

EFFECTIVE AMATEUR: ALEXANDER DONIPHAN'S  
LEADERSHIP IN THE MEXICAN WAR 1846-1847

by

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Table of Contents

List of Maps	111
Acknowledgements	iv
Introduction	1
Chapter 1: Unit Organization and the Trek to Santa Fe	10
Chapter 2: The First March and First Battle	28
Chapter 3: El Paso and the March to Sacramento	38
Chapter 4: The Conquest of Chihuahua	53
Conclusion	68
Footnotes	78
Bibliography	83

List of Maps

- |   |    |
|---|----|
| 1. Doniphan's Route from Missouri to Chihuahua to New Orleans | 9  |
| 2. The Counties Doniphan's Men Came From                      | 22 |
| 3. Plan of the Battle of Brazito                              | 33 |
| 4. Plan of the Battle of Sacramento                           | 49 |

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## Introduction

The Mexican War has remained notable in American history for the amazing successes of U.S. soldiers against a supposedly superior enemy, but few of the campaigns are as remarkable as Colonel Alexander Doniphan's expedition into Chihuahua during the winter of 1846-1847. With approximately 1000 men, he invaded the major province of Northern Mexico, fought and won two battles against larger Mexican forces, and held the provincial capital until ordered to return. After the two battles he never faced any serious danger from enemy forces and had little difficulty holding the city of Chihuahua, thanks to the great desolate distances which separated him from organized Mexican opposition. None of the other campaigns -- Zachary Taylor's, Winfield Scott's, or John C. Fremont's -- accomplished as much with such a small force or with as little difficulty. Taylor's much stronger army fought and won several closely-contested battles, such as Monterey and Buena Vista, but wasted much time and effort dealing with local guerrillas. Scott also had a more numerous force and great difficulty with guerrillas. Finally, Fremont's activities in California may have resembled Doniphan's initially, in terms of both numbers and success, but Mexican counterattacks nearly threw the Americans out of the area, due to the latter's numerical inferiority and poor tactics. Only hard fighting regained it, something Doniphan did not suffer, because of the lack of any enemy forces after his victories.

Doniphan's campaign receives little coverage in most modern histories of the Mexican War. Although this independent expedition may not have had any significant effect on the war's outcome, it remains worthy of study for several reasons. Doniphan showed what a force of semi-trained volunteers could accomplish without the support of regular troops, if it had proper leadership and high morale. He helped to pacify a hostile area by means of his just treatment of Mexican citizens and his willingness to protect them from Indians.

This served as an example of the proper method for occupying enemy territory, as evidenced by American actions during the Spanish-American War in 1898. In addition, Doniphan's campaign is also one of the earliest examples in American military history of an army operating in hostile territory without a supply line and living off the country, for which General William T. Sherman later became famous in the Civil War. Finally, the campaign contributed to the myth of American invincibility among the Mexicans, thus weakening their will to resist. It reinforced the American legend of ability to overcome hardship, since the troops suffered from thirst, cold, and lack of supplies.

In addition to the above accomplishments, Doniphan's expedition also provided more practical results. It reopened trade between Missouri and Northern Mexico, which had suffered after war broke out and had partially caused the campaign. More importantly, it removed a threat to U.S. occupation and eventual annexation of New Mexico when Doniphan drove the only organized Mexican force near the area out of Chihuahua. This allowed the Americans to consolidate their hold on the territory and prevented the Mexicans from giving support to the January 1847 revolt in New Mexico.

Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of the campaign, however, was what Doniphan accomplished, with a force of ill-clad, poorly-fed, unpaid volunteers. The troops were never paid after leaving Fort Leavenworth to march west. Furthermore, they subsisted on reduced rations for most of their period of service, and could not replace worn-out uniforms. One would expect a force in this condition, lacking the training and the tradition of regulars, to refuse to obey orders, or to pillage the territory to alleviate its problems. The Missouri volunteers did neither. They continued to obey Doniphan throughout the campaign, and because of his orders generally refrained from molesting the inhabitants. Their continued loyalty and obedience made Doniphan's success possible.

The material poverty of the troops resulted from a conflict between Doni-

phan and the Army's finance policy. The U.S. government paid its troops in paper scrip normally redeemable anywhere. Mexican merchants had accepted it as payment prior to the war, especially around Santa Fe. However, they refused to honor scrip after the war began since it came from a hostile government and thus lacked guaranteed redemption. Acceptance of American scrip might also brand a Mexican as a traitor and make him liable to reprisals by his more patriotic neighbors. Since scrip was useless in Mexican territory, Doniphan insisted that his men be paid in specie, which the Mexicans would accept. No specie arrived for this purpose, so the troops remained unpaid, and therefore unable to buy food and clothing. Indirectly, the lack of pay also caused the shortage of rations, since Doniphan insisted the men pay for anything they took from the Mexicans. The government sent few supplies from the States and hunting generally was poor, leaving the local people as the major suppliers of food. The same reasons likewise resulted in the troops' lack of uniforms, thus requiring them to wear whatever they could get to replace those worn-out. The Missourians did not get any pay until they returned home, except for one company which drew its clothing allowance in scrip while in New Mexico.<sup>1</sup>

The success of Doniphan's campaign resulted in great part from his personal character and ability. His background had equipped him with the knowledge to understand and handle the independent Missourians. Born in Mason County, Kentucky on 9 July, 1808, he entered school at nearby Augusta when he was eight years old. Ten years later he graduated from Augusta College, which he had entered at 14, and immediately began studying law under a prominent local attorney, Martin Marshall. In 1829, after three years of study, he received permission to practice law in Ohio and Kentucky. In 1830 he moved to Lexington, Missouri, gained admission to the Missouri bar, and began his career as a prominent defense attorney.

Doniphan supported the U.S. government throughout his life and believed in obeying its dictates, even when these feelings ran counter to local sen-

timent during the Civil War. These beliefs came from the influence of two of his teachers, Marshall and Richard Keene, his childhood instructor. They gave him a strong literary background through study of the classics and great poets, which made him proficient in eloquence and oratory, and a sense of respect for the American system of government. Marshall's lessons in law and the U.S. Constitution especially shaped the latter aspect of Doniphan's character.

These sides of his character helped Doniphan to establish a reputation as a successful lawyer in a frontier area where a man's character determined his position among his neighbors. His eloquent speech and debating ability had a greater effect on his achievements, however. Partly natural, partly learned during his schooling, these traits gave him a power to sway juries which seemed nearly infallible.<sup>2</sup> Doniphan soon found himself involved in nearly every important case in the area, but always on the side of the defense. His sense of justice would not allow him to serve on the prosecution at any time in his life.

One early example of Doniphan's legal ability was his defense of Orrin Rockwell, a Mormon charged with conspiring to murder the Governor. Although the plot failed, public outrage coupled with strong anti-Mormon sentiments (due to Mormon religious beliefs) created a desire for revenge among the people against the defendant.

In this case, Doniphan proved that he could sway public opinion, if not completely, at least to a great extent, a talent which would prove valuable when he attempted to command a group of independent citizen soldiers who objected to formal control. In the trial, even his eloquent arguments failed to overcome the anti-Mormon sentiment and the jury found Rockwell guilty. However, his abilities as a defense lawyer may never have shone brighter, for he was able to win a sentence of only five minutes in jail for his client.<sup>3</sup> Since the 1830's was a period when people considered Mormons a threat to religion and American society, subject to attack at the slightest opportunity, this



result emphasizes Doniphan's talent for influencing people's views.

In 1833, Doniphan moved from Lexington to Liberty in Clay County, Missouri, which he regarded as home for the rest of his life. Here he continued his legal practice, and became a prominent, highly respected member of the community. His election to the Missouri General Assembly as Whig representative from Clay County in 1836 suggests the esteem in which his neighbors held him. This also helped his Mexican War career, since volunteers usually prefer to follow a person with a reputation for leadership. Doniphan held the same office twice more during his life, in 1840 and 1854. Although clearly a local leader, Doniphan evidently lacked a deep passion for politics, since he did not campaign for or occupy any other civil elective position. In fact, his friends may have forced him to run for office when he was elected.<sup>4</sup>

In 1837, Doniphan took a vacation from his legal practice long enough to marry Elizabeth Thornton, a local girl. They became devoted to each other and remained together at home except when business necessitated Doniphan's absence.<sup>5</sup> Their union produced two sons, Jordan born in 1838 and Alexander, Junior, born in 1840.

In military affairs Doniphan also gained useful experience prior to the Mexican War. In 1838, as a brigadier-general in the Missouri Militia, he participated in the campaign against the Mormons in his state. Although biographical sketches of Doniphan give no details, this undertaking probably gave him some experience in leading citizen-soldiers and taught him how to handle them to get maximum results. He also may have learned something about the considerations which go into conducting a military expedition, such as the problems of logistics and maneuvering troops in the field. These experiences would prove useful later in Mexico. Further military teachings possibly came from Albert Sydney Johnston, later a noted Confederate general, when he was stationed at nearby Fort Leavenworth, since records indicate that he socialized with Doniphan.<sup>6</sup>

While Doniphan evidently played no major role in the Mormon campaign, he

did dominate the court trial which was its aftermath. Having already refused to obey an order to shoot Mormon leaders after they surrendered, he defended them at the trial and prevented their execution. Again, these events show his strong moral beliefs and sense of justice.

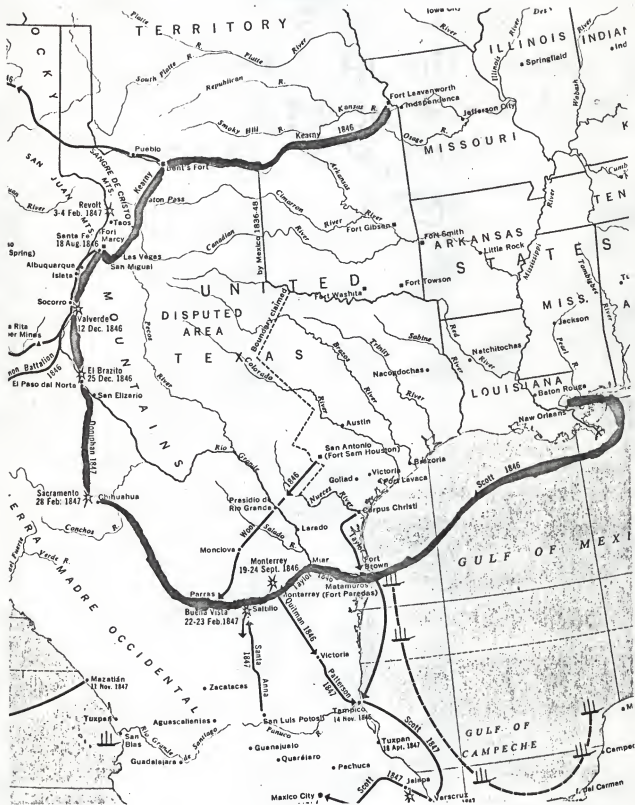
If Doniphan had the social prominence, influence and previous military experience necessary to lead volunteers, he also seemingly had satisfactory material to work with during his Mexican campaign. The men who followed him came primarily from Central and Western Missouri, the same areas which would later provide the Border Ruffians for the troubles in Kansas a decade later. For the most part they were young men, either single or recently married, and generally members of the most prominent families in the region.<sup>7</sup> The regiment also contained a few old frontiersmen who had lived in the wilderness all of their lives and had made marksmanship into a fine art. Of course, since the area was still a frontier region all of the volunteers had experience with rifles and rough living, if only from regular hunting trips. This helped them adjust to the practical hardships of campaigning. Many of them surely had some experience in the militia and may have participated in the Mormon campaign of 1838, thus giving them some idea of what to expect. Young, fearless, self-reliant, expert in marksmanship and inured to hardship, they were the epitome of the American volunteer soldier.

In addition to the above virtues, however, the Missourians had some vices. They had all of the independence ascribed to frontiersmen down to the last "E", as they proved during the Chihuahua campaign. While they might obey a local leader of standing and experience, any attempt by regular officers to command them usually resulted in grudging acquiescence or outright mutiny, depending on the order and the officer. They had no patience with army courtesy and drill. Attempts to subject them to military discipline failed completely because of this. They had enlisted to fight, not to salute officers or hold parades. Boisterous by nature, they did not react well to camp or garrison life. Long

periods of idleness usually resulted in heavy gambling and drinking, which culminated in brawls among themselves or with the local people. These in turn led to unnecessary casualties and poor public relations neither of which held much attraction for the officers. Finally, they had much of the arrogance of Americans in the age of Manifest Destiny. Believing themselves members of a superior society, they looked down upon non-Americans with contempt. This created some mutual hostility when international contacts occurred, although such feelings usually softened on both sides after a period of time, or so was the case with Doniphan's expedition.

Several factors motivated these men to enlist and leave their homes. The major one probably was a desire for adventure and a wish to prove themselves as soldiers. Being young, many of the volunteers possibly wished to abandon the ordinary life of a Missouri farm for a period of dangerous and exciting military life in the West. Intense patriotism caused others (probably including Doniphan) to join the colors. The "perfidious Mexicans" had slain American troops on American soil, an insult which the volunteers wished to avenge. These men believed they had a duty to "defend" their country, even on enemy soil. The acquisition of new territory provided further motivation. In particular, the Missourians saw advantages to conquering the New Mexico territory, the terminus of the Santa Fe trade. This commerce had a major impact on the state's economy and such conquest would eliminate the Mexican tariffs on it, thus increasing the profits for those people engaged in the business. Coupled with this was the concept of Manifest Destiny, although it probably had much less influence. Yet little doubt can exist that some of the volunteers received exposure to the idea that America eventually would expand to its natural boundaries (at the least to the Pacific Ocean) and that the time to further this dream had arrived. Social pressures and the esteem which went with enlisting may also have been an enticement. To join their friends or to prove their manhood would have seemed sufficient reason for volunteering to many young men.

In addition, anti-Mexican sentiment reigned strong in Missouri, left over from the Texas revolt in which many Missourians had participated.<sup>8</sup> Finally, a few men joined simply because they had nothing better to do and suffered from boredom.<sup>9</sup> In short, the common reasons for voluntary wartime service seem to have motivated the Missourians, except for the direct interest in New Mexico.



Doniphan's Route from Missouri to Chihuahua to New Orleans

(from: The American Heritage Pictorial Atlas of United States History,  
New York; American Heritage Publishing Co., Inc., 1966) 163.

Scale: 1 inch equals 200 miles

Chapter 1:  
Unit Organization and the Trek to Santa Fe

The New Mexico province played an important role in causing the war which gave Doniphan and his men their niche in history. In this area the first major contacts between the United States and an independent Mexico occurred, contacts which increased as the young United States pushed westward searching for more land and profit for its citizens. This expansion helped bring on the war, for Americans increasingly settled in the Texas-New Mexico region and came to dominate it, which the Mexicans resented. U.S. attempts to purchase much of the area west of Texas following Texas independence, finally pressured Mexican leadership to use force to stop this imperialism, thus the declaration of war.

U.S. interest in New Mexico had begun even before Mexico's independence, however. Zebulon Pike entered the region in 1807, marking the first direct contact with the culture which would become the United States' southern neighbor. Pike, an American army officer, had been exploring sections of land in the recent Louisiana Purchase area for the Federal government and had encamped on the upper Rio Grande in New Mexico. There the Spanish arrested him on charges of espionage, but allowed him to move about freely while in the provincial capital of Chihuahua. Eventually they released the exploring party in order to avert possible American retaliation. The whole affair thus became little more than a minor misunderstanding.

Pike's expedition, however, did play an important part in future United States-Mexican relations. Pike brought back much information on economic conditions in New Mexico, gathered from his observations while in Santa Fe and Chihuahua. He also provided geographical reports on much of the region north and east of these cities. Americans later used these reports to lay the groundwork for their most significant contact with Mexico -- the Santa Fe trade. Pike's accounts of the high prices paid for luxury items, particularly textiles, in New Mexico aroused the Americans' commercial spirit.<sup>10</sup> In 1810, a small party

of traders took a load of goods from Northern Louisiana into Mexico in an attempt to enter this potentially profitable business. They discovered, however, that the Spanish authorities objected to American business ventures. They confiscated the traders' merchandise and imprisoned the Americans for two years. Later parties unfailingly suffered similar treatment. For the time being trade between the United States and Santa Fe was impossible, until the Mexican political changes of 1821 occurred.

The Spanish opposed the Santa Fe trade primarily because of their standard colonial policy. Spain had always controlled trade in the Mexican provinces and had forbidden the importation of foreign goods, just as it did in all of its overseas possessions. The royal government prohibited commercial dealings outside the empire. Several provincial governors used this monopoly to augment their income by engaging in trade themselves or placing tax restrictions on it. American traffic would not only violate the official edicts, but also undercut these officials' profits. Coupled with the prohibition was the Spanish fear that contact with other countries would weaken their own control over the colonies. While this was true of all foreign nations, past history may have aggravated it in the United States' case. The American Revolution had created a spirit of defiance of foreign authority and personal independence among American citizens. No doubt the Spanish feared that Americans would spread their revolutionary ideals among the populace and encourage them to revolt. Contact with a nation which had established itself by driving out its mother country could cause a similar occurrence in Mexico, something which Spain naturally wished to avoid.

Finally, a traditional hatred of England and its colonies also may have influenced Spanish opposition to the trade. The two nations had opposed each other in the search for trade and colonies for three centuries, particularly in North America, with Spain generally coming off second best. The old rivalry, coupled with England's increase in power and Spain's decline, could have made

the Spanish hostile to trade with former English colonies. This would be true especially of one which already had taken a large portion of the North American continent which Spain had claimed. The Louisiana Territory, which the Spanish had controlled and had expected to receive back from France, provided fuel for these feelings. When France sold it to the United States instead, Spain considered the transaction illegal.

After Mexico gained its independence in 1821, however, the trade pattern reversed itself. When William Becknell led a small trading party into Santa Fe that year, he found the Mexicans eager to purchase his goods and to open regular trade with Missouri. News of this trading success stimulated the formation of larger expeditions and for the next several years increasing amounts of American goods rolled into Northern Mexico, while Mexican raw materials flowed back along the Santa Fe Trail to the States.

As this commerce continued, however, difficulties arose between the two nationalities. High tariffs and strict controls which Mexico imposed on trade, along with the corrupt officials who enforced them were the major causes. The tariffs, amounting to 25 percent of the value on some goods, were an important source of government income.<sup>11</sup> To these regular taxes local officials frequently added arbitrary charges for their own profit. When the Americans began using various questionable practices to reduce or evade these charges, the Mexicans countered with requirements for duplicate cargo manifests in Spanish and detailed identity cards, as well as with other restrictions. Harassment and occasional imprisonment of U.S. traders also increased American resentment, as did a brief Mexican embargo in 1843. By 1846, the Americans involved had become vocal in their desire either to annex New Mexico or to force the Mexican government to change its policies, and thus remove these barriers to their prosperity. Therefore they supported a war with Mexico.

