THE NAVAL ASPECTS OF THE MEXICAN WAR

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PREFACE

This thesis is an attempt to bring together in brief form the operations of the United States Navy during the Mexican War. In this conflict the Navy was divided into two squadrons: the Home Squadron operating in the Gulf of Mexico, and the Pacific Squadron operating off the coast of California and the West Coast of Mexico. The major problem has been to select the pertinent documentation for the many events which occurred, and to arrange it into readable form. Because there has been so little written on this subject, few people realize the important role the Navy and Marine Corps played in our country's expansion during the era of Manifest Destiny.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my appreciation for the prompting, encouragement, and many helpful suggestions given by my adviser Dr. Odie B. Faulk. Professor George F. Jewsbury made a number of helpful suggestions and corrections which have helped to clarify the text. In addition I would like to express my thanks to Joan Neal for her patience and excellence of typing.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

When hostilities commenced between the United States and Mexico on April 24, 1846, the Americans did not have a navy adequate to prosecute a war in foreign waters. The inadequacies of the United States Navy in size, communications, training, and supplies were not generally known. It was divided into two general squadrons: the Home Squadron, which was responsible for the Atlantic, including the West Indies, the African Coast, the Mediterranean area, and the East Coast of America, commanded by Commodore David Conner; and the Pacific Squadron, which patrolled the Western Coast of North and South America and the Orient, commanded by Commodore James Biddle.[1]

There was a shortage of ships at all times with which to conduct the naval operations of the Mexican War. This was particularly true of vessels of light draft, which were needed to cross the shallow sand bars of the Mexican ports. On paper the United States, in November of 1846, possessed a total of eighty-one ships--eleven ships-of-the-line, fourteen frigates, one razee, twenty-four sloops, six brigs, nine schooners, twelve steamers, and four

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[1] House Executive Document 2, 28th Congress, 2nd session, Vol. 1, Serial 463, p. 540. Personnel records show that Captain was the highest official rank at this time. Commodore was an honorary title for senior naval officers in command of a squadron.

storeships. Of this total, however, only sixty-three were available for combat service.[2]

Two seventy-gun ships-of-the-line, the Ohio and the Columbus, under Commodore James Biddle, were in the Orient. Three ships, the fifty-four gun frigate United States, the sloop Marion with twenty-two guns, and the storeship Southampton with only two guns, were on the African station to check the trade in slaves. At the Brazilian station was the frigate Columbia, with forty-four guns, and the Bainbridge, carrying six guns. An additional eleven ships were stationed at various U. S. ports.[3]

Communications and supplies were a major problem at all times. The three months required to send a message from Washington to the commander of the squadron off the California Coast was a source of endless confusion and misunderstanding. Supplying these ships was an even greater problem than communications. The supply problem became even more serious when hostilities commenced as there were only four storeships to service the entire navy.[4] These were the Relief, assigned to the Home Squadron, the Erie and Lexington, assigned to the Pacific fleet, and the Southampton which supplied

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[2]House Executive Document 4, 29th Congress, 2nd session, Vol. 1. Serial 497, pp. 465-469. Herein after cited as HED 4. The total number of ships in commission varied during the war.

[3]Robert Wilden Neeser, Statistical and Chronological History of the United States Navy 1775-1907, (2 vols., New York: The Macmillan Company, 1909), II, pp. 62-72.

[4]Justin H. Smith. The War With Mexico, (2 vols., New York: The Macmillan Company, 1919), I, p. 196.

the ships assigned to the African station.[5]

Even the supplying of a ship at the Pensacola, Florida Naval Yard was costly in terms of the time involved. On one occasion it took four weeks to supply the Potomac with sufficient bread for a three-month cruise. For ships stationed in the Gulf of Mexico it took a month to make the round trip to Pensacola for supplies.[6] Even fresh water was hard to obtain at Pensacola. The problem of supplying ships on extended tours of duty in the Pacific was far greater than that of the home fleet. When a ship left its home port for a long cruise, it carried rations and water only for a limited time. The commander of the ship was provided with funds for the necessary purchases that were made during the tour of duty. The health of the crews was a constant problem: scurvy and fever were threats to the sailors. Procuring clothes was a must, although shoes could be made from ship's canvas--as was the case with the crews of the ships stationed in the Pacific during the Mexican War.[7]

United States vessels were designed exclusively for war, but a long confinement at sea impaired the efficiency of the men. The initial supplies had to be constantly supplemented by any means. Livestock was carried to provide fresh meat, while new supplies of beans, wheat, and flour were bought when possible.[8] To aid in financing these purchases for the fleet, foreign

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[5]HED 4, p. 466.

[6]Smith, The War With Mexico, II, p. 196.

[7]Clyde H. Metcalf, A History of the United States Marine Corps, (New York; G. Putnam's Sons, 1939), p. 151.

[8]Stephen C. Rowan, "Recollections of the Mexican War," United States Naval Institute Proceedings, XIV (1888), pp. 543-545.

customhouses in times of war were seized and their revenues used. Such an example occurred during the Mexican War when the Pacific Squadron occupied Mazatlán, Mexico, where over $200,000 was collected in five months.[9]

Additionally a shortage of small arms existed in the Navy during most of the war. For the early part of the California campaign there were approximately ninety muskets for the 350 sailors and Marines who took part in the expedition to retake Los Angeles. There were some carbines and pistols, but not enough.[10] Efficient small arms continued to be scarce throughout most of the war, at least in the Pacific Squadron. On November 11, 1846, Commodore David Conner, writing to Secretary of War John Y. Mason, requested an additional five hundred muskets for the Home Squadron.[11]

There are a number of reasons for this shortage of small arms on warships although there apparently was no real paucity of arms in the naval depots. Several ships in the Pacific Squadron were on duty before the war commenced and therefore could not readily be supplied. Although the navy had anticipated war as early as 1842, it nevertheless had failed to arm the crews with sufficient small arms. Obviously naval crews were not expected to fight on land and thus were armed with pistols, cutlasses, and boarding pikes, which

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[9]Samuel F. DuPont, "The War With Mexico: The Cruise of the U. S. Ship Cyane During the Years 1845-48." From the papers of her commander, the late Rear-Admiral S. F. DuPont. United States Naval Institute Proceedings, VIII, no. 3 (December, 1882), p. 430.

[10]Edgar Stanton Macley, A History of the United States Navy From 1775 to 1893, (3 vols., New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1893), pp. 76-77.

[11]Philip S. P. Conner, The Home Squadron Under Commodore Conner in the War With Mexico. (Philadelphia, 1896), p. 15 fn 1.

were standard arms for the crew of a war vessel. The one exception would be the Marine detachments found on American vessels of war. High ranking Naval officers in Washington obviously did not anticipate the role that sailors would play in the acquisition of California and the war on the East Coast of Mexico.

Ordinance, food, and clothing were not the only problems which plagued the Navy Department. The Department was poorly organized and was not ready to conduct a war it had been anticipating for more than two years. Three months after the war began, the first cargo of coal reached the Pensacola Naval Yard.[12] This was critical because the early steamers were notoriously inefficient in their use of fuel. Possibly this was the reason for not assigning steamers to the Pacific Squadron during the war.

In an attempt to meet the needs of the Navy, as well as the Army, Congress passed the War Bill of May 13, 1846. This appropriated $11,000,000 for the Navy. The Secretary of the Navy was instructed to complete all vessels then being built, and to purchase or charter, arms, equip, and man such ships and steamboats as he may think proper to convert into armed vessels.

The Marine Corps, an integral part of the Navy, was in the same generally poor condition. At the outset of the war the Corps numbered approximately 1,178 enlisted men and fifty nine officers.[13] In October of 1848, the

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[12]Dudley W. Knox, A History of the United States Navy, (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1936), p. 170.

[13]House Executive Document 67, 30th Congress, 1st session, Vol. 8. Serial 521, p. 2.

Corps numbered 897 enlisted men, still 1,502 men short of what Congress had provided for by the act of March 2, 1847. In addition the act provided for seventy five officers--a total of 2,324 enlisted men and seventy five officers.[14]

Despite the general state of unpreparedness the Navy and Marine Corps played an important role in the political and territorial expansion of the United States from 1846 through 1848. The war in the Pacific was almost exclusively a naval conquest, while the invasion of Mexico by two armies was given invaluable support by the Home Squadron. On both coasts the right naval blockade of Mexican ports brought economic pressure to bear on the enemy. Fortunately for the United States Navy, the Mexican Navy was all but non-existent. It was comprised of thirty four ships, mostly small vessels, which were quickly swept from the ocean and gave no real opposition. There were no naval duels between the United States ships and Mexican vessels in this war.

The intent of this thesis is threefold: to examine this dual role of direct warfare and supporting operations assumed by the United States Navy during the war with Mexico; to show that the occupation of California was a purposeful goal of the United States government; and to prove that the Navy had a direct and equally important role in the subjugation of Mexico itself by means of an effective blockade.

[14]These figures are based on the following two acts: Act of June 30, 1834, The Public Statures at Large of the United States of America, 1789 to March 3, 1845, Richard Peters, ed., (82 vols., Boston: Charles C. Little and James Brown, 1850), Vol. 4, pp. 712-714; Act of March 2, 1847, Statutes At Large and Treaties of the United States of America, December 1, 1845, to March 3, 1851. George Minot, ed., (82 vols., Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1854), Vol. 9, pp. 154-155.

CHAPTER II

THE PACIFIC SQUADRON

Mexican fears as to the American intentions in her northern territories, extending from Matamoras to the Sea of California, were well founded historically. In 1835 Andrew Jackson had proposed the purchse of San Francisco Bay and in this proposal Mexico saw unlimited Yankee expansion. When John Tyler became president in 1841 he quickly reaffirmed American interest in the Mexican Province of California through his minister to Mexico, Waddy Thompson. James K. Polk was certainly in favor of acquiring California and there is little doubt that he was an ardent expansionist. To the Mexicans, and many others, he deliberately provoked war for the single purpose of seizing California.

In all probability only a few traders, merchants, and politicians were well informed on the economic possibilities existing in California at the beginning of the Mexican War. The American people as a whole were not that well informed about California nor did they care that much about its future. However, it would have been extremely difficult to have convinced the Mexican government of this when on October 20, 1842, Commodore Thomas ap. Catesby Jones, commander of the Pacific fleet off California, landed an armed party of 150 men, under the command of Commander Cornelius K. Stribling, to take possession of Monterey, California. Jones mistakenly thought the United States and Mexico were at war, but when he realized his mistake he apologized and retired as gracefully as was possible under the circumstances.

This did not settle the matter, however, and in order to placate the Mexican government Jones was recalled, but never officially censured.[1] Commodore Jones' ill-timed attempt to claim California for the United States has often been cited as proof by historians, that the United States Naval officers in the Pacific had standing orders to occupy California in case of war between Mexico and the United States to prevent Great Britain from occupying it.

An important link in American-Californian relations was Thomas Oliver Larkin, maritime merchant, trader, friend of the Californians, and the United States Consul at Monterey. Larkin had come to California in 1832 and in the intervening years had industriously worked for the peaceful annexation of California by the United States.[2]

The political situation in California in the early months of 1846 was marked by internal jealousy and rivalry. Governor Manuel Micheltorena was expelled in February of 1845 and the man who succeeded him as governor, Pio Pico, moved the capitol from Monterey to Los Angeles. This revived ancient feuds over the location of the government and division of the spoils of office. General José Castro of Monterey, who controlled the treasury and the military departments of California, was Pio Pico's chief rival. Pico and Castro were so involved in their personal quarrel that they were unable to present a unified effort to stem the growing menace of foreign invasion. By the time Pico and

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[1]George M. Brooke, Jr., "The Vest Pocket War of Commodore Jones," Pacific Historical Review, XXXI (August, 1962), p. 233.

[2]Thomas O. Larkin, The Larkin Papers, ed., George P. Hammond, (10 vols., Berkley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1965), V, pp. V-IX preface.

Castro, along with their followers, could bring themselves together in May, 1846, time had run out. Two events were to take place which would nullify any actions taken by the two factions in California and which would change the course of California history. War between the United States and Mexico was the major event and the Bear Flag Revolt of June, 1846, in California was the immediate cause for concern among the Californians. Even then they were unable to present a unified front.

Initial action in the Bear Flag Revolt was led by Ezekiel Merritt and William B. Ide. Captain John Charles Frémont who, with his "topographical engineers," had been camped near Klamath Lake, Oregon, immediately resigned his commission as a United States Army officer and joined the revolt. This action, on the part of Fremont, would seem to have been unnecessary as the men who were involved in the Bear Flag Revolt were from his camp.

