoners' escape nor of President Santa Anna's plans for punishing them. X

It was a tragic state of affairs that the Mier prisoners had to rely upon the good offices of foreign

ministers rather than on their own government to obtain such redress of grievances as was obtained. The Republic of Texas seems derelict in not using the offices of the United States and Great Britain in securing better treatment as well as the release of the Mier prisoners. The final release of the Mier prisoners in September of 1844 was due almost entirely to the independent efforts of the United States Minister and to a lesser extent his British counterpart. This is amply demonstrated by the numerous accounts of General Thompson's efforts contained in Thomas W. Bell's narrative.

The most unforgivable action of President Houston was to deny the benefits voted by the Congress of the United States to Captain William G. Cooke. The Mier prisoners felt that Sam Houston seemed to be going out of his way to affront them by this action. If what Houston really wanted was a peace treaty with Mexico; he certainly would have had the support of the United States and Great Britain anyway.

In conclusion, the expedition to the Southwest and its Mier expedition appendage was organized and conducted in order to placate the settlers on the southwestern frontier and the critics of Sam Houston. It also served to give Texas some justification for claiming the Rio Grande as her southern and western boundary. The expedition was conducted in such a way as to incur the least expense

to the Republic of Texas and attain only limited objectives. The Mier expedition resulted from the frustration of the three hundred men who felt the Somervell campaign had not attained its ultimate objectives. They were members of the Army of the Southwest who, with the permission of the highest authority then present, sought to salvage some of the lost prestige of the expedition. That their entry into Mexico had been previously authorized by the President of the Republic of Texas has been proven. That they also had instructions to look to the Rio Grande Valley for remuneration has been substantiated as well. Had these two preconditions not existed it is doubtful that the Mier expedition would ever have been attempted and without them the Mier men would not have expected to be treated as prisoners of war.

If any fault can be found in the Mier men, it must be one of judgement. They misjudged the will and the capability of the Mexican army to resist their encroachment upon the cities south of the Rio Grande. Once captured the Mier prisoners were again the victims of poor judgement in the timing and conduct of the escape operation. They waited too late to make their escape and, when the escape was made, contributed to their ultimate failure by not staying with the routes with which they were familiar.

The Mier men blinded by desire for revenge and material gain embarked upon a second operation on their own

initiative. They embarked upon the operation with the permission of their field commander, but with realization that their specific action was without sanction from any higher authority. Thus the Mier men had a questionable military standing, but they marched under the Texas flag and the orders of the President of the Republic of Texas as they interpreted them. Their foolhardiness deserved no praise, but neither did it warrant abandonment to the harsh treatment of a hostile nation, nor the branding of the men as renegades without the protection of the country to which they claimed allegiance.

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