Aside from the commercial difficulties in New Mexico, another important irritant between the two countries lay in the Texas question. Mexico's offer



of land to American settlers had led to an influx into this province, which continued after Mexico forgade further immigration. The resulting cultural clash, as well as opposition to certain policies of the Mexican government, caused the Texans to revolt in 1836. Although they successfully drove out the Mexican army and set up an independent republic, Mexico refused to recognize it and fought a "cold war" with Texas for the next ten years to reassert its authority. Since American sympathy and support had lain with the Texans, Mexico was bitter toward the United States for its interference in internal affairs. When Texas requested annexation to the U.S. and the government expressed favorable interest in it, the Mexicans saw this as a blatant attempt to steal territory which was rightfully theirs. When Texas entered the Union, the question of whether the Rio Grande or the Nueces River farther north was its correct boundary exacerbated this feeling and supplied the direct cause for the war, since the first bloodshed took place between these rivers. In one sense this problem spilled over into New Mexico, for Americans also settled there, although not in the large numbers that moved to Texas. Yet they still represented a threat to Mexican control, especially after U.S. interest in that region became manifest. Fearing another possible revolution, Mexico tightened its anti-American restrictions in this area, which caused further difficulties for American traders and a greater desire on their part for New Mexico's annexation.

The American appetite for territory showed itself in other areas as well. Aside from the desire for the New Mexico region, the United States had also shown interest in acquiring the Mexican province of California. This area represented the natural western boundary of the country to many Americans who accepted the precepts of Manifest Destiny. Also, merchant ships which had traded there brought back glowing reports of its wealth and beauty, which incited American greed and pioneering instincts. The fact that Mexico had little control over California further encouraged acquisition, for some residents indicated a desire for rule by another power and several European nations showed interest

in annexing it. If the United States did not get control of California soon, another country probably would and thus seal off the U.S. from the Pacific. This would also deprive it of useful port sites for the lucrative Oriental trade which the U.S. had established. Such ports, coupled with adequate transcontinental communications, eventually would eliminate the expensive sailings from Eastern seaports, since goods could enter and leave the country directly on the West Coast. Not only would this be more profitable, but it would give the United States an advantage over European nations engaged in the same business.

This desire for California further encouraged the takeover of New Mexico. The southwestern territory would provide an important connecting link between the rest of the United States and the Pacific Coast. It would establish a stronger bond between them than the narrower tie between Utah and the Canadian border would allow, and thus make communication easier. In Mexican hands, the province would remain a salient thrust into American territory, a constant threat to security, since the Mexicans could use it as a base from which to retake either California or Texas. Furthermore, New Mexico could provide an important route for transcontinental communication, especially from the Southern states. Therefore, its acquisition seemed necessary as a steppingstone to California.

All of these territorial desires reflected the American concepts of Manifest Destiny, which proposed that God intended the United States to stretch from the Atlantic to the Pacific Oceans. Although the people disagreed on exactly how much territory this would cover, they frequently interpreted it to mean that the U.S. would eventually govern all of North America, from the North Pole to the Panamanian isthmus. However, acquisition of lands of New Mexico and California was of first importance, since they seemed most readily available and since they would enable the Americans to reach the Pacific Ocean, thus accruing all of the previously-mentioned benefits. Manifest Destiny also included the belief that American culture and industry were superior to anyone else's

and thus that the U.S. had an obligation to convert the rest of the world to its lifestyle.<sup>12</sup> Immediate neighbors became the first targets for this crusade, since the Americans could reach them most easily, and their weaknesses were most evident.

The annexation of Texas and attempts to acquire New Mexico and California were major causes of the Mexican War. President James K. Polk had campaigned on a platform to achieve these goals in 1844, and proved to be one of the few presidents able to carry out his campaign promises. He pushed an annexation bill through Congress and successfully brought Texas into the Union in 1845. The Mexicans denounced this as an unwarranted act of aggression and declared that they would continue to try to recover their wayward province by force.<sup>13</sup> They also continued to deny Texan claims to the area between the Nueces River and the Rio Grande. Polk responded by sending 3000 soldiers under General Zachary Taylor into the disputed region to protect Texas from Mexican incursions and to show the government's support for its claims.<sup>14</sup>

At the same time Polk tried to resolve the problem peacefully. Learning that the Mexican government would negotiate if it did not exhibit weakness in doing so, he sent John Slidell to Mexico for the purpose. Slidell received authorization to purchase the disputed Texas area, New Mexico and California for a maximum of \$30 million and the assumption of U.S. citizens' claims against Mexico. This would not only acquire all desired territory, but also would solve the problem of trade difficulties with New Mexico by eliminating the Santa Fe tariffs placed on U.S. goods.

Unfortunately, Slidell's mission failed. Popular sentiment in Mexico opposed negotiation and favored war with the gringos, and the central government felt too weak to oppose it. The officials first asked Slidell to return at a later date. Then they claimed they had no authority to discuss any issue except the Texas question. While Slidell waited to open negotiations, a revolution set up a new government, which seemed willing to yield claims to Texas beyond

the Nueces River, but would discuss no other topics. Slidell returned to the U.S. at the same time an army moved north to deal with Taylor's "invasion" of the disputed region.

Although New Mexico was only one item on Slidell's agenda, its' acquisition represented a major goal. Annexation of the region would help satisfy expansionist desires. More importantly, it would bring that economically profitable territory under U.S. control, thus eliminating the international trade barriers which currently obstructed the Santa Fe caravans. Mexican refusal to discuss the issue showed that they recognized New Mexico's value and desired to retain possession of it. Even if Mexico recognized Texas independence and sold California, however, U.S. control of New Mexico remained necessary, for the strategic and economic reasons of contiguity to other possessions. Therefore the negotiations took an "all or nothing" slant, which probably further hindered Slidell's success, since in life price as the only open issue.

Hostilities began in April, 1846, shortly after the Mexican army arrived at the Rio Grande. On the 24th, a body of troops crossed the river and ambushed an American patrol, killing or capturing nearly everyone. Several days later the Mexicans besieged a small fort on the riverbank and blocked Taylor's path when he marched to relieve it. Taylor attacked and drove them off the field in a tactical victory, but the next day the Mexicans again blocked his advance. In the ensuing battle, the Americans' spirit proved superior, and their furious charges drove the enemy across the Rio Grande in panic. When word of these battles reached Washington, the government declared war and began preparation to take by force what it could not gain by purchase.

The decision to invade Chihuahua, an area which seemingly held little importance for U.S. interests, originated in Washington as part of the overall American war strategy. President Polk, while meeting with Winfield Scott, General in Chief of the American army, and Secretary of War William Marcy on April 14th, decided to send four separate columns of troops into Mexican ter-

ritory. Taylor's army would invade the Northern provinces immediately. The main army under Scott himself would cross the Rio Grande and occupy the Mexican interior, while another force of 2000 men would capture Santa Fe and a fourth army of 4000 troops would advance on Chihuahua.

Why did the American strategists include Chihuahua as a target? It appeared to be far removed from the main areas of U.S. interest, Texas and New Mexico. Also, it rested in a seemingly desolate area of no apparent military value. No munitions industries operated in the city, and it did not occupy an important spot on a major road. Yet the number of troops assigned to its capture indicated that Polk and his advisors considered it important.

The answers lay in Chihuahua's location and its relationship to American trade. As the only large city in Northern Mexico, its capture would be a moral victory which would awe the surrounding natives as well as provide a center from which to conduct local operations. More importantly, it could act as a base for an American force which would march due west and seize Guaymas on the Gulf of California coast, thus severing all of Northern Mexico from the rest of the country. This not only would prevent the Northern and Southern regions from providing support for each other, but also would permit the United States to annex all of Northern Mexico if it chose to do so. While Polk may not have considered this latter point when he formulated the war strategy, American military successes encouraged widespread annexation as a possible goal. Doniphan's men certainly expected it. Several of the diaries written by men in his regiment contain remarks on how the Americans would improve the territory after the war. However, control of New Mexico necessitated the conquest of Chihuahua, an arid stock-raising province, but with enough fertile soil to produce a surplus of crops.

Other reasons for a Chihuahua expedition, related to its location and importance, also became evident. Army occupation of Chihuahua would eliminate Mexican forces in that region. Such troops represented a potential danger to

either Taylor's army or the California invasion force, since they were in an ideal position to strike the flank of either one. Also, if not defeated they might reinforce the main Mexican army or the Santa Fe garrison and thus make overcoming them more difficult. The Americans doubtless overestimated the number and value of the Chihuahua forces in making these conclusions, since they had only limited intelligence of questionable accuracy from U.S. citizens in the region, but this consideration did help encourage the expedition.

The United States also received encouragement for an invasion from the reports of local attitudes provided by the above-mentioned sources. Traders living in Chihuahua or returning from there stated that the region's inhabitants showed much sympathy for the American cause and a dislike for their own government. They indicated that if U.S. troops entered the province, the natives would flock to their support and the local government would fall without difficulty. They also reported a desire among the people for annexation to the United States. Although a strong likelihood existed that the merchants exaggerated the favorable opinions for their own interests, since American occupation would both protect them and reopen their markets, the possibility of strong local support justified an invasion attempt.

Diplomatic reasons for Chihuahua's capture also may have existed. Although no concrete evidence concerning it has appeared, the possibility exists that the American government wanted the province to use as a bargaining position for peace negotiations. It could return Chihuahua in exchange for other territory (perhaps part of California or New Mexico) which it might have failed to conquer, or for some other considerations. This practice had been common in the 18th century, and while the United States had not used such ploys, no reason exists to assume that the government did not consider it.

Perhaps the most important reason for Chihuahua's capture, however, was its apparent role in the economy of both countries. For Mexico it once had been a major mining center, and according to reports, still produced a signi-

ficant amount of valuable minerals. Due to this and its importance as the only major city, it served as the economic center for the entire region, and thus its conquest would disrupt the local Mexican economy. Also, the Americans saw Chihuahua as the terminus of the Santa Fe trade. Because of its reported wealth and economic importance, many merchants traded there instead of at Santa Fe. Until the U.S. captured it, they could not conduct their business and therefore they undoubtedly put pressure on the government to take it as soon as possible. Considering the Santa Fe trade's importance and Chihuahua's role in it, the city's capture obviously appeared desirable, although Doniphan's invasion proved that the reports had exaggerated its wealth.

To undertake the Santa Fe/Chihuahua campaign, the U.S. government called for volunteers from the various states and instructed General Stephen W. Kearny, whom it had appointed to command the column aimed at Santa Fe, to integrate those from Missouri into his force. Since the war was popular in Missouri, Kearny easily gained his quota of men. William Kennerly, who joined the force with a volunteer artillery battery from St. Louis, noted that:

Feelings against the Mexicans for the terrible massacre of the Alamo were still high in Missouri, for many of these settlers of Texas had gone there from our state. Therefore, when war was declared there was no difficulty in raising several companies of militia to take arms against Mexico.<sup>15</sup>

A fellow artilleryman, Frank Edwards, also remarked on the enthusiasm for the war: "the young men of all classes were eager to go -- indeed, it became a question of who must be left".<sup>16</sup> Eventually Kearny gathered about 1400 volunteers, who made up a mounted regiment of eight companies, two artillery batteries, and two small infantry companies. Organized by counties of origin, these units began arriving at Fort Leavenworth in early June, where officials mustered them into federal service.

One puzzling question connected with the volunteers concerns how much equipment they received from the government and how much (weapons, for instance) they supplied themselves. Most accounts mention the Missourians as carrying

rifles during the campaign and provide other evidence, such as accuracy, to support the idea that they actually used rifled muskets. Since the U.S. Army still used smoothbore muskets for the most part and had few rifles available, the volunteers probably supplied their own. Jefferson Davis, a U.S. Representative from Mississippi, a strong Polk supporter and Taylor's son-in-law, did get government rifles for the regiment he raised and commanded, but neither Kearny nor Doniphan had his political power. Davis himself only got the rifles with great difficulty, so the possibility of someone with weaker political connections getting them seems remote.

The Missouriians did bring most of their own equipment. The artillerymen from St. Louis certainly supplied most of their own needs except for arms.<sup>17</sup> Members of the expedition also used their own horses and clothing as Polk had instructed when he called for volunteers, and received a pay allowance at least for the latter.<sup>18</sup> Beyond this, however, no contemporary author commented. A few later historians made the unsupported assertion the the Missouriians received most of their equipment, including all armament, at Fort Leavenworth.<sup>19</sup> Yet the diarists among the volunteers fail to mention drawing any firearms. On the other hand according to them, sabers, mess kits and similar uncommon military items came from government stocks. Therefore the primary evidence would indicate that the Missouriians supplied their own horses, clothing and firearms, while the government equipped them with the other necessities.

As the companies arrived at Fort Leavenworth, they received letter designations and became part of the regimental structure. When complete, the units that would follow Doniphan into Mexico included nine companies of mounted riflemen and an artillery battery. In addition, the Missouriians also produced two infantry companies and another battery. Eight of the horse companies made up a regiment, called the First Regiment, Missouri Mounted Volunteers: Company A from Jackson County under Captain David Waldo (116 men); Company B from Lafayette County under Captain William Walton (112 men); Company C from Clay County



under Captain O.P. Moss (119 men); Company D from Saline County under Captain John Reid (95 men); Company E from Franklin County under Captain John Stephenson (113 men); Company F from Cole County under Captain M.M. Parsons (90 men); Company G from Howard County under Captain Horatio Hughes (108 men); and Company H from Callaway County under Captain Charles Rodgers (110 men). The citizens of St. Louis provided the ninth company, known as the Laclede Rangers led by Captain Thomas Hudson (104 men). They also contributed Battery A and Battery B of the Missouri Light Artillery Battalion under Captain R.H. Weightman (116 men) and Captain Holdeman Fisher (125 men) respectively. The two companies of infantry, grouped under the heading of Battalion Infantry, were: Captain William Anzney's Company A from Cole County (71 men) and Captain W.S. Murphy's Company B from Platte County (78 men).<sup>20</sup> The last three units did not participate in the Chihuahua invasion. The total shows that Missouri contributed 1388 men plus staff officers and company commanders to the initial invasion force.

While the volunteers elected company officers before leaving their homes, (American militia units commonly elected their officers rather than accept ones trained and appointed by the government), regimental elections waited until most of them had arrived at Fort Leavenworth. Two men campaigned for regimental colonel, Doniphan and John W. Price of Howard County. Price, who had served unspectacularly in the Seminole War, lost overwhelmingly to Doniphan. Some evidence exists that Doniphan had begun campaigning before reaching Leavenworth as other volunteers passed through Clay County, but his fame as a lawyer and oratorical skill probably had greater influence on the outcome. The result also indicates that the Missourians may have preferred their leaders not to have had any regular army experience. William Gilpin and C.F. Ruff competed for the lieutenant-colonelcy, which Ruff won by a mere two votes. Gilpin then defeated several other candidates for the office of major.<sup>21</sup> Both men had attended West Point and Ruff had served in the dragoons, but neither currently had any ties with the regular army. In fact, Gilpin turned down a lieutenantcy



The Counties Doniphan's Men Came From

(specific counties are blacked in)

(from: Duane Meyer, The Heritage of Missouri -- A History, St. Louis; State Publishing Co., Inc., 1963) 693.

in the regulars in order to run for major.<sup>22</sup>

The volunteers spent most of June learning the basics of military life. Twice daily, in the morning and afternoon, they underwent rigorous drilling in cavalry and infantry maneuvers. Since most of them could already ride and shoot effectively, little practice in these arts proved necessary. However, they did require some training in using their sabers, which resembled Roman short swords rather than long, slightly curved weapons. The soldiers also collected locally available equipment for the expedition, such as wagons and horses, and awaited the arrival of other vital items, such as cannon, from the East.<sup>25</sup> Meanwhile General Kearny sent detachments of dragoons along the Santa Fe Trail to inform traders of the war and halt their caravans until after his passage. While most of the merchants obeyed these instructions, at least one train, which carried rifles and ammunition, never received the message. The Mexicans arrested the teamsters and confiscated the weapons near Chihuahua after Kearny captured Santa Fe.

By late June sufficient supplies had been collected and the volunteers trained enough to make passable soldiers for "The Army of the West", as Kearny's force was designated, to begin its invasion. Further delay would only give the Mexicans more time to organize opposition and make travel across the plains more difficult, since it would take place at the height of summer when the heat was most intense. To conserve water and forage along the trail, Kearny divided his command into sections, with a day or two between the departure of each one. Companies A and D left on the 22nd, followed by LtC. Ruff with B, C, F and G on the 24th. Doniphan marched out with E, H and the infantry on the 25th. Finally, Kearny led the remaining unit out of Leavenworth on June 30th. The supply train with a guard of volunteers had gone in advance of the first companies to have fresh rations waiting along the road. All sections had orders to rendezvous at Bent's Fort on the Arkansas River to rest and consolidate for the final advance into Mexican territory.

No events of great importance occurred during this march, yet it provided valuable experience for the volunteers. During the 900-mile trip to Santa Fe through the relatively treeless, rolling grassland, they learned to work together in a military fashion and became toughened by the trail's hardships. They learned to withstand excessive heat, sudden storms, hunger and thirst. The latter two proved especially troublesome, despite, or perhaps because of, Kearny's sending the supply train in advance of the troops. Frequently part of the column feasted while those who had not reached supply points starved. However, these difficulties prepared the men for similar inconveniences which they would encounter in Mexico. They also learned to discern the proper route of march (twice units got lost and headed for Oregon, but scouts intercepted and brought them back) and to haul wagons over difficult terrain.<sup>24</sup> In this capacity they cut passages down stream banks, built bridges, pushed stuck wagons out of soft ground and repaired them when they broke down.<sup>25</sup> This hard work proved invaluable when they had to perform similar tasks in Mexico. Finally, the journey acquainted the volunteers with death, as some weaker soldiers fell ill or drowned while crossing rivers. This lessened the chance of a decline in morale when battle losses occurred in the future, something which occasionally happened with raw troops.

On July 29th, the Army began arriving at Bent's Fort. There the troops rested and refurbished their equipment for three days, while Kearny and his officers gathered intelligence on conditions in New Mexico and planned their future operations. Spies reported that the common people favored the Americans, but that Governor Manuel Armijo had determined to resist and was gathering an army. Kearny sent them back into the region to discourage opposition by proclaiming that the Americans would respect Mexican rights. On August 2nd the Army followed and invaded Mexican territory, at the tiny village of Lower Moro.

The capture of New Mexico became an unqualified American success. Despite reports of forces gathering against them, the troops met no organized resistance.