The atmosphere of uncertainty, bitterness, and rivalry was only partially dispelled with the arrival, off Monterey, of Commodore John D. Sloat in the American warship Savannah on July 2, 1846. Commodore Sloat immediately conferred with Consul Larkin concerning the course to be followed with respect to the occupation of California. Contrary to general opinion Larkin did not influence Sloat to take immediate official action and declare California a part of the United States. Actually he wanted Sloat to wait two or three weeks before taking any official action.[3] Apparently Larkin hoped to offset the Bear Flag Revolt and bring about a peaceful settlement with the

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[3]Ibid., p. 181.

Californians who were greatly upset by the imprisonment of Mariano Guadalupe Vallejo, a prominent citizen of Sonoma, who had been taken prisoner by Ezekiel Merritt and approximately twenty men from Fremont's camp.

On June 24, 1845, Secretary of the Navy George Bancroft had sent a dispatch to Commodore Sloat with specific instructions that in the event of war between the United States and Mexico he was to occupy the Port of San Francisco and other such ports as his naval forces would permit.[4] Apparently this was understood to include Monterey and San Diego. These were the only orders that Sloat actually received from Secretary Bancroft; although almost identical orders were sent him on June 8, 1846, he never received them.[5]

On July 12, 1846, Bancroft sent Sloat further instructions, which he did not receive; subsequently he did know it existed. This message stated that ". . . the object of the U. S. under its rights as a belligerent nation, is to possess itself entirely of Upper California. . . the object of the United States had reference to ultimate peace with Mexico; and if, at the peace the basis of the uti possidetis shall be established, the government expects, through your forces to be found in actual possession of California."[6] This order had been the focal point of much criticism directed toward the United States government to prove that it had plans for the acquisition of California prior to the commencement of hostilities. Hubert H. Bancroft (collector of

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[4]House Executive Document 60. 30th Congress, 1st session, Serial 520, p. 231.

[5]Ibid., p. 237.

[6]Ibid., p. 238.

histories) stated that the United States government had plainly given such orders and it remained only for the principal people involved to interpret and to act as they saw best.[7]

President James K. Polk and Secretary of War William L. Macy made plain their intentions when they commissioned Colonel Jonathan D. Stevenson of New York to organize the New York Volunteer Regiment. The members of this regiment were to be armed with the tools of their trade as well as their rifles. They further agreed to accept their discharge in California or in the nearest American territory at the close of the war. Here was a combined colonizing-military expedition with the clear, but unstated, purpose of pioneering in a new territory.[8]

Commodore Sloat was slow to act on his orders of June 24, 1845. No doubt he remembered Jones' embarrassment; also his original orders made it clear that a state of war must exist before he occupied any of the California ports. The need for making a decision was very much present in the form of British Admiral Sir George E. Seymour and his Majesty's Ship The Collingwood 80. It was the confirmed belief of many that England wanted to occupy California. Mexico was greatly in debt to British capitalists who had enlisted the aid of their government to collect their debts. To this end England had attempted to attach California as security until Mexico could meet its financial

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[7]Hubert Howe Bancroft, History of California, (7 vols., San Francisco: The History Company Publishers, 1886), V, p. 198.

[8]Norman A. Graebner, Empire On The Pacific, (New York: Ronald Press Co., 1955), p. 156.

obligations. In the spring of 1846 the American Pacific Squadron was at Mazatlan, Mexico, supposedly being watched by the British. Naval surgeon William Maxwell Wood and John Parrott, the American Consul at Mazatlan, heard that hostilities had commenced; Wood lost no time in relaying the news, by messenger, to Commodore Sloat anchored off Mazatlán.[9]

Sloat later wrote to Wood that his information was the deciding factor in his carrying out his official orders to occupy California in the event of war.[10] He was still hesitant to commence hostilities. However, on May 17, 1846, he dispatched the Cyane, commanded by Captain William Mervine, to Monterey, California, but he remained at Mazatlán until news arrived that the Navy had blockaded the Mexican East Coast port of Vera Cruz. Not until June 7, did Sloat finally set sail for Monterey in his flagship Savannah. He arrived off Monterey July 2, 1846, where he joined the Warren, the Cyane, and the Levant, and learned that the Portsmouth was anchored off San Francisco.

Commodore Sloat, although still doubtful, accepted the advice of his officers and made preparations to raise the flag over Monterey. Early on the morning of July 7, 1846, Captain Mervine with a combined force of 165 sailors and eighty five Marines landed and took possession of Monterey. The Stars and Stripes were raised over the custom-house by Passed Midshipman Edward

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[9]Frank M. Bennett, The Steam Navy of the United States, (Pittsburg: Warren and Company, 1896), pp. 89-90.

[10]Bancroft, History of California, V, p. 202 fn.

Higgins and Midshipman William P. Toler.[11] Appropriate salutes were fired by the Savannah, the Levant, and the Cyane. Commander Sloat's proclamation was read to the inhabitants. The proclamation read stated:

> "I declare to the inhabitants of California that although I come in arms with a powerful force, I do not come among them as an enemy to California, but on the contrary, I come as their best friend-as henceforth California will be a portion of the United States and its peaceable inhabitants will enjoy the same rights and priveleges as the citizens of any portion of that nation, with the rights and priveleges they now enjoy, together with the privelege of choosing their own Magistrates and other officers for the administration of Justice among themselves, and the same protection will be extended to them as to any other state of the Union. They will also enjoy a permanent government under which life, property and the constitutional rights and lawful security, to worship the Creator in a way most congenial to each one's sense of duty will be secure . . . all persons holding title to real estate, or in quiet possession of lands, under color of right shall have those titles and rights guaranteed to them. All churches and the property they contain in possession of the Clergy of California, shall continue in the same rights and possession they now enjoy.
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> All provisions and supplies of every kind furnished by the inhabitants for the use of the United States, Ships and Soldiers will be paid for at fair rates, and no private property will be taken for public use without just compensation at the moment."[12]

After the ceremony the sailors returned to their ships. Marine Captain Ward Marston and a Marine detachment remained ashore to establish a permanent garrison. The Mexican Commandant of Monterey, Mariano Silva, had refused to officially surrender the town to Commodore Sloat claiming he had no authority to do so. He referred Sloat to the commanding general of California, Jose

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[11]Aubrey Nesham, "Flag-Raising At Monterey, July 7, 1846," California Historical Society Quarterly, XXV (December, 1946), p. 196.

[12]House Executive Document 1, 30th Congress, 2nd session, Vol. 1 Serial 537, pp. 1010-1011. Herein after cited as HED 1.

Castro, who was at Los Angeles. In response to a demand from Sloat to surrender Castro informed him that he would defend California against all United States forces with the utmost zeal.[13]

Commander John B. Montgomery of the Portsmouth was directed to raise the flag at San Francisco. With seventy men Montgomery landed and raised the flag in the public square in front of the custom-house at San Francisco. A twenty one gun salute was fired, three rousing cheers were given, and San Francisco was taken. Marine Lieutenant Henry B. Watson and twenty six Marines remained on shore as a garrison. To further strengthen the occupation forces, a local civilian militia was organized. Lieutenant Watson continued as military commander until November of 1846, during which time he constructed Fort Mervine, a block building which cost $140.00. The fort was built as a base from which to defend San Francisco and the surrounding country from the Californians.[14] On Thursday July 9, Montgomery sent Lieutenant James W. Revere, and a naval shore party, in the ship's boat to Sonoma to raise the flag and to remain in command, which was for the next four months.

Commodore Sloat was military commander of California from July 7, 1846, to July 23, 1846, a total of sixteen days. During those sixteen days Monterey and San Francisco were occupied. The American flag was raised at Sonoma, Sutters Fort, the Pueblo of San Jose, and the mission of San Juan.

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[13]Ibid., pp. 1012-1013.

[14]Senate Document 1, 29th Congress, 2nd session, Vol. 1, Serial 493, pp. 663-664. Herein after cited as SD 1.

A communications patrol under Purser D. Fauntleroy, consisting of thirty five volunteers from the ships and citizens ashore, was organized to reconnoiter the country between Monterey and San Francisco and to keep land communications open between the two towns.

On July 23, 1846, Commodore John D. Sloat--old, sick, overdue for leave, and worried about his responsibilities, turned over his command to Commodore Robert F. Stockton. Sloat transferred his flag to the Levant and sailed for the East Coast by way of Mazatlán and Panama, believing there would be no further resistance to the occupation of California. In this, however, he was mistaken. Had Sloat's proclamation been carried out by Commodore Stockton, considerable trouble might have been avoided. His conciliatory military attitude was very different from Stockton's militant stance.[15]

Commodore Stockton's first act was to issue a new proclamation which was harsh and accusing. He denounced the Mexican government as being the aggressor against the United States. Commandant José Castro was censured for his retalitory attitude toward Frémont and his men. According to Stockton, Monterey and San Francisco had become scenes of rapine, murder, and bloodshed which necessitated strict martial law. Castro was branded a thief, usurper, and traitor to his people.[16] Stockton's next move was to muster Fremont and Marine Lieutenant Archibald H. Gillespie, along with their Bear

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[15]HED 1, pp. 1035-1037. Frémont and Gillespie are given credit for influencing Stockton to take a hard attitude towards the Californians.

[16]Theodore Grivas, Military Governments In California 1846-1850, (Glendale, California: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1936), p. 53.

Flag Company, into the service as a naval battalion. Frémont was promoted to brevet major and Gillespie to brevet captain.[17] Sloat had refused to accept them because they did not have official orders authorizing their armed activities.

Frémont and his force of 160 men were embarked on the Cyane, now commanded by Commander Samuel Francis DuPont, and taken to San Diego for the purpose of attacking General Castro's rear echelons, while Commodore Stockton advanced against his front. Frémont's troops were landed after Lieutenant Stephen C. Rowan, USN, in command of a small detachment of sailors and Marines, occupied San Diego. Several towns were occupied in August, 1846--Santa Barbara, San Pedro, and Los Angeles.

With the occupation of California all appeared to be quiet in Upper California, but the conquest was by no means as complete as Stockton thought. Lieutenant Gillespie, with fifty nine men, had been left to occupy Los Angeles. His responsibility soon proved more than he could possibly carry out. Since most of the population of Los Angeles was Mexican it was here that a rebellion against American occupation began. However successful Gillespie may have been as a Marine he did not fare so well as a military commandant. When he

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[17] Frémont came to California as a Captain in the Topographical Engineers. He resigned his army commission and joined the Bear Flag Revolt. He was later appointed a brevet major in command of a Naval Battalion by Commodore Robert F. Stockton. Next he was appointed a brevet lieutenant colonel in the Regiment of Mounted Rifles but refused to take orders from Brigadier General Stephen Watts Kearny because he was serving under Commodore Stockton. Gillespie was a lieutenant in the Marine Corps. He was appointed a brevet captain in the California Battalion but is listed in Metcalf's, History of the United States Marine Corps as a Lieutenant. He had none of the later problems with senior officers such as Frémont had.

arrested several Californians as troublemakers and attempted to deport some of them, armed rebels led by Cervula Varela attacked his garrison. This rebel force was soon augmented by some three to four hundred Californians commanded by José Maria Flores who had succeeded Castro. A systematic siege was conducted and Gillespie was forced to surrender before Stockton could send any armed relief other than Lieutenant Henry Watson and twenty five men all of whom were captured. On August 29, Gillespie came to terms with the Mexicans and the following day he marched his men to San Pedro and embarked them aboard the hide ship Vandalia.[18] Captain Gillespie was able to arrange excellent capitulation terms with the Mexican commander Jose Flores--terms which apparently allowed him to continue to bear arms.[19]

Los Angeles was not the only troubled spot in California. One thousand Walla Walla Indians, or so Stockton was led to believe, had taken to the warpath and were threatening Sutter's Fort on the Sacramento River. In response to this development, Commodore Stockton sailed to San Francisco where word reached him on September 30 concerning Gillespie's embarrassing situation. Frémont succeeded in calming the Indians, some of whom he knew, and settled the trouble thus allowing Stockton to give his attention to Gillespie's problem. He immediately sent Captain Mervine and the Savannah to San Pedro to support Gillespie, who by this time had been forced to surrender. A contributing factor in the Navy's success in California was the use

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[18]Clyde H. Metcalf, A History of the United States Marine Corps, (New York: G. Putnam's Son, 1939), pp. 144-146.

