

CONSCIENCE AND CONFLICT
DURING THE MEXICAN WAR, 1846-1848

by

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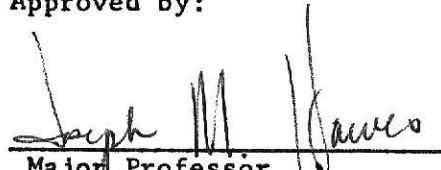
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INTRODUCTION

The involvement of the United States in South East Asia since 1962 has been accompanied by complex and confusing side-effects in American society, polarizing and creating divisions that may take years to heal. A sizeable segment of American young people have actually left their homeland during this time, some of whom will undoubtedly never return again. The historian, looking at the contemporary situation, may seek to understand it better by examining the past to see if other, similar situations have arisen in the nation's history. My interest in Viet-Nam and my personal experiences there have led me to a closer examination of America's past, and eventually to the Mexican War as having some relationship to the present time.

For a number of years the United States' diplomatic relationships with Mexico deteriorated, eventually leading to a short but violent and expensive war. The nature of that conflict was controversial, so much so that the war itself and its aims became a national debate. Political parties, social and fraternal organizations, even families, were split by the arguments over the aims of the war. Those arguments continued for many years after the war was actually ended by the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, signed in 1848.

Opposition to the war took several forms. It was political, in that the Democrats under Polk were in charge of government policy. It was natural then that the Whigs, the other leading party, should raise questions about aims and operation of the war. However, the opposition was also regional. Though there was some support and some antagonism in each area of the United States, it is safe to say that opposition waned the further one moved from the actual front. Thus, the support of the war was

strongest in the deep South, and the western states and territories. The opposition was also ideological. The concept of manifest destiny, the idea that the United States had a special mission, was sweeping the country. The proponents of this movement maintained that the United States would not have attained its true destiny until the nation stretched from ocean to ocean and from Canada in the North to Mexico in the South. Some leaders of this movement even suggested that those two nations should eventually be a part of the United States.

One aspect of the ideological controversy also related to slavery. The anti-slavery movement, with a broad spectrum of attitudes, felt the war would add new territory to the country which would eventually be opened to slavery. Feeling that the growth of slavery was inimical to the best interests of the nation, they opposed the move to expand into the southwest.

Running through these strands of attitudes were several moral and ethical questions, particularly in relationship to slavery, expansionism, and manifest destiny. Among each group were leaders who continued to raise the important ethical considerations, thus contributing to the debate at a different level.

My purpose will be to analyze several aspects of opposition to the Mexican War and why it developed. I will consider various segments of the society in order that the diversity of the opposition may be examined and compared. Attention will be given to the attitudes from within the military as expressed through letters and memoirs. Consideration will also be given a segment of the literary-intellectual community, based upon the assumption that that group often reflects the leading edge of attitudes towards current social trends within the society. My aim then is to look at

several types of documents in order to learn something of the extent and aims of the opposition to the Mexican War, 1846-1848. At all times my particular concern will be the effect of moral and ethical attitudes on opposition to the War.

BACKGROUND OF THE WAR

The exact origins of the Mexican War are a subject of historical debate. Controversy still surrounds any suggestion that either the United States or Mexico was wholly to blame. As the causes of the War with Mexico are outside the scope of this paper, only a general background is necessary.¹

Between 1823 and 1839 Stephen F. Austin led some twenty thousand American immigrants into the Texas area, at that time one of the frontier provinces of the Republic of Mexico. That Republic, recently freed from Spanish domination, agreed to settlement, feeling settlers would provide stability. The government failed to realize, however, that a "fifth-column" was legally infiltrating into the country.

Mexico, during this period, regularly erupted in internal strife bordering on civil war. Such eruptions demonstrated the breadth of political attitudes within the nation, and the lack of depth of support for any one group. In 1835 a new revolt disrupted life in Mexico. A part of the insurrection involved a coalition of American settlers and Mexican natives in the province of Texas who felt their state and national government was too unresponsive to the local needs. The Mexican Army marched into the turbulent province and won several preliminary battles. Eventually General Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna, the Mexican president, was defeated at San Jacinto in April 1836. He was forced to sign a treaty, later repudiated, recognizing the independence of Texas, a move not originally a part of the settlers demands. The immigrants quickly organized a new government using a recently written Constitution, and placed the boundary with Mexico at the Rio Grande. Within a year the United States formally recognized the new Republic of Texas, as did several European powers.²

Relations between Texas and the United States proved amicable. The young Republic was a favored country by popular sentiment; the United States promoted its international interests. This favoritism, however, displeased Mexico. Two unclarified and controversial points continued to cause difficulties between the countries.

Various United States Presidents had pressed Mexico to pay financial claims made by American businessmen. Between 1840 and 1843 the two countries conducted negotiations, with Prussia serving as an impartial third-party. A number of the claims were disallowed, but through continued attempts at agreement the two countries eventually decided on the validity of a portion of the claims. Mexico then refused to pay some of these allowed claims, with the United States continuing to press for payment.³

The second problem concerned the long-simmering boundary dispute. Santa Anna, by the treaty made under duress at his capture, recognized the Rio Grande as the Texas-Mexico border. However, when Texas had been a part of Mexico, the Nueces River, much further to the north and east, had been the recognized internal border. That river was also the line of demarcation across which Austin and later immigrants were not allowed to settle under their agreements with the Mexican government. Further the Constitution of Mexico forbade the unilateral executive powers which Santa Anna had usurped in signing the treaty.⁴

Many citizens of the United States wanted the Republic of Texas annexed as a state. They felt a natural kinship with the settlers there, most of whom had come from the United States. They also felt that annexation was justified since the Mexicans would not settle the claims of the American businessmen. Within the United States and Texas the movement for statehood

by annexation rapidly developed. During the Tyler administration of 1841-1845, the movement particularly grew in the South, which hoped for Texas' admittance as a slave state. In other parts of the country there was opposition to the annexation, mostly related to the spread of slavery. (Some of this will be seen in the literary documents examined later in the paper.) Eventually President Tyler promoted a treaty annexing Texas. It was defeated however by a combination of Whigs and abolitionists.

The Whigs though failed to measure the strength of the expansionist mood sweeping the United States and the political know-how of John Tyler. After James K. Polk was elected President in November 1844, John Tyler, waiting for the change of office, used a simple measure to get Texas annexed. Rather than fighting the Senate's treaty-making powers, where he was sure to lose again, he asked for a joint resolution of the House and Senate. This required only a simple majority rather than the two-thirds majority required if the Senate acted alone. Thus, a lame-duck president merely waiting for his successor's inauguration added a new state in a move which was constitutionally questionable, but which was seemingly desired by the people. Tyler signed the resolution, March 3, 1845, a day before leaving office, with Texas accepting the measure the following July. On December 29, 1845, Polk formally signed the Texas Admission Act.⁵

Juan Nepucemo Almonte, the Mexican Ambassador to Washington, declared the joint resolution an aggressive act against the integrity of a sovereign nation. He demanded the return of his passports and left for Mexico, insisting that the resolution was tantamount to a declaration of war.⁶

Boundary claims continued to play a large role in the diplomatic turmoil which ensued. Several earlier envoys had journeyed to Mexico to no

avail. Polk attempted negotiations by sending John Slidell to Mexico. As minister he carried several proposals, to include the purchase of New Mexico and California, an offer by the United States to pay the claims of its businessmen against the Mexican government, and an offer to settle the border dispute. None of the proposals satisfied the Mexican government as the various parties pressured the ruling party not to give up further territory. Inter-party conflict and actual violence within Mexico made any decision difficult; within that nation cries of national honor and prestige were raised in the legislative councils. Slidell's credentials were rejected as invalid and the atmosphere became even more heated.⁷ On Slidell's return to Washington in the Spring of 1846, Polk confided in his Diary, " . . . our relationship with Mexico had reached a point where we could not stand still but must assert our rights firmly; . . . I saw no alternative but strong measures towards Mexico."⁸

In January 1846 President Polk ordered the US Army in the Southwest, under the command of General Zachary Taylor, to proceed southward from the encampment on the Nueces River. The order read: "Advance and occupy, with the troops under your command, positions on or near the east bank of the Rio del Norte Rio Grande , as soon as it can be done . . ."⁹ From the very beginning Taylor demonstrated an element of ambivalence toward the proposed action. As the order did not specify an immediate move, it was not until March that the small force of regulars began its trek through the rough brush country.

Taylor described his mission as peaceful in intent; however the Mexican commanders did not agree. It was probably inevitable that two forces with equally hostile understandings would eventually clash.

The Army arrived on the Rio Grande in early April, and began to build hasty fortifications opposite the city of Matamoros, the Mexican garrison city. From Matamoros, the Mexican commander, General Pedro de Ampudia demanded that Taylor return to the Nueces, "while our governments are regulating the pending question in regard to Texas. [the boundary question]"¹⁰ Taylor refused the demand; his forces continued building their defensive positions and reconnoitering the area.

Polk meanwhile seemed to look for an act of aggression to serve as a pretext for war. On April 21, 1846, he recommended to the Cabinet that "strong measures be adopted to take the redress of our complaints against Mexico . . . into our own hands."¹¹ With the concurrence of the Cabinet, James Buchanan, Secretary of State, was instructed on April 25th to prepare a declaration of war to be submitted to Congress the following week.¹² On the 28th Polk "requested Mr. Buchanan to prepare . . . a succinct history of these wrongs as a basis of a message to Congress."¹³ The President however did not know the full course of action on the Rio Grande.

By mid-April several serious incidents had taken place in the area. Colonel Truman Cross rode away from the camp on April 10; later it was learned that he had been killed by Mexican irregulars. One week later Lieutenant Theodorick Porter was killed under similar circumstances. Other Americans wandering too far from the camp were captured and taken across the Rio Grande.¹⁴

On April 24th Captain Thornton and a detachment of dragoons rode out to search the area around the camp. Unknowingly he moved into a trap set by approximately sixteen hundred Mexican regulars. Though the Americans fought desperately through the heavy underbrush, the overwhelming odds were

too much. The survivors surrendered after Thornton was knocked insensible in the fighting. When Taylor heard of the action, he wrote Polk a short report to let him know that "hostilities may now be considered as commenced."¹⁵

The despatches from Taylor arrived in Washington after the Cabinet had ended its regular session on May 9th. There Polk, feeling there was "ample cause for war", had asked that a war message be sent to Congress if there had been no action by the following Tuesday. Only Secretary of the Navy George Bancroft dissented. He felt war should not be declared without an actual act of hostility by Mexico. The Cabinet, recalled to consider Taylor's reports, unanimously voted for war.¹⁶

On May 10th, Polk prepared his war message: on the following day the House passed the war resolution 173 to 14 after acrimonious debate. Of the negative votes, five were from Massachusetts, and five from Ohio. Both of these states were centers either of abolitionism, pacifism, or Whig power. On the twelfth of May the Senate, with vituperative debate equal to that of the House, voted in favor of war by 40 to 2. The negative votes were cast by Whigs, but a number of Senators did not vote.¹⁷ Polk signed the declaration of war on May 13, not realizing that two more battles, Palo Alto and Resaca de Palma, had been won by the United States in the meantime.

