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## **Irregulars: Guerrilla and Ranchoero Warfare in South Texas and Northern Mexico during the Mexican - American War**

*James W. Mills*

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*The overall outcome of the Mexican - American War (1846-1848) was determined largely by regular military forces. There was, however, another war within this war waged by irregulars, guerrillas, and ranchoeros from Mexico, as well as by Texas Rangers and elements within the U.S. volunteers. Although these forces were important to both sides in the war effort, people most often remember them for the atrocities they committed.*

**A**fter acquiring its independence from England in 1783, the newly established nation of the United States of America realized territorial boundaries stretching from the Atlantic Ocean inland to the Mississippi River. Within twenty years, this young nation acquired the Louisiana Territory, thus doubling the size of the country. As the U.S. boundary spread westward, so did the nation's population.

Mexico, meanwhile, gained independence from Spain in 1821 and inherited vast amounts of land in her own right including the northern Mexican state of Texas. In hopes of luring settlers to its north Texas frontier, the Mexican government made the fateful decision to issue generous land grants to foreigners, particularly to people from the United States who were already in the process of moving

westward. By 1836, Texas had a substantial Anglo-American population and, along with a small number of Tejanos, declared and won their independence from Mexico.

In 1845, the U.S. government proposed legislation to annex Texas as the 28th state, an action viewed by Mexico as an act of war. While negotiations with Texas were under way, President James K. Polk dispatched General Zachary Taylor to the mouth of the Nueces River and then south to the Rio Grande River, the disputed southern boundary of Texas and a serious provocation to Mexican authorities.

By May 1846, the two nations were engaged in war and used conventional army personnel to fight the battles, while an additional contingency of troops known as “irregulars,” also fought for Mexico against the United States. The irregulars were armed men, not officially affiliated with the Mexican army, who fought against the American invasion. People referred to these groups as *rancheros* or *guerrillas*, and although they did fight on occasion in coordinated efforts with the regular Mexican army, they most often fought alone at times and locations of their own choosing. General Zachary Taylor had first encountered irregular or *ranchero* fighters in January 1846 while encamped at Corpus Christi Bay near the Nueces River. There, Taylor received a dispatch from Antonio Canales, the proclaimed General of the Liberal forces of northern Mexico. Canales, a staunch supporter of states’ rights and a broad distribution of political power, vehemently opposed the Conservative party of Mexico, which advocated a strong centralized government. Canales initially offered his services, along with that of his aide, Jose Maria de Jesus Carvajal, and a Liberal irregular militia in a proposed alliance against Mexican Centralist president Mariano Parades.<sup>1</sup> Canales also requested that his men be supplied with U.S. guns, ammunition, and money. Leery of such a scheme, Taylor sent dispatches outlining Canales’ offer to Washington, D.C. and weeks later received word from Secretary of War William Marcy that the U.S. govern-

ment would not supply Canales and his irregular force with weapons. Marcy did, however, encourage Taylor to accept any Mexican volunteers into U.S. service, although few if any availed themselves of that opportunity.<sup>2</sup>

With the American rejection of collaboration, Liberal Party supporters Canales and Carvajal had to decide which side to assist during the Mexican - American War. In the end, they, along with their irregular army, fought reluctantly with their rival Centralist countrymen against the American invasion of their homeland.<sup>3</sup>

General Taylor did not encounter further Mexican irregular activity until his army received orders to move south through the desolate Nueces strip towards the Rio Grande River. In mid-March 1846, an advance guard under Colonel David E. Twiggs happened upon a small group of Mexican guerrillas who were in the process of setting fire to the prairie grass north of the Arroyo Colorado, an act designed to impede the advance of the U.S. Army. The next day, Twiggs' scouting party of six soldiers under the command of Lieutenant Hamilton Fowler confronted a Mexican force of twenty-two mounted irregulars led by Lieutenant Ramón Falcon. Falcon inquired as to the Americans' intentions and warned against further encroachment on Mexican soil. Falcon also gave the impression that he was merely the advance guard of a much larger Mexican force close by. Fowler informed the Mexican lieutenant that he would discuss Falcon's warning with his superior officer and then report back that afternoon, but on his return Fowler found that the Mexicans had disappeared.<sup>4</sup>

Taylor and his army continued to move south unopposed until 19 March. Upon nearing the Little Colorado, also known as the Arroyo Colorado, a brackish stream about a hundred yards wide and approximately twenty-five miles north of Matamoros, the Americans were once again confronted by a *ranchero* or irregular cavalry unit. Stationed on the south bank of the arroyo and concealed in the thick chaparral, the Mexican force cleverly disguised its true size.

