

# IN COMMAND AT VERA CRUZ, 1847-1848.

Colonel George Nauman, a native of Lancaster, served with distinction through the Mexican War. During the latter part of that conflict he was in command of the fortress of San Juan de Ulloa, at Vera Cruz, the "City of the True Cross," and, as that city occupies a prominent place in public view at the present day, it may be interesting to know how it appeared to an officer of the old army, and this paper is compiled from his letters, using his own words, so far as it is possible.

It never occurred to me, he writes, that I ever should be commandant of this great fortress, yet such is the fact. I did not wish to come here but I was told that although I might remain in the city of Vera Cruz in command of two companies for the present, in a short time I would be transferred to the castle. It is considered a much better position than the city, on account of its being much more healthy. It is, however, very isolated, and during northers is cut off from all intercourse whatever, either with the shore or the shipping. It is distant from Vera Cruz about half a mile. One of its greatest inconveniences is the vast number of visitors who resort to it in fair weather.

Our regiment marched from the City of Mexico as a part of the escort to the train. The march occupied us exactly fourteen days, and, although we had no rain, we occasionally suffered a great deal from cold and dust. At this season (December) it seems to me that there is no country as dusty as Mexico, and, although that part of it which we traversed lies entirely within the tropics, I do not think I ever suffered as much from the cold as I did on the day we marched from Tepe Aguato to Perote. Soldiers and all rode, so that on the whole the march was a very easy one. One of the most un-

pleasant things connected with it was occasionally seeing a wagon loaded with the coffins containing the remains of officers who have perished in this infernal war. On one occasion I saw one capsize, and the coffins were strewed on the road. We brought with us thirty-six bodies, and I have in my charge eight that were brought down by the previous train, and many have been left behind in the region of their glory and their last agony. We brought with us the bodies of Captains Capron and Burke and Lieutenants Irons, Johnson and Hoffman. Our regiment has suffered severely. Five of our officers have been killed and four so desperately wounded that they have been compelled to leave the country. No regiment stands higher in the estimation of the army than the First Artillery for gallantry, distinguished courage and general good conduct. We are proud of belonging to it. I meet General Scott occasionally. He pats me on the back and calls me his "gallant friend."

The castle of San Juan de Ulloa is an exceedingly strong place. It has guns and munitions of war enough to set at defiance all the navies of the world. It has many mortars and howitzers of the largest size, and I never saw so large a pile of shot as may be seen in one part of the castle, all twenty-four-pound balls. The castle, as well as the town, had but little provision. But the town Vera Cruz is a walled city, and the castles, beautifully constructed as they are, offend the nostrils at every turn from their bad police.

I seldom go into town, unless I have business there, which is sometimes necessary on account of my being a kind of national jailer. Personally, I scarcely know what is going on in the town of Vera Cruz. It is a dirty, dissipated and disgusting place, containing as much iniquity as can be impressed into so small a place. I might reside there, if I chose, but I prefer being here, as I believe the castle is much the healthiest spot in this region, although its general fame is, in that respect, that it is no safer than any other place bereabouts. Clean as we keep it, I cannot conceive how it can be sickly.

It may interest you to know that my lieutenant is the son of Chief Justice Gibson, of Pennsylvania, and a nephew of General Gibson, Commissary General of the army.

The Mexican guerrillas are not quiet. Only yesterday a part of them killed a volunteer a short distance from Vera Cruz. Before we came to Mexico it was calculated that there were 3,000 assassinations per annum in the country. I wonder what the number is now? I verily believe that the low people of Mexico delight in murder for itself. I have asked a few of them who have rendered themselves notorious by the number of their victims if they felt no compunctions of conscience for their crimes, and they have uniformly told me that they did not, feeling, as they did, that they were justified by circumstances.

Gen. Scott is on his way home. He goes direct from here to New York, by sea. This will greatly disappoint the good people of New Orleans, Mobile and some other places, where the most extensive preparations have been made to receive him magnificently. I regret that he will not give the people the opportunity of manifesting in this way their admiration for his services and abilities, and their detestation of the harsh and unjust maner in which he has been treated. It is a great pity he is so irascible, and it is not especially creditable to his enemies that they have availed themselves of this weakness in him, and it is monstrous to see the "old lion" so goaded, and that, too, by persons of not one tithe his merit.

Commodore Perry is here, and I frequently see him. He is quite a rigid disciplinarian, and has tabooed his officers from all visits to the shore since the commencement of the sickly season, and the only place they are permitted to visit is this isolated and dungeon-like fortress. I see but little of them, for the heat is such in this region that at this season (May) people move about as little as possible, and the true art of preserving health here in hot weather is to agitate yourself as little, and to take as little exercise, as possible. The vomito prieto has begun its fearful ravages in the city. We are all

anxious to get away. Let any one, unacclimated, be here at this season (July) and witness the frequent deaths from yellow fever and other diseases incident to the climate, and his nerves must be unusually strong if he can say truly that he is without apprehension of disease. I have lost a good many of my men within a month, and it grieves me sadly to see these poor fellows die so, most of them having been through all the battles of the valley. They have become perfectly panic-stricken, and are infinitely more afraid of yellow fever than they would be of battle.

One of the great reasons why everyone is so disgusted with Mexico, is the horribly degraded mental and moral and religious character of the people, and the almost total amalgamation of colors. I do not believe the sun shines upon a more wicked and depraved people. I am certain as a nation they cannot succeed, and that, before a great many years, they will be absorbed by our great Northern confederacy.

The heat here is such that the Mexicans call Vera Cruz "el infierno," but it deserves that appellation for other reasons besides that of being one of the hottest places in the world. At times it is almost impossible to walk across the parade grounds of the fortress. Even the natives say it is too hot.

It is interesting to see the troops that have latterly come down from the interior. At this awfully hot season, it may readily be imagined how ragged, dirty and worn they appear. The Germantown is the only armed vessel of any importance left in the harbor belonging to the United States. Nothing, on the whole, could have turned out better for the country than the Mexican War, and the evacuation is proceeding in the most satisfactory manner. We sail to-morrow, and then farewell to this rock of desolation.

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