A strong outcry met the formal declaration of war, and the nation was swept into debate over the causes and validity of the conflict. Abolitionists and slaveholders, pacifists and non-pacifists, Whigs and Democrats argued loudly over the justice and wisdom of the war. Such questions had been simmering in the United States for years. Now they were heatedly verbalized in churches, universities, newspapers, Congress and to some extent even in the Army.

VOICES FROM THE FRONT

Mexican War memoirs, letters, and journals written by American military men provide some examples of the thinking of enlisted men and officers, regulars and volunteers. For the most part they are the writings of regular officers, many of whom continued for some time to play an important role in American life, particularly during the Civil War. The dominant ideas of the time- manifest destiny, slavery, and annexation of Texas- can be traced through the writings, along with attitudes toward the War itself. In the pages that follow the writings of ten men will be examined and analyzed with particular emphasis on their response to the war as they experienced. Woven among their writings will be a continuing narrative of the military campaign.

After the initial successes at Palo Alto and Resaca de Palma, both on the northern banks of the Rio Grande, the Mexican forces retreated to the safety of Matamoros. In a message to the Mexican commander on May 17, Taylor ordered the capitulation of the town, "I must have Matamoros, even if I am forced to batter down the town. I am fully prepared to do that very thing. These are my terms: The city must capitulate; all property must be surrendered; then and only then may the Mexican Army march out and retire."¹

Learning the Mexicans had retreated, Taylor moved his forces across the Rio Grande. Outside the city he opened a new base camp for his troops. From that camp the General wrote regularly to his son-in-law, Dr. Robert Wood, who was serving with the American military forces in New Orleans. Speaking freely of his experiences and attitudes, he expressed his desire

that peace could be brought about. On August 4, 1846, he wrote, "I hope negotiations will be opened before a great while for bringing about a peace."² In the same letter he admitted that attitudes in the United States might prevent this. He felt that some desired territorial indemnity, not just for the expenses of the War, but also for "pretended robberies committed on our commerce." Such economic demands upon Mexico were unjust and a part of a drive to gain as much territory as possible from a weak nation. Only a week later he spoke of the possibility of exorbitant demands for the acquisition of territory, "which may prevent an early settlement of the quarrel."³

To Taylor, the prolongation of the conflict would be disastrous for the United States. He feared a lengthy war "will have expended . . . all the money in the treasury" or even worse, "it will completely break down the administration."⁴

In later letters Taylor's mixed feelings about the war became more obvious. Eventually he came to feel a majority of the people had serious misgivings about the war. In November 1846 his army was camped at Monterrey, after successfully capturing that city some two months earlier. While there he received word of the congressional and local elections taking place in the United States. The Whigs wrested control of the House from the Democrats in a decisive victory, substantially changing the political climate in the country and increasing congressional opposition to the war. It is probable that these elections led Taylor to his feeling that Polk was in trouble.⁵

Six months later General Taylor gave his strongest expression in regard to the war. He wrote Dr. Wood, "The country has been . . . mislead and mistified [sic] in regard to this Mexican War." He then referred to some of its aspects as being "absurd or outrageous."⁶ For a general commanding

an invading force, these were strong words, not uttered against local tactical decisions, but in response to basic governmental aims and policy. General Taylor later made similar negative statements concerning the war for public consumption but not until he left command of the troops on the front. The earlier comments were obviously only for the eyes of his son-in-law, they were not publicized until much later.

General Taylor then did have strong personal views about the origins and validity of the Mexican War and desired an early negotiated peace. Some of his attitudes were known or at least rumored in his command. As early as September 1845, Lieutenant George G. Meade, later famous as a Union General, wrote to his wife from Corpus Christi that Zachary Taylor is "a staunch Whig, and opposed to the Texas annexation, therefore he does not enter heart and soul into his present duties; all this, however, is mere rumor."⁷ President Polk too had doubts about Taylor. Polk feared Taylor was "not the man for the command of the army. He is brave but does not seem to have resources or grasp of mind enough to conduct such a campaign . . . He seems ready enough to obey orders, but appears to be unwilling to express any opinion or take any responsibility on himself . . ."⁸ Later, however, Taylor took such responsibility. After the battle of Monterrey he agreed to an armistice which was exceedingly liberal to the Mexicans. Upon hearing of it, Polk wrote in his Diary, "In agreeing to this armistice Genl Taylor violated his express orders & I regret that I cannot approve his course."⁹ By November 1846, Polk declared, "I am now satisfied that he is a narrow-minded, bigoted partisan, without resources and wholly unqualified for the command he holds."¹⁰ Seven months later the President, speaking of Taylor and Scott, confided to his Diary, "The truth is that I have been

compelled to wage war through hostile Generals."¹¹

Polk underestimated Taylor's pride and sense of duty, however. Taylor continued to perform good, but unspectacular service, while suffering from a lack of men and supplies. Finally, when the northern front guarded by Taylor's forces had quieted, he asked for and received a leave of absence to return to the United States. In November 1847 he left Mexico, returning to a tumultuous welcome in New Orleans.¹² In 1848 while peace negotiations were taking place in Mexico, Taylor, a popular hero, was nominated as a presidential candidate by the Whigs. Polk, tired of the pressure of office, chose not to run, and Taylor was narrowly elected. There is no indication that Taylor's election came about due to any animosity on his part toward the war. In fact there is every indication that his military victories, making him a hero, brought him both the nominations and the election.¹³

President Polk's concern about the conduct of the war and General Taylor's rising popularity at home eventually led to the opening of a second front against the Mexicans. Senior in rank to the Texas-based Taylor¹⁴ was General Winfield Scott who lived in Washington and served as an advisor to Secretary of War, William Marcy. Scott, long active in Whig politics, had not originally been sent to the front because of Polk's dislike and lack of trust in him. The President, soon after beginning discussions about the new front, wrote in his Diary of Scott, "I have strong objections to Gen'l. Scott, and . . . nothing but stern necessity and a sense of public duty could induce me to place him at the head of so important an expedition. Still I do not see well how it can be avoided. He is Gen'l.-in-chief of the army,"¹⁵

The pressure of time forced Polk to a decision. He gave Scott the command, then laid out the plan of operations in a series of conferences. General Scott was highly pleased by the opportunity to go to Mexico and expressed his gratitude to the President.¹⁶

Scott's instructions, to draw heavily upon Taylor's experienced forces, would leave Taylor unable to carry out any operation except of a purely defensive nature, giving him little opportunity for increased popularity. Scott was to take the force by ship to attack the city and fortress of Vera Cruz, then move toward Mexico City, thus attacking the recalcitrant nation at its heart.

Scott hoped that word of his coming would not offend Taylor, making the new mission even more difficult. He wrote

I am not coming, . . . to supersede you in the immediate command on the line of operations rendered illustrious you and your gallant army. My proposed theater is different. You imagine it and I wish very much that it were prudent at this distance to tell you all that I expect to attempt or hope to execute. 17

Taylor was suspicious, however. He realized that Scott's mission would totally disrupt any further offensive operations on the northern front. When Scott arrived at the Rio Grande in December 1846, Taylor was hundreds of miles away. Though Scott continued to write letters, Taylor chose not to meet him. Finally Scott could wait no longer. Issuing orders through General Butler, who commanded Taylor's rear party at Monterrey, Scott took the necessary troops and began his move toward Vera Cruz.¹⁸

The newly-formed southern force invaded Mexico at Vera Cruz in March 1847, almost one year after the first battles on the Rio Grande. At every turn they were successful, though not without some hard fighting. In spite of major problems related to personnel and supplies, the American forces

proved far superior to their Mexican opponents. Scott, like Taylor, became a military hero to the vast multitudes of the American people.¹⁹

Though Scott left memoirs, they seem to have been written and edited to vindicate him in the political intrigues that ended his service in Mexico.²⁰ At no point did he express himself regarding the aims of the war itself.

Before the war began, however, General Scott did speak on several issues related to the war. In a private letter of 1843 to an otherwise unidentified Virginian, he wrote of slavery, "I am persuaded that it is a high moral obligation of masters and slave-holding States, to employ all means, not incompatible with the safety of both colors, to meliorate slavery, even to extermination."²¹ The General himself owned no slaves, and did not expect to. He felt that religion and humanitarianism would lead Americans eventually to end slavery as an institution, but that Congress had no authority to forcibly interfere in any state.²² Charles Elliott, Scott's leading biographer, accused him of cautiously straddling the subject, and consequently satisfying neither North or South.²³

On the question of peace Scott committed himself on two occasions. In 1844 he held a place of prominence in the nation as the General-in-Chief of the Army, the senior officer on active duty. For a time he was seriously considered as a possibility for the Whig nomination for President. It was natural that the American Peace Society, preparing an album of statements by prominent citizens, invited his response. He said:

The highest moral obligation is to treat national differences with temper, justice, and fairness; always to see that the cause of war is not only just but sufficient, to be sure that we do not cover our neighbor's lands, "nor anything that is his."

This statement is especially important considering that nowhere in his memoirs or letters is there any mention of the annexation of Texas. That vexing issue was widely debated during this period. There were many who felt strongly that Texas was in fact "our neighbor's lands." Two years later the United States was embroiled in a war that obviously had a great deal to do with land acquisition from a neighbor.

One year later the peace movement queried Scott again. In a letter to the Secretary of the General Peace Convention, Scott mentioned his earlier statement, then emphasized, "I have always maintained the moral right to wage a just and necessary war, and, consequently the wisdom and humanity of defensive preparations."²⁵

Nowhere in Scott's memoirs is found an explanation of these statements. He does not attack the Mexican War as unjust, nor does he defend it as being defensive in nature. There is no indication that the General, his friends, or his detractors, saw any contradiction between the statements and his later participation in the conflict. One can only surmise that for General Scott there was no personal question of conscience as one might believe from reading these two statements, or that he changed his mind, for which there is no evidence.

One member of Scott's personal staff plainly stated his opposition to the war. L. Col. Ethan Allen Hitchcock, the Inspector General for Scott's invasion force, wrote in February 1847 to Theodore Parker, the anti-war abolitionist pastor:

I coincide with you in your views of this abominable war in which our country is engaged with Mexico . . .
I wish not to fall a victim to this war without
entering my protest against the war itself as unjust

on our part . . . I am here not from choice, but because, being in the Army, it is my duty to obey the orders of the constituted authorities . . . As an individual, I condemn, I abominate this war- as a member of the government I must go with it until it shall be brought back to a sense of justice . . . 26

In his own words he suffered a terrible contradiction which illustrates the dilemma for the man of sensitive conscience in the military. Serving his country as he felt called to do, Hitchcock found himself drawn into a war with which he could not at all agree, but from which he could see no method of personal extrication. His articulate expression of this obvious paradox is mirrored in the voices of others examined here.