As they occupied each village, Kearny summoned the inhabitants, promised to respect their rights and protect them from the Indians, and then had the local officials swear allegiance to the United States. Only once did battle seem imminent, when Kearny learned that from 2000 to 3000 Mexicans had fortified Apache Pass (now Raton Pass), through which he would have to march to reach Santa Fe. However, instead of defending this formidable position, Governor Armijo and the regulars fled toward Chihuahua, while the rest of the force simply melted away. On August 18th the Americans entered Santa Fe and declared New Mexico officially conquered.

Until that point in time, Doniphan and his men had played only a minor role in operations which easily captured one of the major objectives of American expansionism, and one for which the Missourians had a special interest. Now their status began to change. First, Kearny ordered Doniphan to codify the local laws and use them as a basis for drawing up a new territorial constitution, tasks which Doniphan and some assistants performed quickly. He also informed the colonel that the Missourians would occupy New Mexico while he led the rest of the army to conquer California. When reinforcements then enroute from Missouri arrived, Doniphan's men were to proceed south to assist General John Wool, the commander of the force aimed at Chihuahua, in capturing that city.

The reason for sending the Missourians to Chihuahua remains unclear. Kearny does not seem to have received orders to detach troops to Wool's assistance, yet he promised to do so shortly after capturing Santa Fe.<sup>26</sup> Nor does any account state that Wool requested such aid, although he did have difficulty gathering and organizing his troops. Bad roads which delayed troop arrivals and the indiscipline of the volunteers caused these problems. Lacking other evidence, the most reasonable explanation seems to be that Kearny learned of Wool's trouble and, realizing that he had more men than he needed to garrison New Mexico, decided to send the excess to augment Wool's manpower. The ease with which New Mexico fell probably supported this belief, since Kearny could assume that

the inhabitants would give the occupying forces little trouble, and therefore he would require fewer troops for that purpose. Since he expected sea-borne reinforcements in California and had to leave a garrison in New Mexico anyway, he could not take them west with him. To do so would increase the demands on his supplies, which might cause severe hardship during the march, and would leave New Mexico defenseless against Indians or an enemy counterinvasion. Also, Doniphan's garrison would protect his rear from attacks by Mexican forces from Chihuahua. In addition, the volunteers' desire to fight Mexicans probably had become evident to him. Left indefinitely in Santa Fe this spirit might vent itself on the local citizenry and ruin U.S.-Mexican relations, which in turn could lead to a revolt and American loss of the territory. Therefore sending the volunteers to a combat zone would satisfy everyone.

Kearny started for California on September 25th, leaving Doniphan in charge of New Mexico until Colonel Sterling Price and the replacements arrived. Further orders in October delayed Doniphan's departure, however, for Kearny sent back instructions to pacify the Navajos before he joined Wool. This tribe continually terrorized Mexican settlements and had failed to meet with Kearny before he left Santa Fe, although chiefs from the Utes and Apaches had done so and made peace. Finding the Navajos recalcitrant and raids continuing, Kearny decided that Doniphan must pacify them, fulfilling his promise to protect the local citizens. Kearny hoped to avoid encumbering U.S. strength in an Indian campaign, leaving the region open to a counterstrike from Mexico.

While the Missourians had had some activity rounding up Indians for the earlier conference, this represented their first independent campaign, so Doniphan tried to plan it as effectively as possible. He divided his regiment into three columns and sent them into Navajo country from different directions in late October. Major Gilpin took two companies west and then south, while Colonel Jackson (who had replaced Ruff when the latter received a regular army commission) led three companies into the southernmost Navajo grounds and Doniphan

marched the remaining three units into the heart of Indian country. To increase their speed the columns used mules instead of wagons to haul their few supplies. With no tents, the clothing they wore and little food, the volunteers suffered greatly from the cold of early winter, yet still managed to penetrate most of the Navajo lands. The Indians presented no resistance and obeyed the soldiers' orders to gather at Ojo Oso (Bear Spring) to talk peace. Here, on November 22nd, three/fourths of the tribe met with Doniphan, and fourteen chiefs signed a treaty with the American government.<sup>27</sup> Although this did not stop all of their depredations, it gave the illusion of doing so, and thus satisfied Kearny's requirements. Doniphan withdrew from the Navajo country and reunited his force at Valverde, south of Santa Fe, for the march to Chihuahua. His men had traveled 300 miles through mountainous terrain to accomplish their first mission.

Although minor in itself the Navajo campaign further prepared Doniphan's men for their major task. The severe cold and short rations helped accustom them to operating under adverse conditions, while further increasing their stamina and toughness. More importantly, it gave some indication of Doniphan's military ability. His use of scattered columns to comb the Navajo region proved highly successful if the number of Indians at the conference is accurate. This technique would later become standard military practice in dealing with Plains Indians, as the Little Big Horn and Crook's Apache campaigns show. Doniphan had sound tactical knowledge which would prove useful against the Mexicans. If he did not stop the Navajo raids, he at least reduced their frequency for a while, and thereby strengthened America's hold on the region. Even if the Missourians had yet to fire a hostile shot, they proved adept at accomplishing their objectives. So far they had expended their entire effort to capture and hold the seemingly valuable New Mexican region. Having done this easily, they were willing to continue on to Chihuahua, in hopes of capturing all of Northern Mexico and inflicting revenge on the enemy for insults Americans had suffered.

Chapter 2:  
The First March and First Battle

The troops that gathered at Valverde in early December were no longer the same fervent volunteers who had left Missouri. Disease had already several, while Indians had slain a few of the pickets. The march to Santa Fe and the subsequent Navajo expedition had inured the survivors to the rigors of campaigning. In addition, Doniphan had received reinforcements from Santa Fe in the form of 95 men under Captain Hudson. Colonel Price, who had arrived and was in command of Santa Fe, sent this force to escort Lieutenant Colonel David Mitchell to Chihuahua to open communication with General Wool, whom Price believed was already in that city. Upon discovering that Doniphan had already begun his advance, this unit, which styled itself the "Chihuahua Rangers", joined him and placed itself under his command.

Already the entire regiment had begun to suffer from deprivations. Although the troops had been under arms six months, they had received no pay, although a government paymaster had arrived. Doniphan took the blame for this. The paymaster had come equipped only with government drafts, which most Mexicans refused to accept in exchange for goods, for fear that Mexican forces would punish them if they reconquered the area. Therefore, Doniphan refused to allow his men to be paid in what he called "worthless paper", but insisted on waiting until a supply of solid coin arrived.<sup>28</sup> Since Missouri was a state where specie dominated the economy, Doniphan may also have had an innate distrust of scrip. As a result, the troops bartered for their needs, even to the extent of trading buttons for parched corn, or taking supplies by force.<sup>29</sup> A small minority of the men had received a long-delayed clothing allowance in November, the first pay any of the expedition had received.

The troops also suffered from a dearth of military supplies. Besides the food shortage, which they alleviated by forage and barter, the Missourians needed tents and new uniforms, items which the government had failed to supply



and which the soldiers could not purchase from the local settlers. The cold of coming winter underlined these particular deficiencies, as snowfalls became more frequent and ice appeared in the Rio Grande.<sup>30</sup> Eventually the men evidently acquired tents, since contemporary sources mention them prior to Sacramento, and they supplemented their uniforms with bartered Mexican clothing. For the present, however, they merely overcame the cold as best they could. This gave the entire force a ragged, unmilitary appearance which the volunteers' natural disorder and indiscipline further emphasized.

Under these conditions, far from home in a conquered country, one might have expected these citizen-soldiers to refuse to undertake further campaigning. Even regular troops seldom conducted large operations in the winter, although they had begun to do so with greater frequency. However, Doniphan's men never seem to have objected to continued action. Their hardiness as frontiersmen, support of the war and eagerness to come to grips with the Mexicans sustained them through difficulties which would have discouraged men with less enthusiasm for their cause. The fact that they intended to march south to warmer weather also may have contributed to their enthusiasm for advancing. As a result, the Missourians remained an effective combat force, poised and ready to spring at the Mexicans.

Doniphan himself arrived at the Valverde encampment on December 12th, and immediately set into motion the advance on Chihuahua. The first obstacle was the dreaded 90 mile Jornada del Muerto or "Journey of Death" between Valverde and the village of Dona Anna.<sup>31</sup> Below Valverde the Rio Grande curved west and made a large loop before turning back southeast toward El Paso. The Jornada cut across the base of this loop instead of following the river, thus shortening the time and distance to Doña Anna. However, it had a reputation as a nearly waterless wasteland which would kill an unprepared party.

Doniphan divided his force into three detachments and sent them along the trail two days apart. First, this allowed stragglers time to rejoin the regiment

at Valverde. More importantly, it conserved the sparse resources along the Jornada, by not overusing the few waterholes and allowing them time to refill between parties. This, in turn would increase the entire regiment's chances of making the trip with minimum hardship. The first detachment of 300 men under Major Gilpin left on the 14th, followed by Colonel Jackson and 200 men on the 16th. Doniphan and the remaining troops, including Captain Hudson's force which had arrived the day before, departed on the 18th.<sup>32</sup>

At some point during these movements a large body of traders also advanced with the troops. They had been encamped at Valverde since Governor Angel Trias of Chihuahua had threatened to confiscate the goods and imprison any American traders who failed to hire Mexican workers or pay the heavy taxes he had established.<sup>33</sup> Mexican officials at El Paso had arrested a deputation of five traders who went to negotiate, and sent them to Chihuahua for imprisonment. As a result, the remainder waited to move with Doniphan's advance so that they could have his protection against similar incidents.

The trip through the Jornada proved less fearsome than its reputation. The first detachment found only one waterhole a few miles from the trail at the end of the first day's march, but most of the troops carried enough water with them to make the journey safely. Those who suffered most were the men who had filled their canteens with whiskey instead of water. After emptying these the first day, they marched under the miseries of drunkenness and alcohol-induced thirst.<sup>34</sup> A freak rainstorm, which rarely occurred during that season, saved another section which had used up its water.<sup>35</sup> The men suffered more from cold and continual marching than from thirst. The elevation ( $1\frac{1}{2}$  miles above sea level) and the winter weather produced temperatures close to  $0^{\circ}$  Fahrenheit. The only available plants were grama grass and soap plant, neither of which made a good fire. Without tents or fires the troops felt the cold keenly, but had no choice except to continue. They marched continually until well after dark, rested a few hours and then marched on at sunrise. They trav-

eled thus for three days until they reached Doña Anna, averaging 30 miles a day. That the Missourians made it without loss is a tribute to their hardihood; and except for the cold they made no complaint.

Doniphan reunited his command at Doña Anna and allowed it to rest while he replenished his supplies and gathered intelligence about the enemy. The local inhabitants proved quite friendly, supplying the Americans with food, drink and the information that more than 700 Mexicans with artillery awaited him further down the river.<sup>36</sup>

Governor Trias had not been idle while Doniphan was winding up his Navajo campaign and preparing to advance. Shortly after the war began, when Chihuahua became obvious as a possible military target, he asked the national government for assistance.<sup>37</sup> In response he received 1000 muskets and the services of General Jose Heredia to organize the defenses. Lacking more substantial military equipment, Trias appealed to the citizens and discovered a strong local spirit of resistance. The people contributed generously to a loan to finance military operations, helped establish a foundry for casting cannon and brought in weapons for the troops, which the captured American wagons filled with muskets supplemented. Volunteers joined the newly-formed militia units, where they received donated clothing and learned rudimentary drill. With the support of neighboring states, by December Trias managed to raise 4000 men and several cannons, plus some unorganized groups of rancheros.<sup>38</sup> He then sent 1500 men to El Paso to protect it from the now threatening gringos.

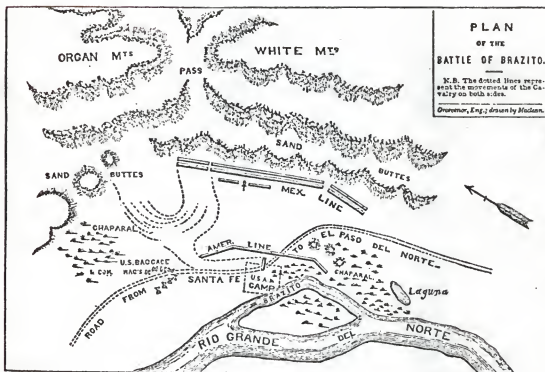
El Paso's attitude, however, was quite different from that of Chihuahua. American trade had created strong sentiment for annexation there which made determined resistance difficult. American partisans accused the Mexican government of planning to sacrifice the city by withdrawing the troops and thus let the gringos take revenge for any prior hostility. This charge had received substantial support in September when Trias instructed the local government to abandon the city and fight a guerrilla campaign. The people disobeyed the

order, but it caused a further decline in morale. When an expedition marched against Doniphan from El Paso in October, the officers quietly encouraged insubordination among the men, which caused it to turn back after reaching <sup>Anna</sup> Dona Anna. Upon its return no one showed any inclination to punish this mutiny.<sup>39</sup>

By the time Doniphan reached <sup>Donna</sup> Dona Anna, the local Mexican forces -- approximately 2000 men and four guns -- had divided into two schools of thought concerning further resistance.<sup>40</sup> Some proposed not to fight hard when the Americans arrived, while others preferred not to fight at all. The latter camp contained most of the local garrisons and National Guards (militia), who made up a large part of the army. It also included the commanding officer, Colonel Gauno Culty.<sup>41</sup> Just as he was preparing to advance he became ill with what his personal surgeon diagnosed as brain fever. Following the latter's advice, Culty departed immediately for Chihuahua, with his surgeon in attendance. Considering his attitude toward the Americans, the possibility that his illness was either faked or less serious than diagnosed seems likely. By falling ill he could avoid the conflict between government orders and his own inclination in dealing with the advancing Missouriians. Following his departure Lieutenant Colonel Luis Vidal took command. His solution to the difficulty was to advance three miles from El Paso, build a fort and then send a detachment forward under his second in command, Lieutenant Colonel Antonio Ponce de Leon, to attack Doniphan.

Meanwhile the rested Missouriians left <sup>Donna</sup> Dona Anna on the 23rd of December and advanced toward El Paso. They encountered several Mexican scouts, but no organized resistance. Nevertheless the frontiersmen became more nervous as they advanced deeper into hostile country. Night guards fired at every movement in the shadows, disturbing the men's sleep. Yet the volunteers still continued to hope for a battle with the Mexicans soon, confident of their ability to defeat them.

On Christmas Day, 1846, after a short holiday celebration in the morning, Doniphan's men marched about 15 miles and then began to set up camp at Brazito.



Plan of the Battle of Brazito

(from: John Hughes, Doniphan's Expedition, Chicago; Rio Grande Press, 1962 1848 ) 263.

This was a point where the Rio Grande split for a short distance, forming a small island. Since one of the river's branches was smaller than the other, the Mexicans had given the place the name Brazito, or "little arm". Some of the Missourians had a small brush with a few Mexicans, drove them off and captured a horse. Unable to decide who among them should claim it, they turned the question over to their officers, who decided to play cards for it, each player representing one of the soldiers involved. So while the rest of the men turned the horses loose or scattered in search of wood and water, Doniphan and several officers began playing three trick loo for the horse.<sup>42</sup>

In the midst of this activity some of the men observed a large dust cloud approaching the camp, and sentries reported to Doniphan that they had spotted a large force of Mexicans approaching. He observed the cloud's distance and insisted on finishing the hand, after which he ordered everyone to their posts. Lacking time to collect the horses, the Missourians grabbed their weapons and formed a line on foot facing the enemy, who also deployed for battle.

As the Americans finished falling in, a soldier rode out of the Mexican lines carrying a black flag. Doniphan sent an interpreter forward to meet him, which resulted in the following exchange:

Mexican: "The Mexican general summons your commander to appear before him."  
 American: "If your general desires peace let him come here."  
 Mexican: "Then we shall break your ranks and take him there."  
 American: "Come then and take him."  
 Mexican: "Curses be upon you. Prepare for a charge. We neither ask nor give quarter."<sup>43</sup>

With which the trooper wheeled his horse and galloped back to the Mexican lines.

The Missourians had formed a line parallel to the enemy with the wings bent back toward the river to prevent them from turning their flanks and reaching the camp. The traders' wagons which had already arrived formed a circle just behind their left wing in case a breakthrough should occur.<sup>44</sup>

The Mexicans drew up with most of their cavalry, consisting of Vera Cruz lancers and some Chihuahua and Zacatecas dragoons, on the right flank, the state

and local militia covering the center and left, and the remainder of the dragoons on the far left flank. The howitzer remained with the infantry in the center.

When the messenger returned, Ponce's entire force advanced against the Americans, firing ragged volleys and cheering wildly. In contrast, Doniphan ordered his men to lie down and withhold their fire until the enemy came within easy range. This boosted the Mexican morale, for they believed the volunteers who lay down had been killed by their volleys, which therefore had done terrible execution. Unfortunately, they actually had fired so high that even the Missourians who still stood remained largely unscathed. When they were about 60 yards away Doniphan gave the command to fire.

The resulting volley was disastrous for Ponce's troops. The "dead" Americans rose up and devastated their ranks at close range. The "resurrection" in particular unnerved them; and, when a second volley crashed from the Missourians' rifles, the Mexican center and left hastily retreated with the volunteers in hot pursuit. They overran the original Mexican line, capturing the howitzer, but failed to catch their enemy.

On the American left events occurred in only a slightly different fashion. The Mexican cavalry veered off from the volunteers' fire, but then swept around their flanks and attacked the wagons. Here, however, the teamsters delivered a volley which checked their charge. As they milled in confusion, Captain Reid led approximately 20 mounted men in a countercharge, which broke their ranks and drove them off. Reid pursued, but again the Americans failed to catch up, and half an hour after the first shot the Mexicans had departed from the vicinity completely, leaving their casualties and a large amount of equipment behind.

The actual numbers involved in the battle remain in dispute. Most American accounts give the Mexican forces a range of 1000 to 1200 strong and Doniphan's men at roughly 500.<sup>45</sup> The Mexican sources consulted, however, list their troops at 500 and the Americans at over 700. Justin Smith and Jack Bauer, who wrote the most respected histories of the war, accept the Mexicans' figure for their

own forces. Yet, if one accepts the Mexican statement that Trias sent 1500 men to supplement the existing forces in the area, the American figures seem most plausible. These reinforcements would have given Vidal an army in excess of 2000 soldiers, which could allow him to detach 1000 under Ponce and still have a strong force to defend El Paso. Furthermore, Mexican scouts certainly should have given their commanders a reasonably accurate assessment of the size of Doniphan's force. With knowledge of previous U.S. victories elsewhere, particularly Taylor's, available to them, the idea that Vidal and Ponce would attack 900 Americans with only about half that number seems ridiculous, particularly when more troops were available. The American strength of 500 seems most acceptable since all contemporary accounts refer to fresh troops arriving during and after the battle. The Mexican figures would require the presence of nearly the entire American force on the battlefield.