Buglers were located up and down the waters edge and back into the brush. Using a relay or echoing system, they were able to give the impression that a much larger force than actually existed was in the area.<sup>5</sup>

Taylor halted his army for the night opposite the unknown number of Mexican irregulars and dispatched his engineers under Captain Joseph Mansfield to hack out a road for U.S. troops and supplies. As the engineers worked through the night clearing brush, Taylor assigned sharpshooters to provide protection in case of an enemy attack.

The next morning, Captain José Barragan splashed across the arroyo and delivered a message to Taylor from Mexican authorities in Matamoros. The wording of the letter made it clear that if the Americans proceeded any further, Mexico would consider the American actions as an act of war. Undeterred, Taylor ordered his men forward to face the supposed thousands of Mexican troops on the other side who could be heard shouting orders. As the Americans braced for battle and the tensions reached a crescendo, Brevet Brigadier General William Worth, with his sword raised high, galloped past the American troops and down into the water, emerging moments later on the opposite bank. There, he discovered that the Mexican irregulars, who in reality numbered only a hundred, were quickly retreating south towards the Rio Grande.<sup>6</sup>

With the "Battle of the Arroyo" averted, the Americans continued to advance. They established a supply base along the coast at Point Isabel, and erected a six-sided earthen fort on the bank of the Rio Grande opposite Matamoros. As long as the U.S. army traveled *en masse*, they were safe from attacks by irregular forces. However, stragglers, or those straying away from camp, were especially vulnerable to ambush and/or guerrilla attack.

One of the first men in Taylor's army to be killed by local roving bands of *rancheros* was Colonel Trueman Cross, the Quartermaster General of the Army of Occupation. Aware of the possible dan-

gers, Cross nevertheless was fond of going on daily rides into the countryside. On 10 April 1846, the Quartermaster left the American encampment opposite Matamoros with his son, but did not return as scheduled. When his son returned to camp alone later that evening, Taylor dispatched a search party.<sup>7</sup> After several days of searching, Lieutenant Stephen D. Dobbins of the 3rd Infantry, and Lieutenant Theodoric H. Porter of the 4th, along with twenty privates, encountered a band of some one hundred and fifty armed Mexicans who were either *rancheros* or members of the regular army. The two sides exchanged shots and in the melee that followed, an American named Flood was killed and Lieutenant Porter was surrounded and slashed to death. Porter's death was especially mourned as he was the son of the renowned naval commander, David Porter. Because it had begun to rain heavily, neither side was able to fire their weapons since their gunpowder had gotten wet and with darkness approaching both groups retreated.

American officials did not learn the fate of Colonel Cross until eleven days after his disappearance. On 21 April, Chapita Sandoval, a Mexican spy working for Taylor, alerted military officials that he had discovered a partially decomposed body in the surrounding chaparral. Another search party was immediately dispatched and was led to the badly decomposed remains of the unfortunate American colonel. Positive identification was made by the tattered remains of his uniform. Sandoval believed that the ambush and murder had been the work of *rancheros* under the leadership of Romano Falcon. The Mexicans had initially planned to take Cross to Matamoros as a prisoner, but Falcon objected. The American colonel was found with a hole in his skull and rumors swirled that it had been Falcon who inflicted the mortal wound. Taylor confronted General Pedro Ampudia, the Mexican commander of the regular army forces in Matamoros, but Ampudia maintained that he knew nothing about the incident nor had he given Falcon permission to engage in such activities.<sup>8</sup>

Despite receiving wounds on 25 April while supporting regular Mexican forces at the battle of Los Carricitos, Lieutenant Falcon continued to lead irregular Mexican forces in extreme south Texas, harassing and killing Taylor's men whenever the opportunity arose.