The United States Army of the time was an all-volunteer force, small but well-disciplined and trained, and fiercely proud. The adventure of life in the West, where most of the Army was quartered, attracted many men. The wave of nationalism that swept the United States after the declaration of war also brought its volunteers. Among the volunteers was one who served on both fronts under Generals Taylor and Scott. Barna Upton, a young Vermonter, enlisted in 1845. Sent to the Corpus Christi base camp, he made the march to the Rio Grande, and fought in the earliest battles on the border.²⁷

Upton seemed to have no political attitudes as he wrote to family and friends; never did he distinguish between Democrats and Whigs. As one might expect considering that he was a volunteer, his letters reflected a positive attitude toward the involvement in Mexico. In a letter to friends in August, 1846, he placed the entire weight of the conflict on Mexico.

It was their own haughtiness, stubbornness, and narrow-minded, blind self-will, and foolish ignorant pride that was the immediate cause of hostilities. 29

Though this statement is adamant and without any qualifications, Upton backed off somewhat, later saying, "There is one war in twenty that is justifiable, but I believe . . . that Mexico is more at fault than the United States."²⁹

Soon after writing that letter, Upton, along with several thousand other seasoned troops marched back from Monterrey to the mouth of the Rio Grande. There they shipped to Vera Cruz to join General Winfield Scott's invading force, where he seemed to have a change of attitude toward war in general.

I realize as well as you how fearful, how strange and inconsistent, is the idea of thousands of intelligent and enlightened men, meeting together to mangle and 30
kill each other.

There is no indication why Upton wrote this. Nowhere else in his letters had the young soldier described ill-will toward the war, nor did he ever make any specific complaints against the conflict in Mexico. Upton stayed with his obligated duty, continuing to participate in Scott's campaign. He wrote to his family and friends, but never again made such comments. Unfortunately, he died of wounds October 15, 1847, during the assault on Mexico City.³¹

A young officer serving in Taylor's army on the Rio Grande expressed views very similar to those of Upton. Ulysses S. Grant, a West Point graduate of 1843, spoke seriously about his profession and his service to the United States. His letters, most of which were written to his fiancée Julia Dent, were more of a commentary on incidents than reflective of any serious analytical thinking.

In a letter as early as October 1845, Grant expressed some negative feelings toward the Mexican people. His attitudes seemed to be based upon

popularized stereotypes connected with laziness and lacked blatant racial overtones. As similar comments were not made later, it would appear that Grant's attitudes were never strong, based on this passing reference.³²

Several days after the first battle of the war Grant wrote to Julia, "There is no great sport in having bullets flying about one every direction." He hoped "that we will soon be able to end it."³³ The following month, June 1846, Grant seemed rather unconcerned, or even removed from the reality of the conflict. Several skirmishes had been fought by this time; Grant had seen limited action. "War seems much less horrible to persons engaged in it than to those who read of the battles."³⁴

In spite of these non-committal phrases Grant grew tired of the war-front; actually he never really expressed any great excitement for it. Eventually he wrote to his fiancée, "Aren't you getting tired of hearing war, war, war? I am truly tired of it . . . I do wish this would close."³⁵ Several days afterwards Grant fought at the battle of Monterrey, but the war still did not end. After Monterrey in September 1847, Grant was relatively inactive, helping in normal base-camp activities. The boredom of such activities could have affected his mental state, for he expressed to his fiancée a greater desire to be away from the front. Eventually his weariness broke through in a plaintive question, "Do they [the people] think there will ever be peace again between the United States and Mexico?"³⁶ About that time Grant moved from Taylor's army on the northern front to join Scott in the new invasion from where few letters survived, making his attitudes difficult to trace.

Grant's weariness with the war evidenced itself plainly, but there is no indication that it is more than a physical and emotional weariness

brought on by being at the front, absent from family and fiancée. Never in his letters did he write in a disparaging manner of the nation's war aims or foreign policy. One can only speculate that his education at West Point and his pride kept him at a job which he found displeasing but not immoral.

Contrasted with Grant, George G. Meade, another young West Pointer, demonstrated a different kind of personal change. He often wrote to his wife and family concerning not only incidents around him but also of his changing moods and attitudes. Before the movement from Corpus Christi in March 1846, Meade expressed some excitement at the possibility of a fight and some personal glory.

I hope for a war and a speedy battle . . . one good fight will settle this business; after coming so far and staying so long . . . it is hardly the thing to³⁷ come back without some laurels.

Gradually though the lieutenant's feeling did crystallize. He addressed questioning comments to his wife as when he wrote:

I fear that Mr. Polk . . . has no restraining influences; on the contrary I believe he desires a war with Mexico, for he can then take possession of California, and hold³⁸ it be right of conquest.

Meade did not indicate the source of such a realization; it was a charge frequently lodged by the Whigs of the time to discredit Polk.³⁹

Meade demonstrated great pride in the United States forces and their accomplishments as he commented to his wife on the early battles of May 1846. Even then, like Taylor and Grant, he indicated, "I should have preferred settlement without a war."⁴⁰ As a West Pointer, the young lieutenant had been indoctrinated with a sense of duty to his country. Eventually, he indicated some personal conflict between his personal attitudes toward the

war and his sense of duty.

I trust I will always do my duty . . . in the defense of my country, and giving my services to a government by which I have been supported when there were no risks to run. But I candidly acknowledge . . . no penchant for it; nothing but a sense of duty would keep me in it. 41

A growing sense of political awareness pervaded Meade's letters. In July 1846 he wrote "I fear Mr. Polk is not very anxious for peace."⁴² That accusation, made only two months after the declaration of war, was rather mild when compared to the strong indictment expressed five months later.

For myself, individually, you know my sentiments, opposed, at first to this war, brought on by our injustice to a neighbor, and uncalled for aggression. 43

It is highly unlikely that any U.S. officer other than Hitchcock made any statement stronger than that, whether publicly or privately. Though it may have been Meade's true feelings, it may also have been the result of the battle weariness which Grant seemed to express. Considering the strength of Meade's other statements, it appears probable that he disagreed heartily with the war though he was not a Whig in politics. There also seemed some elements of personal frustration at inability to do anything realistic about the war. He felt that if the war had to be fought, it must be vigorously pursued in order to finish it quickly and end the ordeal. He also expressed awareness of the opposition to the war in Congress; it was known either through reading of newspapers, letters from his family, or talking with other men of the army. He felt that Mexico was undoubtedly sustained and strengthened by the opposition to the war but he did not accuse the opposition party of treason nor did he call for a cessation of activities by the peace movement.⁴⁴

Meade remained in Mexico throughout the war. When recalled home he continued to serve in the United States Army, and was to become one of the leading generals of the Union Army.

Not all young lieutenants serving in Mexico had such sharply defined attitudes as Grant and Meade. When the West Point Class of 1846 graduated, George McClellan, with others of his class, went to Mexico. He joined the Army there, remaining through the battle of Cerro Gordo, April 1847, after which he was posted back to the United States. His diary-journal served as a place to preserve his thoughts, but he chose to write little more than vivid descriptions of places and events. The diary contained no indication of any serious thinking or questioning of his personal situation except in regard to rank. McClellan indicated he planned to leave the military if promotion during the war proved difficult.⁴⁵ Otherwise he did not mention the bloody conflict around him.

Another young man who served in the southern invasion force of Scott was Jacob Oswandel, an observant and articulate volunteer from Pennsylvania. Oswandel published his diary in 1885 and included in it letters he had written home to his family during the war, thus, providing a more complete description of his adventures.

Oswandel probably was typical of the hundreds of young men who volunteered to fight in Mexico. Soon after he arrived in Mexico in the Spring of 1847, Oswandel sent a letter to his parents. "If it is my lot to be killed," he wrote, "it shall be gloriously in defense of our country and our flag."⁴⁶ Among the documents examined in this research such a comment is unique. No other persons indicated a feeling that the Army was in defense of the United States by attacking Mexico. The soldier was at this point thousands of

miles from home and part of a task force invading a sovereign foreign nation. Oswandel continued with this line of thought when soon afterward he wrote to his brother that he was "proud to serve in the US Army during this time of troubles and danger."⁴⁷ Oswandel was not just caught up in the flag-waving propaganda of his time. He was relatively safe from the rigors of the war in the rear echelon of Scott's advancing army, making of his view of the action extremely limited.

By July 1847 Oswandel reported that the "general conversation among our soldiers today is . . . negotiation of peace."⁴⁸ In April Nicholas Trist had left Washington to join Scott. The chief clerk of the State Department had been given the mission of a peace treaty for the United States. By July, Trist's presence in Mexico was commonly known, though the peace negotiations were proceeding poorly.⁴⁹ Trist's very presence, however, aroused comment and excitement among the American troops.

Though Oswandel indicated no personal dissatisfaction with the war, others were of a different mind for the author referred to Catholic deserters "who were persuaded by the priests that it was wrong and sinful to fight against their church and religion."⁵⁰ The large scale desertion rate which plagued the Army indicated many men did not want to serve in the invading forces.

By September 1847 the possibilities of peace had brightened. American forces took possession of the Mexican capital on September 14th. Santa Anna slipped out of the city, resigned as president, and retired to his ranch home. Once more Oswandel referred to rumors of peace and the common soldiers talking about it. Without committing himself personally, he implied that General Scott would make peace at the proper time.⁵¹

In spite of having seen much carnage late in the war and having lost several friends, Oswandel never indicated any weariness with war, as did Grant, nor any negativism toward war as did Upton. He wrote of no personal longing for peace; he spoke only of others having such desires. Oswandel, a small cog in the military machine, though relatively articulate and sophisticated, raised no substantive questions regarding his nation's invasion of another country. He volunteered for his duty; he saw himself as carrying out policy as a soldier, but not as having anything to do with the making of that same policy.

Major Phillip N. Barbour, a Kentuckian of social prominence, held views similar to those of the enlisted Jacob Oswandel. Barbour graduated from West Point in 1834, served at various posts before going to Texas. He appears to have been a proud and dutiful officer, respected and liked by those around him.

Barbour marched from Corpus Christi to the Rio Grande with the earliest contingent of Taylor's forces in March 1846. A careful observer of detail, he wrote to his wife of the American arrival opposite Matamoros:

Hundreds of citizens were assembled on the Mexican side of the river to witness the approach of our troops . . . The four columns of the Army filed in front of the town, within range of the Mexican batteries, and took position in a plowed field on the bank . . . without molestation of any sort . . . In about an hour a flagstaff was procured and General Taylor ordered the 'Stars and Stripes' to be run up . . . while a band of music struck up our national air. 52

Soon after arrival on the Rio Grande, Barbour wrote to his wife, "I go to meet the enemy with feelings all schooled to do my duty regardless of personal consequences."⁵³ On September 20, 1846, one day before his death, he continued that thought, saying, "I have long since made up my mind that, during

a time of war, my life is the rightful property of my country."⁵⁴ Barbour did not see his duty as questioning government policy; it was to fight his nation's wars. For him the nation's leaders were competent to decide when and where those wars were to be fought.

As the young major wrote to his wife, he spoke negatively only about the conduct of the war, not about its aims. He wished that the war would be brought to an early close by the use of all available force "as becomes a great and powerful nation."⁵⁵ He saw the United States as a rising nation on the world scene and the most important nation in the hemisphere. At the same time he questioned whether the government really had enough energy to pursue the war as vigorously as he thought necessary.⁵⁶ He thought the Administration, beset with domestic and foreign problems, might not proceed with the conflict as it should, but might let it drag on for a number of years.