If the number of troops involved remains subject to debate, most sources agree on the casualty figures for Brazito. American authors usually estimate 200 Mexicans killed and wounded in a 1:3 ratio, as well as another half-dozen prisoners.<sup>46</sup> Doniphan suffered only seven men slightly wounded, all of whom recovered. These numbers, however, do not include several Mexicans killed by Navahos, who had watched the battle from some nearby mountains and fell upon the retreating stragglers.<sup>47</sup> Contemporary accounts also mention two Mexican women captured while serving the howitzer, one of whom died of wounds.

Brazito was clearly an American victory. Despite being surprised, the volunteers quickly formed ranks and drove the Mexicans off after a brief fight, inflicting 30 times their own casualties. Doniphan's unorthodox tactic of having his troops lie down until the enemy came within easy range not only protected his men, but, coupled with close range rifle volleys, demoralized the Mexicans. The Mexicans later claimed that their cavalry had misinterpreted a bugle call to charge as a command to retreat, and they merely carried the infantry along with them when they retired.<sup>48</sup> One suspects that this story, like the Mexican



troop strengths, originated to reduce the sting of an extremely embarrassing defeat.

The Missourians spent the rest of Christmas Day feasting on captured supplies and celebrating their victory. Perhaps the most amusing incident occurred when Doniphan and his officers finished their interrupted card game, only to discover that the horse they had played for had escaped during the battle.

The next morning, however, the men resumed their march in a serious frame of mind. Learning of Vidal's army and fortification outside El Paso from the prisoners, they expected another ambush, or at least a major battle for the city. Doniphan again sent back to Santa Fe for artillery, having only the captured howitzer with which to bombard the fort.

Surprisingly, the expected fighting did not materialize. When the fugitives informed Vidal of what had occurred he retreated to Chihuahua with the regulars, while the local militia destroyed their military markings and dispersed to their homes. A deputation of prominent citizens met Doniphan a few miles from the city to welcome him and to offer the surrender of El Paso. Thus on December 27th, the volunteers quietly marched through the town and encamped to the south. They had achieved their first major objective.

Chapter 3:  
El Paso and the March to Sacramento

The occupation of El Paso provided a pleasant interlude for Doniphan and his men. At this time, the city occupied a narrow strip of land along the south bank of the Rio Grande (present-day Juarez) and contained approximately 12,000 people. Fields and orchards covered the surrounding area, watered by artificial streams dug from the river. In El Paso itself, trees lined the clean streets, providing a shady, pleasing location for the volunteers to recover from their hardships. The inhabitants' general pro-Americanism and the abundance of food made the city seem a paradise to the trail-worn troops in their present condition.

Doniphan immediately took several steps to ensure that the occupation of El Paso would be peaceful and beneficial to all concerned. After releasing some Americans whom the local authorities had jailed several months earlier, he finished arranging the surrender terms with the city's envoys and issued a proclamation to the citizens outlining his intentions. Among other things he promised to protect the lives and property of all people who remained neutral, punish those who preached insurrection, to purchase all supplies required and not to lay waste to the city. He underscored this by issuing similar orders to his own troops, particularly regarding payment for any goods taken.<sup>49</sup> Doniphan also encouraged the Mexicans to establish a market for his men to purchase supplies, which would further facilitate relations between the two nationalities.

To prevent a possible uprising, Doniphan also ordered his company commanders to conduct a house-to-house search and confiscate any weapons found. This put the Missourians in possession of 500 stands of small arms, 400 lances, 4 cannon, several light fortress guns and 20,000 pounds of powder, lead, cannon and musket shot.<sup>50</sup> A reconnaissance to an abandoned fort 20 miles further south returned with another cannon and several wagonloads of ammunition. Doniphan took the cannon, powder and shot for his own use, and probably stored the small arms under guard until after his departure.

Doniphan's awareness that many of the inhabitants remained hostile to the United States justified this search, which went beyond normal precautions taken in Santa Fe. Some of those who had remained in the city hid their true feelings, while plotting to revolt against the occupation. In this endeavor they received advice and encouragement from Chihuahua. After the Missourians learned of the revolt which took place in New Mexico in early January, they watched suspected plotters more closely and soon received enough evidence to justify the arrest of several of them. The most prominent of these was the local curate, Esther Ramon Ortiz. Doniphan had these men imprisoned during the remainder of his stay in El Paso. With their influence gone, tension relaxed and both sides continued to fraternize harmoniously.<sup>51</sup>

Shortly after arriving in El Paso, Doniphan learned some information of extreme importance: Wool had not arrived at Chihuahua and never would. His army had started out well enough, but Taylor had ordered it to halt at Monclova, nearly 300 miles from its objective, because an armistice he had agreed to forbade further American advances. This enforced stop grated on both the disciplinarian Wool and his rowdy volunteers, who objected to his intensive drills. When he received word that the Mexicans at Chihuahua had marched to join Santa Anna, Wool asked Taylor for permission to join him. He felt that no reason existed for continuing to Chihuahua if there was no enemy there for him to fight, which to him and his men was the whole purpose of the war. Eventually, when in December, 1846, Taylor ordered Wool to join him, the latter did so with alacrity, and the main thrust against Chihuahua ceased to exist.

This news naturally had a great impact on Doniphan. Kearny had given him orders to join Wool at Chihuahua, but since Wool never would reach that city, he could not carry them out. More importantly, Wool had not neutralized or distracted Trias' military forces, which could now concentrate their full strength against the Missourians, who could expect no significant support from either Santa Fe or from Taylor at Monterrey. If they continued on to Chihuahua they

would face every soldier Trias could gather, which certainly would outnumber their force greatly. If they remained in El Paso, the Mexicans probably would attack them there, thus merely delaying the confrontation. In any event, Wool's failure left Doniphan hanging at the end of a tenuous line of communication on the border of hostile territory, with no prospect of assistance. Therefore, he needed to make a decision quickly concerning his next move.

The Missouriians' reaction to this news shows their attitude toward the war and Doniphan's understanding of them. After pondering the information and discussing it with his officers, Doniphan summoned a mass meeting of the volunteers and conveyed the problem to them. He then put to a vote the issue of whether the expedition should continue to Chihuahua, remain at El Paso, or return to Santa Fe. Military logic dictated one of the latter two courses. The whole purpose of the march had been to join Wool, which now seemed impossible. Furthermore, Doniphan had only a small force poised on hostile territory, which the Mexicans could annihilate easily if they concentrated their strength. Finally, the men's enlistments would expire in a few months, so why risk their lives on an objective which seemed to serve no purpose.

Nevertheless the volunteers had different ideas. They had enlisted to fight Mexicans, and the battle of Brazito had given them a belief in their own invincibility. Therefore they scorned the dangers of continuing on in their eagerness to meet the enemy again. Also, they felt that they had a job to do in capturing Chihuahua, and they hated to leave it uncompleted. Almost unanimously they voted to continue the march.<sup>52</sup> Accordingly, Doniphan sent back another request for artillery support and planned to resume the advance after its arrival.

Undoubtedly this was the most momentous decision of the expedition. Had the men voted to discontinue the advance or had Doniphan arbitrarily ordered such an action, the expedition probably would have received little historical notice. Its sole achievement had been the capture of El Paso in the face of

less than strong resistance, something which hardly reflected great glory on the participants. By continuing on the volunteers added to the legends of American hardihood and willingness to risk danger to achieve their original objective. Besides, they had already traveled over 1000 miles, so another 300 seemed trivial.

The events described also show that Doniphan knew how to deal with his men. Although they seemingly indicate that he relinquished his military judgment to theirs, thus avoiding responsibility for the decision, he actually recognized that their opinion would influence the success of any operation he might undertake. If he had given an order to advance or retreat, those who disagreed with his decision probably would have created difficulties -- disobeyed orders or weakened morale through criticism of his move. Certainly they would not put their full effort into completing the mission, which would jeopardize its success. By putting the issue to a vote, he played upon the men's belief in democracy and personal independence. This also showed his recognition of the fact that the volunteers disliked arbitrary commands and liked to have an input into important decisions. By catering to these he greatly reduced the possibility of a threat to his authority and retained disciplinary control over his command.<sup>53</sup>

As mentioned earlier, the stay in El Paso generally proved enjoyable for all concerned. Mexicans, merchants and soldiers traded briskly with each other without incident. In addition, a great deal of socializing took place between the occupation force and the natives, particularly after high winds and the resulting dust storms forced the soldiers to move their quarters into the city early in January. Parties and balls occurred frequently, both sides exchanged numerous social visits and gambling went on constantly, frequently blocking traffic on the streets. Doniphan forbade public gambling and the sale of liquor after a knife brawl between two of his lieutenants resulted in one seriously wounding the other, but beyond this he encouraged fraternization. Curiously

enough, this fight is the only violent incident most contemporary writers mention during the entire occupation. Evidently, the Mexicans avoided antagonizing their conquerors (the widespread pro-American sentiment undoubtedly aided in this), and the soldiers generally behaved themselves.

This does not mean that incidents did not occur. Rumors of large Mexican forces approaching the city circulated frequently, usually started by the anti-American faction in order to encourage the gringos to retreat. Several times the soldiers conducted thorough patrols of the surrounding area in response to these false alarms, but as time passed they became fewer and the troops paid less attention to them.

One confrontation between the two cultures stands out, showing Doniphan's awareness of his limitations in dealing with his men. A Mexican came to him one day to complain about a soldier who had stolen his pig, and even identified the offender. When Doniphan asked the trooper if the charge were true, he replied that it was and demanded to know what the Colonel intended to do about it. Doniphan hesitated a moment, then replied: "Well, I don't know unless I come and help you to eat it". The Mexican received no redress, which some of the men who heard the exchange felt was most unjust.<sup>54</sup> Evidently this affair did not affect U.S.-Mexican relations adversely, since no contemporary accounts mention any native reprisals.

This exchange indicates that, although Doniphan attempted to treat the local Mexicans fairly, he knew he could not act too overbearing toward his men in matters of discipline. Despite his orders against looting, if he had punished this soldier he probably would have alienated some of his men, who would have seen the theft as merely taking necessary food from an enemy. Like most armies, they could see little reason to protect civilians' property which they needed for their own use in wartime, and being volunteers they would object more strenuously to it than regular troops. Had Doniphan, an elected officer, forced the issue, his men probably would have become more ill-disciplined, re-

fused to obey his orders, and he would have had great difficulty controlling them. The fact that the records mention only this one incident suggests that most of the Missourians treated the Mexicans fairly and obeyed Doniphan's orders. Perhaps he felt that he could afford to be lenient in rare, isolated cases. Also, he may have believed that he needed to depend on the troops' obedience if one of the rumors of approaching enemies turned out to be true. No record exists of a change in relations between the different nationalities after the incident, so the Mexicans evidently did not become too upset.

Around the first of February, the long-awaited artillery finally arrived: six guns under the command of Major Meriwether Lewis Clark, son of William Clark. Price had delayed their departure when the revolt broke out in Santa Fe, which cost the lives of several Americans, and even after he suppressed it he refused to send as many guns as Doniphan had asked for. Still, it was more than Doniphan had had to begin with, so he determined to advance on Chihuahua without further delay. On February 8th, after destroying some of the captured cannon and shot, the volunteers resumed their march toward their final objective. The column included slightly over 900 effective soldiers; approximately 300 traders organized into two companies under Samuel Owens, a prominent merchant; Clark's six guns, plus the larger captured Mexican pieces; and the subversive prisoners from El Paso, particularly Father Ortiz. Approximately 312 wagons carried the army supplies, the traders' merchandise, and the arms confiscated at El Paso.

This march of 300 miles proved less arduous than the journey to El Paso, since the Missourians were better prepared for the difficulties, but some unique events occurred. The trip through the Jornada del Muerto had taught them how to prepare for the two long waterless stretches they faced, but the hot weather mentioned in their diaries caused them to suffer from thirst more, despite the abundance of water they carried. Also, Mexican detachments appeared more frequently than on the former journey, and their presence required the men to watch

more carefully for an ambush. Yet their former trials had tempered the Missourians, giving them a greater awareness of what they faced, so they operated with greater discipline than previously.

Before the expedition left the Rio Grande and entered the desert, however, difficulties arose with some of the traders. First, two of them who were using British passports evaded the camp guards one night and hastened to Chihuahua with 45 wagons full of goods.<sup>55</sup> This defection violated Doniphan's orders for all merchants to remain with the army, orders which they all had promised to obey. Although the factor behind the men's departure probably was their desire to increase their profits, rather than any designs of betrayal, they undoubtedly provided Trias with information concerning Doniphan's advance. He would certainly have questioned them thoroughly upon their arrival at Chihuahua which they could not have concealed.

The second incident involved two Mexican traders named Porus and Harmony, who had joined the party. Aware of Trias' vast military preparations to destroy the Americans and therefore expecting Doniphan's imminent defeat, they feared reprisals for their membership in the group and attempted to turn back to El Paso. Here they intended either to sell their merchandise or await the outcome of the impending battle, after which they would arrive in Chihuahua hailing the victors. Colonel Mitchell led a small force to compel them to rejoin the party, but the two men claimed that Indians had run off their mules, thus immobilizing their wagons. When Mitchell threatened to hang them, however, they revealed where they had hidden the mules to undertake this deception. The traders re-hitched the animals to the wagons and returned to the main body, where Doniphan had them watched closely for the rest of the trip.

Following these events, the army turned away from the river on February 14th, after resting there for a day, and began the first jornada of 65 miles. Knowing from previous experience that thirst would be a major problem, the troops carefully filled their canteens before leaving. Several soldiers who lacked



canteens or desired an extra margin of safety, even filled their saber sheaths, letting the weapons hang naked from their belts. Even with these precautions the jornada proved arduous. Hot days alternated with freezing nights, which the men could not relieve because fuel for fires was lacking in the region. The deep sand along the trail frequently caused the wagons to bog down, thus requiring double or quadruple teams of animals, and men pushing on the wheels, to keep them moving. Thirst ravaged the regiment to such an extent that some party members offered as high as ten dollars and a team of mules for a drink of water.<sup>56</sup> Father Ortiz endeared himself to many of the sufferers by providing them with water from the large quantities that he had stored in his buggy before leaving the river. Many animals collapsed from dehydration and were abandoned. These conditions lasted for three days, until the troops reached Laguna (lake) de los Patos. Even then the wagon train bogged down ten miles from the lake, when the animals could pull the wagons no further. Doniphan ordered the rear guard on to the lake to bring back water for them. While the teamsters waited, however, a sudden rainstorm in the nearby mountains flooded the plain, refreshing the group enough to allow them to push on.

By February 18th, the entire expedition had reunited at the lake and went into camp to recover from its ordeal. Several men had died from disease since the party had left El Paso, and at least one died from overdrinking after arriving at the lake. Also, the traders had abandoned a great deal of merchandise and supplies during the jornada in order to lighten their loads. The heaviest loss was four tons of flour and a large quantity of salt.<sup>57</sup> Fortunately, no Mexican force appeared to threaten the march, although Doniphan had feared such an occurrence and had kept the columns as close together as he could. During the jornada he even ordered the wagons brought closer to the main body for better protection against possible attacks. Numerous scouting parties which he sent out show Doniphan's awareness of his vulnerability. The moment the march had begun, his flank had been exposed to attack from the neighboring state of Sonora,

and rumors indicated a Mexican force was gathering there for just that purpose.<sup>58</sup> More importantly, information indicated that Governor Trias was raising an army to stop the gringos and that the local population had become actively hostile. Signal fires in the hills lent support to these rumors.

After resting overnight, the Missourians left the lake and marched to the village of Carrizal. The advance guard had captured it a few days earlier and accepted the submission of the townspeople, so Doniphan's formal occupation occurred peacefully. The only untoward incident happened that night, when a windstorm blew down most of the soldiers' tents, thus leaving them scrambling in the dark trying to capture and re-erect the elusive canvas. The inhabitants proved quite friendly, but whether this showed actual pro-American sentiment or fear of the Missourians and a desire for their protection against Indians (an ever present threat in this region) remains unreported. Probably all these elements joined to form the local Mexican attitude.

From Carrizal the expedition advanced to the hot springs Ojo Caliente, arriving there on February 21st. Here Doniphan ordered a halt to rest and prepare for crossing the last jornada before Chihuahua. While the men bathed in the refreshing, warm water and prepared rations for the next march, he sent a scouting party forward to Laguna de Encinillas, his next major goal. Intelligence indicated that a large body of Mexicans waited on the Americans there, so Doniphan wished to ascertain their disposition before he arrived.

Advancing from Ojo Caliente through the treeless, grassy prairie, the troops found the final jornada relatively uneventful. Again they suffered from the extreme heat of the day alternating with the cold nights, but waterholes began appearing after two days, so thirst did not become a problem. However, homesickness ravaged the column for the first time. M.B. Edwards reported that one frequently heard men promising "never to return to Mexico", "never do another voluntary act", or just wishing for a home-cooked meal.<sup>59</sup> Fortunately, they restricted themselves to griping and did not voice any loud complaints or threat-

en mutiny.

As the expedition reached Laguna de Encinillas, on the 25th, a new danger threatened it: fire. One of the previous evening's campfires had raged out of control, and, joining with a similar fire from an earlier campsite, raced across the grassy plain toward the column. Attempts to outrun it proved futile, so the frontiersmen began to use every trick they knew to stop the flames. While the drivers drove the artillery and ammunition wagons into the lake, the cavalry dismounted and cut a wide swath in the grass. Other men built backfires. Eventually these tactics proved successful and the fire burned itself out, but the Missourians had to encamp on the barren, blackened terrain, which provided no forage for the animals.

At the south end of the lake stood Governor Trias' hacienda. The Americans had accurate reports that 700 Mexican troops occupied it, and had driven off its large animal herds to deprive the volunteers of them. Doniphan determined to attack this force, so Captain Reid volunteered to lead 25 men on an exploratory reconnaissance of its positions. This party gained the ranch without meeting the enemy, but discovered its walls prevented them from seeing inside. Therefore, in a bold effort to accomplish his mission, Captain Reid led a cavalry charge through the gate into the compound. Here he discovered that the Mexicans had departed to rejoin their main army, leaving only the household servants. After rounding up a few stray cattle, Reid rejoined the main column, which continued its advance unimpeded.

On February 27th, Doniphan received positive reports that the Mexicans awaited him entrenched along the Sacramento River. Scouts reconnoitered the position to discover the number of troops and the location of their artillery batteries, which they reported to Doniphan. They also clashed with Mexican scouts and captured a few horses, but neither side sustained any casualties.