[19]Richard H. Collum, History of the United States Marine Corps, (Philadelphia: L. R. Hammersly and Company, 1890), p. 83.

of commercial vessels, when they were needed, by naval officers. The captains of the vessels did not hesitate to offer their services--nor did they hesitate to file claims, some of which were exorbitant, for their services rendered.

As a result of this type of arrangements Stockton immediately engaged the services of the merchant ship Sterling to carry Frémont and 160 men to Santa Barbara with orders to proceed from there to Los Angeles. Stockton in the Congress sailed to San Pedro where he would begin an advance by land against Los Angeles. En route to San Pedro, Stockton received word that Monterey was in serious danger; therefore, he put into Monterey, landed an additional force of two officers and fifty men, including Marine Lieutenant William A. T. Maddox, a Marine detachment, and additional stores. From Monterey he proceeded to San Pedro. Stockton left San Francisco on October 15, and arrived at San Pedro October 23. There he learned that on October 9, a combined naval force, 310 strong, under Captain Mervine and Captain Gillespie had attempted unsuccesssfully to reach Los Angeles. They were able to move only twelve miles from San Pedro before they were stopped by approximately two hundred Californians.

After a short skirmish the Americans had been forced to retreat. The next morning they returned to San Pedro where they re-embarked on the Savannah. During this brief expedition the advanced guard of Marines commanded by Captain Marston was the most valuable part of the force. On October 14, Mervine sent two officers and thirty five men from the Savannah, along with fifteen of Gillespie's volunteers under Navy Lieutenant George Minor, aboard the whale ship Magnolia

to help hold San Diego.[20]

These events emphasized the dual problems of communications and of conducting a land campaign from naval vessels. Stockton had received Gillespie's message for help on September 30, but he did not arrive until October 23rd. Meanwhile Fremont, unable to find sufficient horses for his command, had returned to Monterey. On November 15, he finally began his march towards Los Angeles.

The general unrest continued to grow and break out in other quarters. A group of Californians, approximately 120 in number, led by Francisco Sanchez became quite active in the San Francisco area where they took Lieutenant Washington A. Bartlett and five sailors prisoner while they were on a supply detail to purchase beef. A short time later, after a brief skirmish, Captain Marston managed to rescue Bartlett and his men and to pacify Sanchez.

About the same time Stockton had sent Lieutenant Minor with the whale ship Stoington to Ensonada, about ninety miles below San Diego, for the purpose of procuring horses and beeves which were needed before the march could be undertaken to Los Angeles. Perhaps the sharpest criticism offered by numerous rancheros, who did not openly oppose the American occupation, was they could not protect their cattle from the roving quartermaster departments of the two opposing forces. Most of December was spent by Commodore Stockton in mobilizing, training, and equipping every available man for the

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[20]Metcalf, A History of the United States Marine Corps, pp. 147-148.

purpose of retaking and holding Los Angeles and by the last of the month his six hundred man expedition[21] was ready to move. During this time of preparation, Frémont was moving his forces over the mountains from Monterey, by way of San Marcos, to Santa Barbara.

Before pursuing further the actual conquest of California Stockton found it necessary to give attention to an internal development lasting much longer than the drama of conquest that gave rise to it. This was a three-way struggle for authority between Stockton, Brigadier General Stephen Watts Kearny, and Brevet Major, later Brevet Lieutenant Colonel John Charles Frémont. In September the third party in the controversy had appeared in the person of General Kearny, who under orders from Washington had marched overland from Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, to New Mexico, and on to Warner's Ranch in California. As he attempted to move from Warner's Ranch to San Diego, Kearny's force became engaged in a bloody fight at San Pascual with an armed force of Californians commanded by Andres Pico. In the ensuing battle nineteen Americans were killed and fifteen wounded including Kearny and Captain Gillespie who, with approximately thirty five men, had been sent to aid him. The Californians lost thirty, killed or wounded. Further help arrived from Stockton in reply to an urgent message from Kearny, brought through the lines by Navy Lieutenant Edward Fitzgerald Beale, Kit Carson, and an Indian. The relief expedition of 215 sailors and Marines commanded by Navy Lieutenant Andrew F. Gray and Lieutenant Jacob Zeilin, USMC,

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[21]Dudley W. Knox, A History of the United States Navy, (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1936), p. 173.

arrived at Kearny's camp on December 11, 1846. Kearny and the relief forces arrived at San Diego the next day where Kearny was received by Stockton.[22]

The struggle which developed for the command of the United States forces in California, as well as the military governorship of the territory, was the result of confusion in official orders, the interpretation of those orders, personal ambitions and stubbornness, and to some extent professional jealousy between the Army and Navy forces in the area. Prior to General Kearny's arrival, Stockton had been the recognized authority and had prepared, on paper, the civil government he planned to establish; it consisted of a governor, a secretary, and a legislative council.[23] Interestingly, Commodore Stockton, although he never received such orders and did not know they existed until he saw Kearny had anticipated the views of the United States government with respect to civil government in California.

When Kearny arrived at Stockton's headquarters the Commodore offered him the position of commander-in-chief and himself as aid. This offer was refused by Kearny as were several subsequent offers of the same nature. In fact Kearny insisted that Commodore Stockton remain commander-in-chief. The first indication of a rift came a short time before the second attack on Los Angeles. Kearny indicated, but not strongly, that he should be the governor of the territory. In the second attack on Los Angeles, Kearny commanded the assault troops and Stockton was over all commander-in-chief

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[22]Arthur Woodward, "Lances At San Pascual," California Historical Society Quarterly, XXVI (March, 1947), pp. 21-62.

[23]Grivas, Military Governments In California 1846-1850, p. 74.

coordinating Army and Navy forces. On January 13, Kearny recognized Stockton as governor of California and the commander of the United States forces. However on January 16, Kearny in a letter to Stockton demanded that the Commodore cease all further proceedings relating to the formation of a civil government for California.[24]

It was Frémont's misfortune to be caught in the argument between these two senior officers and to choose the side which ultimately lost its appeal to officials in Washington. Possibly he thought Commodore Stockton was the senior officer, or he may have thought his own political connections through his father-in-law, Senator Thomas Hart Benson of Missouri, warranted his disobeying a superior officer. Later when Commodore W. Branford Shubrick became the Pacific Squadron commander, he and Kearny agreed to let the matter rest, however, Frémont continued to maintain he was military governor of California, duly appointed by Stockton, even though he did not assume the position until Stockton left Los Angeles on January 19. He acted in this capacity for fifty days beginning on January 16, 1847, and ending March 7, 1847.[25] Although he carried out his "irregular actions"[26] in the name of the United States, Frémont's government was never official.

There were, however, two sides to the argument. General Kearny clearly possessed orders, which neither Frémont of Stockton had, to estab-

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[24]HED 1, pp. 1050-1052.

[25]Grivas, Military Governments In California 1846-1850, p. 97.

[26]Bancroft, History of California, V, pp. 465-468.

lish a civil government. Kearny later stated that he accepted a temporarily inferior position for the sake of cooperation and because he lacked troops to control the necessary key areas.

Frémont had no legal ground on which to stand when he refused to accept General Kearny as his superior officer in California. When he arrived at Los Angeles on January 15, 1847, Kearny had sent him a copy of Secretary of War William L. Marcy's orders of June 18, 1846, which were addressed to Kearny and clearly stated that ". . . these troops, and such as may be organized in Upper California, will be under your command."[27] If Frémont had accepted these orders he would not have been arrested by Kearny and ultimately court martialed.[28] On March 28, General Kearny sent Colonel Richard Barnes Mason, who had been sent as his eventual replacement, to Los Angeles to be both military and civil governor. This brought on the clash with Fremont, which resulted in a challenge. Although the date for the duel was not set, Colonel Mason did select the weapons--double barreled shotguns.[29]

The controversy over chain of command did not keep Commodore Stockton and General Kearny from pressing their expedition against Los Angeles. Approximately three weeks passed after Kearny's arrival at

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[27]House Executive Document 31, 30th Congress, 2nd session. Serial 573, p. 240.

[28]Senate Executive Document 33, 30th Congress, 1st session. Serial 507, pp. 1-446. This document contains the complete records of Fremont's court martial trial.

[29]Grivas, Military Governments In California 1846-1850, p. 77.

Stockton's camp, before their combined forces met and defeated a California force of eight hundred men commanded by José Flores. The two armies met, January 8, at San Gabriel River, and on January 9, at Mesa. The Americans were victorious in both battles. As Flores retreated towards Pasadena, the Stockton-Kearny column found the road open to Los Angeles, which they entered on January 10, 1847, and Captain Gillespie once again raised the American flag which he had been forced to lower the previous September.

A short time later Frémont and his ragged, weary, miserably clad host encountered the Californians at Rancho Cahuenga near San Fernando. Flores, realizing that he could not negotiate with Stockton, had turned over his command to Andres Pico who met Frémont January 13, and signed the Capitulation of Cahuenga which brought to a close the war in Upper California.[30] Commodore Stockton as commander-in-chief was disturbed at Fremont's presumptive act of negotiating a treaty without the presence of a senior officer. What Frémont's motives were is unknown. Possibly he anticipated being appointed governor and wanted to prove his friendship to the Californians. Whatever the reason Stockton accepted the capitulation and included a copy of it in his dispatch to Secretary of Navy George Bancroft.[31]

On January 22, 1847, Commodore W. Branford Shubrick arrived in California and assumed command of the Pacific Squadron. Commodore

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[30]William H. Ellison, "San Juan to Cahuenga: The Experiences of Fremont's Battalion," Pacific Historical Review, XXVII (August, 1958), pp. 260-261.

[31]Grivas, Military Governments In California 1846-1850, p. 63.

Stockton joined a party of hunters, and crossing the Rocky Mountains, returned overland to the United States. Shortly after the second occupation of Los Angeles army units, namely the Mormon Battalion, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Philip St. George Cooke, and the New York Volunteers under Colonel Jonathan Drake Stevenson, arrived the last of March and the first of April. The last of May General Kearny, who had been military governor from February 9, 1847 until May 31, 1847, turned the government of California over to Colonel Mason and returned to St. Louis. Thus ended the first phase of the naval operations on the West Coast.

Commodore James Biddle, the senior American naval officer in the Pacific area, arrived off California March 2, 1847, and remained until July, 1847. During this time he assumed overall command but did not interfere with Commodore Shubrick and the Northern Pacific Squadron which was preparing to enter the second phase of operations against Lower California and the West Coast of Mexico. He did assert his authority by calling back to ship duty all naval officers and men assigned to shore duty. Also he ordered the American ships blockading the port of Guaymas to allow the resumption of trade in that area.

Commodore Shubrick's first official action was to take charge of the fleet which at that time consisted of the razee Independence 56, Congress 60, Portsmouth 24, Cyane 24, Preble 16, Dale 16, Warren 24, and two supply ships, the Erie and the Southampton. Shubrick's next move was to strike a blow at Mazatlán, Mexico, as it was the most important commercial port on the Mexican West Coast. His plan was

to gain control of the custom-house, declare a tariff[32] as he had been directed by the new Secretary of Navy John Y. Mason, and collect revenue from such to help defray the expenses of the squadron. This operation was delayed, however, until September, 1847, for two reasons: first, to give the crews a chance to rest; and second, because weather conditions along the West Coast of Mexico in the late spring and summer months made it virtually impossible for sailing vessels to operate, let alone engage in landing operations. Meanwhile operations were carried out against Baja, California, which had been left out of the treaty negotiations with Upper California. In March, 1847, while Shubrick was preparing to move his naval forces to the West Coast of Mexico, Commodore Biddle sent Commander John Berrien Montgomery in the Portsmouth to occupy San Jose, located near the tip of Baja, California. The landing force consisted of 140 men who met no resistance of any kind. At 10:00 a.m., March 30, 1847, the Mexican flag was lowered and the American flag raised in its place, Cabo San Lucas, at the very tip of the Baja peninsula, was occupied in the same manner. La Paz, on the East Coast, was occupied without resistance April 14, by ninety Marines and sailors under Navy Lieutenant John S. Missroon. A humorous incident occurred as a result of the occupation of La Paz. Commander Montgomery reported to Commodore Biddle they had confiscated $11,950.00 worth of cigars. No mention was made of

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[32] HED 1, p. 1073.

their disposition.[33] These three ports were easily taken, however, as the Navy was soon to learn, the occupying forces would have their troubles.