General Taylor, meanwhile, countered such threats by employing his own brand of irregular forces—Texas Rangers under the leadership of Captain Samuel Walker.<sup>9</sup> A wiry Marylander, Walker had previously served in the Seminole Wars and had twice escaped from a Mexican prison after being captured during the ill-fated Mier debacle a few years earlier. Having arrived at Point Isabel in mid-April 1846, Walker and his Texas Rangers were commissioned to gather intelligence, serve as scouts, and to keep the supply and communication lines open between the two U.S. positions of Point Isabel and Taylor's encampment across from Matamoros. On 28 April, Walker, who was encamped a few miles southwest of Point Isabel, rode out on an early morning scouting expedition leaving behind a small detachment of about fifteen Rangers. The men were shortly thereafter confronted by a large Mexican force of both regulars and *rancheros* under the command of Major Rafael Quintero. In the ensuing fracas, the Mexicans killed six of Walker's men including one Ranger who was roped around the neck and dragged through the brush. Throwing a lariat around an enemy's neck and then dragging the victim through the thorny underbrush was one of the more unsavory tactics used by *rancheros*. To avoid falling victim to this sort of humiliation, Rangers learned to carry large bowie knives to cut themselves free. Quintero's force also captured four Rangers, but they later returned via a prisoner exchange. Walker and the remainder of his men retreated to the coast with Quintero's troops in hot pursuit. The Mexicans broke off only when they came within cannon shot of the American post at Point Isabel.<sup>10</sup>

In part due to the addition of guerrillas and irregular forces that were aiding the regular Mexican army, General Zachary Taylor made an appeal to the governors of Texas and Louisiana for five thousand

volunteers. These American forces arrived too late to participate at the battles of Palo Alto and Resaca de la Palma, but they would be an important, albeit unruly, addition to the U.S. forces for the remainder of the war. Their officers, for instance, were often elected on the mere basis of personal popularity or by their ability to supply whiskey to the men.<sup>11</sup>



*Figure 1: A Mexican Ranchoero about to lasso an unfortunate victim.” Courtesy of Northern Illinois University.*

Although both American volunteers and Mexican irregular forces were important to both sides in the war effort, they are most often remembered for the atrocities that they committed. In early May, for example, guerrilla forces from Reynosa, perhaps under the leadership of General Antonio Canales, descended upon a group of sutlers and their supplies en route to Port Isabel. Lead merchant Patterson Rogers, along with his two sons and about twenty others, were attacked as they reached the Arroyo Colorado. The *ranchero* forces showed no mercy to the American invaders and proceeded to kill all of the men as well as the seven women and children who were in the group. The assailants then dumped their bodies into the water below. The sole survivor of the massacre was Patterson Rogers’ son William, who had a smashed windpipe. He managed



to escape and hide in the brush but was later captured and held in prison in Matamoros until General Taylor secured his release. The Rogers' valuables and other property that had been stolen were discovered the following December in the possession of the *alcalde* of Reynosa.<sup>12</sup>

Irregular forces played only a small role at the key battles of Palo Alto (8 May) and Resaca de la Palma (9 May), contests which were determined almost exclusively by the regular armies on both sides. The exception for the Americans was the presence of Walker's Rangers. Antonio Canales, meanwhile, led an irregular militia comprised of Mexican volunteers from the northern states of Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas. Canales organized his guerrilla band following the Palo Alto and Resaca de la Palma battles and harassed Taylor's forces along the Rio Grande and into northeastern Mexico with a degree of success.<sup>13</sup>

As the American forces moved to occupy Matamoros and U.S. volunteers began to arrive in large numbers along the coast, regular Mexican forces retreated into the interior. Nevertheless, the Americans had to be on constant guard since *rancheros* and other irregular forces roamed the countryside and preyed on unsuspecting victims. These Mexican guerrilla fighters tended to be well armed. It was not unusual for each to carry two pistols, an *escopette* (a short musket), sword, lance, and the ever-present lariat of which they possessed great skill in using. While the vast majority of these irregular groups were loyal to Mexico and fought for the Mexican cause, some were merely bandits who sought to profit from the war and attacked both sides indiscriminately.<sup>14</sup>