The Mexicans had not remained idle during Doniphan's month-long advance. The loss of El Paso increased their anger against the American invaders and resulted

in redoubled efforts to prepare to defeat them, especially after the survivors of Brazito reached the city with their tale of disaster. Under the leadership of Governor Trias and Commandent-General Heredia, the remaining pro-Yankee sentiment disappeared as the people gathered additional troops and equipment. Householders produced more old weapons and ammunition, the churches gave up their bells for Trias to cast into more cannon, and everyone donated clothing for uniforms. Volunteers flocked in to join new militia units. To pay the men and cover the cost of equipment, Trias borrowed from the local landowners, thus successfully meeting all of his expenses. The militia underwent further training to learn how to use their unfamiliar weapons. Everywhere a spirit of confidence and victory prevailed, as the citizens proudly viewed the results of their exertions. Soon they would march north, drive out the gringos and free El Paso. Then they would sweep on and free New Mexico. Confidence was so great that the leaders planned to capture Doniphan's entire force, strip them of their possessions, bind them and march them to Mexico City. Trias even had a large quantity of rope cut to suitable lengths for this purpose.<sup>60</sup>

On February 10th, General Garcia Conde, fresh from the battle of Monterrey, arrived and received command of the cavalry. Shortly afterward, he took 700 horsemen north with orders to observe the Americans' advance and attack them if he could do so without causing a general engagement.<sup>61</sup> He advanced to Laguna de Encinillas, learned of Doniphan's approach and fell back south slowly, keeping contact with the enemy. This certainly was the force that fled Trias' hacienda shortly before Reid's attack.

Meanwhile the remainder of the Mexicans fortified their chosen battlefield at Sacramento Pass. Here the El Paso-Chihuahua road crossed a peninsula formed by the dry Arroyo Seco connecting with the Sacramento River. On this peninsula, a high hill dominated the eastern side of the road, while a broad plateau flanked it to the west. On the northeast corner of this hill (its highest point, called



Plan of the Battle of Sacramento

(from: John Hughes, Doniphan's Expedition, Chicago; Rio Grande Press, 1962 1848 ) 303.

Cerro Frijoles) the Mexicans built a fortified battery. They also erected two other batteries on the hill's northwestern spurs, and two on its southwest corner. The northern batteries covered a secondary road running along the Arroyo Seco to its junction with the Sacramento crossing. Along the whole western crest between the batteries, Heredia built entrenchments which covered the road's entire length. Breastworks also connected the northern batteries. A stone wall and entrenchments protected the hill's eastern face, while an abatis blocked the secondary road under the Frijoles battery. The main Mexican camp rested in a depression in the center of this hill, concealed from the Americans' view.

In addition to these preparations, Heredia built breastworks connecting the hill with the river, thus covering the road, and one blocking the El Paso road itself on the plateau just south of the arroyo. He erected a final battery on the ridge of Cerro Sacramento hill south of the river, which overlooked the ford, and partially fortified Rancho Sacramento, a hacienda guarding the ford. Breastworks blocking the road from Rancho Torreon, west of the plateau on the river's south bank, to Chihuahua completed the fortifications.

To arm and man the works Heredia had ten field pieces, ranging from 4-pounders to 9-pounders, and six light culverins (rampart guns).<sup>62</sup> His troops numbered approximately 4000 men, including Conde's detachment. This number consisted of 1200 cavalry, 1200 infantry, 300 gunners and 1400 rancheros using only lances and machetes.<sup>63</sup> Numerically this was a formidable force, and if it lacked weapons, it had high morale. When the Americans arrived, the defenders would show their prowess.

When completed, Heredia's defenses provided a seemingly insurmountable obstacle to the Americans' advance. If they overcame the breastwork blocking the main road and continued marching along it, the hilltop fortifications would rake their entire flank and decimate them. If they turned east along the arroyo, the abatis would delay them while the northern batteries pounded their ranks. Should they turn west and make for Torreon, the entrenchments on that road would

halt them until the main Mexican body fell on their flanks and rear. If the Missourians tried to storm the fortifications, they would have to charge uphill against men protected by prepared works, usually a disadvantageous attacking condition involving high casualties. In short, no matter which way the volunteers went, if they tried to cross the river in this area they would suffer heavy losses, thus making them easy prey for the Mexicans. Heredia's superiority in numbers and artillery further weighted the odds in his favor, since he could do more damage to the Americans than they could do to him, in terms of firepower. Doniphan could outflank the defenses, of course, by making a long circuitous march, but the time involved would allow Heredia to shift to a blocking position. With the evident advantages of men, morale and position the Mexicans should defend their lines easily, in spite of any standard military maneuver.

For their part, Doniphan and his men had accomplished a great deal in their occupation of El Paso and the march south. They had defused a potentially hostile city with fair treatment, thus securing their communications. The Americans certainly promoted annexation, but many of the populace also supported it. By trading freely and encouraging fraternization, Doniphan produced an air of goodwill which reduced hostile confrontations. Although some of the troops considered the Mexicans inferior, no reports of trouble because of this seem to exist. In their march the men penetrated deep into hostile territory, overcoming the natural dangers of weather, thirst and fire rather than human foes. After the short stay in El Paso, to which they easily could have returned, such a feat is a tribute to their endurance and perseverance.

Doniphan's decision to march south, however, does not appear justifiable. He was entering a hostile region of which he had little intelligence, facing an enemy of unknown size and exposing his flanks and rear to attack. He left behind a peaceful city, but it could turn hostile at any moment, thus cutting off his communication. Military sense indicated that he should have returned

to Santa Fe and from there taken his troops where they would be more useful to the war effort. Failing this, he should have remained in El Paso and kept the region pacified. Doniphan risked his entire force on the basis of their eagerness to go on and his lack of alternative instructions. Yet, like other officers in similar situations, he weighed the choices and implemented the one which seemed likely to prove most effective against the enemy. He held the responsibility for war events in his region and needed to ensure his own success. He had a regiment anxious to fight and who could beat the Mexicans easily, based on previous battles involving either his own force or other American units. By remaining in El Paso, the men would become restless and trouble might erupt. By retreating they would give up El Paso, the fruits of their victory, to Trias, who would surely come north to retake it. Also, their enlistments would expire in June, probably too soon to get the men reassigned to perform any useful functions. According to these considerations, Doniphan was using "combat ready" men in the best possible way, and depending on their hardihood and eagerness to fight to overcome all opposition. Such a solution frequently produces more tangible results than military sense.



#### Chapter 4: The Conquest of Chihuahua

Knowing that a battle was imminent, Doniphan adopted a unique formation to approach the Sacramento works. He formed the wagons in four parallel columns of approximately equal length. In the space between the two interior columns he placed Major Clark's artillery, while a battalion of infantry marched in each of the other two intervals. The three mounted troops rode in the van of this force, protecting it from sudden attack and screening it from the enemy's view. This organization concealed the Americans' strength and exact positions from Mexican observers, and also had defensive advantages. The column was no longer strung out in such a way that it was vulnerable to sudden flank attacks, and if Heredia should go on the offensive, Doniphan could form the wagons into a fort.

The Americans continued along the road as though they intended to pass along the face of the Mexican entrenchments, thus exposing their flank and falling into Heredia's trap. Suddenly, Doniphan ordered them to swing west, away from the fortifications, while his cavalry continued to advance in order to conceal the maneuver as long as possible. Once beyond range of the enemy's guns, they swung south again to cross the arroyo. This in itself seemed formidable due to its high steep banks, but the men broke them down with tools and then drove the teams across with much exertion and profanity, dragging the wagons with ropes where necessary. Upon reaching the plateau on the other side, the Missourians reformed their ranks facing the Mexican lines. Rejoined by the cavalry, they placed the unlimbered artillery in front of their lines, while the wagons remained in the rear with the teamsters' battalions protecting them.

This maneuver took the Mexicans by surprise. Heredia had organized his forces to contest the arroyo crossing at the El Paso road. The cavalry had drawn up in three ranks in front of the entrenchments in order to attack the Americans as they attempted the crossing. The infantry, also in three ranks,

waited in the forts to fire on the enemy as they passed. When Doniphan swung west, the Mexican leaders concluded that he intended to cross the arroyo at Torreon, and march on to Chihuahua, thus bypassing their positions without a battle. Although redoubts blocked the Torreon road, Conde ordered his cavalry to stop this escape. However, Doniphan's ruse had gained him enough time to begin making his battle dispositions on the plateau. When they realized that the gringos were not attempting to escape, but were willing to fight, the Mexican cavalry halted to await infantry and artillery support. When four guns and the accompanying foot soldiers arrived, the cavalry again advanced on the Missourians.

The cavalry's delay in attacking allowed Doniphan to complete his combat dispositions. When the Mexicans finally charged, Major Clark's guns opened fire with deadly accuracy, killing and wounding many of the enemy. After three shots, the Mexicans broke and retreated a short distance. They attempted to rally, but a fourth round from Clark's battery sent them fleeing into the redoubts. This unmasked the Mexican artillery, which immediately opened fire to silence their opposite numbers, but the Americans retained the advantage. Freak atmospheric conditions and/or inferior powder made the Mexican cannonballs visible as they traveled through the air.<sup>64</sup> The volunteers quickly became adept at dodging these shots, and thus sustained few casualties. The wagons and teams in the rear suffered the most damage from the cannonade. In contrast, Clark's battery quickly dismounted one Mexican gun. It also inflicted several casualties among the infantry despite problems with the American ammunition (the explosive shells used tended to detonate when halfway to the target).<sup>65</sup> Already demoralized by the cavalry's retreat, the Mexicans withstood this punishment for less than an hour, before they also fled to the entrenchments with their guns.

As the Mexicans fell back, Doniphan ordered his entire force, except for the wagons, to advance against the forts. His order of battle was as follows:

Major Gilpin with the Second Battalion (dismounted) held the left, then came the three cavalry companies under Captains Reid, Parsons and Hudson; beside them was Clark's artillery; and finally, Lieutenant Colonels Jackson and Mitchell commanded the First Battalion on the right flank. The Mexican artillery attempted to halt this advance, but did little damage, since the Missourians continued to dodge their shots with alacrity. At the same time a body of enemy horsemen, described by the Americans as released criminals,<sup>66</sup> swept down on the wagon train in Doniphan's rear. The teamsters there managed to drive them off before they disrupted the volunteers' movement.

Near the base of the ridge Doniphan briefly halted his infantry, while ordering the cavalry and howitzers to charge the central, most annoying battery. Initially these bodies charged bravely, but due to a misunderstanding or possible stupidity, an unidentified American officer halted them in a crossfire some distance from the works. Here they might have suffered grievous losses, except for Captain Reid. Not receiving the order he continued to charge with a small force, and briefly drove the Mexicans out of the battery. In this attack, Major Cwens, who commanded the teamsters, died charging the parapet. Several others were wounded when the Mexicans drove Reid out of the fort.

At this crisis the rest of the Missourians stormed the entrenchments. Supported by howitzers, the rest of Reid's company permanently recaptured the redoubt. The infantry battalions also swarmed over the fortifications. After a brief flurry of hand-to-hand fighting the Mexicans fled, leaving Doniphan in possession of the western crest. The Second Battalion, assisted by some of Clark's guns then cleaned out the northern fortifications, including the Cerro Gordo battery, with little difficulty. Heredia's attempts to rally his troops failed. American artillery broke up any bodies that attempted to make a stand. Most of the Mexicans simply scattered, with the mounted volunteers in hot pursuit.

Of the Mexican defenses, only the Sacramento redoubt remained untaken.

It had bombarded the Missourians throughout their attack, but the distance and angle of fire prevented it from doing any damage. As Doniphan's men cleared the entrenchments, Heredia, in a last attempt to save the battle, ordered two more guns up Sacramento Hill to rake their line. Through some ambiguity or deliberate misunderstanding, all of the remaining artillery and organized infantry headed for this post, thus ending any possibility of organizing a new defense on the plateau.<sup>67</sup> Yet even this effort to reinforce the hill failed, for the Americans rapidly pursued and overtook the enemy, scattering the infantry in all directions and capturing the guns. Then Major Clark turned his artillery on the Sacramento Redoubt, while Doniphan's cavalry, supported by infantry, charged it. In an amazing stroke of luck, Clark's first shot dismounted one of the Mexican guns. This so demoralized the defenders that they offered little resistance when the volunteers poured into their works.

With the Sacramento Redoubt's fall, all resistance ceased. Trias and his generals fled south to El Parral with a few men, while the rest of the Mexicans dispersed in all directions to avoid the vengeance of the gringos. Even the citizens who had come to watch the battle joined the stampede. As the last of the enemy disappeared, Doniphan rode over to Father Ortiz, who had continuously prophesied that Heredia would defeat the Missourians easily and said to him: "Well, Ortiz, what do you think about the Mexicans whipping my boys now." Ortiz replied, "Ah! sir, they would have defeated you if you had fought like men, but you fought like devils."<sup>68</sup>

The volunteers had indeed "fought like devils." Their spirited attack and eagerness to close with the enemy completely broke the Mexicans. One Missourian, detailed to hold horses, abandoned his task and charged the entrenchments, shouting: "Hold hell in a fight! I didn't come here to hold horses -- I can do that at home."<sup>69</sup> Enthusiasm such as this carried Doniphan's men through positions which might have daunted more experienced troops.

The casualties and amount of equipment captured also bear out Father Ortiz's

comment. Doniphan reported at least 600 Mexicans killed and wounded, plus 40 prisoners, including one brigadier-general. In contrast, the Americans lost one man killed (Major Owens) and eleven wounded, two of them mortally. Furthermore, they captured all of the Mexican artillery and all of the equipment in the enemy camp. This included: 50,000 sheep, 1500 cattle, 100 mules, 57 assorted vehicles (among them the general's carriage), 100 stands of small arms, 100 stands of colors, and 25,000 pounds of ammunition.<sup>70</sup> The Missourians also found among the spoils the ropes Heredia had intended to bind them with and the black flag the Mexicans had carried at Brazito.

The casualties help to make the Battle of Sacramento a remarkable one in military history. That a force of semi-trained men could defeat an enemy four times their number, who had the advantages of entrenchments with artillery and elevation, seems contrary to military logic. That such a force could win such a decisive victory seems even more impossible. Yet, several factors combined to bring about this astounding result. First, the Mexicans had inferior equipment. Over 25 percent of them (the rancheros) had no firearms at all, and thus were useful only as shock troops. Since the only hand-to-hand combat occurred when the Missourians invaded the fortifications, these men probably contributed very little to the battle. They may not even have participated at all, but instead abandoned their posts before the Americans reached them. Also, even the Mexicans who had guns did not use them effectively, as Doniphan's losses indicate. Several contemporary accounts declare that they did not aim their weapons, but merely thrust them over the parapet and fired blindly while crouching under cover.<sup>71</sup> In addition, the Mexican shoulder arms probably were of lower quality than those the Americans used. Considering that most of them came from the homes in Chihuahua, one suspects that they consisted mostly of smoothbores, with a sprinkling of more modern weapons. The guns that the disloyal traders had brought probably were of fairly recent manufacture, but they made up only a small portion of those available. Certainly the possibility

that Heredia had a large quantity of rifles comparable to those of Doniphan's men seems remote, since rifle production in large quantities had barely begun. Therefore, one doubts that the average Mexican had access to such a weapon. No concrete evidence concerning this appears in the sources, but the conclusions appear logical.<sup>72</sup>

Fluctuating Mexican morale also contributed to Doniphan's victory. Initially the enemy forces expected to overcome the Americans quite easily, due to their superior numbers and position.<sup>73</sup> This feeling may have contributed to their willingness to allow Doniphan time to form ranks on the plateau. When the Missourians successfully dispersed their attack, the Mexicans lost heart. Although they defended the breastworks vigorously for a brief period, their shattered confidence prevented any chance of rallying and regaining the initiative, as subsequent events showed, such as the artillery's departure. The fact that the Mexicans had never faced combat before, and had had only minimal training may also have contributed to their discouragement after Doniphan's initial success. Despite their great advantages, since Doniphan had already beaten the Mexicans in their minds with his early victory, they failed to put up the stiff resistance which, given their superiority, should have defeated the Americans.

In contrast, the Missourians' performance at Sacramento proved excellent. Doniphan's early movements and unorthodox tactics took his opponents by surprise, completely upsetting their battle plan. From the moment the Mexicans halted, allowing the Americans time to form their ranks, they surrendered initiative to Doniphan, who used this advantage to the best of his ability. The volunteers' technological superiority also gave them a tremendous supremacy over their foes. The range and accuracy of their weapons allowed them to inflict great damage on Heredia's troops, without suffering severely themselves. Clark's artillery, of course, played a pre-eminent role in this success. His accuracy broke up several Mexican troop concentrations and silenced their cannon, while his gun-

ners' willingness to take their pieces clear up to the enemy lines enabled Doniphan to break through the entrenchments. Along with this, the men's high morale and confidence in victory carried them up to and over the Mexican works, despite the storm of fire issuing from them. This esprit enabled them to overcome the rather feeble resistance the Mexicans made. Finally, their harrying of the retreating enemy clinched the triumph, since it gave the latter no chance to rally and counterattack. Doniphan's tactical control of the battle and the men's high morale gave them the victory.

Sacramento produced several practical advantages for the volunteers as well. Its most immediate benefit was that it removed the final obstacle to Chihuahua's capture. The small area of terrain between the battlefield and the city offered no site for another stand against the Americans. Even if such a position had existed, Trias no longer had an armed force to defend it. He did manage to regather the regular units later, which would represent a threat to Doniphan's occupation. For the present, however, all organized resistance to the gringos vanished, as the Mexicans scattered over the countryside. Most of the militia quietly returned to their homes, destroying any evidence of their armed service on the way. In addition, even if the citizens had wished to undertake further resistance, Doniphan's victory effectively destroyed their means to do so. The weapons and equipment he captured represented most of the available arms in the area, and subsequent confiscations during the occupation of the city accounted for most of the rest. Therefore, even if the Mexicans had wanted to oppose the conquest, they lacked the necessary equipment.

On the day following the battle, the Missourians' advance guard entered the nearly empty city of Chihuahua. Most of the inhabitants had fled into the hills, fearing the rapaciousness of the gringos. A few citizens remained behind, but even they concealed themselves. This situation remained prevalent when Doniphan paraded the rest of his force into the city on March 2, 1847, and conducted a formal occupation ceremony. Aware of the people's hostility, which

their enthusiasm in raising the Sacramento force had shown, he undertook careful precautions to prevent an uprising from surprising and massacring his men. He quartered most of them in the public buildings and vacant houses surrounding the main square, with the artillery positioned to cover the square and all approaches to it. The remaining troops occupied the bullring on the edge of the city and posted pickets there to protect themselves. Even after confiscating all weapons found, the volunteers remained alert, since American prisoners they had freed described the citizens' rampant hostility and the threats they had made against the captives prior to Doniphan's victory.

A significant contrast exists between Doniphan's occupation of El Paso and that of Chihuahua. Although no major incidents marred the latter period, Chihuahua lacked the friendliness and open hospitality the Americans found further north. Despite the Missourian proclivities for drinking and gambling, less fraternization occurred. Several contemporary accounts mention the large number of thefts which the Mexicans perpetrated and the frequent whippings meted out to the offenders. Evidently, these punishments did not cause any major disputes with the local populace, for the same sources describe most of the men so convicted as common criminals who deserved their fate. Still, these diarists use the frequency of the thefts to indicate a lack of the pro-American sentiments which El Paso had displayed.