Commodore Shubrick now shifted his operation to the mainland and attempted to blockade several ports at the same time. He soon realized he did not have sufficient ships to accomplish this and that the reduction of these ports could be accomplished only by landing parties of sufficient strength to seize and hold them. As it was the season of bad weather he sent all ships, except the Cyane and the Independence which were left to blockade Mazatlan, north to Monterey and San Francisco where the months until October were spent in intensive training for landing operations. During this period of training the various ships of the squadron took turns in blockading Mazatlan. Early in August, Commodore Shubrick sent the Congress, the Portsmouth, and the Dale south to enforce as strict a blockade as possible on the principal Mexican ports which included Mazatlan, Guaymas and San Blas.[34] When Commodore Shubrick was ready to commence operations again Colonel Mason replaced the old muskets and carbines used by the sailor companies with fine army muskets and other accoutrements.[35]

Shubrick's plan, as reported to Secretary Mason, was to blockade the minor ports and occupy the major ones with landing parties. Accordingly,

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[33]Ibid., p. 1057.

[34]Metcalf, A History of the United States Marine Corps, pp. 156-157.

[35]Samuel F. DuPont, "The War With Mexico: The Cruise of the U. S. Ship Cyane During the Years 1845-48." United States Naval Institute Proceedings, VIII, No. 3, (December, 1882), p. 426.

on September 30, 1847, the Dale, under Commander Thomas O. Selfridge approached the harbor of Mulejé, running under English colors in order to deceive the Mexicans; after an appropriate lapse of time Selfridge hauled down the English flag and ran up the American colors. Lieutenant Tunis Augustus McDonahue Craven was sent ashore under a white flag of truce to obtain information concerning the inhabitants of the town. He was net by a Mexican who informed him the town was in the possession of Mexican forces who were not disposed to accept American jurisdiction and further they would fire upon the Americans if they attempted to land. The next day, following a brief skirmish, the enemy were driven from the town by the sailors and Marines from the Dale. The Mexican schooner Magdalen, owned by Jesus Mandana of Guaymas was seized, stripped of all valuable equipment, and burned at sea. Not having sufficient strength to maintain a permanent garrison at Mulejé, Commander Selfridge chartered the schooner Liberty of Loreto, for seven dollars a day, and placed Lieutenant Craven in command of her with orders to help maintain a blockade in the Gulf of California.[36]

At the time of pacification of these smaller ports was taking place a much larger operation was underway against the important port of Guaymas. The Congress, commanded by Captain E. A. F. Lavallette, the Portsmouth under Commander J. B. Montgomery, and the Independence, Lieutenant Richard Le Page in command were sent to occupy the port and arrived there on October 17. The same day they arrived the landing forces set up heavy

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[36] HED 1, p. 1100.

mortars on two small islands in the harbor. It was known that the sentiment of the town was anti-American because a year earlier, when the Cyane was sent to blockade the port, United States Consul John A. Robinson had reported that all American citizens had been ordered to move twenty leagues into the interior.[37] This was a precaution taken a number of times on the Frontier by Spanish authorities dealing with Anglo-Americans. The next day the Mexicans were given an opportunity to surrender. The Mexican commander delayed giving an answer and that night the forces defending the town retreated to another position some three miles distant where they had a battery of fourteen guns placed in order to resist the Americans should they attempt to penetrate the interior. The next morning, October 20, at 6:00 a.m. the vessels opened fire on the town. The two mortars on the islands took part in the bombardment which amounted to some five hundred rounds. Only one person, an Englishman, was killed and only minor damage occurred to the town. The citizens gladly surrendered, and a party of Marines under Lieutenant Henry Watson went ashore and raised the American flag. Before he left the port Commander Montgomery had all the small arms and ammunition collected and placed on board the Portsmouth.

On November 17, 1847, Commander Selfridge, from the Dale, was forced to land sixty five Marines and sailors in order to retake Guaymas from approximately 350 local Mexican forces. The supporting fire from the

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[37]United States Department of State. Dispatches From the U. S. Consuls in Guaymas, Mexico, 1832-1898. Micro-copy T-210, roll 1, October 10, 1846.

Dale was the decisive factor in driving the Mexicans out of the town. On December 30, Lieutenant Craven, with fifty sailors and a detachment of Marines captured the village of Cochori. The situation there remained unsettled throughout January and February and up to March 15, 1848, when Lieutenant Robert Tansell, who commanded the Marine detachment on the Dale had to again drive the enemy from the town. Thereafter the Marines maintained a garrison in Cochori until June 24, 1848, when news was received that peace had been established by the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo.

The important naval operation on the West Coast of Mexico was the occupation of Mazatlán whose excellent port and town were garrisoned by approximately 1,200 Mexican troops under Colonel Rafael Telles. Commodore Shubrick, commanding the Congress, Independence, and the Cyane arrived off Mazatlán on November 10, 1847. He stationed his ships, after dark, so that the fort could be brought under fire simultaneously from three sides. Early on the morning of November 11, Captain Lavellett went ashore with a surrender message from Commodore Shubrick to Colonel Telles: no definite answer was given by the military commander, however, the civil authorities wanted to surrender. At twelve noon Commodore Shubrick gave the order for the force of 750 to commence landing. The five artillery pieces and the boats of the Congress were commanded by Lieutenant J. W. Livingston, the boats of the Independence were under Lieutenant Le Page while the immediate commander of the landing party was Captain Lavallett. The city was occupied without resistance. Mazatlán is remembered as the most precise naval operation of the Pacific Squadron during the Mexican War. Soon after the occupation of Mazatlán news was

received of the capture of Mexico City.[38]

Perhaps the greatest humiliation to the Mexican government, resulting from the Pacific operation, was the occupation of historic San Blas Naval Yard and Port. Established May 16, 1768, by Visitador José de Galvez, the Department of San Blas had remained for more than fifty years an important outlet for Mexico's interior trade with the West Coast.[39] The United States Navy had first visited San Blas, so far as the Mexican War was concerned, in September, 1846, when the Cyane, under Commander DuPont sailed into the harbor and DuPont sent Lieutenant Stephen C. Rowan, his executive officer, and a detachment of men on shore to spike the twenty four guns defending the harbor.[40] The second and final occupation occurred January 12, 1848, under the command of Lieutenant-Commandant Theodorous Bailey and a landing party from the supply ship Lexington, who occupied the port without resistance.

La Paz, which had been initially taken in April, 1847, by a combined naval force commanded by Lieutenant Missroon was soon occupied by two companies of New York Volunteers commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Henry S. Burton, whose over all mission was to control Lower California. This proved to be a much harder task than had been anticipated as enemy activities

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[38]DuPont, "The War With Mexico," pp. 428-429.

[39]Michael E. Thurman, "The Establishment of the Department of San Blas Its Initial Fleets: 1767-1770," Hispanic American Historical Review, XLIII (February, 1963), p. 68.

[40]Edgar Stanton Maclay, A History of the United States Navy From 1775 to 1893. (3 vols., New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1893), II, p. 88.

could be readily supported by Mexican forces across the gulf. It was the opinion of Colonel Burton and Commodore Shubrick that five hundred to a thousand men were needed to control the inhabitants of Lower California instead of the 110 men which Burton had. As a result he was, of necessity, confined to the town itself.[41] Nor were their fears without considerable justification since during the month of November Manuel Peneda led an insurrection against Burton's force at La Paz. Several times during the month they attacked but were repulsed by the New York Volunteers. Burton's force was strengthened by the arrival of the Cyane and its Marine detachment which remained until February, 1848, when 150 troops commanded by Colonel Mason, arrived from Upper California.

Approximately the same time that La Paz was being attacked Marine Lieutenant Charles Heywood, who had been left at San José with forty five Marines and sailors and twenty civilian volunteers,[42] came under seige by a force of 150 Mexicans. The enemy force, for the most part, consisted of tough Yaqui Indians whose fighting prowess was known to the Spanish Conquistadors. This action occurred November 19, 1847. Heywood was harrassed from that time until he was relieved on April 30, 1848, making this the longest battle engaged in by the Pacific Squadron. He had been reinforced several times for a few days and each time the enemy would withdraw until the reinforcements left. During this period the Cyane, Portsmouth, and the

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[41] HED 1, p. 1084.

[42] Maclay, A History of the United States Navy From 1775 to 1889, II, pp. 95-96.

Southampton all visited the port.

From the time the Southampton left San José and the Cyane arrived on February 14, 1848, the Mexican forces had increased to an estimated three or four hundred men and thus by February 10, the Marines were in a desperate situation. When the Cyane finally arrived they had been under close siege for more than a week and the enemy controlled all the town except the mission which Heywood occupied. On February 12, the Marines were cut off from their water supply located in the immediate vicinity of the mission. The afternoon of the fourteenth the Cyane came in sight but was unable to land reinforcements until the following morning, when Commander DuPont landed with 102 men and officers. With the supporting fire of the Cyane's twenty four guns the landing party fought its way toward the mission; as they approached Heywood with his Marines sallied forth and helped drive off the enemy. The Mexicans were routed and thus ended the long series of sieges to which the American garrison had been subjected.[43] The battle of La Paz and San José continued after the Treaty of Peace, between the United States and Mexico, had been signed on February 2, 1848. Soon after the siege at San José had been lifted Padre Gabriel, the chief troublemaker in Lower California, surrendered to Commodore DuPont at Mazatlán.[44]

After the cessation of hostilities until May, 1848, the Pacific Squadron maintained a hold on Mazatlán and Guaymas, and blockaded San Blas. On

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[43]Metcalf, A History of the United States Marine Corps, pp. 160-161.

[44]HED 1, p. 1151.

May 7, 1848, the cycle of naval command and the further humilitation of the Mexican government were completed when Captain Thomas ap. C. Jones, in the 70-gun ship-of-the-line Ohio, once again assumed command of the Pacific Squadron.

Government documents, personal memoirs, naval records, eye witness accounts, and secondary sources prove that the conquest, occupation, and governing of California by American military forces from July, 1846, through December, 1849,[45] was indeed a pre-determined goal[46] of the United States government carried out, for the most part by the Pacific Squadron of the United States Navy and its military arm, The United States Marine Corps. In a war both land and sea, hindered by operational blunders, disregard of orders, shortage of military personnel, equipment and experience, the Pacific Squadron as a unit accomplished a remarkable feat. At times out of communication with its government, forced to forage for supplies, and to conduct a war for which it was not trained, it none the less accomplished its goals -- the reduction of Upper and Lower California and a satisfactory blockade of the West Coast of Mexico. There was no lack of valor on the part of individuals and detachments whether Marines or sailors. Military feats, such as Lieutenant Charles Heywood's stand at San José reflect the traditions of the

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[45]Grivas, Military Governments In California 1846-1850, p. 79.

[46]Robert G. Cleland, "Early Sentiment for Annexation of California, An Account of the Growth of American Interest In California From 1835 to 1846," The Southwestern Historical Quarterly, In three parts. Part I (July, 1914 to April, 1915), pp. 1-40; Part II (October, 1914), pp. 121-161; Part III (January, 1915), pp. 231-260. This article is an excellent discussion of the problem.

Marine Corps even at that early date. Commodore Shubrick in his official report of February 21, 1848, to the Honorable John Y. Mason Secretary of the Navy, emphasized the importance of the Corps and recommended that it be increased in size.[47] The problem of coordinating military movements from sailing vessels was without question a frustrating experience, and to adhere to a strict schedule was almost impossible. More than once a ship was becalmed and arrived too late to be of help in a landing operation.

The Mexican forces in California, and in the Mexican West Coast ports, were inadequately prepared in arms or by nature to offer any but token resistance, in most cases, against the over extended American forces. From their actions it would appear that they were more interested in saving their "honor" than in seriously challenging the military forces of the United States.

Approximately twelve major towns and ports were occupied by the Squadron. A total of forty enemy ships,[48] for the most part small coastal vessels, were either destroyed or confiscated. The number of Americans killed or wounded were relatively small compared to the size and importance of the prize gained. At no time were there more than ten ships involved. In the era of Manifest Destiny it was a welcome accomplishment.

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[47] HED 1, p. 1132.

[48] Robert Wilden Neeser, Statistical and Chronological History of the United States Navy, 1775-1907. (2 vols., New York: The Macmillan Company, 1909), II, pp. 312-316.