In his letters to his wife Major Barbour gave no indication of ever hearing any criticism of the war from among those along the Rio Grande. However, he made reference to an otherwise unidentified man, Kingsbury, who was evidently known to Mrs. Barbour. He accused Kingsbury in Galveston, Texas, of having "made himself especially conspicuous in denouncing this war as unholy," and said the man's conduct "has prevented the raising of more volunteers in the city."⁵⁷

At another time Barbour wrote of the strong home front criticism of the President, the war, and the Army. He hoped for "a battle . . . the only thing that will save the Army from the attackers and denunciation of demagogues, in and out of Congress."⁵⁴ That letter, dated April 28, 1846, was written before the formal declaration of war and the first battles.

Even at that time the criticism of government policy was strong enough to be commonly known and discussed. Barbour's statement indicated that he was stung by the criticism and pictured it as unfair and unwise.

William S. Henry, a regular West Pointer like Barbour, also shared his attitude toward the war. Considering the size of the American forces that went originally to the Rio Grande, the two officers may well have known one another though neither mention the other in letters or diary.

The idea of a progressive, growing America influences Henry considerably. Though he did not specifically mention the term 'Manifest Destiny', he spoke of similar ideas- that providential will led America to grow toward the West at the expense of other nations. He dared any foreign power to stand in the nation's path, which led to logical and inevitable growth. Henry also emphasized the internal unity of nation, though such a statement is in strange contrast to the disagreement with the war. Henry acknowledged this paradox, but felt that "true patriotism" would overcome.⁵⁹

Throughout his diary and the added narrative, Henry pictured himself as an earnest patriot with no role but to fight as a good Army officer. There appeared no doubt in his mind that the War was just and proper.

Thomas D. Tennery, an Illinois volunteer, evidenced the influence of manifest destiny in his short diary. Particularly obvious was the concept of racial superiority. Tennery saw Mexico as containing "lazy, shiftless people" incapable of making the changes necessary to bring about a stable, democratic society with an expanding economy. He felt such advancement required Americans with their ambition, drive, and vision. Tennery, totally committed to pro-Americanism, showed in his diary no sympathy for either the

Mexicans or Indians as human beings.⁶⁰

The sample of memoirs, diaries, and letters examined here is quite small, considering the number of men involved in the war; it is also heavily weighted toward regular officers. Even with this imbalance, certain conclusions can be safely drawn.

The Army on the front was aware of anti-war sentiment at home. Newspapers were available to them as were the broadsides on which were printed notices and General Orders. Letters from home obviously carried some news indicating responses to the war.

There was little anti-war sentiment expressed by the enlisted men, at least in the way it has been seen during the Viet-Nam conflict. There were desertions from the ranks, but that fails to indicate opposition to the war itself. The younger volunteers came of their own free will to serve, and it is obvious that life in the Army was not always liked. If there had been great personal opposition to the war, the enlisted soldier probably would not have volunteered at all. At the same time there are few documents remaining from the lives of the enlisted men. It is possible that their views were simply not recorded as extensively as those of the officers.

There was a more obvious realization of anti-war sentiment among the officers in the sample quoted. Other than the enlisted Upton, the officers tended to be more urbane, better educated, and more politically involved and motivated. From the literature examined it is apparent that there were officers who questioned the war on moral grounds. However, they seemed to feel no method of influencing the course of the war policy; their sense of duty moved them to continue serving with their troops on the battlefield.

THE PROBLEM OF DESERTION

From the time General Zachary Taylor's army arrived on the Rio Grande from Corpus Christi in late March 1846,¹ desertions began to occur. For the rest of the war, desertions plagued the American forces. Though it is difficult to trace the exact numbers of the deserters, various figures will illustrate the magnitude of the problem. For instance, in March 1847, after less than a year of hostilities, the Adjutant General of the United States reported 1,011 deserters.² A little more than a year later, William Jay, a pacifist writer, quoted a report dated April 8, 1848, from the Secretary of War, ". . . it appears that the desertions in Mexico, up the 31st December 1847, . . . amounted very nearly to five thousand . . . The newspapers represent the desertions in the early part of 1848 as very numerous."³ Francis Heitman's statistical research, accepted as authoritative by the United States government, speaks of 9,207 deserters of a total of 39,197 casualties, or a little less than 25 per cent of the casualties from all causes. Of the deserters, 5,331 were from the regulars or professional military, while 3,876 were volunteers for the war. Heitman indicates that none of the deserters were officers.⁴ Considering that 100,182 soldiers, sailors, and marines participated in a combat phase which lasted only seventeen months, the total casualty rate, as well as the deserter rate, must be considered very high.⁵

With such an alarming desertion rate, an obvious question must be asked. Why did it happen? There appear to be various reasons. Jacob Oswandel, the Pennsylvania volunteer wrote in his diary, ". . . the Mexicans held inducements of great promise to our men, and particularly to the Catholics, to desert and join their cause." He wrote of the special plea by Catholic

priests on religious grounds, and then further referred to "bad treatment at the hands of young snot-nose and tyrannical officers."⁶

It is probable that there was a disenchantment among the volunteers who experienced the unpleasant living conditions in Mexico. Heitman indicates that approximately 11,000 officers and men died of disease during the campaigns.⁷ A ten per cent death rate due to disease alone would certainly be disillusioning to those most likely to take ill due to poor living conditions and least likely to get quick medical aid due to rank. Also to be considered was the fear of actual combat; others may also have fled the American Army to escape the harsh military punishment of the time.⁸

There is no definite proof that the desertions took place because of opposition to the aims of the war, although that might be the case for some deserters, such as the members of the San Patricio Battalion, which will be given extensive consideration. Opposition to the struggle might well have led some men to fight against their own nation, which requires a thorough look at the desertion problem.

On March 30, after arriving on the Rio Grande, Major Phillip Barbour wrote in a letter to his wife, "It has just been reported that one of our men has crossed the river by swimming. He has doubtless deserted."⁹ During the next few days, more followed. Captain Matthew S. Henry, another American officer, mentioned desertions in his diary entries of April 3rd, 5th, 6th and 8th, with some of those attempting to desert "drowned in crossing the river."¹⁰ Barbour wrote to his wife on April 4, "We have lost about thirty men from the whole army by desertion to the enemy."¹¹ Lieutenant George G. Meade reported that his unit lost fourteen men in a single night.¹²

Desertion was obviously very serious, and extreme measures were taken to combat it. Taylor ordered his guards to shoot the deserters as they swam the Rio Grande from the American camp to the Mexican side.¹³ Both Barbour and Henry wrote of being disturbed in their sleep by the picket's shooting, but neither of these West Point regulars opposed the action. Considering the harsh military discipline of the time, it must have been a satisfactory disciplinary act in their minds.¹⁴

Several possible reasons for the desertions need to be given recognition. First, the Mexican leaders were well aware of the conflict in the United States concerning the war. The debates of the Senate and House over Texas annexation and slavery had continued for a number of years. Prominent leaders in the nation had strongly opposed the war. Many leading ministers preached sermons against the war; several large church bodies debated and passed resolutions condemning the action. The Whig press did not fail to report the opposition.¹⁵

The Mexicans also knew of the problems of recent immigrants to the United States, many of whom joined the Army for want of other employment. In the early Eighteen Forties a wave of anti-foreign sentiment had developed in the United States, centered in the East where large numbers of Irish and German immigrants had settled. The "Nativists," or American-born citizens, attempted to proscribe the suffrage rights of both naturalized and Roman Catholic voters.¹⁶ Anti-Catholic riots occurred in Philadelphia in May and July 1844, resulting in the deaths of thirty persons, many of them Roman Catholic.¹⁷

Even General Winfield Scott, General-in-Chief of the U.S. Army, was involved in nativist thinking. The Native American Party nominated him for

President in 1844; it was not until mid-1848, when he realized the disadvantage of such nomination, that he disassociated himself from this group.¹⁸

Soon after Taylor's arrival on the Rio Grande, General Pedro de Ampudia, the Mexican commander, issued a proclamation which gained distribution among the American troops. The leaflet called on English and Irish soldiers to resist the invasion of Mexico as an act of aggression by the United States. It further made a special appeal to Germans and Poles, promising good treatment and transportation to Mexico City, at that time away from the combat area. Only a few weeks later, Ampudia's successor, General Mariano Arista, issued a similar proclamation, in which he offered three hundred twenty acres of land and Mexican citizenship to all who would desert.¹⁹

The Mexican Army, pushed away from the border, attempted a defense at Monterrey, Mexico's largest northern city. After a hard-fought victory by the Americans, the Mexican troops were allowed to leave the city and return to their own lines further south.²⁰ As they marched out through the American troops, several deserters were recognized by their former comrades and were met with derision. Particularly obvious was "an Irishman by the name of Riley, who has been appointed a captain in the artillery of the enemy."²¹ John Riley, a Sergeant in the U.S. 5th Infantry, had deserted across the Rio Grande in April 1846, prior to the declaration of war. With other deserters he formed an English-speaking artillery unit known as the San Patricio (St. Patrick) Battalion which fought in the Mexican defense of Monterrey. The unit left the city with the beaten Mexican army; it would fight again in several later battles.²²

With the occupation of Monterrey, desertations continued. Captain Henry wrote in his diary on November 5, 1846, that "a priest was detected

inducing our men to desert." The Americans arrested the cleric and transported him to Camargo where he was imprisoned. The same officer also reported the perquisites of desertion- "as high as one hundred and fifty dollars per man, with a promise of a captaincy."²³ Such inducements obviously appealed to the American soldiers, for later the same month Henry commented, "Desertions of late have been alarmingly on the increase . . . There is a regularly-organized gang to effect desertions."²⁴

Some of the Americans who deserted after the capture of Monterrey probably made their way into the San Patricio Battalion. Though American sources or records do not show its movements during the time, Mexican records list "the artillery company organized from the deserters of the invading army" being paid at San Luis Potosi in November 1846. In that city approximately half-way between Monterrey and Mexico City, Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna had gathered the pieces of the Mexican Army in order to remold them as a viable fighting force.²⁵

By capturing a courier with dispatches, Santa Anna learned that General Taylor's forces at Monterrey would soon be cut considerably. The majority of his troops were to join General Winfield Scott for shipment to Vera Cruz, from where they would invade Mexico and move toward the capital itself. Determined to win one convincing battle, the Mexican leader marched his twenty thousand troops north again. The two forces met at Buena Vista for two days, February 22-23, 1847.