On their side, the Missourians had little respect for their hosts' property. A trader's wife who arrived in Chihuahua during the occupation wrote: "The citizens' houses were turned into stables, the roofs made kitchens of, the drinking fountain used as a bathing trough, the trees barked and forever spoiled, and a hundred other deprivations."<sup>74</sup> If the Missourians paid for all of the goods they consumed, (which they evidently did, since accounts mention no difficulties over that issue), they countered this with their rough treatment of public and private facilities, something which did not occur in El Paso.

The volunteers found that Chihuahua was not as rich as they had believed.



While El Paso was a thriving, prosperous community, Chihuahua had declined economically. The Mexicans had built a mint there to stamp the precious metals mined locally. However, Indian activity had forced the abandonment of most of these mines, including the salt works. Therefore the city's only remaining major product was wheat. All other commodities came from outside sources, which resulted in an unfavorable balance of trade. The local need for external goods made business here profitable for the Americans, since the people would pay high prices, but the city had few products to offer in exchange.

Despite tensions on both sides and his men's disrespect for property, Doniphan attempted to win the people over to the American side. Upon occupying the city, he issued a proclamation asking the inhabitants to return to their homes and resume their former businesses, particularly trade. He promised to respect the rights, religion and property of all who remained neutral and punish his men for any excesses they committed. The proclamation closed with a warning that those who took up arms again could expect American reprisals.<sup>75</sup> Most of the local people responded to this document to the extent that business returned to normal, but it evidently did not alter their antipathy toward the Americans. In a further gesture of goodwill, Doniphan released his hostages from El Paso. After his victory, no organized force remained to assist an uprising there, thus making its success improbable. Furthermore, the prisoners' accounts of the battle would dampen such a movement, since the "invincible Americans" could deal with a revolt easily. Finally, Doniphan directed the local priests to conduct funeral services for Major Owens (who had been a Catholic). He may have hoped to show that the Americans could respect, and even share, the local religion, and thus reduce the Mexican hostility. If this was his purpose it failed, for the people felt that a gringo funeral profaned their church, rather than that it showed sympathy for their beliefs.<sup>76</sup>

The most significant incident of the occupation took place shortly after the army's arrival. Colonel Mitchell led a party of men to occupy the governor's

mansion and found the building locked up. Inquiries revealed that an Englishman named Potts, who claimed to be the local British consul, had the necessary keys. However, he refused to give them up, claiming that the building was under his care and the Americans would not be given a chance to damage it. Accordingly, Mitchell brought up a howitzer to blow in the doors, but some of the Missourians managed to enter by another door and opened the building from the inside.<sup>77</sup> Although this had no major effect on Mexican-American relations, it indicates the depth of anti-American sentiment in the city, since even resident foreigners seemed disposed to hinder Doniphan's occupation. Certainly Potts had economic interests in the mint which Doniphan's conquest threatened, but this does not adequately explain his willingness to obstruct the Missourians in an activity which did not directly affect him. Perhaps his British sense of honor caused his interference.

Aside from their normal gambling and drinking activities, Doniphan's men found several diversions in Chihuahua. Major Clark, for example, spent a great deal of time correcting the book classifications in the palace library.<sup>78</sup> Some of the troops started an English language newspaper, which disseminated local news and rumors of the war's progress. Some of the local citizens also arranged a bullfight for the Missourians' amusement, but this entertainment fell rather flat. Most accounts indicate that the men viewed it as a barbaric sport which was proof of Mexican inferiority. Furthermore, the bulls used were not of high quality and failed to defend themselves vigorously, thus presenting a dull spectacle. Cockfighting proved more popular with the volunteers and became a major recreation at which much betting took place.

In addition to the aforementioned events, military activities required a great amount of the men's attention. They had to make new cartridges for their own weapons as well as for the captured cannon. This work made at least one soldier extremely nervous, for he observed the men so engaged were smoking cigars and pipes, unconcerned about the huge amounts of loose gunpowder around

them.<sup>79</sup> The volunteers also undertook patrols of the surrounding countryside, for frequent rumors of approaching Mexican forces circulated through Chihuahua. Fortunately the rumors always proved false as at El Paso, but they kept the soldiers alert and wary of a sudden attack.

Doniphan was well aware of his precarious position in Chihuahua. He now occupied a city deep in hostile territory, cut off from communication with other American armies, with little prospect of reinforcement. The route to Santa Fe remained open, but guerrillas or a Mexican thrust from Sonora could cut it at any time, thus completely isolating the Missourians. Furthermore, Doniphan had not destroyed the enemy forces in Chihuahua. Governor Trias had established himself at Parral in Northern Durango, and was gathering the stragglers from Sacramento into a new force. This provided another threat to American security, since it conceivably could attempt to recapture Chihuahua and destroy the Missourians. The local citizens themselves represented another danger. Considering their anti-American attitude, any Mexican victory might cause them to revolt and attempt to massacre the garrison. Such an outbreak almost occurred when preliminary reports of the Battle of Buena Vista indicated Santa Anna had won. However, Doniphan quickly (and correctly) proclaimed an American victory by firing a salute in Taylor's honor, thus averting an outbreak. Finally, the volunteers themselves provided an additional problem. As at El Paso, they suffered from boredom when limited to the relative inactivity of garrison life. As a result, discipline became lax and the possibility of trouble with the locals increased. Also, enlistments would expire in three months, necessitating some action on Doniphan's part soon.

Several courses of action remained open to the Colonel. First, he could abandon Chihuahua and attempt to join Taylor. Alternatively, he could return to El Paso. If he remained in Chihuahua, he could undertake an aggressive campaign to destroy Trias' military strength, or merely wait in the city until enlistments expired. The latter course, however, merely delayed the decision

concerning which direction to move. Doniphan himself desired an early departure; but if the troops left, the Mexicans probably would massacre the traders who remained behind. They were doing a profitable business in Chihuahua and had no desire to leave soon.

In order to resolve his dilemma, Doniphan held a staff meeting to discuss the options. Most of the officers favored remaining in the city until enlistments expired, since they enjoyed its luxury. Doniphan, however, announced that he was in favored "going home to Sarah and the children."<sup>80</sup> This became the enlisted men's slogan, for they quickly learned the events of the meeting. Possibly Doniphan supplied this information to get their support for his views. This proved immediately forthcoming, for the volunteers also longed for Missouri.

Two decisions came out of subsequent staff meetings, after the volunteers made their feelings known. The Mexican retreat after Buena Vista cleared the route to Wool and Taylor, so Doniphan sent a party to them in early April requesting orders. At the same time he opened negotiations with Trias for the governor to resume control of Chihuahua on the condition that he would protect the traders from molestation. Unfortunately, these talks collapsed when Trias insisted that the Americans return all of the equipment captured at Sacramento and pay for any damages to the city.<sup>81</sup> In an effort to compel Trias' acceptance or at least eliminate his force as a threat, Doniphan led an expedition against Parral. Reports of a large body of Mexicans approaching Chihuahua caused it to return before reaching its goal, and no further contact with Trias took place until near the end of the occupation.

Late in April, the messengers to General Taylor returned with orders for Doniphan to join the main army. Despite rumors of their death or capture, only one incident marred their trip. A party of Mexican militia had tried to arrest them, but the couriers bluffed their way past it at gunpoint without casualties on either side.

Beginning on April 25th, the volunteers departed Chihuahua for Saltillo

in several bodies, amid great rejoicing among the Mexicans.<sup>82</sup> Most of the traders, having sold all of their goods, departed with them. Generally, the march proved uneventful. They suffered from thirst during the two-day jornada, but evidently not as severely as on previous occasions. Their earlier experiences had taught them how to deal with such obstacles.

During this march, a scouting party fought the last engagement of the campaign. Captain Reid, with a force of approximately 20 men entered the village of El Poso, where they learned that a party of Comanches was raiding the area and threatening the community. Responding to the people's pleas, Reid occupied a large hacienda from which he could deal with the approaching Indians. When the warriors attacked that night, Reid suddenly charged them from ambush. In the ensuing skirmish, the Indians lost 17 killed and 25 wounded, including the chief, out of 55 men. Reid was the only American casualty, sustaining two minor arrow wounds. He also recovered 19 children and several hundred horses and mules which the Comanches had already captured. The grateful citizens presented the volunteers with horses and Captain Reid with a formal letter of thanks.<sup>83</sup>

The friendliness of El Poso proved the last the Missourians encountered in Mexico. As they approached Taylor's army, the inhabitants became more hostile. Once Doniphan sent a detachment back to protect the wagons from a body of guerrillas which supposedly threatened them. This rumor was false, but some of the citizens at Parras beat one of the artillerymen to death without provocation, when the regiment passed through that village. In response, the volunteers killed two Mexicans, a crime which Doniphan failed to punish. In fact, the Missourians increasingly reacted violently to what they felt was unjustified hostility, and the officers either could not or would not punish them.

On May 22nd, Doniphan's men arrived at Wool's headquarters in Saltillo, where Wool reviewed them and commended them for their accomplishments. They then moved on to Walnut Springs, where Taylor reviewed them on the 27th. At this occasion the General asked Doniphan to describe the maneuver that won Sac-

ramento, to which the Colonel replied: "Maneuvers be hanged. I told my boys to charge -- they were off like a shot -- and that's all I know about it."<sup>84</sup> Taylor then issued orders for them to proceed to the Rio Grande, where shipping would take them to New Orleans for discharge. Before they departed, Clark turned his guns over to Taylor's artillery, but kept the cannon captured at Sacramento.

The march to the coast provided a few final adventures for Doniphan's men. Although this last part of the march proved less arduous, since it lacked the waterless jornadas of previous ones, local hostility provided greater danger. Near one village, guerrillas ambushed and killed one of the regiment's advance scouts. Subsequent search of the town produced five suspicious characters, but lacking concrete evidence, Doniphan ordered their release. However, the dead man's friends so desired vengeance that they killed the men after their release and then burned the house they had been found in. As at Parras, Doniphan failed to punish the volunteers involved, either because he could not properly identify them or because popular opinion so favored their action that he feared punishment would result in loss of control over his troops.

At Reynosa the Missourians boarded boats which took them to Brazos Island, where Doniphan had already gone to arrange for transports to take them home. Before leaving, they burned their horse tack, since no space for it remained on the boats. Approximately 30 of the volunteers agreed to drive the horses overland to Missouri at the rate of \$10 a head, an offer which the remaining men accepted.<sup>88</sup>

At New Orleans, amid the enthusiastic welcome of the citizens, Doniphan's men turned in the government equipment they had used, and received their discharges and long-overdue pay. They then traveled up the Mississippi in small groups, as inclination and transportation dictated. Most returned directly home, but a large party of about 300 men, including Doniphan, halted at St. Louis. Here the citizens held a reception in their honor consisting of a parade and banquet on July 2nd. The St. Louis festival was only the first of many

such celebrations, in which the volunteers received the plaudits of their friends and neighbors. After a march of over 5,000 miles, suffering insignificant losses, they had returned home.<sup>86</sup>

## Conclusion

The practical results of Doniphan's independent expedition became obscured by the publicity surrounding Taylor's battle of Buena Vista and Scott's invasion of Mexico. From the time the Missourians left home, these two generals had dominated the newspapers with their plans and campaigns. Taylor had invaded Northern Mexico and defeated the Mexicans in several battles, among them Palo Alto, Monterrey and Resaca de la Palma. Scott, meanwhile, had laid plans to land on Mexico's Gulf Coast and strike straight for Mexico City, a target which captured the Americans' imagination. Although these events seemed more evidently consequential than those of the Missourians' march, the volunteers and their partisans believed that they had accomplished great things. In terms of human endurance and successful completion of objectives, if not influence on the war's course, these beliefs seem justified.

Doniphan's success certainly had no effect on the further conduct of the war. Polk's scheme to use Chihuahua as a base for an expedition to the Pacific had vanished in the practical difficulties of pacifying territory only half-sympathetic and penetrating the hostile interior from the east. By the time Doniphan reached Chihuahua, military emphasis had shifted to Scott's forthcoming invasion, and to this the government allocated most of its resources. Also Chihuahua's distance from Mexico City prevented the occupation force from threatening that area and therefore caused little concern to the central government. The Mexicans saw little danger to their capital from this source, for the long journey from Chihuahua and the small size of the American force discouraged an attack from that quarter. Further proof of Chihuahua's loss of importance comes from Taylor's failure to reinforce it. After the battle of Buena Vista, Taylor's army became merely a garrison force, with no further objectives. Taylor could have dispatched troops at least to garrison the city, had he wished or received orders to do so, particularly since his army now included Wool's



force which originally was destined for that point.

This lack of official support caused the campaign to fail in one of its original primary purposes: the seizure of territory as a bargaining counter for peace negotiations. Without reinforcements, Doniphan could not hold Chihuahua, since his men would leave when their enlistments expired, a problem common to all U.S. forces. Therefore, when assistance did not arrive, the opportunity to retain Chihuahua vanished. In any case, the Americans had already captured the territories they wanted most -- New Mexico, California and the disputed part of Texas -- so they had no objectives for which to trade Chihuahua. This lack of support also caused the final collapse of intentions to add the state to American territory. These plans had essentially vanished when the Missourians discovered that the local Mexicans were hostile to U.S. control, rather than friendly as reports had led them to believe. Aware of the difficulties involved in pacifying a semi-hostile territory, as evidenced by their own Navajo campaign and the revolt in New Mexico later, they realized that the effort required to pacify this more hostile area would not equal the rewards involved.

The volunteers' discovery that reports had exaggerated Chihuahua's wealth further supported this decision. They had expected to find a city rich from the products of surrounding mines. However, as mentioned earlier, Indian hostility had closed down nearly all of the mining operations, leaving only limited farming as an economic base. Therefore Chihuahua had not the economic importance to encourage an American takeover in the face of strong opposition. Nor would its loss disrupt Mexican economy to any great extent. For the same reason it was a poor bargaining counter, since the Mexican government did not consider it rich enough to offer major concessions or other territory for its return.<sup>87</sup>

Finally, Doniphan's success did not encourage the Mexicans to discuss peace. Both the region's remoteness and minimal economic importance contributed to their attitude. However, both belligerents' emphasis on other theaters repre-

sented the main factor in this failure. After Buena Vista the war shifted southward as Scott prepared to invade Vera Cruz. Since the Mexicans expected to defeat the Americans in that region, the loss of an unimportant province which they had already abandoned to its own resources provided no incentive to discuss peace.

One could argue that Doniphan's campaign tied down Mexican troops which might have joined Santa Anna, thus achieving one objective, but this seems tenuous at best. The troops Trias raised to fight the Missourians were local volunteers, organized solely to defend the state and retake New Mexico if possible. The central government had already withdrawn one local military force for service elsewhere, which greatly annoyed the population. The possibility that Chihuahua would release a force raised and equipped by its own efforts for its own defense, to an unpopular government in order to fight in another part of Mexico appears remote. Considering that many of the men were poorly armed and therefore could contribute only limited assistance further increases its unlikelihood. Had Doniphan not invaded, Trias probably never would have organized his army, since its purpose was to defend the state.

Doniphan's only significant strategic achievement lay in the results of his Navajo campaign. By successfully rounding up the hostile Indians and convincing them to sign a peace treaty, he established a peaceful situation which allowed American forces to concentrate on other matters. True, some of the Navajo participated in the Taos revolt in 1847 and the whites did not subdue the tribe completely until the 1860's, but Doniphan did convince a large part of it to remain quiet for the rest of the war. By doing so, he freed his own regiment for the Chihuahua expedition and created a situation which allowed the garrison forces to concentrate on civil matters and introduce the American system to the local populace. Had he failed to pacify the Indians, the U.S. would have needed to allocate many of the available troops to defend the territory against their depredations. The Taos revolt might have succeeded, since

fewer troops would have been free to deal with it. In achieving its other objectives Doniphan's expedition failed, but his Navajo campaign helped to ensure that New Mexico would remain in American hands and become a federal territory.

According to most authors, the major impact of the Chihuahua campaign lay in its psychological effects, rather than its material achievements. In this context, it contributed primarily to the U.S. reputation of invincibility and to the Mexican habit of defeat. Twice the Missourians fought superior enemy forces and came away victorious. Once the Mexicans surprised them in camp, and the other time they had the advantage of entrenched positions, yet in both battles the volunteers inflicted many casualties on the enemy while suffering few themselves. In many Mexican minds this created a belief that they never could conquer the Americans thus weakening their will to win, especially when further discouraged by Taylor's successes. This attitude showed itself in what contemporary observers referred to as "Mexican cowardice": their failure to stand against the gringos. The dispersal of Trias' army at Sacramento provides an acceptable example of this. As Doniphan drove the enemy before him, the Mexicans began to believe that they could not win against him. Even Trias never seriously threatened the regiment after Sacramento although he refused to surrender and reoccupied Chihuahua after the volunteers left. One can assume that this attitude spread to other parts of the country where it undermined the national will to resist and added to American military prestige.

Weapons superiority was a major factor in Doniphan's success. As pointed out elsewhere, his men's rifles had greater range and accuracy than most Mexican shoulder arms, thus making the volunteers' fire more deadly and demoralizing to the enemy. Even more important at Sacramento was American artillery superiority. Clark and Weightman handled the U.S. guns brilliantly. They silenced the Mexican artillery, drove the enemy under cover and then dragged their pieces right up to the entrenchments to punch holes in them for Doniphan's assault. The accuracy of the American guns, which destroyed enemy cannon and

troops, demoralized Trias' men and broke up their attempts to rally, thus preventing their efforts at strong resistance. In contrast, the newly-cast, home-made Mexican artillery proved unable to inflict serious damage on the Missourians, thus further discouraging the Chihuahuans. Had Clark's men not served their guns so courageously and so well, the volunteers would have suffered much greater casualties in overrunning the fortifications, if they succeeded at all.

The expedition's propaganda value represented its second major importance. It not only added to the myth of U.S. invincibility, a significant propaganda point, but it illustrated the average American's ability to undergo hardship. One certainly cannot underplay the difficulties the Missourians overcame. They made the longest march of any units involved in the war, with minimal government support. They crossed waterless deserts, suffering the extremes of temperature common to such regions. Although this indicates their willingness to face hardships, expedition accounts point out that Doniphan's men took basic precautions to deal with these obstacles, such as bringing extra water, tents and blankets. While they suffered from weather and occasional lack of necessities, they did not march out unprepared, as some accounts suggest. The volunteers showed their willingness to face difficulties, especially since they continued on where opportunities to turn back occurred, as at El Paso. They showed that Americans could overcome all obstacles to achieve their goals, and thus discourage Mexican opposition.