CHAPTER III

THE HOME SQUADRON

The naval operations of the Home Squadron[1] in the Gulf of Mexico is largely the story of two officers--Commodore David Conner and his successor in command, Commodore Matthew C. Perry. Considerable controversy developed among the early historians of the Mexican War, several of whom were either Naval or Army officers, as to the reason Conner was replaced by Perry during the Navy's greatest achievement in the war on the East Coast--the battle of Vera Cruz. Some implied that Conner was removed for having failed to carry out his orders and because he had in some way displeased the Navy Department.[2]

Normally a commodore was given the command of a squadron for a period of three years and he retained it for that period unless sickness, death, or some other emergency removed him. If for unsatisfactory service he was removed, he was said to have been "superseded"; if his term of service was satisfactory he was "relieved". When the war with Mexico began in May,

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[1]Philip Syang Physick Conner, The Home Squadron Under Commodore Conner In the War With Mexico, (Philadelphia, 1896), p. 50 fn 2. The Home Squadron was originally intended as a school for seamen.

[2]Ibid., p. 4

1846, Conner already was due to be relieved. However, Secretary of the Navy James Y. Mason asked Commodore Conner to continue in command.[3]

When Perry took over the command of the Home Squadron on March 21, 1847, just as the battle for Vera Cruz was beginning, it came as no surprise to either man. It had been understood from the beginning that Perry would assume command. That it took so long, almost a year, to transfer the command from Conner to Perry was due, in part, to the general unpreparedness of the United States government, a situation which effectively hindered the Army and Navy in their prosecution of the war. Conner commendably was willing to resign his command at a most crucial hour in his career.

As a result of the general state of unpreparedness at the outbreak of war, the Navy did not enjoy great popularity and found it hard to secure recruits, a fact which was not overlooked by foreign newspapers. The London Times reported, "The United States government has authorized recruiting officers to offer a bounty of $20.00 and three months advanced wages to all able bodied men who will re-enter the service. New recruits are offered $15.00 bounty and three months advanced wages."[4] Discipline in the years from 1812 to 1846 was poor. Control of naval matters had fallen into the hands of shrewd officers who were interested in themselves and their friends. In some cases those who drew the most pay rendered the least service. The

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[3]Ibid., p. 5. John Y. Mason was Secretary of Navy March, 1844 through March, 1845; George Bancroft was Secretary from March, 1845 through September, 1846: John Y. Mason from September, 1846 through March, 1849.

[4]London Times, June 29, 1846, page 5, column 3. Quoted from the Baltimore Patriot.

top echelon of officers in the Marine Corps was in a similar condition. Marine officers usually refused to cruise after being promoted to a field grade rank and one Marine officer had been in the Corps for a long period of time without ever going to sea.[5] This situation developed because of conditions which existed after the war of 1812: there was little opportunity, or need, for promotion or increased efficiency within either the Navy or the Marine Corps after that conflict ended.

The chain of command, from the Navy Department to the squadrons did not function properly. This was due generally to the poor communications system and the fact that an entire squadron could be out of contact with Washington for several months at a time. Thus, for all practical purposes, the naval war in the Gulf and along the East Coast of Mexico was conducted separate from the naval operations of the Pacific Squadron. If there was any coordination of plans it was to be found in the blockading of Mexican ports and this was probably accidental. The Home Squadron was plagued with many of the same problems as those faced by the Pacific Squadron -- inadequate equipment, poor communications, a shortage of supplies, and long supply lines. One advantage the Home Squadron had over the Pacific Squadron was the number of different ships available, at one time or another, during the war.

Type of Ship	Size of Guns	Number of Guns
Steamers		
Spitfire	8-inch (63-pounder)	1
	32-pounders	2

[5]Justin H. Smith, The War With Mexico, (2 vols., New York: The Macmillan Company, 1919), II, p. 190.

Type of Ship (Continued)	Size of Guns	Number of Guns
Vixen	24-pounders	3
Petrita*	32-pounders	1
Mississippi**	10-inch (85-pounder)	2
	8-inch	8
Princeton**	8-inch	1
	42-pounders	8
Scourage	32-pounders	1
	24-pounders	2
Scorpion	8-inch	2
	18-pounders	2
Frigates		
Potomac**	32-pounders	24
	42-pounders	20
Cumberland**	32-pounders	24
	42-pounders	20
Raritan**	8-inch	8
	32-pounders	42
Sloops of War		
John Adams**	8-inch	4
	32-pounders	16
St. Mary's**	32-pounders	24
Falmouth**	24-pounders	24
Albany	8-inch	4
	32-pounders	18
Decatur	32-pounders	14
Germantown	32-pounders	18
	8-pounders	2
Schooner		
Flirt	18-pounders	2
Brigs		
Perry	32-pounders	6
Lawerence	12-pounders	2
	32-pounders	18
Somers**	32-pounders	10
Washington	18-pounders	1
	32-pounders	2
Porpoise	9-pounder	8
	24-pounders	8
Gun Boats		
Bonita*	32-pounder	1
Reefer*	32-pounder	1
Petrel*	32-pounder	1
Falcon	32-pounder	1
Tampico	32-pounder	1
Mahonese*	32-pounder	1
Nonata*	42-pounders	4

Type of Ship (Continued)	Size of Guns	Number of Guns
Bomb Vessels		
Stromboli	85-pounder	1
Vesuvius	85-pounder	1
Hecla	85-pounder	1
Etna	85-pounder	1 [6]

Pensacola, Florida, the closest supply depot, was nine hundred miles away from the scene of action. It took a sailing vessel a month or more to make a round trip from Vera Cruz to Pensacola. Even at Pensacola critical supplies, such as fresh water for the crews and coal for the steamers, were by no means assured whenever a ship arrived. Conner's operations in the early part of the war were greatly hindered by this inadequate system of supply. Attacks and blockades on Mexican ports in June and July of 1846 were impossible because gun-boats promised him did not arrived until July 28, and the small schooners, so badly needed for river operations, did not arrive until fall when for the lack of fuel they were useless. It was not until August, 1846, that the first storeship arrived, and its supplies consisted mainly of water. On October 6, the first shipment of coal reached Conner's squadron off Vera Cruz.[7]

In addition the Home Squadron had to contend with the vicious winter

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[6]Robert Wilden Neeser, The Statistical and Chronological History of the United States Navy 1775-1907, (2 vols., New York: The Macmillan Company, 1909), II, pp. 64-72.

*captured Mexican vessels placed in service by the Home Squadron.
**The Home Squadron as of May 13, 1848, when the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo was signed.

[7]Conner, The Home Squadron, p. 10.

gales of the Gulf, known as "northers". The East Coast of Mexico was well protected in the winter by these fierce storms which came up unexpectedly and blew for as long as seventy two hours without a break.[8] During one twenty four hour period off Vera Cruz, twenty three merchant ships were blown ashore, several small boats were destroyed, and the steam frigate Mississippi parted her anchor cable.[9] Disease, principally yellow fever, was the great protector of Mexicans along the coast during the summer months. As a result of these two problems time became a very important factor in naval operations on the Mexican East Coast. Because of the time element involved and the difficulty of keeping the events of war straight, a brief chronological account of naval operations on the East Coast is necessary. The calendar of naval operations was as follows:

May 8, 1846, Point Isabel.

May 18, 1846, Barrita, Mexico.

June 8-15, the first expedition to Tampico.

August 7, the first attack on Alvarado.

October 15, the second attack on Alvarado.

October 16 through November 1, first expedition to Frontera and Tobasco.

November 10 through December 13, the second expedition to Tampico.

November 14-15, the Panuco River expedition.

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[8]Raphael Semmes, U. S. N., Service Afloat and Ashore During the Mexican War,(Cincinnati: Wm H. Moore & Co., Publishers, 1851), pp. 109-111.

[9]Dudley W. Knox, A History of the United States Navy, (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1936), p. 169.

December 17-27, the first expedition to Laguna de los Terminos, Yucatan.

January, February, and March, 1847, blockade duty and preparation for Vera Cruz landing.

March 9-29, 1847, Vera Cruz. Marine detachments sent with Scott's army to Mexico City.

April 1-4, the third and final expedition against Alvarado.

April 18, occupation of Tuspan.

May 18, the second visit to Laguna de los Terminos.

June 16-24, the second expedition to Tobasco and an expedition to Campeche, Yucatan.

June 30, the occupation of Tamultay.

July, 1847 through July 26, 1848, the occupation of ports captured and the continued blockade of the East Coast ports. The completion of naval activities in the Mexican War.

The Home Squadron, commanded by Conner, was ready when General Mariano Arista's forces attacked Captain S. B. Thorton's dragoon patrol April 24, 1846. The squadron began its active engagement in the war by supporting General Zachary Taylor's advance to the Rio Grande. While Taylor was defeating the Mexicans at Palo Alto and Resaca de la Palma, a landing force of five hundred Marines and sailors, commanded by Naval Captain F. H. Gregory, was sent to protect Fort Polk, located at Point Isabel, which was Taylor's supply depot. The men for this landing force were taken primarily from the Cumberland, Raritan, Potomac, and the John Adams. The Marine Battalion, commanded by Lieutenant William Lang, was assigned to the center of the enclosure as its defensive position. The sailors from the Raritan and the Potomac defended the rest of the same side of the fort which faced the enemy. The naval landing party remained until May 13, when it returned to

the fleet.[10]

On May 18, a detachment of two hundred seamen and Marines from the Cumberland and the Potomac, under the command of Captain John H. Aulick, USN, proceeded up the Rio Grande to the Mexican town of Barrita, located on the right bank of the river; as the army did not cross over from the left bank until after noon, the honor of unfurling the American flag on Mexican soil went to the Navy.[11] The naval party remained in Barrita for two days before returning to Fort Polk. The next naval activity did not take place until June 8, 1846. The somewhat long periods of time between operations of the Navy, at various times during the war, were not due to any hesitancy on the part of the naval forces engaged, but rather to the obstacles mentioned earlier.

At the same time these initial co-operative engagements with the Army were taking place. Commodore Conner was attempting to carry out the two major orders that had been given him by the Secretary of the Navy -- blockading the Mexican East Coast ports and waging war on privateers.[12] The blockade was, at first, ineffectual because of the shortage of ships, especially the smaller steamers which were later used to such good advantage in the river operations. A partial blockade of the East Coast ports was maintained. The hope

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[10]Clyde H. Metcalf, A History of the United States Marine Corps, (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1939), pp. 110-113.

[11]House Executive Document 1, 30th Congress, 2nd session. Serial 537, pp. 1163-1164. Herein after cited as HED 1.

[12]House Executive Document 4, 29th Congress, 2nd session, Serial 497, pp. 40-42. Herin after cited as HED 4.

apparently was to encourage foreign trade to continue, for with the American occupation of these ports revenue would be forthcoming for the expenses of the squadron.

One other incident should be mentioned with respect to the blockade. In late June or early July, 1846, Commander Alexander Slidell McKenzie was dispatched to Cuba on a secret mission; he was to arrange for the return of Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna to Mexico -- with the blessing of the United States government -- the vain hope that he would co-operate in bringing the war to a close. Accordingly, in August, the Steamer Arab was allowed to run the blockade and land Santa Anna and his suite at Vera Cruz.[13] The appearance of Santa Anna off Vera Cruz was no surprise to Conner. On May 13, 1846, George Bancroft, who was then Secretary of the Navy, had sent Conner a confidential dispatch which read: "Commodore, if Santa Anna endeavors to enter the Mexican ports, you will allow him to pass freely."[14] Santa Anna had not changed, for no sooner was he safely back on Mexican soil than he was again anti-American. His egotism, however, worked favorably for the United States and made him, in the end, an effective instrument for ending the war.

On June 8, 1846, Commodore Conner began his first major operation against the Mexican ports with a preliminary expedition to Tampico. This was carried out by the sloop St. Mary's, commanded by Commander, J. L. Saunders. The fort was shelled until the Mexican defenders were forced to

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[13]Ibid., pp. 117-120.

[14]House Executive Document 50, 30th Congress, 1st session, Vol. 7, Serial 520, p. 774. Herein after cited as HED 60.

withdraw temporarily. An attempt to cut out, or to board, the Mexican vessels lying in the Panuco River was unsuccessful because the current was too strong to row against. Not until November 10, was Conner able to mount a second attempt to occupy Tampico.