The San Patricio Battalion manned the Mexican's heavy guns and were "distinguished by a green flag embroidered with a figure of St. Patrick, a harp of Erin, and a shamrock."²⁶ After high losses on both sides, the Mexican Army retreated in a disgraceful manner, not defeated, but leaving

thousands of wounded and sick to die on the battlefield. On February 24th, Taylor found his tired army in occupation of the battlefield.²⁷ The General, greatly relieved by the retreat of the opposition, wrote to his brother, "The great loss on both sides . . . has deprived me of everything like pleasure."²⁸

The San Patricio Battalion moved with Santa Anna from Buena Vista, but its subsequent movements are obscure. Santa Anna went to Cerro Gordo on the road from Vera Cruz to Mexico City. There his southern forces attempted to stop Scott's invading army which landed at Vera Cruz in early March. Again, the invaders routed the Mexicans, who retreated westward toward their capital. There is no mention in diaries, letters, or dispatches that the San Patricio's fought at Cerro Gordo.²⁹

Later that summer the foreign elements of the Mexican Army reorganized. A decree issued July 1, 1847, proclaimed:

Art. I: Two infantry companies of territorial militia are to be formed from the unit known as the Foreign Legion. They are to be named the First and Second Territorial Militia Companies San Patricio. 30

The decree also described the organization and composition of the unit, but did not mention their location at that particular time. However, considering that Santa Anna's obvious intent was to protect Mexico City, it is safe to assume that the deserters were attached to the Mexican Army in the South.

Gradually Scott's army moved toward the capital. The supply lines became more and more difficult to keep open due to guerrilla action by the Mexican military and brigands. The defence of the highway route could not be abandoned because of the need for supplies to come through Vera Cruz. President Polk, desiring to keep open all available lines of communication,

required Scott to divert a small American force to become a counter-guerrilla unit. They protected the convoys and troop movements.³¹

As the Americans moved inland, personnel problems plagued Scott. His original army included the majority of Taylor's earlier regulars as well as a large number of volunteers. The enlistments of the volunteers varied considerably, however. By the middle of June, many volunteers service ended and his total force dwindled to approximately seven thousand men. At Puebla, Scott chose to wait for replacements who had landed at Vera Cruz. By early August the Army had grown to about fourteen thousand men. The delay allowed rest, training, and the stockpiling of supplies, all of which were badly needed, but nearly three thousand of the force were sick or convalescent, thus ineffective for combat.³²

In mid-August Scott again moved his forces toward the capital. The approaches to Mexico City offered several alternative routes for attacking the Mexican positions. Scott chose to attack from a southerly direction through fields and small villages and over some rugged heights. Santa Anna defended his nation's capital with a series of man-made and natural barriers. At every point the Americans won, though not without stiff fighting. They moved from Contrera through San Angel to Churubusco.

At the latter point Santa Anna determined to hold the Americans in a decisive action. The strong point of the defenses was an old convent considered an impregnable fortress. In a bloody battle on August 20th, Scott defeated Santa Anna again. As inadequate intelligence by the Americans underestimated the strength of the defender, Churubusco proved to be "one of the most daring desperate defences our army came in contact with," according to Jacob Oswandel, an enlisted volunteer.³³ After hand to hand fighting the Americans finally overpowered their opponents.³⁴

The Mexican defenders at Churbusco included the San Patricio Battalion. Though the number of men in the unit that day was unknown, the effect of the battle on the unit is known.³⁵ Six months after the battle a Mexican newspaper quoted the official Mexican report- "Killed in action: 2 second lieutenants, 4 sergeants, 6 corporals, 23 privates. The rest are either prisoner or dispersed."³⁶

The Americans captured sixty-five of the deserters, including the leader John Riley. A series of trials began immediately. General Order 263 convened the initial trial for twenty-nine men, including Riley. A Colonel Bennett Riley, of no relation to the prisoner, presided over the court which convicted all twenty-nine and sentenced them to be hanged. General Scott's review of the case changed several of the sentences. Two men, unwillingly forced into the unit, were pardoned. Seven who deserted the ranks before the actual beginning of the war had their sentences commuted.³⁷ These men, including John Riley, were sentenced by General Scott:

to forfeit all pay and allowances . . . to receive fifty lashes on the bare back . . . to have the letter D indelibly branded on the cheek with a red-hot iron, to be confined at hard labor, wearing about the neck an iron collar having three prongs each six inches long, the whole weighing eight pounds, for six months, and at the expiration of that time to have the head shaved and be drummed out of the service. 38

Captain George T. Davis, Scott's aide de camp, attended the mass punishment of the sentences. He described the scene at San Angel, September 10, 1847:

those to be whipped and branded were tied up to trees in front of the Catholic church on the plaza, their backs naked . . . and an experienced Mexican muleteer inflicted the fifty lashes . . . Their backs had the appearance of a pounded piece of raw beef, the blood oozing from every stripe.

The whipped men were then branded and required to dig the graves of those to be hung.³⁹

The punishment concluded with the hanging of the sixteen men on a large, specially constructed gallows. Each man was "dressed in the uniform of the enemy in which he had been captured, the white caps being drawn over their heads."⁴⁰ The four other prisoners sentenced were hanged the next day at nearby Mixcoac.

A separate trial presided over by Colonel John Garland convened at Tucabaya. Thirty-six prisoners were tried, convicted, and sentenced to be hanged. Again, General Scott adjusted the sentences, pardoning two men, and sentencing four to be lashed and branded.

On September 13, the American forces stormed Chapultepec Castle, the last stronghold before Mexico City. The thirty condemned men were hanged on that day. Colonel William S. Harney, in charge of the execution, told them they would be hanged when Chapultepec actually fell. Harney stood the deserters in wagon with nooses ready round their necks. Their hands and feet tied, they stood through several hours of shelling and close in fighting. "As the American flag was seen to rise to the peak of the flagstaff of the castle, the word was given, the teams started and the . . . deserters paid the penalty of their treason with their lives."⁴¹

The executions evoked consternation and protest among the Mexicans. The Roman Catholic Archbishop of Mexico and other prominent clergy of the country pleaded with Scott not to take the lives of the deserters. Scott felt the American Articles of War gave him adequate guidance- desertion in time of war was treasonous and punishable by death.⁴² There had been a certain amount of duplicity involved in the desertions. Priests had enticed American Catholic soldiers to desert; the proclamations of Ampudia and Arista in 1846 had appealed to religious sentiment on the part of immigrant

soldiers as well as offering land and citizenship. Beset by the new appeals soon after conquering Mexico City, Scott issued General Order 296 as a warning to both Mexicans and Americans.

The conspirators have also the services of several false priests who dishonor the religion which they profess . . . Their plan is to . . . entice our Roman Catholic soldiers who have done honor to our colors to desert, under the promise of lands in California, which our armies have already acquired . . . Let all our soldiers professing the Catholic religion remember the fate of the deserters taken at Churubusco. ⁴³

The battle of Churubusco effectively destroyed the San Patricio Battalion. Those sentenced to hard labor worked in Mexico City during the occupation and eventually returned to the United States.⁴⁴ Their fate is unknown except for one brief mention of John Riley. After the war he entered suit in the U.S. District Court of Cincinnati, Ohio, asking \$50,000 damages for his flogging and branding. After a short hearing the jury decided against him; he was not heard of again.⁴⁵

What happened to the deserters who escaped at Churubusco? A new deserter unit organized in December 1847, almost six months afterward. Some of the San Patricio's could have been members, though little is known of it, and it soon disbanded.⁴⁶ The war for practical purposes was already over. The Americans occupied all the major cities, and the Mexican Army dissolved as an effective fighting force. Desertions continued to take place in the American Army, however.⁴⁷ Several small force engagements took place with some deserters involved, though it is not clear whether they fought as Mexican soldiers or bandits.⁴⁸ As peace gradually came to the Mexican countryside in the summer of 1848, the remaining deserters probably made one of three choices: to settle in Mexico on land given by the government, to return to their homes in the United States, or to move

to some third country to rebuild their lives. There are no known surviving records of the group, making their actions impossible to trace. Thus ended one of the strangest episodes in American military history.

ATTITUDES TOWARD THE WAR
AMONG SELECTED LITERARY FIGURES

After eight long years of involvement in South East Asia in a seemingly endless struggle, a rising crescendo of anti-war sentiment made its impact upon the United States. Vice-President Spiro T. Agnew in a burst of anger and pique referred to the leaders of the peace movement as "effete, intellectual snobs." He felt they were attacking the nation's foreign policy from protected, academic ivory towers with little or no valid understanding of the harsh realities of the Viet-Nam War. Had Agnew been Vice-President of the United States during the Mexican War of 1846-1849, he might well have made the same blast at a similar group of Americans.

Among the nineteenth century intellectual group were several literary and philosophical figures of the New England area, centered primarily around Boston. Investigation of the life and writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Margaret Fuller, and James Russell Lowell shows them all opposed to the Mexican War though for slightly differing reasons. Writing at the same time as the others, but as a professional journalist in Brooklyn, the American poet Walt Whitman provides a contrast, demonstrating that not all the intellectual-literary world was against the war. An examination of their writings set amidst a summary of their milieu will bear this out and show their contrasting views.

In the period 1800-1815 war damaged both Europe and the United States. David Low Dodge, a Quaker merchant, formed the New York Peace Society in August 1815 in response to the years of war. He hoped to spread the message of peace, that the carnage of war might cease. Of the initial group of approximately thirty, several were clergy of the New York area. They

expressed their belief that war, either offensive or defensive, was against the will of Christ, and pledged themselves to propagandize for peace.¹

Similar organizations soon followed in Ohio and Massachusetts, with the Reverend William Ellery Channing a leader in the latter. Though organized as local societies, leaders and members of the rapidly growing movement constantly corresponded with one another, not only within the United States but also at the international level. Gradually political leaders saw the movement as a ground-swell of popular opinion; statements on peace became politically expedient.²

An abolitionist movement also developed in the United States at an early time. Soon these two groups had many interlocking lines of communication. Many of those in the anti-slavery and abolitionist movement responded to the peace movement; likewise many within the peace movement responded to anti-slavery thinking.³

The New England literary group were both abolitionist and against the Mexican War. Their intellectual roots were in both groups. They were good friends and had frequent written and verbal contact with one another and with other members of the abolitionist and peace movements. Ralph Waldo Emerson, an ordained but nonpracticing Unitarian clergyman, lived in Concord.⁴ Henry David Thoreau stayed nearby at the famous Walden Pond.⁵ Margaret Fuller, the leading feminist of her time, lived at several places in the area before moving to New York and then to Rome;⁶ also in the vicinity were Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and James Russell Lowell. In their diaries, journals, and letters, there are constant references to one another and their mutual admiration and respect. Many of the leading thinkers of the time such as William Lloyd Garrison, the abolitionist; Charles Sumner, the

politician; William E. Channing and Theodore Parker, both ministers, were frequent guests at one or another of the homes, at which time a gathering of the others was to be expected. In effect there was in the Concord area a series of seminars that lasted for a number of years, that included many of the great minds of the time, and that discussed the leading issues of the passing years.⁷

As early as March 1838 Emerson had publicly expressed himself on the issue of war and peace. With no war on the visible horizon for the United States at that time, a group of Unitarian ministers, including Emerson, addressed a regional peace meeting in Boston.⁸

Emerson's address, entitled "War,"⁹ defended war as having some limited value and purpose. Among a group of people who were basically pacifists, with many morally opposed to the use of any force even in self-defense, Emerson emphasized the principle of selectivity, that is to say, some wars can be good while others can be bad. A decision then must be based on the facts and circumstances surrounding a particular war. This approach is best seen in the following statement from Emerson's Journal.

We are the children of many sires, and every drop of blood in us in its turn betrays its ancestor. We are of the party of war and of the peace party alternately; to both very sincerely- only we always may be said to be heartily 10 on the side of truth.