Most studies of the Mexican War emphasize the innate abilities of Doniphan's men as the campaign's greatest attribute and fail to discuss other successes or failures of Doniphan's march. They compare it with Xenophon's expedition, usually to the detriment of the latter, and tend to minimize the effect of the Americans' victories on the campaign's success. One suspects, however, that Doniphan's tactical skill and the Missourians' high morale contributed more to its triumph than mere fortitude.

Throughout the campaign the volunteers' high morale furthered their success.

Always eager to meet the Mexicans in combat, they continuously favored pushing onward toward Chihuahua, the final objective, as the vote at El Paso showed. Their performance in the battles of Brazito and Sacramento, where they attacked in the face of discouraging obstacles, further substantiates this assessment. The volunteers' confidence in their own abilities and those of their officers helped them endure the difficulties imposed by distance, tension and rumors of overwhelming opposition.

A great part of the volunteers' confidence arose from their view of the Mexican foe. Initially they saw the average Mexicans as basically friendly, interested in the advantages of American annexation and likely to put up little opposition. Contact with the people of Santa Fe and El Paso seemed to substantiate this picture. Most of the citizens greeted the soldiers as allies, after some nervousness concerning the form occupation would take. Doniphan's men described these people as oppressed and poverty-stricken. Generally, the Missourians looked upon the upper-class Mexicans, particularly the priests as "with few exceptions, below their followers in morals and character."<sup>88</sup> To some extent, this probably stemmed from anti-Catholic sentiment, which ran strongly in the states during this period. It remained, however, a minority opinion among the volunteers.

Doniphan's men also had great confidence in their ability to overcome armed opposition. Believing in the basic friendliness of the inhabitants and their inferiority in military affairs (as evidenced by campaigns in Texas), the Missourians expected to defeat any resistance encountered. The battles of Brazito and Sacramento confirmed this belief, when the volunteers' aggressiveness and esprit proved greater than that of the Mexicans. The ease with which they won these combats convinced them of their own fighting superiority and the weakness of the enemy.

Because the volunteers looked upon most of Northern Mexico favorably, fing-  
ing it a fertile region rich in economic potential, they expected the United

States to annex the area as a result of the war. In their diaries they frequently mentioned the benefits it would receive from American rule, such as a more benevolent government and greater personal freedom, and they discussed ways to increase mining and farming production. The Missourians saw New Mexico as a region which would benefit the United States in other fields besides trade, an idea which probably had occurred to few of them prior to seeing it.

Of course, the conquest and occupation of Chihuahua altered these opinions, at least concerning that state. The population's hostility discouraged attempts to introduce the benefits of American government, and the difficulties involved in overcoming these attitudes seemed greater than the rewards warranted. The region's poverty, in contrast with its reported wealth, suggested little opportunity for economic gain, and thus no advantages lay in annexation. The constant hostility soured the Missourians toward the local people, making them less sympathetic to their conditions. The discovery that several Mexican prisoners of war, who were released after Brazito under the truce arrangements, but had fought at Sacramento, heightened the soldier's disgust with Mexicans. It added to the feeling of untrustworthy Mexicans. The civilians' attacks on them during their return home, which the volunteers considered unjustified, further increased their dislike of the people, at least in that area. While Doniphan's men came out of the campaign with a sense of accomplishment resulting from conquering New Mexico and then making their successful march, they undoubtedly felt that the Chihuahua occupation served little purpose and the U.S. had no use for that state.

Among a minority of the Missourians, the question concerning whether the population of Chihuahua could ever become Americanized further contributed to their discouragement with that state. These men reflected a feeling which had arisen out of the "annex all Mexico" movement, that the Mexicans were an inferior "Indian" race and could not learn the virtues of U.S. citizenship. Those people who believed in this generally did not oppose annexation of territory.

Instead they proposed that the number of Mexicans the country could absorb was limited and therefore the government should acquire only the sparsely inhabited portions of the nation to the south. To these few volunteers this would have meant annexing New Mexico and abandoning hostile Chihuahua.

Mexican reaction to Doniphan's invasion also varied according to the region. While one author claims that Doniphan's success showed that most Mexicans were apathetic to the war, since his men made a long journey without much opposition, this argument overlooks several other factors.<sup>89</sup> Much pro-American sympathy existed in Northern Mexico, particularly in New Mexico. In that region friendly feelings for Americans defused attempts to organize opposition to Doniphan's advance and created the welcoming atmosphere. In Chihuahua, however, Trias' war party overcame the American supporters and built up a strong spirit for resistance. Doniphan's victory, which destroyed the equipment and army which the people had labored hard to create, merely hardened their hostility. Although the citizens made no overt resistance to American occupation, they did not welcome the Missourians as friends. Even the attempts to encourage interaction, which had worked well in El Paso, failed to alter Chihuahua's attitude.

Probably the most significant result of the campaign from the Missourians' viewpoint was the reopening of trade with Northern Mexico, after all a major reason for undertaking the campaign. By the time he departed, Doniphan and Trias had reached an informal agreement guaranteeing American merchants' lives and property in Chihuahua, thus ensuring the continuation of trade with its profits for the United States. Of course, American conquest had already ensured the continuation of commerce with Santa Fe and El Paso. Since this trade directly affected the Missourians, they had a great interest in its restoration and viewed it with satisfaction, and it did play an important role in the economic life of the U.S. and Mexico. Furthermore, if Chihuahua ever became able to reopen its mines the profits from trading there would increase greatly, since the precious metals it produced would be a valuable commodity. Reopening of

trade probably represents the only valid justification for Doniphan's invasion.

The volunteers also took pride in their avenging the insults Mexico had given Americans for the past several years. They had easily defeated two hostile armies and occupied an enemy city, with minimal losses. Further satisfaction came from the fact that they had won these victories over the forces of the Mexican state from which most of those insults had come. Doniphan's volunteers showed the Mexicans the power of their northern neighbor and warned them that they could not harm U.S. citizens with impunity. In short, Doniphan's men had taught the enemy a lesson and satisfied American honor.<sup>90</sup>

In addition to these points, the campaign also undoubtedly aided the subsequent careers of at least two of the officers: Doniphan and Major Gilpin. Doniphan resumed his legal practice after the war, generally remaining inactive in public affairs, except for another term in the Missouri legislature in 1854, and an unsuccessful bid for U.S. representative in 1856. Given the public liking for military heroes, his expedition probably gained him much support during these elections. In 1860 his fame earned him a position as a Missouri delegate to the Washington Peace Conference, which futilely attempted to avert the secession crisis by producing a compromise settlement. Then the next year, secession-minded Governor Jackson appointed him major-general in charge of the state militia. Again his Chihuahua campaign probably influenced this appointment, since it had proven him an able and popular leader of Missouri troops. However, grief over his son's recent death and his wife's ill-health caused Doniphan to resign almost immediately.<sup>91</sup>

Doniphan failed to participate in the Civil War, due to poor health and his Unionist sympathies. He alone of the Missourians at the Peace Conference had opposed secession. This attitude so conflicted with his neighbors in Liberty that he had to flee to St. Louis after the war began. His health prevented him from joining the Union forces, so he remained quietly in the city until 1868, when he moved to Richmond, Missouri and resumed his legal career. He



died alone in Richmond in 1889. The strong Rebel sentiment in Liberty kept him from ever returning there, although he still referred to it as home.

Gilpin immediately returned to military service after his discharge in Missouri. He organized and led a regiment which dealt with Indian depredations along the Santa Fe Trail until the end of the war. His participation in Doniphan's expedition probably helped attract volunteers, as well as gain official sanctions for his activity. The only other effect of his war experience appeared in 1861, when Lincoln appointed him the first territorial governor of Colorado. Certainly it was a factor in his favor, especially considering the secession tensions, which briefly threatened to add the territory to the Confederacy. In a whirlwind campaign, Gilpin drove out the Rebels, thus saving Colorado for the Union. Despite his lesser role in the conquest, he received greater rewards than Doniphan, although the latter could have had them if he had so desired.

Although Doniphan's campaign had little effect on the course of the war, since the major reasons for capturing Chihuahua no longer remained strategic considerations, it did provide several benefits. It demonstrated the military capabilities of volunteer troops if competently led and confident in their own skills. While the campaign also provided a remarkable example of American fortitude and fighting ability against the Mexicans, authors have overemphasized this as its sole significance. Yet the expedition's major accomplishments lay in the reopening of the important Southwestern trade, between Missouri and Northern Mexico, and its indirect protection of U.S. control of New Mexico. Doniphan not only restored a major economic link between the two countries, he neutralized the military power of Chihuahua. This prevented Trias from reconquering New Mexico and thereby depriving the U.S. of one of its main war aims. Without Doniphan, the country might have lost the opportunity to annex the Southwest, for Trias could have invaded and retaken control of it. These are the considerations which made the campaign significant.

Footnotes

1. Jacob Robinson, A Journal of the Santa Fe Expedition Under Colonel Doniphan, (Princeton; 1932) 61.
2. Allan Johnson and Dumas Malone, ed., Dictionary of American Biography, (New York; 1930) Vol. 5: 365.
3. Johnson and Malone, D.A.B., 5: 365.
4. William Elsey Connelley, Doniphan's Expedition and the Conquest of New Mexico and California, (Topeka; 1907) 28.
5. Connelley, Doniphan's Expedition, 29.
6. James Wilson and John Fiske ed., Appleton's Cyclopedia of American Biography, (New York; 1900) Vol. 2: 200.
7. Connelley, Doniphan's Expedition, 32.
8. William Kennerly, Persimmon Hill, (Norman; 1948) 183.
9. Frank Edwards, A Campaign in New Mexico, (Ann Arbor; 1966) 21; Robinson, Journal, v.
10. Max L. Moorhead, New Mexico's Royal Road: Trade and Travel on the Chihuahua Trail, (Norman; 1958) 58.
11. Moorhead, Royal Road, 65.
12. K. Jack Bauer, The Mexican War 1846-1848, (New York; 1974) 2.
13. Bauer, Mexican War, 16.
14. G.L. Rives, The United States and Mexico 1821-1848, (New York; 1969) Vol. 2: 59.
15. Kennerly, Persimmon Hill, 183.
16. Edwards, Campaign, 20.
17. Kennerly, Persimmon Hill, 185; Edwards, Campaign, 21-22.
18. Dwight L. Clarke, Stephen Watts Kearny Soldier of the West, (Norman; 1961) 110.
19. George Gibson, Journal of a Soldier Under Kearny and Doniphan 1846-1847, (Glendale; 1935) 36.
20. Connelley, Doniphan's Expedition, 529-581.
21. Ralph Beiber, ed., Marching With the Army of the West, (Glendale; 1936) 115.

22. Thomas Karnes, William Gilpin Western Nationalist, (Austin; 1970) 141.
23. Edwards, Campaign, 22.
24. Karnes, Gilpin, 143,145.
25. John Hughes, Doniphan's Expedition: An Account of the U.S. Army Operations in the Great American Southwest, (Chicago; 1962) 31.
26. Clarke, Kearny, 148.
27. Nathan Brooks, A Complete History of the Mexican War 1846-1848, (Chicago; 1965) 268.
28. Karnes, Gilpin, 158.
29. William Richardson, Journal of William H. Richardson a Private Soldier in the Campaign of New and Old Mexico Under the Command of Colonel Doniphan of Missouri, (New York; 1848) 40.
30. Paul Horgan, Great River, (New York; 1954) Vol. 2: 743.
31. This was the name the Mexicans gave to any long, waterless stretch of road.
32. Hughes, Doniphan's Expedition, 257.
33. Florence C. and Robert H. Lister, Chihuahua: Storehouse of Storms, (Albuquerque; 1966) 121.
34. Edwards, Campaign, 79.
35. R.S. Ripley, War With Mexico, (New York; 1970) Vol. 1: 455.
36. Brooks, Mexican War, 269.
37. Albert Rmasey, trans., The Other Side: Or, Notes for the History of the War Between Mexico and the United States, (New York; 1970) 168.
38. Ripley, War With Mexico, 456.
39. Justin H. Smith, The War With Mexico, (New York; 1919) Vol. 1: 300-301.
40. Ransey, The Other Side, 169.
41. Smith, War With Mexico, 1: 301.
42. Loo was an extremely popular card game in the 19th century, combining elements of polor and euchre. The dealer would place three chips in the pot and deal each player three cards from a full deck. The players would try to take each trick by playing a higher card of the same suit as the one led, and the chips would be divided by the players taking the three tricks. Trump cards could be led only on the third trick.
43. Hughes, Doniphan's Expedition, 264.
44. Edwards, Campaign, 83.

45. Hughes gives the Mexican numbers at 1300, this being the highest figure for their side. Otherwise he agrees with other U.S. accounts. Hughes, Doniphan's Expedition, 261.
46. Smith claims only 100 Mexicans were killed and wounded. Smith, Mexican War, 302.
47. Edwards, Campaign, 88.
48. Ramsey, The Other Side, 170.
49. One volunteer avoided this by asking Doniphan if he had to pay for "mice" (maize). Not recognizing the reference to corn, Doniphan said he did not, at which the soldier immediately went out and appropriated a large quantity of corn. Doniphan found the incident humorous and failed to punish the man. Hughes, Doniphan's Expedition, 272.
50. Hughes, Doniphan's Expedition, 273.
51. Although details were lacking, Doniphan believed that Ortiz and others were planning an insurrection in El Paso, which would massacre his men. Learning that Ortiz received strangers at his house frequently, the Americans watched it and soon determined that these men were couriers from Mexican forces further south. They attempted to capture some of these messengers at Ortiz's house, but found only the priest. Ortiz denied plotting an insurrection, although admitting his patriotic feelings, but Doniphan decided to arrest him and the other suspicious citizens anyway. No concrete evidence of a plot was discovered.
52. One account claims that the regiment opposed marching on Chihuahua, but Doniphan convinced them to do so. Since only one diary makes this statement it seems to have little validity. Robinson, Journal, 69.
53. This contrasts with Wool's experiences. The volunteers with Wool hated him for his strict discipline and rigorous training, while Wool looked down upon them for their lack of military ability. At one point the soldiers refused to grind their own corn meal, forcing Wool to rescind the order to do so. Although there was no outright mutiny, Wool made no effort to compromise with the volunteers or understand their views, and therefore got little cooperation from them.
54. Edwards, Campaign, 98.
55. Hughes, Doniphan's Expedition, 290.
56. Beiber, Marching With the Army, 262.
57. Hughes, Doniphan's Expedition, 294.
58. These rumors were false. Sonora did not have the resources to mount an attack on Doniphan's force. Smith, Mexican War, 304.
59. Beiber, Marching With the Army, 255.
60. John Jenkins, History of the War Between the United States and Mexico, (Auburn; 1849) 313.

61. Cadmus Marcellus Wilcox, History of the Mexican War, (Washington; 1892) 156.
62. Hughes, Doniphan's Expedition, 320-321.
63. Hughes, Doniphan's Expedition, 320-321. The Mexicans give their numbers at 1500-2000 men. However, in the force breakdown they fail to include the militia and rancheros, which would make up the discrepancy between the Mexican and American figures. Ramsey, The Other Side, 173.
64. The way the cannonballs were seen varies in different accounts. Some authors claim that they made a blue streak as they traveled through the air, while others state that the weak Mexican powder caused the balls to bounce before reaching Doniphan's lines, thus allowing the soldiers to mark their path.
65. Beiber, Marching With the Army, 262.
66. Hughes, Doniphan's Expedition, 307.
67. Ramsey, The Other Side, 176.
68. Hughes, Doniphan's Expedition, 314.
69. Hughes, Doniphan's Expedition, 315.
70. Hughes, Doniphan's Expedition, 313.
71. Smith, Mexican War, 312.
72. Susan Shelby Magoffin, Down the Santa Fe Trail and Into Mexico: The Diary of Susan Shelby Magoffin, Stella Drumm ed., (New Haven; 1926) 221. A footnote in this diary states that most of the Mexicans were using flintlock muskets.
73. Ramsey, The Other Side, 173.
74. Magoffin, Down the Santa Fe Trail, 229.
75. Hughes, Doniphan's Expedition, 325-326.
76. Lister, Chihuahua, 126.
77. Edwards, Campaign, 130. Most sources agree with the details of this story, but Hughes' account claims that the mint was the building in question, not the governor's mansion. Hughes, Doniphan's Expedition, 328.
78. Karnes, Gilpin, 178.
79. Edwards, Campaign, 130-131.
80. Edwards, Campaign, 131.
81. Beiber, Marching With the Army, 275.
82. Edwards, Campaign, 132.
83. Hughes, Doniphan's Expedition, 364-365.

84. Edwards, Campaign, 152.
85. Of these horses,  $\frac{1}{2}$  died on the trail and the rest were delivered to their owners in Missouri. Connelley, Doniphan's Expedition, 492.
86. Edwards, Campaign, 184.
87. Ripley, War With Mexico, 1: 467.
88. Edwards, Campaign, 61.
89. Rives, United States and Mexico, 2: 375.
90. Hughes, Doniphan's Expedition, 380.
91. Doniphan's eldest son died in 1853, when a doctor accidentally poisoned him while treating him for an illness. The youngest son went to college in Virginia, where he drowned while swimming in a nearby creek in 1858. Connelley, Doniphan's Expedition, 30-31.

## Bibliography

Although the Doniphan campaign has received little detailed attention from Historians, a large amount of material on it exists. Several of the participants left journals describing the events surrounding the expedition and some of the histories of the war written in the ante-bellum period also provide useful information. In secondary sources, some general Mexican War studies give reasonable accounts of Doniphan's march. Two Mexican histories of the war provided a picture of the campaign from the enemy's side. In addition, several general works contributed background information on trade, American motivations and conditions in the Southwest prior to the war. Biographies of General Kearny and Major Gilpin were also useful. Sadly, no biography of Doniphan seems to exist, but biographical dictionaries provided most of the necessary background information concerning his career.

Seven members of the expedition left memoirs. Of these, the most authoritative is John T. Hughes' Doniphan's Expedition: An Account of the United States Army Operations in the Great American Southwest (Chicago; Rio Grande Press, 1962 [1848]). A private in Company C, Hughes enlisted with the intention of writing the regiment's history. Aware of this, Doniphan provided him with information and material, thus making his account the "official" history of the expedition. Hughes goes into great detail in describing the events, and provides letters and proclamations written by Doniphan. Generally, he presents a balanced view of the expedition, but a strong pro-American and pro-Doniphan bias is evident. Of major interest is Hughes' statement that his material on the Mexican forces came from captured documents supplied by Doniphan. For this reason I have accepted his figures for troop strengths and battle casualties, except for rare instances where other figures seem more logical. On the whole, this account provides much detailed material, as well as some insight into the reasons for Doniphan's actions.