Commodore Conner's next move, on August 7, was an unsuccessful assault on the important port of Alvarado, which lay about thirty miles southeast of the fleet anchorage at Antón Lizardo, off Vera Cruz. Alvarado had proven difficult to blockade because of the wide bar covering its approaches. On the first attempt Conner had no steamers of sufficiently light draught to cross the bar and tow the gun-boats. Nevertheless Conner attempted to carry out his orders. The Mississippi and the Princeton bombarded the defenses of Alvarado for about six hours with little success. While the two steamers were engaging the Mexican fort, which was unable to reply because of its light guns, a landing party of Marines and sailors attempted to row, unsuccessfully, upstream and attack the fort. Failing in this, because recent rains had so swollen the river, they returned to their ships. The failure to take Alvarado was especially embarrassing as the unfortunate affair had been witnessed by British naval ships. In addition, the weather turned bad, forcing Conner to retire with his force to Antón Lizardo.[15]

The Home Squadron, in the Gulf of Mexico, was at a disadvantage in that it was in closer contact with Washington, D. C. than was the Pacific Squadron. In September, Conner was notified by the Navy Bureau that the

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[15]Metcalf, United States Marine Corps, p. 113.

administration wanted something done for the newspapers to make a "noise about".[16] Accordingly, Conner made plans to renew his attack on Alvarado.

A second attempt to take Alvarado was made on October 15, 1846. The defenses of Alvarado consisted of eleven artillery pieces, two brigs of nine guns each, a schooner with seven guns, two gunboats each mounting a long 24-pounder, and approximately one thousand men. To combat these defenses Conner had two steamers and five gunboats mounting a total of fourteen guns and from four to five hundred men for his assault force. Commodore Conner led the attack with one steamer towing two gunboats. This part of the flotilla managed to cross the bar and engage the Alvarado batteries. Further progress was stopped when the second wave of the assault grounded on the bar.[17] A landing party led by Captain French Forrest, commander of the Mississippi, was forced to retire when it became evident that Conner's force, the Vixen and two gunboats, were ineffective against the defenses of Alvarado. Conner apparently had not given any consideration to landing a strong naval party west of the town and attacking by land. This tactic was later used successfully by Perry.[18]

On October 16, immediately following the second attempt to take Alvarado, Conner sent Commodore Perry with a force of eight vessels and two

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[16]Smith, The War With Mexico, II, p. 196.

[17]Conner, The Home Squadron, pp. 7-8.

[18]Metcalf, United States Marine Corps, p. 114. P. S. P. Conner blames the failure to take Alvardo on Washington claiming that Commodore Conner did not have the proper forces and equipment for the attack. Conner, p. 17.

hundred extra Marines and sailors from the fleet on an expedition to take Frontera, located at the mouth of the Tobasco River in the state of Tobasco. This was an important move because Frontera was a source for cattle. Also, a considerable amount of supplies were thought to be eluding the blockade through this port. Perry's orders were to capture any enemy vessels found on the river and then to move upriver seventy-two miles against San Juan Bautista de Tobasco, the capitol of the state of Tobasco and an important trading center.

The Marines were organized into a special squadron under the command of Marine Captain Alvin Edson of the Raritan.[19] When Perry arrived off the bar at the mouth of the Tobasco River, he transferred to the light steamer Vixen, which had the Bonita and Forward in tow, and, followed by a landing party in barges, pushed across the bar and took the Mexican vessels by surprise. The Mexican schooner Petrita was captured, along with a hot meal left by the crew, and was immediately placed in service as a tow vessel.

In order to keep the enemy from gaining valuable time, Perry left a small force to hold Frontera while the remainder of the task force headed upstream towards San Juan Bautista. The next two days, October 24 and 25, were spent in moving upstream. The Vixen and the Petrita towed the other vessels. At Devil's Turn, a few miles below Tobasco it was necessary to land a detachment and capture a breastwork containing four long 24-pounders. At three o'clock in the afternoon of the 25th the expedition arrived at San Juan

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[19]Richard H. Collum, History of the United States Marine Corps (Philadelphia: L. R. Hammersly and Co., 1890), p. 89.

Bautista and after a very brief bombardment the Mexicans asked for hostilities to cease until they could negotiate a surrender.[20]

When the Americans landed they were immediately brought under fire by Mexican troops concealed in the chaparral. The landing force held its ground until nightfall when they returned to their ships. Early the next morning the Mexicans opened fire on the ships but were silenced by a few bursts of grape and cannister. Soon after this exchange of gunfire, several citizens came on board the Vixen and informed Perry that the town would like to surrender.[21] As the flotilla was preparing to leave, Lieutenant William A. Parker and eighteen men, on board a captured boat, were attacked. Lieutenant Charles W. Morris, who was sent to reinforce him, and one other man were killed. Realizing he did not have sufficient men to occupy San Juan Bautista, Perry returned downstream to Frontera where the McLane and the Forward were left to maintain a blockade. Perry and the rest of the expedition then returned to Anton Lizardo.[22]

Commodore Perry next succeeded in capturing four schooners, two steamers, and one brig, all of which were used by the American Navy for blockading the river ports. Two American merchant brigs -- the Coosa and

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[20]Edgar Stanton Maclay, A History of the United States Navy From 1775 to 1898 (3 vols., New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1893), II, p. 101.

[21]Ibid., p. 103.

[22]HED 1, p. 1167.

the Plymouth -- were found in communication with the enemy, were confiscated, and pressed into service. Also, four smaller Mexican vessels were burned.[23]

On October 20, Commodore Conner received word from Mrs. Franklin Chase, the wife of the American consul at Tampico, that the Mexican Commandant General Anastasio Parrodi would evacuate the town on October 21, and that no resistance would be made to the American attack.[24] This evacuation, however, did not take place until October 27-28 and it was not until November 10 that Conner was able to follow up on this information and move against Tampico.

On September 22, Conner had received specific orders to occupy Tampico so that it might be used as a port of supply for General Taylor's troops who were moving south into Mexico. Accordingly on November 10, 11, and 12, the fleet, consisting of eleven vessels, sailed from Anton Lizardo with orders to rendezvous fifteen miles off Tampico.[25] Assembled there on November 14, the Squadron consisted of the frigates Potomac and Raritan; the steamers Mississippi, Princeton, Vixen, and the Spitfire; the schooners

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[23]Ibid., p. 1169.

[24]Smith, The War With Mexico, I, p. 279. Mrs. Chase's part in the victory at Tampico is somewhat obscure. She possibly spread rumors of a large landing party to the Mexican Commandant. Both she and her husband had sent Conner detailed plans of the forts, guns, and men defending the town. It is not known if Conner ever received them. If he did, he never gave Mrs. Chase credit for the information.

[25]Ibid.

Petrel, Bonita, and Reefer; the sloop St. Mary's; and the brig Porpoise.[26]

The landing force at Tampico consisted of three hundred Marines and sailors under the personal command of Commodore Conner. The initial movement across the bar was led by Lieutenant W. E. Hunt, commander of the blockading vessels at Tampico, who acted as pilot for the expedition. The fort was passed with no signs of resistance, as the Mexicans had already withdrawn. The Navy's work at Tampico was made easier because General Parrade did not believe in the war and readily had accepted Santa Anna's order to withdraw further inland. Conner gave the Marines, under Captain Edson, the temporary responsibility of garrisoning the town.

Soon after the occupation of Tampico, Conner received information that a considerable amount of supplies, munitions, and several boats had been left at Panuco, about eighty miles upriver from Tampico. A small expeditionary force, commanded by Commander Josiah Tattnall, consisting of Captain Edson, twenty Marines, and twelve sailors embarked on the Spitfire and Petrel and proceeded upstream to Panuco. There they destroyed a large amount of supplies -- including guns, and ammunition. The capture of Tampico and Panuco was important not only for military reasons but also because it was a psychological victory. The Panuco River penetrated far into the interior of Mexico and was navigable by small boats carrying supplies and the Mexicans had considered Tampico as one of their most important ports.[27]

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[26]HED 1, p. 1172.

[27]Conner, The Home Squadron, p. 40.

The United States War Department, in anticipation of Conner's occupation of Tampico, had already ordered its occupation by the Army. On November 23, 1846, the steamer Neptune, with five hundred troops commanded by Colonel William Gates, arrived off Tampico. The same day Captain Edson formally turned over the command of Tampico to Colonel Gates. This successful operation gave the Polk administration its much needed "victory news".[28] Tampico also became the main base of supplies for the movement against Vera Cruz and Mexico City.

Although the state of Yucatan was supposedly neutral during the Mexican War, United States Naval commanders kept watch over its more important ports. In accordance with this policy Commodore Perry, commanding the Mississippi, Vixen, Petrel, and Bonita, arrived off the town of Carmen, Yucatan on December 20, 1846. Carmen was a principal port situated at the opening to a large lagoon known as Laguna de los Terminos. The naval force occupied the town without resistance. Perry left the Vixen and the Petrel, under the command of Commander J. R. Sands, to blockade the port. Little attention was given to this port until May, 1847, when Perry would again return.[29]

President James K. Polk, and his advisors in Washington had by now become somewhat discouraged with the progress that General Taylor was making in his war by land. They decided that the best way to win the war was to strike at Mexico City by way of Vera Cruz. With this in mind, politics

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[28]Metcalf, United States Marine Corps, p. 118.

[29]Ibid., p. 136.

were laid aside and General Winfield Scott was given overall command of the war with instructions to take Vera Cruz and move inland against Mexico City, as rapidly as possible.

Any fleet approaching Vera Cruz from the sea, for the purpose of attacking the city, had to come under the guns of Forts Concepcion and Santiago which flanked the city. Such ships had to also contend with the famous fortress San Juan de Ulloa, situated on an island about one-half mile from the city. Construction on this castle fortress was begun in 1582[30] and was completed at a cost of approximately forty million dollars.[31] The castle was really several forts, and formed a polygon five hundred yards long facing Vera Cruz and the north channel. The walls, approximately five feet thick, were constructed of soft coral and faced with hard stone. The fortress was provided with sufficient storerooms and powder magazines to support four hundred pieces of ordinance found in it.[32] It would accommodate five thousand men with sufficient small arms. Water was supplied by seven cisterns which held more than a thousand cubic feet of water.[33]

There was a considerable difference of opinion among the numerous

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[30]John Frost, Pictorial History of Mexico (Philadelphia: Thomas Cowperthwait and Co., for James A. Bill, 1848), p. 468.

[31]Frank Bennett, The Steam Navy of the United States (Pittsburg: Warren and Co., 1869), p. 95.

[32]P. S. P. Conner, "The Castle of San Juan de Ulloa and the Topsy-Turvyists," The United States Service (February, 1897), p. 13.

[33]Frost, Pictorial History of Mexico, p. 468.

Mexican War historians as to the defensive condition of San Juan de Ulloa at the outset of the war with Mexico.[34] General Winfield Scott, commander of the Army forces at Vera Cruz, and Commodore Conner solved the problem in a simple manner -- they bypassed the castle and attacked Vera Cruz by a round-about method. This was accomplished by an amphibious landing out of range of the castle's guns.

General Scott had arrived at Brazos, Texas, on January 1, 1847, with orders to take Vera Cruz and proceed from there to Mexico City if the Mexicans continued to fight after the capture of Vera Cruz. With these goals in mind, Scott began his build up of troops and equipment. A large part of General Taylor's army was withdrawn and placed under Scott. A large fleet of transports was assembled; and all the necessary equipment for this large scale landing operation, including long seige guns, was provided or arranged for. Sixty-five surf boats, each thirty five feet long, were constructed for use as landing barges.[35]

From Brazos, Scott's expedition sailed to Lobos Island, 120 miles northeast of Vera Cruz, for final training and coordination of plans with the Navy. The expedition was assembled by the end of February and was then convoyed to the Home Squadron's anchorage off Antón Lizardo on March 5, 1847. Scott and Conner now completed their plans for the invasion. Conner

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[34]Conner, San Juan de Ulloa. This article deals with the controversy concerning vulnerability of San Juan de Ulloa and whether it really posed a threat to United States forces.

[35]Maclay, United States Navy, p. 106.

suggested that the Navy could better carry the troops into the harbor for the final assault than could the Army transports; to this Scott readily agreed. General Scott and Commodore Conner worked out an elaborate flag system of communication between the Army and Navy, as well as regular communication between naval vessels. For all practical purposes, however, the landing at Vera Cruz was a naval operation.[36]

On March 7, aboard the Petrita, Commodore Conner accompanied by General Scott and his staff, pointed out the most suitable location for the landing -- the beach of Collado[37] some three miles southeast of Vera Cruz. It has already been noted that this landing site completely bypassed the fortress of San Juan de Ulloa and rendered it ineffective for the protection of Vera Cruz -- and simultaneously allowed an attack against the city from its weakest point -- by land.