Emerson was neither a war-monger nor a pacifist. In his thinking war and peace were transient and elusive; Truth was of a permanent Higher Order, to be sought after diligently. With such an understanding Emerson then could sanction or condemn a particular war based upon his understanding of it. He believed that the Mexican War was immoral because of the expansionism growing out of slavery but he did not express his views too widely. Most of his comments on the Mexican war seem to have been made privately among

friends or in the privacy of his Journal, and there only in a limited fashion.

As Emerson sought for Truth between 1845 and 1849, he disagreed equally with his dogmatic, pacifist friends, and those who cried "my country, right or wrong."¹¹ He felt neither group really sought the Higher Order, but had a limited vision based on their own limited immediate goals.

One of Emerson's closest friends was Henry David Thoreau. Probably the most famous incident related to literary figures and the Mexican War is Thoreau's going to jail when he refused to pay the taxes levied for support of the war. Emerson wrote of his friend and the act of civil disobedience with some compassion. In his Journal Emerson compared that act with the words of Daniel Webster who had voiced opposition to the war in Congress, but then voted money to support it. Emerson felt Webster's act one of political expedience, and Thoreau's one of a Higher Order. It was more costly and dangerous for the individual, and therefore more important.¹²

Thoreau, of great interest in our own time, was a man of personal inner strength and moral conviction. The ability to be independent and self-supporting was of great importance to him, as expressed in his living in semi-isolation at Walden.¹³ Thoreau felt there was "a stronger desire to be respectable to one's neighbor than to one's self."¹⁴ His personal independence was a counter-force to that drive and an expression of his personal integrity. Such attitudes led him to jail in 1846 as a symbolic act of resistance.¹⁵

The protest, which strangely is not mentioned in Thoreau's Journal, was important to him and his development. In 1849 as the war was ending, Thoreau published "Civil Disobedience," one of his best-known works. In

that tract he expressed the idea that civil law inhibiting or limiting moral concerns, such as war or slavery, is encroachment on the rights of the individual. When that happens, the individual must choose some form of resistance to the power of the state. Thoreau made his choice with refusal to pay his taxes. With this view he of all the literary group seemed most compelled to act on his moral and political views.¹⁶

A regular member of the Boston intellectual movement was the remarkable Margaret Fuller.¹⁷ One of the brilliant women of her time, she often shared in the intellectual soires at the various homes. Having gained some reknown for her criticism and other writings, she left the United States in 1846, shortly after the declaration of war, for travel and study in Europe. Her expenses were paid by writing regular letters to the New York Tribune. These letters were extraordinary, however, for Fuller proved herself capable of careful and intense analysis of the European scene, particularly Italy during the Revolution. It was from that strife-torn country that her letters pertinent to this study were written.

Long opposed to slavery, Fuller saw the war as related to slavery, "a horrible cancer."¹⁸ She understood the annexation of Texas as having been brought about to extend slavery, thus she opposed the annexation on that basis.¹⁹ Travelling through Italy when the people were breaking down longtime prejudices and oppressiveness, she expressed the feeling that the American forefathers had stood for liberty and justice. However, "the spirit of our fathers flames no more, but lies hid beneath the ashes."²⁰ The war was an unmitigated act of aggression against a poor and backward nation. Such aggression was an act of "tyranny and wrong," particularly when for an immoral purpose such as the extension of slavery. With the country asleep to the moral wrongs of the war, Fuller hoped for

an early awakening and a rebirth of the commitment to freedom.

It is difficult to assess Fuller's impact on the mentality of her homeland. Her feminist writings had gained her a mixed reaction. Some saw her as strange, for she deviated from the accepted life-style of women in her time. She advocated a freedom for women which was not acceptable except in limited circles. It is known though that the Tribune was pleased with her writing and extended her initial contract due to the public response to the letters from Italy.²¹

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow also shared in some of the intellectual ferment of the Boston area. He is not thought of as a full member of the Emerson-Thoreau-Fuller circle though they were friends. His best known works are not from the Transcendentalist style which the others expressed.²² Longfellow's Journal show his attitudes and reactions to the United States' involvement in Mexico, and little was presented in his poetry.

Two weeks after the opening of hostilities in Mexico, Longfellow wrote in his Journal, there is "little interest locally" in the war. This is not a statement of indifference, of lack of real interest, but a response of negativism and rejection, typical of New England. Longfellow clearly referred to the war as "shabby and disgraceful."²³ Evidently it was so bad and there was so little he could do about it, that he was better off paying little attention to it. In fact he chose not to read the newspapers in order to stay from news of the war.

Two weeks later the poet attended services at the local church, as was his practice. Arriving home afterwards he commented in his Journal.

S. Preached against the Mexican War. If all the clergy in the country had done this three months ago, the war would not have been.²⁴

While he castigated the clergy for not preaching against the war, Longfellow

was satisfied to continue his own university teaching. He does not indicate any lecturing against the war to his students, nor does he indicate any real action on his part similar to that of Thoreau. In his Journal he does not even mention Thoreau's jailing, though it would have been difficult not to have heard of it. Evidently Longfellow's rejection of the war was a decision that was personal, religious, and intellectual, but that required no great exertion on his part.

These two short phrases are the only specific comments made in Longfellow's Journal. During this time he was actively engaged not only in teaching but also in his own literary efforts. As his great poem "Evangeline" is a product of this period, it is probable that his personal interests occupied most of his attention.

In the literary world the most devastating critic of the Mexican War was James Russell Lowell. His satirical poetry and prose, now known in collected form as the THE BIGLOW PAPERS, first appeared intermittently as nine letters in the Boston Courier between 1846 and 1848. Lowell wrote anonymously, using several fictitious New England characters to convey his message.²⁵

In Lowell's work, Homer Wilbur, pastor of First Church in the Massachusetts town of Jaalam, served as mentor for Hosea Biglow, a poorly educated local boy. Wilbur helped Biglow edit and improve his poetry, and suggested sending the poetic commentary on the current scene to the Boston paper. An examination of the Biglow letters demonstrates Lowell's attitudes toward the war, slavery and annexation.

In the first letter Biglow reflected upon his own attitudes after seeing a recruiting sergeant on a visit to Boston. While thinking of the military figures he expressed his feeling about military conflict.

Ez for war, I call it murder-
 There you hev it plain and flat;
 I don't want to go no furder
 Than my Testyment for that;²⁶

For several more lines Biglow continued to express his feelings of the conflict between religion and war. He felt war was inconsistent with the spirit of the Christian religion and indefensible on religious grounds.

In a later stanza he spoke more specifically to the War with Mexico. Particularly of concern was the debate on territorial acquisition which raged in the Senate, which he connected with the desire for opening more slave territory.

They jest want this Californy
 So's to lug new slave-states in
 To abuse ye, an' to scorn ye, 27
 An' to plunder ye like sin.

Biglow continued to attack slavery and territorial acquisition as immoral, calling upon the people of Massachusetts to stand for freedom and morality. He closed the poem by urging his friends to tell the South they would not help in the evil of a slavery-connected war. Finally he suggested the possibility of dissolving the Union "that God has noways joined."²⁸

When the first letter was published in the Courier, people responded in various ways. In the Boston area most reaction seems to have been favorable. Immediately there were those who recognized Lowell's ideas and style in the anonymous letter. Lowell refused to acknowledge authorship and it was some months before he chose to do so.

Though the ideas of the first letter are similar to those that follow, each letter is unique and self-contained. For instance, the second letter to the Courier was a fictitious letter from the Texas-Mexico battlefront. Biglow refused to volunteer for duty because of his opposition to the war; one of his friends Birdofredum Sawin did go, and shared his experiences

with his far away friend. Sawin is mentioned in several of the nine letters; his changes in attitudes are reflected with the passing of time. He went to the war with dreams of martial glory and honor; soon after arriving in Texas he wrote that war was totally unlike the militia training he had done in Massachusetts, that he did not like what he saw around him, and that he would just as soon be home in Jaalam again.

Sawin wrote to Biglow of the racial attitudes expressed in the concept of manifest destiny which was sweeping the nation at the time. He spoke of the lowliness of the Mexican as compared to the American, and connected that idea with attitudes toward slaves and slavery.

Afore I come away from hum I had a strong persuasion That
 Mexicans warn't human beans- an ourang outang nation, A sort
 o'folks a chap could kill and never dream on't arter, No
 more'n a feller's dream o'pigs that he hed hed to slarter;
 i'd an idee they were built arter the darkie fashion all,
 An kicking colored folks about, you know, 's a kind
 o'national. 29

He then went on to emphasize another aspect of manifest destiny- the inherent rights of a larger, more powerful nation to do with smaller, weaker nations as the more powerful desired.

Our nations bigger- so our rights are bigger,
 Its to make them free, that we pull the trigger.³⁰

In a later letter Sawin wrote of his coming home from the war. However, he had become a very different person. Physically ravaged, he suffered loss of one leg, one eye, and one arm.³¹ His experiences embittered him, especially toward the officers of the unit. He felt glory was reserved only for the highest ranks with little praise for the common soldier. "We git the licks, -we're jest the grist that's put into War's hoppers."³²

As well as passing on letters from friend Sawin, Hosea Biglow also reported to the Courier on a fictitious speech on current affairs. He had

heard of the strong resolutions passed at a Whig meeting in Springfield, Massachusetts, 29 September 1847.³³ The Whigs attacked the war and Polk's policy, but praised the bravery of the army. They pictured themselves as the true defenders of the national heritage. Biglow satirized the Resolves as empty words and pure hypocrisy. He felt they were for political expediency and not a true expression of moral indignation.

In another of the letters Biglow made reference to a phrase which Emerson had criticized, that is, "our country, right or wrong." Biglow alluded to this when he said,

The side of our country must ollers be took,
An' President Polk, you know, he our country.³⁴

Parson Wilbur commented on this phrase and spoke of a higher loyalty beyond that to the state. He referred to a higher loyalty which transcended earthly nations, thereby reflecting the thinking of Emerson's higher order. Wilbur said that the moral man in search of Truth and Justice must be able to get beyond earthly nationalism. "That is a hard choice, when our earthly love of country calls upon us to tread one path and our duty points us to another."³⁵ Such a comment is very similar to the thinking of Thoreau in his "Civil Disobedience."

Hosea Biglow, as Lowell's alter-ego, demonstrated various reasons for opposition to the war, to include slavery, annexation of Texas and other territory, and over-powering aggression by a larger nation. His thinking is similar to that of Emerson, Thoreau, and Fuller, though their actions were varied. Thoreau with his resistance to taxation and Lowell through participation in the peace movement and the abolitionist movement took direct action; Emerson, Fuller, and Longfellow remained passive, choosing to express themselves only in writing and lecturing, not in direct resistance to the war movement.

The writing of Walt Whitman provided an interesting contrast to the New England writers.³⁶ Somewhat younger and not of the same intellectual milieu, Whitman's best-known literary work "Leaves of Grass" was not to be published until long after the end of the Mexican War. During the war period itself Whitman served as the editor of a newspaper, the Brooklyn Eagle, "the mouthpiece of the Democratic-Republican Party."³⁷ As the editor he wrote commentaries on the American scene and editorial opinions reflecting the current party attitudes. It is through these editorials that Whitman expressed himself concerning the war and related subjects.