Another important memoir was A Campaign in New Mexico With Colonel Doniphan (Ann Arbor; University Microfilms Inc., 1966 [1847]) by Frank Edwards. One of the artillerymen, Edwards was part of Mitchell's escort which joined Doniphan at Valverde, and thus saw the whole campaign. Edwards agrees with Hughes on most major points, although he contradicts him on a few minor ones. Edwards' major value lies in his descriptions of terrain and inhabitants, which go into more detail than Hughes. His work provides a useful view of American opinions, as well as confirming much of Hughes' material.

George Gibson's Journal of a Soldier Under Kearny and Doniphan 1846-1847 in Volume 3 of The Southwest Historical Series edited by Ralph Beiber (12 volumes, Glendale; Arthur C. Clarke Co., 1935) provides a less useful account. An infantryman attached to Mitchell's escort, Gibson wrote a straightforward history of the expedition. He does provide some interesting cultural material, and makes frequent references to annexing Chihuahua, but little of the information is unique. In contrast, Marcellus Ball Edwards' "Journal of Marcellus Ball Edwards" in Marching With the Army of the West, Volume 4 of Beiber's Southwest Historical Series, gives a unique account. A member of Company D, he discusses the difficulties the men faced, such as homesickness and inept medical attendants. While not hostile to Doniphan or the campaign, he does not portray the Missourians as cheerfully overcoming all difficulties. Also, he makes little mention of Mexican attitudes and conditions.

The diaries of William Richardson, Journal of William H. Richardson A Private Soldier in the Campaign of New and Old Mexico Under the Command of Colonel Doniphan of Missouri (3rd Ed., New York; by the author, 1848) and Jacob Robinson A Journal of the Santa Fe Expedition Under Colonel Doniphan (Princeton; University Press, 1932 [1848]) also provide little unique information. Richardson, another of Mitchell's escorts, gives a straightforward narrative of events as they affected him, with little description of his surroundings. He contributes an interesting view of the campaign's effect on the average soldier, but little



else of value. Robinson, a member of Company D, gives an account of the men's attitudes, which differs from the rest of the diaries. He shows the volunteers as concerned about the lack of equipment, fearful of the Mexicans and unwilling to invade Chihuahua. This provides an interesting contrast to the other accounts but receives no support from any other sources consulted. In his concrete facts, Robinson agrees with the other memoirs.

One other soldier left an account of some use. Persimmon Hill (Norman; University of Oklahoma Press, 1948) by William Kennerly is a general record of his life in St. Louis, but has some material concerning the expedition. Kennerly was one of the artillerymen who joined Doniphan at El Paso. His greatest value lies in his records of the formation and equipping of the artillery and its role in the battle of Sacramento. Otherwise, his memoirs contain little useful information, except for St. Louis' attitude towards the war.

Besides the participants, several non-combatants left valuable records. The Diary of James K. Polk During his Presidency 1845-1849 edited by Milo Milton Quaife (4 volumes, Chicago; A.C. McClurg Co., 1910) contains some worthwhile information on planning the expedition in Volume 1, pages 202-203. However, his references are usually too brief to have any great value. Of more importance is Susan Shelby Magoffin's diary, Down the Santa Fe Trail and Into Mexico: The Diary of Susan Shelby Magoffin, edited by Stella M. Drumm (New Haven; Yale University Press, 1926). As the wife of one of the traders, Susan Magoffin followed some distance behind Doniphan's army and arrived at Chihuahua during the occupation. Generally a discussion of social life and scenery, the diary has a valuable description of the city under the volunteers' presence, as well as an account of the evacuation to Saltillo.

Three other people left accounts of the march from Chihuahua; Josiah Gregg, James Webb and Adolphus Wislizenus. In The Diaries and Letters of Josiah Gregg 1840-1847 edited by Maurice Fulton (2 vol., Norman; University of Oklahoma Press, 1941), this well-known merchant described Doniphan's evacuation. He had come

to Chihuahua with the messengers bringing Doniphan's orders from Wool. Like Magoffin, Gregg was critical of the volunteers' treatment of the Mexicans. He also castigated Doniphan for showing little concern for the traders' interests, but since he was a merchant himself these statements are not entirely reliable. James Webb's Adventures in the Santa Fe Trade, Volume 1 of Beiber's Southwest Historical Series provides another trader's record of events. Webb had gone to Chihuahua ahead of the army, and was arrested for being an American. His diary describes the situation in Chihuahua prior to Doniphan's arrival, and includes some useful information concerning Mexican attitudes. Finally, Wislizenus' Memoir of a Tour of Northern Mexico Connected With Colonel Doniphan's Expedition in 1846 and 1847 (Glorieta, N.M.; Rio Grande Press, Inc., 1969 [1848]) covers much of the same material as Gregg. Wislizenus, a doctor imprisoned in Chihuahua in 1846, concentrated on terrain and scientific information in his account. However, he did provide some interesting material concerning the province prior to Doniphan's conquest, plus a detailed account of the march to Saltillo.

Four general contemporary studies of the Mexican War, published shortly after its termination, provided material on Doniphan's campaign. The War With Mexico (2 vol., New York; Burt Franklin, 1970 [1849]) by R.S. Ripley is the most useful of these. It not only gives a reasonably detailed account of the expedition, but also the reasons Doniphan undertook it and the results produced. However, Ripley scattered his references to the campaign throughout Volume 1, making it difficult to form a cohesive view of Doniphan's actions.

Nathan C. Brooks' A Complete History of the Mexican War 1846-1848 (Chicago; Rio Grande Press, 1965 [1849]) and History of the War Between the United States and Mexico (Auburn; Derby, Miller & Co., 1849) by John Jenkins also contain descriptions of the campaign. Like Ripley, they generally agree with the facts given in the participants' diaries, but they do not attempt to analyze the results. Both authors, however, do describe it as an example of American forti-

tude and play up the difficulties involved in the march. They also discuss Mexican preparations to deal with Doniphan, but Jenkins goes into greater detail than Brooks, who gives this only superficial treatment.

The fourth work, Edward Mansfield's The Mexican War (New York; A.S. Barnes & Co., 1851) contains a different account. Its treatment of the campaign is extremely brief, but seems to rely on Mexican sources more than the others did. Mansfield describes the Mexicans in El Paso as hostile and uses the low Mexican figures of their strength at Sacramento. The brevity and difference with other works makes Mansfield suspect, but he does provide an interesting alternative view.

Two sources provided accounts of the campaign from the Mexican viewpoint. The most useful was The Other Side translated by Albert Ramsey (New York; Burt Franklin, 1970 1850 ). An overall Mexican account of the war, it gives the details of Chihuahua's preparations for defense, including the troop movements. This book portrays the Mexican forces as much weaker than American sources claim and blames their defeat on misunderstood orders rather than U.S. fighting ability. Jose Maria Roa Barcena's Recuerdos de la Invasión Norte Americana 1846-1848 (3 vol., Editorial Porrúa S.A.; Mexico, 1947) follows this trend in its description of the campaign in Volume 1. Generally it agrees with Ramsey's description and interpretation of events, with only a few minor differences. Barcena gives more material on American movements than Ramsey does, and accepts some U.S. figures for battle strengths. However, since no translation of Barcena exists, the difficulties involved in extracting the information, coupled with the minimal unique intelligence, hardly makes its value worthwhile.

Several secondary works relating to the Mexican War contributed information concerning the expedition. William E. Connelley's Doniphan's Expedition and the Conquest of New Mexico and California (Topeka; by the author, 1907) was one of the most useful. The only secondary work dealing with the campaign, its greatest failing lay in the fact that most of the book was merely a reprint

of Hughes' account. Connelley supplemented this with footnotes from other sources, but made no attempt to analyze the march. However, he offset this omission by including the troop rosters of all of the units involved, as well as biographical sketches of Doniphan and some of the other participants. These supplied information on numbers and casualties not available elsewhere, plus material on Doniphan's early career. Although some of the addenda are not pertinent to the expedition, the majority of the supplementary material ensures the work's value as a source.

Two other secondary works proved of great importance. These are Justin Smith's The War With Mexico (2 vol., New York; Macmillan Co., 1919) and K. Jack Bauer's The Mexican War 1846-1848 (New York; Macmillan Co., 1974). Long considered the best work on the war, Smith's book gives a detailed narrative of Doniphan's march in the first volume. He includes a greater account of Mexican preparations than most sources, and occasionally refers to the Missourians as less orderly or disciplined than many works picture them. Although he generally agrees with most of the concrete facts, Smith fails to furnish much interpretation on the causes and effects of the campaign. Bauer also shares this problem, in addition to supplying a much briefer account of Doniphan's march. Considered one of the best books on the war since Smith, in part due to his use of original sources, Bauer provides a useful, readable overview of Doniphan's work, but includes no significant discoveries or conclusions. Both books, however, provide an excellent starting point for studying the campaign, due to their accurate narrative of events.

The other secondary histories consulted, Robert Henry's The Story of the Mexican War (New York; Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1950), To Conquer a Peace (Garden City; Doubleday & Co., 1974) by John Weems, and History of the Mexican War (Washington D.C.; Church News Publishing Co., 1892) by Cadmus Marcellus Wilcox all furnish rather standard accounts of the trek. All three supply basic information concerning it with no attempt at interpretation. All of them emphasize

the difficulties the volunteers faced and their fortitude in overcoming them. They include little material about Mexican defensive preparations, except for Wilcox, who goes into some detail on the subject. In short, all three works merely confirm previous facts without providing any new ones.

A few general secondary works had information pertaining to Doniphan. Paul Horgan's Great River: The Rio Grande in North American History (2 vol., New York; Rinehart & Co., 1954) includes some discussion of the campaign in the second volume. Like most other works, Horgan fails to analyze the expedition and he does not include adequate coverage of events after El Paso's occupation, which occurred away from the river. He does contribute some unique detailed information concerning the Valverde encampment, however. He also indicates that the Mexican population was more hostile and the Missourians less brave and disciplined than most authors imply.

Another useful work was Florence C. and Robert H. Listers' Chihuahua: Storehouse of Storms (Albuquerque; University of New Mexico Press, 1966). A general history of the province, this work supplies much useful information concerning its attitude towards the Americans, as well as a lengthy description of the city's occupation by Doniphan. The rest of the campaign and the actual Mexican defense preparations receive only sketchy coverage, however, thus detracting from an otherwise well-done book.

New Mexico's Royal Road: Trade and Travel on the Chihuahua Trail (Norman; University of Oklahoma Press, 1958) by Max L. Moorhead also proved quite valuable. A history of trade in Chihuahua, it furnished much useful material on Missouri-Chihuahua commerce, particularly on Mexican attitudes and restrictions. The account of Doniphan's campaign is rather brief, but focuses on its role in reopening trade. Moorhead's chapter on the traffic's significance also provides some intriguing concepts.

Still another interesting work was G.L. Rives' The United States and Mexico 1821-1848 (2 vol., New York; Kraus Reprint Co., 1969 [1913]). Rives provides

little background information on the expedition itself, but his pre-war material on Mexican-American relations contained some worthwhile points, and he makes several interesting inferences about the campaign's effects. The events themselves receive only cursory coverage in Volume 2, which agrees with most of the other sources. Nevertheless, the conclusions make the work worth consulting.

Aside from the material in Connelley mentioned earlier, four general biographical sources provided information on Doniphan. These consist of: The Cyclopedia of American Biographies edited by John H. Brown (Vol. 2 of 7 volumes, Boston; The Cyclopedia Publishing Co., 1897), Dictionary of American Biography edited by Allan Johnson and Dumas Malone (Vol. 5 of 20 volumes, New York; Charles Scribner's Sons, 1930), Appleton's Cyclopedia of American Biography edited by James Wilson and John Fiske, (Vol. 2 of 8 volumes, New York; Appleton Publishing Co., 1900) and the National Cyclopedia of American Biography, anonymous editors (Vol. 11 of 15 volumes, New York; James T. White & Co., 1909). All of these contain relatively similar information describing Doniphan's early life and military career. D.A.B. does furnish more specifics on his postwar life. Wilson and Fiske also contain some unique material. Beyond this, however, all four say approximately the same thing, although Brown's work proved least informative.

Biographies of two other men connected with the campaign also were useful. Dwight L. Clarke's Stephen Watts Kearny Soldier of the West (Norman; University of Oklahoma Press, 1961) had worthwhile accounts of the force's organization and march to Santa Fe, from General Kearny's viewpoint. Acceptable coverage of the city's occupation also made up part of the book. Of course, it focused on Kearny's difficulties, so Doniphan played only a minor role. William Gilpin: Western Nationalist (Austin; University of Texas Press, 1970) by Thomas Karnes looked at the expedition from Major Gilpin's angle. Its primary value lay in the descriptions of regimental politics and daily life in the unit. In addition, the author drew some interesting conclusions on why the campaign succeeded, and

gave much material concerning Gilpin's subsequent career.

Several works on Manifest Destiny contributed facts on that creed's role in bringing on the war and the campaign. Albert K. Weinberg's Manifest Destiny A Study of Nationalist Expansionism (Baltimore; Johns Hopkins Press, 1935) provided the most detailed view. He includes lengthy descriptions of all of the factors which made up this attitude and its part in American history. Of particular interest is the section concerning how it influenced American perceptions of the Mexicans and the unusual ideas Weinberg proposes in this context.

Frederick Merk's Manifest Destiny and Mission in American History (New York; Alfred A. Knopf, 1965) represents another worthwhile work in this field. It focuses almost exclusively on the Mexican War era, and therefore covers it more thoroughly than Weinberg. Like him, Merk also contributes some interesting insights into the influence of various aspects of Manifest Destiny. His comments on attitudes toward native assimilation proved particularly useful.

Manifest Destiny, edited by Norman Graebner (New York; Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1968) and Graebner's Empire on the Pacific (New York; Ronald Press Co., 1955) round out this section of sources. The former work is a collection of contemporary writings concerning various aspects of the subject. Its main value lies in the picture it provides of the actual views of the proponents. The latter book concentrates on American attempts to gain Oregon and California, but touches on other regions that interested the U.S. at that time. Its portrayal of New Mexico's role in the Pacific Coast acquisitions, as well as the province's own usefulness, proved especially valuable.

All of these sources contributed to this study to some degree. The large number of primary works, surprising considering the obscurity of the campaign, proved especially helpful. Most of the books generally agreed on the events and their effects, but enough differences appeared to produce some interesting insights. The secondary sources basically furnished details on the campaign's finer points, plus conclusions concerning the expedition's value.

EFFECTIVE AMATEUR:  
ALEXANDER DONIPHAN'S LEADERSHIP IN THE MEXICAN WAR 1846-1847

by

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Doniphan's expedition against Chihuahua in 1846-1847 represents one of the forgotten campaigns of the Mexican War. A Missouri lawyer commanding a regiment of volunteers from that state, Doniphan marched from Santa Fe to Chihuahua, Mexico without regular army support, and overcame all opposition along the route. In the process, he proved his abilities of both military command and leadership of militia units. Doniphan successfully accomplished his objectives without suffering serious losses or losing his authority over the independent-minded volunteers.

Several reasons existed for undertaking this campaign. First, Chihuahua was the terminus of the trade route from Missouri through Santa Fe, and therefore its capture had an economic importance for American commerce, since the war had closed that market. Interest also existed for annexing the province to the United States or possibly trading it for other territory the Americans wanted. Reports indicated that the inhabitants sympathized with the U.S., which would make annexation easy. In addition, the campaign would eliminate hostile Mexican forces in the region, thus preventing them from threatening other American units or reinforcing the main Mexican army.

When Doniphan's men embarked on the campaign in December 1846, they already had gained some practical experience on the march from Missouri and rounding up hostile Indians for a peace conference near Santa Fe. This helped accustom them to the expedition's hardships, which included long waterless stretches of road, cold weather and lack of fuel for campfires. Lacking government supplies, they bartered for most of their needs with the natives, who proved quite friendly toward the Americans. Although the volunteers suffered under these hardships, they continued to advance without complaints.

The Missourians met their first opposition outside El Paso at Brazito. Here 1200 Mexicans surprised their main body, about 500 strong, making camp.

However, Doniphan had time to get his men into battle formation and stopped the enemy charge with rifle volleys at close range. A U.S. countercharge then routed the Mexicans and captured much of their equipment. The remaining Mexicans retreated to Chihuahua, allowing Doniphan to occupy El Paso without opposition.

Doniphan remained in El Paso a month waiting for artillery support. He originally intended to unite with a larger American force which supposedly had already captured Chihuahua, but reports now proved that it had abandoned the campaign. Although the Mixxourians favored continuing, they needed cannon to ensure their victory, thus the delay. The stay was pleasant, however, for most of the citizens preferred American dominance and therefore were quite friendly with the volunteers. Doniphan contributed to the goodwill by insisting that his men respect Mexican rights and pay for all goods taken. With few exceptions they did so, thus showing Doniphan's ability to control his men.

When the artillery arrived in early February, increasing his force to 1000 men including traders, Doniphan advanced on Chihuahua. The soldiers suffered all of the previous difficulties, but met no serious obstacles until they reached the Sacramento River. Here, the province's entire military strength of 4000 armed men blocked the road with entrenchments and artillery. In a brilliant maneuver, Doniphan flanked the defenses, then surprised the Mexicans by charging them. After a sharp fight the defenders fled, leaving the Americans in possession of their artillery, all of their supplies and the road to Chihuahua.

While peaceful, the occupation of Chihuahua lacked the good relations which had marked that of El Paso. The inhabitants proved hostile to American control and Doniphan's attempts to win them over failed. The volunteers reciprocated these feelings by damaging the public buildings, although they obeyed Doniphan's orders to remain well-behaved and pay for supplies. Besides this hostility, discovery that reports had exaggerated Chihuahua's wealth and the Missouriians' impending enlistment expirations eliminated any intentions of retaining control

of the city. After two months, Doniphan abandoned it and led his force to the Gulf Coast, where it boarded ships for the States and its discharge. Aside from some local hostility, this movement occurred without incident.

Although the invasion of Chihuahua failed in its original intent of occupying the region, several beneficial results did accrue from it. Aside from its display of American hardihood in overcoming natural obstacles, it portrayed the Missourians as invincible, since they won both battles and suffered only 20 combat casualties. The qualitative superiority of American rifles and artillery, as well as the Missourians' high morale, aided in these successes. Furthermore, the expedition neutralized Chihuahua's military strength, thus preventing its use against New Mexico and protecting that region from reconquest. Also, it reopened the trade between Missouri and Chihuahua, thereby restoring this significant economic factor. These practical results justified the campaign.

Several primary and secondary sources provided valuable information concerning this campaign. Among the former, John Hughes' Doniphan's Expedition and Frank Edwards' A Campaign in New Mexico proved most useful. Of the secondary studies, Justin Smith's The War With Mexico, William Connelley's Doniphan's Expedition and K. Jack Bauer's The Mexican War 1846-1848 gave worthwhile material.