On March 9, 1847, a fleet of approximately one hundred ships, comprised of war vessels and transports and carrying 12,603 men, horses, and equipment, was assembled off Vera Cruz.[38] At sunrise the steamers Vixen and Spitfire, accompanied by the gunboats Petrel, Bonita, Reefer, Falcon, and the Tampico, ran in close to shore to cover the landing operation. From sunrise to eleven a.m., the Army was transferred to the naval ships; from two p.m. until six, troops were loaded on the surf boats each carrying from

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[36]Conner, The Home Squadron, p. 18.

[37]Ibid., p. 46.

[38]Maclay, United States Navy, p. 106.

fifty to eighty men. The first wave of troops, 4,500 men, landed in the surf boats at six p.m. By ten that night, approximately ten thousand men, with their equipment and supplies, had been landed and were in their respective positions. The Marines of the Home Squadron were in the first landing wave. The entire operation had taken only sixteen hours[39] and was one of the first amphibious landings in American military history.

The following day, March 10, still more troops and equipment were landed. Immediately the work of surrounding Vera Cruz began. By March 15, the investment was complete, and the Army had a defensive line from the landing beach, in a broken line, to Vergara northwest of Fort Concepcion. Inside this line, about seven hundred yards from Vera Cruz, were the gun batteries. The railway and all roads were occupied, and the visible water supply to the city was cut off. For the next few days, as the "northers" permitted, horses, artillery, and additional supplies were unloaded at Collado beach.[40]

There were many problems. The sand hills and the needle-sharp chaparral made life miserable for the toiling soldiers and sailors -- acting as draft animals to pull the guns into position, because Scott had not received the number of animals he needed. Nor had the bulk of the artillery arrived, especially the long seige guns, and Mexican irregulars, both cavalry and infantry, harrassed the American troops. Despite these difficulties, three

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[39]Conner, The Home Squadron, p. 20.

[40]Smith, The War With Mexico, II, pp. 27-28.

batteries, mounting 10-inch mortars, were ready by the early afternoon of March 22, ". . .the soldiers felt eager to hear what they called the 'sweet music' of those' faithful bull dogs."[41]

On the same day General Scott formally demanded the surrender of the town but his proposal was refused by the Mexicans. On March 21, 1847, Commodore Conner transferred the command of the Home Squadron to his successor, Commodore Matthew C. Perry.[42] The same day that Perry took command of the squadron General Scott asked for a battery of heavy guns from the Navy. Conner had previously suggested the use of these guns, but Scott had refused, hoping that his own siege guns would arrive. Perry agreed to the request, but insisted that they be manned by naval crews. By March 24, the battery was ready to fire. This was the heaviest American battery at Vera Cruz, as it had three 68-pounder shell guns, and one 32-pound solid shot gun.[43] Eventually there was a total of seven batteries firing at Vera Cruz and the two forts, Concepcion and Santiago. The early stages of the bombardment made a spectacular scene by day and night -- but accomplished little of military value. Throughout the first stages of the assault the citizens apparently remained in high hopes that they could resist successfully.

When the big guns of the naval battery, which were close enough to fire point-blank, began to cut away the wall, the Mexicans, according to later

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[41]Ibid., p. 29.

[42]HED 1, p. 1181.

[43]Conner, The Home Squadron, p. 47 fn 4.

reports, realized they were in serious trouble. Too, no help had arrived from the inland, and the Mexican irregulars were unable to penetrate the American lines. While the Army was bombarding Vera Cruz, the Navy was carrying on a hit-and-run battle with the two forts and the castle of San Juan de Ulloa. As a result of this combined action the Mexicans were ready, on the morning of March 26, to surrender. In the afternoon of the 26th, six men, three Mexicans and three Americans met and exchanged propositions. The next day, March 27, 1847, the Articles of Capitulation were signed, and on March 29 Vera Cruz and San Juan de Ulloa were occupied by the Army and the Navy.[44] Although he had formally relinquished the command of the Squadron to Perry, Commodore Conner had remained until the occupation of Vera Cruz was completed. It then became his privilege to carry the news of this successful operation to Washington D.C. Conner had served as commander of the Home Squadron from December 21, 1843 through March 21, 1847.[45] Conner's personal report to Washington was important at this time because there was considerable complaint about American brutality in bombarding Vera Cruz and its civilian population. The actual loss of life was not large considering that the bombardment lasted three days.[46]

By way of summary as to the Navy's role in the successful capture of

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[44] HED 1, pp. 1185-1187.

[45] Conner, The Home Squadron, p. 37.

[46] Semmes, Afloat and Ashore, p. 142. Smith, Vol. II, p. 33, gives the total figure at approximately two hundred killed and an undetermined number wounded.

Vera Cruz, Conner reported that,

> "The operations of the navy in the descent on Vera Cruz embraced the following: The reconnaissance of the coast in the vicinity of Vera Cruz, that a fitting place for the debarkation might be discovered; the convoying of the fleet transports; the piloting of the same to safe anchorage; the organization and manning of the flotilla of surf-boats; the transhipment of the troops from the chartered vessels to the men-of-war; the transportation of the army thus embarked from Antón Lizardo to the place of landing (the beach of Collado, opposite the island of Sacrificios); the conveyance of the flotilla of surf-boats to the place of landing, their arrangement upon reaching that point; the transfer of the troops into them; the landing of the army with its baggage, horses, artillery, and provision, and the covering of the same by the guns of the men-of-war, together with the continuance of the blockade of the city and castle."[47]

With the fall of Vera Cruz, General Scott immediately made plans to move on Mexico City. With this in mind Scott asked Perry to help him secure a large number of horses which the Mexicans had gathered at Alvarado. Perry then began preparations for the Navy's third attempt to occupy that town. He dispatched Lieutenant Charles G. Hunter, in the steamer Scourage, to blockade the port. Perry was to follow with a larger naval force, while General John A. Quitman was to cut off the Mexican retreat by land. Lieutenant Hunter arrived off Alvarado on March 30, and observing the Mexican forces leaving the town he began an immediate attack. The next day he occupied Alvarado, capturing sixty guns and four schooners. Thirty five of these guns were eventually shipped to the United States as war mementos.[48]

Hunter left a small detachment, of one midshipman and five men, to

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[47]Conner, The Home Squadron, p. 20.

[48]Maclay, United States Navy, p. 114.

garrison the town while he pursued the enemy upriver to the town of Tlachalpa, which he also took without resistance. He had accomplished the major part of the expeditions goal before either Perry or Quitman arrived. Lieutenant Hunter had committed one small error. He had allowed the Mexicans to escape with the horses that Quitman wanted, not to mention that a lieutenant had accomplished what a general and a commodore had desired to do. The result for Lieutenant Charles G. Hunter was a court martial and dismissal from the service.[49]

Quitman's thwarted opportunity to obtain horses and glory offered a great deal of amusement to the American public. The New York Sun's May 7, 1848 edition carried a poem about the episode:

"On came each gay and gallant ship,
On came the troops like mad, oh!
But not a soul was there to whip,
Unless they fought a shadow.

Five sailors sat within a fort,
In leading of a lad, oh!
And thus was spoiled the pretty aport
Of taking Alvardo."[50]

Lieutenant Hunter was reinstated to his commission by President Polk, but was dismissed later from the service for misdemeanors by President Franklin Pierce. Yet his actions had made possible the occupation of Alvarado. Captain Isaac Mayo, USN, was made governor of the town. He commanded a

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[49]Ibid. See also HED 1, p. 1190; Bennett, The Steam Navy, p. 97. "In the United States Hunter was given many dinners and receptions, and as "Alvarado Hunter" was the hero of the hour. . ."

[50]Metcalf, United States Marine Corps, p. 121.

detachment of Marines and sailors, which were reinforced by additional Marines, at various times, from then until 1848 when they were withdrawn.[51]

Commodore Perry next continued with his orders to blockade the Mexican East Coast ports by making preparations to attack the port of Tuspan. This was the only remaining port of any consequence not already in American hands. Tuspan was defended by two forts, one on the right bank and one on the left bank of the river. The fort on the left bank contained several of the guns taken from the sloop Truxton which had capsized the year before at the port. Tuspan also was defended by 650 Mexican soldiers commanded by General Martin Perfecto de Cos, the brother-in-law of Santa Anna.[52]

On April 18, 1847, Commodore Perry in the Spitfire led the attack on Tuspan; he had fifteen hundred seamen and Marines, including officers, supported by four pieces of land artillery. Captain Samuel Livingston Breese commanded the landing party. As soon as the landing party was within range, the Mexicans opened an ineffective fire. The results were as expected: American losses were three killed and eleven wounded -- five officers and six seamen.[53] The Truxton's guns were recovered and the two forts and their remaining guns were destroyed. Commodore Perry left a small detachment of Marines, supported by the Albany and Reefer, to garrison Tuspan.[54]

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[51]Ibid.

[52]Maclay, United States Navy, p. 114.

[53]HED 1, pp. 1192-1193.

[54]Ibid., p. 1193.

In May of 1847 Commodore Perry paid a second visit to Carmen and Laguna de los Terminos. Commander G. A. Magruder was designated as port commander and governor of the surrounding area. There were several reasons why an American naval force was present and in command of this neutral territory. On several occasions the Yucatan government had requested American protection for the white inhabitants from the depredations of the inland Indian tribes. As the war progressed, the United States became even more interested in an interoceanic communications route across the Isthmus of Tehuantepec. This area also offered fresh supplies, fruit, vegetables, and meat for the naval crews. For these reasons, and possibly others, a strong Marine garrison was maintained at Laguna de los Terminos and nearby Alvarado until July 26, 1838.[55]

Some six months had elapsed since Perry's first visit to Frontera and Tobasco. Conditions became such that Perry deemed it necessary to send another expedition to impress upon the populace of that area proper respect for United States authority. On his first visit Perry had been unable to leave a garrison to occupy either town; as a result they had been reoccupied by enemy forces. On June 13, 1847, Perry's second expedition[56] of fifteen ships, eleven hundred men, and ten pieces of artillery were anchored off Point Frontera at

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[55]Metcalf, United States Marine Corps, pp. 136-137.

[56]Bennett, The Steam Navy, p. 97. Bennett gives Perry credit for organizing the first Naval Brigade; in this he is mistaken since Commodore Robert F. Stockton had used the same tactics a year earlier in California. HED 1, pp. 1037-1054.

the mouth of the Tobasco River.[57]

Included in the ten artillery pieces were three guns, one each from the bomb vessels Vesuvius, Stromboli, and Etna. These guns are of particular interest because of their tremendous size. They were rated as 85-pounders[58] which is the largest naval gun referred to in any of the accounts of the Mexican War.

The excellent results obtained at Vera Cruz with the surf boats as landing craft were not lost on Perry. He borrowed several of these from the Army, mounted a light field piece on each one, and used them to cross the bar of the river. He also used them as mobile artillery for close protection for various landing parties. On the 14th the Scorpion, towing the Vesuvius, Washington, and the boats from the Mississippi and John Adams, led the way up the river; the Spitfire, with the Stromboli, Bonita, and the boats of the Albany was second. The Vixen, with the bomb ship Etna and the boats from the Decatur, Germantown, and the Raritan in tow, brought up the rear. On board the Scourage which was towing an American merchant ship, was Captain G. W. Taylor with his submarine mine designed to remove all obstructions in the river channel.[59] Obstructions encountered by the flotilla were actually removed by charges placed at either end of the obstruction and detonated by

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[57]HED 1, pp. 1209-1210.

[58]Conner, The Home Squadron, p. 16.

[59]HED 1, p. 1209. See also Knox, History of the United States Navy, p. 177, fn.

electric wires connected to a battery on board the Scourage.

On June 18, just beyond Devil's Bend at a point known as Seven Palms, Perry in just ten minutes landed his entire assault force of eleven hundred men and artillery. This was made possible by preloading into the surf-boats before moving upstream. The flotilla, commanded by Commander Abraham Begelow continued upriver to a point just below Fort Iturbide. Perry had landed nine miles below the city of Tobasco -- nine rugged, fatiguing miles. His column entered San Juan Bautista just after four on the afternoon of June 15, 1847.[60]

At various points along the river and at the fortifications before the city of Tobasco, the landing force was fired upon by troops hidden in the brush. Only one man was killed, six wounded, and three were missing in action on this expedition which had eight surgeons in attendance.[61] All reports indicate that the Mexican forces numbered fourteen hundred men, of whom only thirty were killed.[62] The expedition seized and destroyed a large amount of military supplies.[63] Perry left four vessels, the Etna, Spitfire, Scorpion, and the Scourage, and a force of 115 Marines and 205 sailors to occupy, patrol, and

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[60]Ibid., p. 1210.

[61]Ibid., p. 1214.