Whitman agreed with Lowell that slavery was wrong, but unlike the latter, he felt that the institution in the South should not be disturbed too quickly. The growth of a Democratic spirit among the people along with enlightened public opinion would eventually bring slavery to an end.³⁸ He was adamant however that the institution should not be extended to the new territories added to the United States. When the Wilmot Proviso was entered into Congress in August, 1846, Whitman vigorously supported it. He called upon all legislators regardless of party to support the Proviso, and vote for it, as it would prevent the spread of slavery.³⁹ He did feel that expansion was inevitable; that feeling was based on his belief in America, and her intended destiny. The "spread of Democracy and freedom justified any measure of expansion."⁴⁰ Such an attitude seems to support the concept "our country, right or wrong," which both Lowell and Emerson satirized. It is obvious though that Whitman expressed expansionism but opposed the admission of slavery to new territories.

Whitman's support of the war was based upon expansion and the feeling that Mexico had injured the pride of a more powerful nation. He felt that "Mexico must be thoroughly chastised." The United States had "coaxed,

excused, listened with deaf ear to the insolent gasconade of her government."⁴¹ In early June 1846 after the formal declaration of war he wrote a series of editorials on expansion in the West. Repeatedly he expressed the idea that America had a particular mission of settling and developing new states. An example of this was the editorial of July 7,

What has miserable, inefficient Mexico . . . to do
with the great mission of peopling the New World
with a noble race. Be it ours, to achieve that
mission. 42

Like many other Americans of the time Whitman expressed scorn for the people of the slowly developing Republic to the south. They were not really capable of using the natural resources in developing a great nation; only the Americans could do that.⁴³

From the beginning of hostilities Whitman did not appreciate the vocal opposition to the war. As a result he often chastised those who attacked President Polk and his policies. The New York Tribune in which Margaret Fuller's letters were appearing was probably the leading Whig paper in the city. Though there is no evidence that Whitman attacked Fuller personally, he did comment on the paper for which she wrote.

These sneaking innuendoes which the Tribune is throwing out day after day- its open advocacy of the Mexican cause . . . comprise a dastardiness, which outrages all the decency that should be observed by
. . . an American citizen. 44

Though Whitman continued to attack the Whigs for not supporting the war, eventually he felt it needed to end.⁴⁵ After months of bloodshed and obvious United States military superiority, Whitman felt continued fighting could serve no real purpose. "The time has arrived when all citizens should speak candidly and firmly. LET IT GO NO FURTHER."⁴⁶ Polk's efforts at ending the war through force or negotiation continued unsuccessful.

Whitman's frustration over the continued struggle broke into his writing. The United States "must back out entirely or we must drive it through with a vigorous hand."⁴⁷ Whitman felt that the United States was doing its best to end the war as quickly and honorably as possible, that Mexico was at fault in refusing the American offers of peace. In his anger at Mexican hesitation he thus called for heavier use of force to drive the Mexicans to the bargain table, though by this time the American force under General Scott had already captured the Mexican capital. Unknown to Whitman, Nicholas P. Trist and Scott were actively engaged in peace negotiations with the Mexicans.

Whitman gradually differed with the publisher of the Eagle over party policy. While Whitman called for support of the Wilmot Proviso, the publisher did not. Eventually their differences became public, and Whitman chose to leave the Eagle. In early 1848 before peace came to Mexico, Whitman went to New Orleans where he continued as a journalist, though without writing editorials. Thus, it is only through the writings on the Eagle that Whitman's feelings about the war may be traced.

From this analysis it is obvious that the leading literary figures of the 1840's gave some consideration to the social scene and moral questions of the day. They expressed their views in diaries, in letters, and in their public writings. They argued, cajoled, and editorialized, each in his own way, and from his own understanding of the situation.

All the writers mentioned were anti-slavery; that is obvious. They were not all abolitionists in the sense of William Lloyd Garrison and Charles Sumner. It was precisely this anti-war attitude that led Emerson, Longfellow, Thoreau, Lowell, and Fuller to oppose the war. They saw it

being used for the benefit of the slaveholders and the slave states. In contrast Whitman's expansionist views led him to promote the war as a method of expansion, but at the same time he discouraged the extension of slavery as a social evil.

With the end of the Mexican War thousands of square miles were added to the United States, providing territory for several states, thus satisfying for awhile the expansionist drive. Eventually these territories were admitted to the United States as free states. Such an outcome would probably have satisfied all the writers considered, though leaving a bad memory for those who had opposed the war itself.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In retrospect, most American historians say the Mexican War could have been prevented. On the war, Dexter Perkins, the American historian, makes a typical comment:

It is possible to criticize his Polk's course as lacking in the essential patience that a strong nation should show toward a relatively weak one. But it is only fair to say that Mexican opinion was fully as bellicose as that of the United States. 1

Neither the United States nor Mexico really had any reason to be proud of the war which they fought between 1846 and 1848. The United States gained tremendously in terms of territory from their adversary, and perhaps something in terms of becoming a world power; neither nation gained in honor or prestige. The war did create or emphasize serious conflicts in American society. Manifest Destiny and expansionism, slavery and abolitionism, and national pride became burning issues. The war, then, brought to the spotlight various, diverse social movements.

Examination of the cited documents leads me to the conclusion that anti-war sentiment, both in isolation among individuals and as a movement, did exist. It grew not only among the civilian population at home, but to a more limited extent, even among the military. This fact is surprisingly similar to the attitudes toward the involvement in South East Asia.

Some of the opposition can be called clearly political; that is, it was the opposition party, the Whigs, automatically taking issue with the ruling Democrats. Some of the opposition may be more classified as moral, as a protest against a wrong, whether it be slavery, or the aggressive abuse of power by a strong nation.

There is no clear cut evidence that desertion took place as opposition

to the war itself, although the Army suffered with the loss of more than nine per cent of its force by this means. There are other reasons for desertion that are much more easily traced, including Mexican inducements of land, and the harsh life of the Army of 1846. During our own time the military as a whole has been faced with the problem of desertion. Many have left because of unwillingness to serve or a dislike for the style of life required by the military. That is comparable to the Mexican War. Thousands more in the 1960's, however, have left the military, and even the United States, out of opposition to the Viet Nam War; specifically they have refused even to serve in the military during the war period. Therein lies the obvious difference between the problem of desertion in 1846 and 1972.

As one examines the extent of opposition to the war, a particular fact must constantly be realized. At all times the war continued on the battle front. The opposition was vocal; in some areas, particularly New England, it was strong. But it never became the prevailing force. It did have its effect in the Congress; it did affect the Army; it did influence the American people. At the same time, President Polk continued his policies and Congress continued to appropriate the necessary financial support. Again, there is a very contemporary ring to such fact; the situation in regard to Viet Nam is little different. In closing I can only say, the United States seems to have been there before.

NOTES: Background of the War

1 The uncited background which follows is common knowledge and can easily be found in any general survey of American history. My summary is based on the following works.

Seymour V. Connor and Odie B. Faulk, North America Divided: The Mexican War, 1846-1848 (New York: Oxford Press, 1971).

Roswell S. Ripley, The War with Mexico (New York: Franklin, 1849).

Justin H. Smith, The War with Mexico (New York: MacMillan, 1919).

2 Connor and Faulk, North America Divided, p.15.

3 Ibid., p. 18-19.

4 Ibid., p. 24-26.

5. Ibid., p. 20; 27.

6 Ibid., p. 20.

7. Ibid., p. 24.

8 James K. Polk, The Diary of James K. Polk, ed. by Milo M. Quaife (Chicago: A. C. McClurg & Company, 1910), I, 337, April 18, 1846.

9. Holman Hamilton, Zachary Taylor: Soldier of the Republic (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1941), p. 170.

10 Ibid., p. 175.

11 Polk, Diary, I. 343.

12 Ibid., I. 354.

13 Ibid., I, 363.

14 Hamilton, Taylor, p. 176.

15 Ibid., p. 176: Connor and Faulk, North America, pp. 30-31.

16 Polk, Diary, I, 384-387.

17 Frederick Merk, "Dissent in the Mexican War," Dissent in Three American Wars (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), pp. 37-40.

NOTES: Voices from the Front

1 Connor and Faulk, North America Divided, pp. 36-40, Hamilton, Taylor, pp. 181-193. William S. Henry, Campaign Sketches of the War with Mexico (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1847), p. 107.

2 Zachary Taylor, Letters of Zachary Taylor from the Battlefields of Mexico (Rochester: Genessee, 1908), August 4, 1846.

3 Ibid., August 11, 1846, Camargo.

4 Ibid., September 3, 1846, Camargo.

5 Ibid., December 10, 1846, Monterrey.

6 Ibid., July 20, 1847, Monterrey.

7 George G. Meade, Life and Letters of George G. Meade (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1913), p. 26, September 18, 1845.

8 Polk, Diary, II, 119.

9 Ibid., II, 181, October 11, 1846.

10 Ibid., II, 250, November 21, 1846.

11 Ibid., III, 58, June 12, 1847.

12 Hamilton, Taylor, pp. 246-255.

13 Charles W. Elliott, Winfield Scott: The Soldier and the Man (New York: MacMillan Company, 1937), pp. 590-597.

14 In Texas, Taylor's original force of approximately 3500 men was about one-half the Army of the time.

15 Polk, Diary, II, 242, November 17, 1846.

16 Elliott, Scott, pp. 439-441.

17 Ibid., p. 443.

18 Ibid., p. 444-451; Hamilton, Taylor, pp. 226-230.

19 For a description of the adulation upon his return to the United States, see Elliott, Scott, pp. 586-587.

20 These intrigues are outside the scope of this paper, but they are covered in Elliott, Scott, Chapter XLII, in a defensive fashion. Smith, War, gives a more objective view, while Ripley, War, downgrades Scott.

21 Elliott, Scott, p. 409.

22 Such a view is remarkably similar to that of Walt Whitman who felt the growth of the "democratic spirit" would end slavery.

23 Elliott, Scott, p. 410.

24 Winfield Scott, Memoirs of Lieutenant-General Winfield Scott (New York: Sheldon and Co., 1864), p. 379.

25 Ibid., p. 373. Neither of these statements is mentioned in Elliott.

26 George W. Smith and Charles Judah, ed. Chronicles of the Gringos: The US Army in the Mexican War, 1846-1848 (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1968), p. 27.

27 Barna Upton, "Our First Foreign War," ed. by W. F. Goetzmann, American Heritage, 17, (June, 1966), 18-27.

28 Ibid., p. 93.

29 Ibid., p. 93.

30 Ibid., p. 98.

31 Ibid., p. 27.

32 Ulysses S. Grant, The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant, ed. by John Simon (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1967), I, 56, October 1845.