Within a few weeks after General Zachary Taylor had placed Matamoros under martial law, Lieutenant Colonel Henry Wilson secured the road from Matamoros leading into the interior and then moved upstream along the Rio Grande to Reynosa. Along the route, he reported meeting with little opposition and found that most of the homes along the way were abandoned. A few days earlier, from

his headquarters in Reynosa, General Canales had sent out an appeal to the local citizens requesting that no trade be conducted with the enemy. When Wilson, accompanied by infantry, artillery, and a few Texas Rangers entered Reynosa, he found that the town's inhabitants had also fled the night before, along with Canales and his estimated irregular force of perhaps three to four hundred men. It was a narrow escape for Canales, who was reportedly seen at a local fandango only hours before.<sup>15</sup>

Back in Matamoros and at U.S. camps situated along the Rio Grande east to the coast, Taylor was having problems with many of his volunteers. These young soldiers, stationed out in the prairie grasses and salt marshes, were bored and occasionally wandered into Matamoros looking for booze, women, and trouble. The local newspaper had to make constant appeals to the volunteers to stop their atrocious behavior against the local Mexican population who considered them to be "like Comanches in appearance, ferocity, and customs."<sup>16</sup>

As rambunctious U.S. volunteer troops began to populate the countryside surrounding Matamoros and occupied Matamoros itself, atrocities and racial tensions escalated as these elements clashed with local *rancheros* and bandits. In July 1846, a bandit caught stealing was bound with his hands behind his back and a heavy lead weight attached to his feet. The man's captors then took him out to the middle of the Rio Grande and threw him overboard. After an initial struggle, the victim sank to the bottom.<sup>17</sup> American volunteers, arrested for minor infractions such as loitering or drunkenness, were arrested and placed in the guardhouse. Others were put to work, often at bayonet point, cleaning the streets, much to the pleasure and jeers of the onlooking local population. The volunteers being disciplined had "their hats so far pulled over their heads, through shame and mortification, as to hide their faces from view."<sup>18</sup>

Irregular Mexican officers, disguising their identity, also occupied Matamoros and worked to recruit local citizens to join or re-join

their cause and to undermine the American presence there and along the border. A Mexican newspaper, *El Liberal*, published articles encouraging the local populous to resist the American presence as well. A Texas Ranger by the name of Thomas Pugh was found with a stab wound to the neck, while the decomposed body of a volunteer officer was found a few miles outside of town. As a result, the American media gave strong warnings against traveling alone or unarmed. American horses also began to disappear mysteriously on a regular basis. Reportedly, as U.S. cavalry paraded through the streets, Mexican *rancheros* and bandits were choosing the horses they planned on taking and were already arranging for their sale.<sup>19</sup>

Not all military participants in the Mexican-American War were male. In a rare example reported in Matamoros in July 1846 members of an Indiana volunteer company were quarrelling amongst each other when the shirt of one soldier tore loose and exposed, to the shock of the others, that the individual was in fact a girl. After a brief and mild interrogation, military officials learned that she had disguised her identity with the goal of coming to Texas to see her father. After learning the truth, members of her regiment “passed the hat” and collected enough money to arrange her passage to the care of her loved one.<sup>20</sup>

Bandits in the countryside, meanwhile, killed indiscriminately. The body of a seventeen-year-old Hispanic boy who had a gunshot wound to the head was brought into Matamoros and put out for public display for identification before burial. The Mexican outlaw responsible for the dastardly deed was apprehended quickly. Later that month, the body of a ten-year-old Mexican boy from a wealthy family was discovered a few miles outside of town. He had been ambushed, robbed, and then stabbed to death by robber bandits. The *alcalde* (mayor) and *escribano* (notary public) were notified and rode out to retrieve the body for a decent Christian burial. Positive identification was made by the young boy’s hat found near his body, which was “in a perfect state of putrefaction.”<sup>21</sup>

Americans were not immune from the violence. The body of a U.S. citizen was found dead in the market square area of Matamoros; his body had been stripped of clothing and he had been stabbed to death. Reports indicated that the deceased had been “senselessly drunk” at the time of his murder. The locally published and pro-U.S. newspaper *The American Flag* felt this was the work of a Mexican as it was “their custom... to strip their victims.” The paper also reported that American volunteers could be found drunk all over the city and at all times of night as they were “overpowered by liquor” and “fall down in the street like senseless brutes.” Still other bodies of volunteers were found floating lifelessly in the Rio Grande.