[62]Ibid., p. 1211.

[63]Ibid. Commander Alexander Slidell Mackenzie's report is found on pages 1216-1218; Lieutenant William L. Blanton's report is on pages 1220-1221.

keep the peace at Tobasco.

Perry departed from San Juan Bautista on the morning of June 22, and proceeded to rejoin the flotilla at Frontera. From there the expedition returned to Anton Lizardo for supplies. On June 26, Perry sent a report to Secretary Mason on the successful expedition against San Juan Bautista, along with a request that a strong reinforcement of Marines, four hundred men and four small boats be sent to the Home Squadron in order to garrison San Juan Bautista properly.[64]

His fears were well founded for on June 26, Commander Gershom J. VanBrunt, commander of the occupation force at San Juan Bautista, sent word that the guards stationed in the Plaza had been attacked by approximately 150 Mexicans the night before. The next day they were again fired upon by about seventy enemy hidden near a church. The Americans suffered no losses while the Mexicans had one man killed and one wounded. Commander VanBrunt's report further stated that there were rumored to be five to eight hundred enemy troops in the vicinity for the purpose of driving out the American occupying force. Possibly, due to bad weather this supposed attack did not materialize.

On June 30, Commander Bigelow, with 240 men and two field pieces, marched upstream to the village of Tamultay where approximately five hundred Mexicans had entrenched themselves. This force was dispersed with the loss of only two Americans killed and five wounded.[65]

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[64]Ibid., pp. 1221-1222.

[65]Maclay, United States Navy, p. 117.

Very early in the war Congress had proposed that the war on land should be fought by volunteers of short enlistment. Despite the fact that the enlistment of more than three thousand of Scott's men would expire in one year's time, Congress had failed to make adequate provision for their replacement. Not until March 30, 1847, one day after the capture of Vera Cruz, did Congress authorize the raising of ten regiments for the Army. At the same time the Marine Corps was authorized an additional twelve company grade officers and one thousand enlisted men. An authorization for the organization of a Marine contingment to be assiged to Scott's army was issued May 21, 1847. This Marine regiment was to be composed of a skeleton cadre from the Home Squadron and filled with new recruits, with officers appointed to command them. Lieutenant Colonel Samuel E. Watson was placed in command of this regiment, with Major Levi Twiggs as second in command; Major William Dulany of this regiment was the only fieldgrade officer of the Corps who saw action and survived. The regiment sailed for Mexico soon after it was organized and was placed under the command of Brigadier General Franklin Pierce.[66]

Perry immediately wrote the Secretary of the Navy protesting the order to assemble the 190 Marines in the Squadron, who were dispersed up and down the coast for nearly six hundred miles, and placed under General Scott's command. He only partially complied with the order by sending only twenty eight Marines and one officer to General Pierce -- they were the only

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[66]Metcalf, United States Marine Corps, p. 126.

ones aboard ship at Vera Cruz.[67]

On July 16, General Pierce's brigade left Vera Cruz to join Scott's army at Puebla. Pierce's command was in reality only a battalion. On the march the Marines were assigned the task of serving as rear guard. By the time Pierce's command reached Puebla, through hub-deep sand and three days of tropical downpouring of rain, it had skirmished with the enemy six times. Upon their arrival at Puebla, the Marines were attached to General Quitman's Fourth Division and, along with the Second Pennsylvania Volunteers, were formed into a brigade with Lieutenant Colonel Samuel Watson in command. This brigade was not immediately sent into action; consequently the Marines did not partake in the initial assaults at Pedregal (lava flow), Cherubusco, and El Molino del Rey.[68]

At Chapultepec the Marines, as a large unit, proved their worth. On September 13, 1847, Major Levi Twiggs, with 120 Marines, led an assault on the steep southern side of the castle. Marine Captain John G. Reynolds and his pioneer party of seventy men bearing ladders, crows, and pickaxes made up the lead unit of Twigg's storming party. Unfortunately Major Twiggs, who was anxious to fight, was killed before the actual assault began. On General Quitman's order the Marine Battalion advanced and successfully stormed their

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[67]Ibid., p. 127.

[68]Ibid., pp. 128-129.

assigned part of the castle.[69] According to M. Almy Aldrich, "The palace was overrun with escaped convicts, and other desperate characters, bent on plundering." Lieutenant Colonel Watson, with his Marines, was ordered to clear the palace of these intruders and to protect it from spoilation.[70] In the storming of the castle and the fight for Mexico City, the Marines lost a total of seven men killed and twenty-one wounded.[71]

Marine Captain George H. Terrett, with seven officers and thirty-six men made history for the Marine Corps outside the walls by dispersing approximately one thousand enemy troops; while in hot pursuit of the fleeing Mexicans he was joined by a then almost unknown Army Lieutenant -- Ulysses S. Grant -- and about twenty soldiers who were also chasing fleeing Mexicans.[72] The Marines, attached to General Quitman's force, fought their way into Mexico City over the Tacuba causeway, the same route which Hernan Cortez had retreated on the memorable Noche Trista (night of sorrows), on December 26, 1520.[73] General Quitman's force was the first to enter the city, and to them was given the honor of raising the American flag over "The Halls of

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[69]Collum, History of the United States Marine Corps, p. 94.

[70]M. Almy Aldrich, History of the United States Marine Corps (Boston: Henry L. Shepard and Co., 1875), p. 105.

[71]Ibid.

[72]Metcalf, United States Marine Corps, pp. 132-133.

[73]Semmes, Afloat and Ashore, p. 461.

Montezuma."[74]

A second Marine battalion, under Major John Harris, arrived at Vera Cruz after the armistice was signed. This battalion was immediately sent to aid in garrisoning Alvarado, Carmen, and Laguna de los Terminos. The first Marine Battalion was returned to Pensacola, Florida, in June, 1848. In July general orders were issued for the return of all Marines remaining in Mexico; the second Marine Battalion withdrew from Laguna de los Terminos on July 26, 1848, and sailed for Boston, Massachusetts, and Norfolk, Virginia.[75]

For the Home Squadron, other than blockade service, the war with Mexico was over after the second expedition to Tobasco on June 16, 1847. The Navy's role in the continued occupation of Tampico was one of support and acting as a depository for the public funds derived from the customs revenue; the Petrel was assigned to this task.

Tuspan was held under blockade by the sloop John Adams. Alvarado and Frontera were still occupied by naval forces who were having minor clashes with guerilla bands. During the closing months of 1847, the blockade was made more difficult because of a shortage of ships and insufficient crews, to man those available. Perry at this time had twenty ships of all classes with which to patrol, blockade, and occupy the Mexican East Coast ports from

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[74]Collum, History of the United States Marine Corps, p. 95.

[75]Metcalf, United States Marine Corps, pp. 136-137.

Matamoros to Campeche in Yucatan.[76]

The early months of 1848 continued the problems encountered in 1847. The Navy was called upon to act as a peacemaker between the Maya Indians and the white Yucatecos at Compeche and its surrounding area, however. Probably the greatest battle the Navy fought during 1848 was the battle of the vomito (yellow fever).[77]

Late in May, 1848, Perry received official notice that the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo had been ratified by Mexico. He immediately took steps to end the naval occupation of the ports and to return the customhouses to the Mexican authorities. The Navy also was responsible for the embarkation and shipping home of some 18,000 Army troops assembled at Vera Cruz. On June 15, 1848, after routing all remaining ships of the squadron to home ports, Perry sailed for New York. A small force was left at Carmen, Yucatan until July 30, 1848, at which time it was recalled. The Mexican War for the United States Navy was officially over.[78]

From the earliest part of the war the Navy had not only helped to supply General Taylor's army, but had also protected them. The Army's capture of Vera Cruz would in all probability have failed except for the supporting role of the Navy. Its transportation of Army troops and the landing of them at Collado beach, below Vera Cruz, was for many years considered a model for

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[76]HED 1, pp. 1233-1237.

[77]Samuel Eliot Morison, "Old Bruin" Commodore Matthew Calbraith Perry, 1794-1858 (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1967), pp. 243-249.

[78]Ibid., pp. 249-251.

combined landing operations. A total of forty-seven general orders were issued, and twenty-two separate flag signals had been arranged for this one operation. The methods, precision, and speed which characterized this landing operation surpassed any previous embarkation of an army up to that time. In fact it is doubtful if there was a total landing operation to compare with it until World War II.[79]

Commodore Perry's superb handling of the river operations against San Juan Bautista and Alvarado, as well as the blockading of Tampico and Tuspan, and Carmen, Yucatan, all demonstrated that the Navy carried out the responsibilities assigned to it. The Navy lost far more men to yellow fever than to combined enemy action. To their great credit the naval crews in face of numerous obstacles accepted every challenge offered to them. Although life on board ship was far from pleasant there were very few incidents of desertion or trouble. One incident was recorded of a seaman who attacked an officer and was hanged for his trouble.[80]

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[79]Conner, The Home Squadron, p. 45.

[80]Morison, "Old Bruin," p. 190.

CHAPTER IV

GENERAL SUMMARY

The two squadrons, the Pacific and the Home Squadron, acting under separate orders, and several thousand miles apart, make an interesting comparison. Both squadrons were successful in their blockade techniques and both accomplished this with a minimum of ships and personnel. The Pacific Squadron, though not plagued by yellow fever, had the same problem with scurvy as did the Home Squadron. Of the two squadrons the one in the Pacific probably felt the critical shortage of supplies more than did the Home Squadron. Several of the Pacific Squadron crews were gone from their home ports for more than three years and the shortage of supplies placed them in harsh circumstances at times. It will be remembered that at one time it was necessary for a crew to make shoes out of ships canvass. A shortage of small arms was felt in both squadrons and to relieve this situation Conner asked for an additional five hundred muskets for his command while the Pacific Squadron was finally supplied with new muskets by the Army.

In both squadrons the crews were called upon to form naval brigades and to engage in a type of warfare for which they were neither trained nor equipped. Fortunately most of them looked on this shore duty as a welcome relief from the boredom of blockade service. It must be said, in all fairness, that most of the officers and the crews quickly mastered the landing techniques. The small Marine detachments assigned to each ship quickly justified their existence as a fighting organization.

The Pacific Squadron was the conquering and occupying force in the campaigns for Upper and Lower California motivated by a sense of "manifest destiny" that did not exist in the Home Squadron. Neither was there the struggle for command in the Gulf Squadron that existed in California between the Army and Navy and between officers within both branches of the armed forces. Possibly it was because the principal characters involved, in the Home Squadron, were not as colorful as a Stockton, Frémont, or a Kearny. Maybe a sense of history was stronger among the men who acquired California for the United States.

On the other hand there are Perry, Taylor, and Scott all of whom were very much aware that the war could become a means whereby they could gain more responsible and prestigious commands. For Taylor it was the Presidency of the United States; for Perry it was the opening of Japan, in 1852, for commercial trade to the Western World. Winfield Scott retired from the army in 1861 having failed to attain his more prestigious command -- that of becoming President of the United States.

Perhaps more important the Mexican War was a training period for the officers of the Navy and Marine Corps. Lieutenant David Farragut served under Commodore Perry in the Home Squadron. Lieutenants Charles Heywood and Jacob Zeilin, who served in the Pacific Squadron, became Commandants of the Marine Corps.[1]

Lieutenant Raphael Semmes, noted for his history of the Mexican War,

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[1]Metcalf, United States Marine Corps, p. 227.

and Lieutenant John A. Winslow shared a cabin aboard the Raritan after they had lost their own ships on a Mexican reef. In the Civil War Captain Semmes commanding the Confederate Ship Alabama, and Captain Winslow commanding the U. S. S. Kearsage engaged one another in a sea battle on June 19, 1864, off Cherboug, France.[2]

Another problem common to both squadrons in the blockading of the Mexican ports was the weather. Probably the Home Squadron had the worst of it on the score of the weather, however, the Pacific Squadron was hindered greatly by summer storms. The Home Squadron had a more difficult time in its landing operations due to the numerous sandbars which lay at the mouth of the East Coast ports. Certainly it was a proving ground for what is now known as amphibious landings as perfected by the United States Marine Corps. The Mexican War awakened the American government to the value of steam ships and the need for modernizing its navy. In all probability there was more international respect for the United States Navy after the war, and especially after Vera Cruz, than existed before the war.

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[2]War of the Rebellion: Records of the Union and Confederate Navies (27 vols., Washington: Government Printing Office, 1896). For Raphael Semmes account see series I, Vol. III, pp. 649-651: for John A. Winslow's account see series I, Vol. III, p. 59.

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