

ARTICLE.

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August, 1906.

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SUBJECT.

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Retained Copy.

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for

NELSON'S ENCYCLOPAEDIA.

By

GENERAL *Oliver* HOWARD,
United States Army, (Retired)

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ZACHARY TAYLOR.

Zachary Taylor.-The twelfth President of the United States.

b. Orange County, Virginia, November 24th, 1784.-d. July 9th, 1850 at Washington, D.C. Son of Colonel Richard Taylor, commissioned army officer under Washington; who was an early settler of Kentucky near Louisville. Zachary was taken in childhood, before he was a year old, to the new home. His mother, nee Mary Strother, came of excellent family, and always showed heroic fidelity to family duties when constantly exposed to Indian raids during Taylor's childhood and youth. She had three children, Zachary being the youngest. He lived at this home most of the time working with his father and brothers till 1808. His school privileges were very limited. An elder brother ^{in the} ~~under~~ army ~~commission~~ having died, ⁽¹⁸⁰⁸⁾ ~~this year~~ Taylor was appointed to his vacancy, 1st Lieutenant, 7th Infantry; he served in New Orleans till attacked by yellow fever.

During a furlough he visited Virginia and Maryland. In Calvert County Maryland, he met ^{his future consort,} Miss Margaret Smith. The marriage took place ^{near Louisville Ky.} in a little log house on the Taylor farm. The record is that she was a home-loving, industrious, Christian woman.

In 1810 ^{Taylor} he became a Captain in the army; and in 1812 gave a remarkable defense of Fort Harrison situated on the Wabash above Vincennes (Now Indiana) against a numerous band of Indians, part of Tecumseh's force. He had about fifty soldiers many of whom were ill of fever. His conduct was so fine that he was rewarded with an honorary brevet, then with a Major's commission. During the war of 1812-14 he continued on the western frontier having several battles with Indians, who were allies of the English. His early education had been meager; but he wasted no time when at Army posts, constantly studying solid military works and other books of research.

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legal and historic. In 1822 he constructed Fort Jesup on the borders of Louisiana; in 1832, again on the north-western frontier with the rank of Colonel, he participated with credit in the Black Hawk War. He was sent to Florida in 1836 and fought a hard and successful battle with the Seminole Indians near Lake Okechobee; his campaign was a success. For this service exceeding other officers in that region he was promoted to Brigadier General and became the commander of the Department of Florida. He was finally after some years relieved from this work at his own request and transferred to the command of the western military department, southern division. He bought a plantation not far from Baton Rouge, his headquarters.

At Baton Rouge he and his family selected a small cottage close to the Mississippi River and refitted it for occupancy. From this point he commanded the Department, the family remaining there during subsequent active operations.

A joint resolution annexing Texas passed the U.S. Congress and became a law March 1, 1845. The Mexican Minister immediately demanded his passports; the Mexican Government organized an army and proclaimed her intention to fight the United States and to cross over the alleged boundaries of Texas with an Army. President Polk decided to order a strong force to the Texas border. Taylor with the frontier troops was ordered to get as near Texas as he could while waiting for the action of the Governments concerned. Mexico not acknowledging the independence of Texas strongly insisted that Texas could in no event have any claim to territory beyond the Nueces, while Texas as stoutly claimed all the territory to the Rio Grande. In November, 1845, Taylor occupied Corpus Christi. March 1, 1846 he with his main army reached the line of the Nueces. He would not move forward under any obscure directions, so finally sent this dispatch:-

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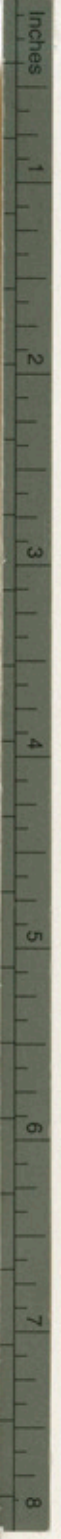
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"This Army will obey any orders that may be received from the Government". In reply, February 4th, 1846, the order came:—"Move forward with your force to the Rio Grande", so that he moved with about 4000 men across the disputed territory; he first built Fort Brown on the River opposite Matamoras. The Mexican Commander, Ampudia, demanded that Taylor retire to the Nueces during negotiations; this Taylor refused to do. Immediately a Mexican force under General Arista, 6000 strong, crossed the Rio Grande and gave battle. Taylor defeated him May 8th, 1846 in this battle, Palo Alto, having with him only 2288 men. Taylor's loss was nine killed, 44 wounded, and two missing. Arista, much chagrined at his repulse, sought a new field not far off and made a ~~stand~~ ^{bold, but futile} stand so that the next day, (May 9th) came Taylor's greater victory in the battle of Resaca de la Palma. Taylor's loss, aggregate, 112 killed and wounded. Arista's loss in both battles far exceeded Taylor's. From this field Taylor drove all not killed or wounded, of the Mexicans across the Rio Grande. As soon as the news reached Washington Congress declared war to exist by the act of Mexico and 50,000 volunteers were publicly called for. Taylor was promoted to Major-General and ordered as soon as reinforced to invade the territory of Mexico.

By Sept. 9th Taylor with 6645 men, having possession of Matamoras and Camargo attacked the City of Monterey which was strongly fortified and defended by 8000 Mexican regulars, 3000 militia and 42 cannon. Gen. Ampudia was in command. Taylor had, such as they were, not to exceed 24 cannon all told. He made a seige of about ten days which was attended with only three days hard fighting; the City surrendered, Sept. 24th, 1846.

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via Vera Cruz. To do this he was constrained to take from Taylor a large quota of troops. Taylor after that had only 500 regulars and 5000 volunteers to meet a new Mexican Army of at least 21000 aggregate, under Gen. Santa Anna. Taylor was apparently retreating before Santa Anna's advance; but selecting a favorable position for his small force to defend, not far from the Hamlet ^{of} Buena Vista, he made a ~~decided~~ ^{determined} stand and fought a closely contested battle the 22nd and 23rd of February, 1847. It was a ~~great~~ ^{decided} victory and gave to Taylor and his Army, in the United States, a wonderful popularity. Taylor said: "The great disparity of numbers and the exhaustion of our troops rendered it inexpedient and hazardous to attempt pursuit", yet the enemy had fled and were scattered in every direction. Taylor held all the ground he had gained. His soldiers dubbed him "Rough and Ready".

At the Whig Convention after the Mexican War (June 8th, 1848) Zachary Taylor was nominated for the Presidency over Scott, Clay and Webster. He was elected over Lewis Cass, the Democratic, and Martin Van Buren, the Freesoil candidates. Taylor entered upon his Presidency in 1849 at a most exciting period of our country's history. The Democrats were in the majority and the Freesoilers were exceedingly active in Congress. He, a slave-holder himself, could not do much; yet by his leadership and ^{the} co-operation of his friends the country was enlarged and extended to the Pacific Coast and the meditated "secession" postponed more than ten years. A writer says, "Worn down by the unaccustomed turmoil of politics, the rough and good natured old soldier did not long enjoy his honors." During Independence Day, 1850, only sixteen months after the beginning of his administration a severe attack of indigestion set in and he died on the fifth day after the attack, July 9th, 1850.

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Taylor's qualities as a man were firmness, thorough honesty, a father rather than a martinet in governing and commanding his soldiers; his personal courage was phenomenal. He made the precepts of the Holy Scriptures his standard, ^{and} was "tender and devoted" as a husband and father in his family.

Consult Wilcox' Mexican War, Howard's Biography (1902) and articles in various Encyclopaedia on United States; Mexico; Mexican War.

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