Confrontations between Taylor’s volunteers and Mexican *rancheros* occurred in and around Matamoros on a regular basis. Two volunteers on their way into town from Burita, an American camp located along the south bank of the Rio Grande, were ambushed by mounted *rancheros*. Quick with their ropes, the guerrillas lassoed their enemies around the neck but both volunteers were able to free themselves before the nooses were tightened and they managed to find cover in the nearby chaparral. There they remained throughout the night, not emerging until the following morning. Later, W. L. Ball of Louisville, Kentucky was found murdered on the Burita road to Matamoros; yet another poor soul was found naked along the same area, his head severed and his body horribly mutilated. The man was too far decomposed for positive identification.<sup>22</sup>

Mexican officials employed a spy network that covered all roads leading from Matamoros. These secret observers would report on American activities to Ciudad Victoria and Monterrey informing officials there of American troop movements and any other pertinent information. In August, authorities discovered a hidden room in a Matamoros building owned by Don Jose Maria Tova. The room was filled with musket cartridges and other military articles. When guards conducted a more thorough inspection, they found a trap door that opened into a deep cellar where a large cache of lances,

uniforms, and additional cartridges were uncovered. Although this discovery was made by accident, American officials believed that other locations about town harbored similar arsenals. The local newspaper reported, "Many citizens of Matamoros such as Don Tova put up a friendly front, but in reality were hatching treason and passing information on as would a spy." American officials also suspected that most of the military supplies concealed in and about the town had already been moved secretly and had made their way to the Mexican army in the interior. Two Mexican spies were captured in Camargo the following month and sentenced to death by hanging. One of them carried a detailed map of the American encampments in and around Camargo, as well as a large spyglass and several letters.<sup>23</sup>

By August 1846, General Taylor and the bulk of his military force had begun to make their way upriver to Camargo. Taylor received alarming reports that large numbers of Mexican *rancheros* were assembling in the nearby countryside led by Antonio Canales, the so called "chaparral fox," and Jose Maria de Jesus Carvajal. Throughout the remainder of the war, Canales and Carvajal controlled much of the rural areas of northeastern Mexico and enjoyed a degree of success in harassing American supply lines by hiding along the roads and attacking small military forces and merchant trains. Robbing sutlers of their money became the mainstay for irregular Mexican forces to acquire arms and ammunition. Captured Mexican guerrillas were tried by the U. S. military. If convicted, the guilty received death sentences by firing squad or by hanging.<sup>24</sup>

In mid-September, a small group of Texas volunteers en route from Camargo to Matamoros was ambushed near Reynosa by some thirty *rancheros* led by Marteo Gonzalez. After a spirited fight, Gonzalez and five others were killed while the Texans lost one dead due to a pistol shot through the neck. After the *rancheros* retreated into the chaparral, the Texans were able to reach Matamoros without further confrontations. Once there, however, they raised a force that

returned to the vicinity and, in retaliation for the attack, burned several ranches. Later that month, U.S. volunteers stood accused of murdering eight innocent Mexicans, including two women, a few miles outside of Camargo. A group of Mexicans arriving in Matamoros in October, meanwhile, reported being robbed at gunpoint by Americans on the outskirts of town. A month later, an American on foot from Camargo testified that he had been lassoed by a *ranchero* and dragged through the brush until he was able to break free and conceal himself. In December, an American officer and a corporal stationed in Matamoros were hunting a few miles from town when they were ambushed by *rancheros*. The corporal was lassoed around the neck and dragged through the underbrush until the captain, firing his weapon at the perpetrators, was able to free his comrade.<sup>25</sup>