33 Ibid., I, 86, May 11, 1846.

34 Ibid., I, 97, June 26, 1846.

35 Ibid., I, 109, September 6, 1846.

36 Ibid., I, 124, February 1, 1847.

37 Meade, Life and Letters, p. 26, September 18, 1845.

38 Ibid., p. 48, February 18, 1846.

39 Meade's statement does in fact reflect some of the private thinking expressed by Polk in his Diary.

40 Ibid., pp. 74-84, letters of May 2-15, 1846.

41 Ibid., p. 94, May 28, 1846.

42 Ibid., p. 114, July 16, 1846.

43 Ibid., p. 154, November 10, 1846.

44 Ibid., pp. 180-181, February 8, 1847.

45 George B. McClellan, The Mexican War Diary of George B. McClellan (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1917), p. 16.

46 J. Jacob Oswandel, Notes of the Mexican War (Philadelphia: n.p. 1885), p. 95, March 26, 1847.

47 Ibid., p. 121, April 17, 1847.

48. Ibid., p. 210, July 18, 1847.

49 Connor and Faulk, North America Divided, Chapter 7, describe Trist's mission and the difficulties of the negotiations, a subject not germane to this research.

50 Oswandel, Notes, p. 229, July 25, 1847. A longer discussion of the deserters will follow in the next chapter.

51 Ibid., pp 274-275, September 5, 1847.

52 Phillip N. Barbour, Journals of the Late Brevet Major Phillip N. Barbour, ed. by Rhoda T. Doubleday (New York: George P. Putnam's Sons, 1936), p. 17.

53 Ibid., p. 51, May 1, 1846.

54 Ibid., p. 108, September 20, 1846.

55 Ibid., p. 72, May 27, 1846.

56 Ibid., p. 81, June 3, 1846.

57 Ibid., p. 77, June 2, 1846.

58 Ibid., p. 49, April 28, 1846.

59 William S. Henry, Campaign Sketches of the War with Mexico, (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1847), p 116, May 25, 1847.

60 Thomas D. Tennery, The Mexican War Diary of Thomas D. Tennery, ed. by D.E. Livingston-Little (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1970), p. 37-38.

NOTES: The Problem of Desertion

- 1 Hamilton, Taylor, p. 171.
- 2 Smith and Judah, Chronicles, p. 433.
- 3 William Jay, War and Peace (New York: Oxford University Press, 1919), p. 283.
- 4 Francis B. Heitman, Historical Register and Dictionary of the United States Army (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1903), II, 282.
- 5 Connor and Faulk, North America Divided, pp. 170-171, compares these statistics to those of other American wars. Such comparison makes them appear even worse.
- 6 Oswandel, Notes, p. 229, July 25, 1847.
- 7 Heitman, Register, II, 282.
- 8 Smith and Judah, Chronicles, pp. 431-432, Elliott, Scott, p. 529.
- 9 Barbour, Journals, p. 23.
- 10 Henry, Sketches, p. 72.
- 11 Barbour, Journals, p. 28.
- 12 Meade, Life and Letters, p. 53.
- 13 Smith and Judah, Chronicles, p. 432.
- 14 Barbour, Journals, p. 29; Henry, Sketches, p. 72.
- 15 Clayton S. Ellsworth, "The American Churches and the Mexican War," American Historical Review, XLV (Jan. 1940), 301-326.
- 16 Elliott, Scott, pp. 395-396.
- 17 Smith and Judah, Chronicles, p. 15; p. 463; p. 43fn.
- 18 Elliott, Scott, p. 412; p. 591.
- 19 John R. Kenly, Memoirs of a Maryland Volunteer in the War with Mexico (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1873), pp. 39-41. Proclamation of April 2, 1846 and April 21, 1846.
- 20 Connor and Faulk, North America Divided, pp. 42-51.
- 21 Henry, Sketches, p. 223.
- 22 Edward S. Wallace, "The Battalion of Saint Patrick in the Mexican War," Military Affairs, XIV, No. 2 (1950, p. 85). G. T. Hopkins, "The San

Patricio Battalion in the Mexican War," Journal of the US Cavalry Association, September 1913, p. 280.

23 Henry, Sketches, p. 240.

24 Ibid., p. 249.

25 "Diario Del Gobierno de la Republica Mexicana," Tomo III, Num 155, (Mexico, 1846), quoted in Smith, War, I, 550 fn6.

26 David Lavender, Climax at Buena Vista: The American Campaigns in Northeastern Mexico, 1846-1847 (New York: Lippincott, 1966), p. 164. This description is in a rather superficial book which does not cite its sources. As no original source of Buena Vista which I found contained this description, I cannot help but wonder if it is poetic license.

27 Nathan C. Brooks, A Complete History of the Mexican War (Philadelphia: Griggs and Elliot, 1849), pp. 217-219.

28 Connor and Faulk, North America Divided, p. 58.

29 Wallace, "Battalion," p. 90.

30 "Diario," Tomo IV, Num 124, July 15, 1847: July 21, 1847: quoted in Detmore H. Finke, "The Organization and Uniforms of the San Patricio Units of the Mexican Army, 1846-1848," Military Collector and Historian, X, (Summer, 1957), p. 37.

31 Connor and Faulk, North America Divided, pp. 116-117. Also see Polk, Diary, III, p. 89, July 16, 1847.

32 Connor and Faulk, North America Divided, p. 120.

33 Oswandel, Notes, p. 471.

34 Connor and Faulk, North America Divided, p. 126. Wallace, "Battalion," p. 88.

35 Oswandel, Notes, p. 471, refers to one-hundred Irish American deserters. It is highly unlikely the total was so small. Wallace, "Battalion," p. 88, speaks of 260 men. The latter figure is used by most writers.

36 "Correo Nacional," Tomo I, Num 26, December 23, 1847, quoted in Finke, "Organization," p. 37.

37 Brooks, History, pp. 380-381: Wallace, "Battalion," p. 88: Hopkins, "San Patricio," pp. 280-281.

38 The American Star, Mexico City, November 12, 1847, quoted in Edward S. Wallace, "Deserters in the Mexican War," 15(1935), p. 374.

39 Wallace, "Battalion," p. 89: Smith and Judah, Chronicles, p. 435.

40 Smith and Judah, Chronicles, p. 436, Hopkins, "San Patricio," p. 281, describes the execution as hanging from a tree. Wallace, "Battalion," uses Davis' in the same form as found in Chronicles.

41 Charles S. Hamilton, "Memoirs of the Mexican War," Wisconsin Magazine of History, XIV, p. 82, quoted in Elliott, Scott, p. 546fn.

42 Smith and Judah, Chronicles, p. 435.

43 The American Star, September 23, 1847, quoted in Wallace, "Battalion," p. 90; Hopkins, "San Patricio," p. 281; Niles National Register, LXXIII, p. 140, quoted in Elliott, Scott, p. 555.

44 Wallace, "Battalion," p. 90.

45 Oswandel, Notes, pp. 427-428.

46 Finke, "Organization," p. 38.

47 Oswandel, Notes, pp. 485-486, describes the drumming out of a deserter in 1846.

48 Ibid., Notes, p. 548.

NOTES: Attitudes Toward the War
Among selected Literary Figures

1 Merle Curti, The American Peace Crusade, 1815-1860 (Durham: Duke University Press, 1929), p. 8.

2 Ibid., p. 36-38.

3 Ibid., p. 63-65.

4 Harold C. Goddard, Studies in New England Transcendentalism (New York: Hillary House, 1960), p. 62.

5 Ibid., p. 91.

6 Madeline B. Stern, The Life of Margaret Fuller (New York: Dutton and Company, 1942).

7 Goddard, Studies, pp. 38-41, discusses some of this interplay of personalities and minds.

8 William Huggard, Emerson and the Problem of War and Peace (Iowa City: Iowa University Press, 1938). p. 22fn. Among the seven were William L. Garrison, Samuel May, Wendell Phillips, William E. Channing, Henry Ware, and Francis Jackson, all of whom knew Emerson and visited in his home. These men were among the most prominent ministers of New England.

9 Ralph Waldo Emerson, The Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson, ed. by E. W. Emerson and W. E. Forbes (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, Co., 1912), II, 552.

10 Emerson, Works(Journals), VII, 79-80, 1840.

11 Ibid., June 27, 1846. This phrase, common in our time, was first used by Stephen Decatur in a formal toast in a dinner at Norfolk, April 1816. Considering the number of allusions, it must have become rather well-known quickly.

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13 These attitudes are expressed through the writings in Walden and the Journal of the period.

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CONSCIENCE AND CONFLICT
DURING THE MEXICAN WAR, 1846-1848

by

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B.A., Texas A&M University, 1958

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CONSCIENCE AND CONFLICT
DURING THE MEXICAN WAR, 1846-1848

Personal involvement in Viet Nam has led me to a closer examination of the American heritage and past. Eventually study centered on the Mexican War period as a result of the internal controversy over that war. Ethical considerations particularly concerned me. These are expressed in such questions as: How did the state respond to the question of conscience by those opposed to the war? Were there any such expressions of conscience among those actually involved in the fighting? Did the literary-intellectual community use their artistic endeavors to influence the society's attitudes toward the war?

Before speaking specifically to those questions, a limited background of the struggle is necessary, for the seeds of the war had been planted years before.

Thousands of settlers moved into the Mexican state of Texas during the period 1823-1840. Continuing revolutions in the country influenced life even in this distant province. In 1836, the President of Mexico, General Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna, was captured and forced to recognize the independence of Texas. The new Republic quickly took its place among the nations of the world, but border conflicts and financial claims continued to make relations unsteady. The United States, supporting the claims of its former citizens who had settled in Texas, annexed the Republic as a state in 1845. In May 1846, armed conflict began when President Polk sent General Zachary Taylor's troops to the Rio Grande. The two nations quickly declared a state of war.

Numerous enlisted and officers kept diaries during the war, or wrote

memoirs soon after. The writings speak not only of the countryside, of experiences with friends, of battles and campaigns, but also of general attitudes toward the war itself.

General Taylor's forces moved from the Rio Grande to the city of Monterrey, defeating the Mexicans at every engagement. Taylor's forces had in its number those who totally supported the war effort, those who saw the experience as something of a necessary evil because they were professional military, and even those who were opposed to the war. Taylor himself was accused of dragging his feet because of feelings about the war and political ambitions.

Desertion confronted the American leaders constantly. The Mexicans barraged the invading soldiers with propaganda related to religion and the unjustness of the war, offering citizenship and land in exchange for deserting. Thousands responded, with well over nine thousand deserting by the end of the war. Obviously some deserted as a result of negativism toward the war, but many others must have done so due to the Mexican offers of land.

On the home front the attitudes toward the war were mixed. Generally reaction followed regional lines, with opposition increasing further from the war front. In New England particularly the agitation against the war became strong and vociferous. The literary-intellectual community gathered around the major cities became deeply involved, especially when the war issue was related to the continuing question of abolition. The literary group centered at Concord around Emerson and Thoreau took an active part in writing against the war, with Lowell most prolific in his Biglow Papers. At the same time Walt Whitman, a journalist rather than a poet at this time,

supported the war effort through editorials in the Brooklyn Eagle. Comments on the war remain a popular portion of the writings of Thoreau and Lowell.

Neither the United States nor Mexico have reason to be proud of the War of 1846-1848. The United States gained a great deal of territory from the weaker nation, but neither gained in terms of national honor. It was a war that was unnecessary, but probably inevitable. Both nations felt its effects for years afterwards.