Supply trains traveling inland from Point Isabel continued to be prime targets for Mexican irregular forces. In late September 1846, a large number of supplies contained in eighty-eight wagons en route to Taylor's army were ambushed near Cerralvo by Mexican *rancheros* reportedly under orders from General Canales, who had agents all over the countryside providing him with intelligence about American troop movements and approaches. *The American Flag* newspaper reported in November 1846 that between fifteen hundred and two thousand Mexican irregulars controlled most of northeastern Mexico. That being the case, American authorities learned to protect merchant convoys with military escorts.<sup>26</sup>

As the major battles of the war moved further south into Mexico, Matamoros and other settlements along the Rio Grande with an American presence became especially vulnerable to *ranchero*, irregular, and bandit attacks as U.S. troop strength declined in those areas. In December 1846, an American colonel rode out a short distance from Matamoros and was quickly confronted by a guerrilla force armed with lances and riding fine horses that reportedly had been recently stolen from U.S. dragoons. The colonel was fortunate to escape with his life. Shortly thereafter, Sergeant George Babcock of

the regular U.S. Infantry was found murdered near the plaza of Matamoros, having been robbed, stripped of his clothing, and stabbed repeatedly with a knife. The apparent reason for his murder was that he owned an expensive watch (which was not even on his person at the time of the murder). In January, a German sutler by the name of Swartz was walking on the outskirts of Matamoros with his mother when the two were accosted by some ten Mexican *rancheros*. Swartz was captured and bound, and his mother was dragged into the brush and ravished until an armed American arrived on the scene and commenced to fire his weapon, dispersing the outlaws.<sup>27</sup>

By late December, Major General Robert Patterson and his staff left Matamoros with a large escort en route for Ciudad Victoria and then on to Tampico. Their main concern while marching overland was attack by irregular Mexican forces. The following month a report reached Matamoros of a “considerable body of armed Mexicans” near Reynosa and a warning was issued to anyone who planned to travel in that area. The irregular band was also serving as spies, reporting to Mexican military authorities in regards to U.S. troop movements. A few days later, a group of four American soldiers was attacked by *rancheros* while en route to Monterrey, while two Tennessee volunteers were discovered near Camargo with their throats slit. Lieutenant John Richey, accompanied by a small patrol traveling from Monterrey to Ciudad Victoria, was ambushed and killed by irregulars. Such continued actions caused General Patterson to issue orders proclaiming that all Mexicans found armed should be treated as the enemy.<sup>28</sup>

General Antonio Canales raided American supply trains moving from Camargo to Monterrey whenever the opportunity presented itself and showed little mercy to those he captured. Mexican ranchers in the countryside sometimes found themselves to be in a no win situation. If they refused to aid Mexican irregulars, they were harassed and their homes destroyed. Some women reportedly had their ears cut off as punishment for helping the invaders. On the

other hand, if Americans suspected the locals of working with the enemy, they too were likely to employ violence to acquire information or to discourage them from giving the enemy any further assistance. In retaliation for not being paid on time, U.S. soldiers in Camargo killed and robbed one of the wealthiest Mexicans of that community, while poorly equipped volunteers indiscriminately robbed Mexicans of blankets, food, money, and anything else they could get their hands on. As natives from Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas continued to be molested by both sides, many fled to the mountains for safety for the remainder of the war.<sup>29</sup>

*Rancho* warfare under the command of General Canales continued throughout the duration of the Mexican war in northern Mexico. In February 1847, Canales claimed to have been responsible for the deaths of over one hundred and sixty Americans including those killed when he and General Jose Urrea, with some four hundred irregulars, led a successful raid against a large U. S. supply train headed for Monterrey. Although guarded by two companies of Infantry, the irregulars successfully surrounded the foreigners and forced a surrender. The Mexicans allegedly had some of the Americans tied to wagon wheels and burned alive. Others were lassoed and dragged to their deaths through clumps of cactus. In one horrific incident, a teamster was bound and a small slit made in his stomach. Into the cut were placed cartridge shells, which were then exploded, blowing the victim to pieces. The goods confiscated by the *rancheros* were estimated to be valued at over one million U.S. dollars.

In retaliation for such heinous behavior, General Zachary Taylor unleashed Texas Rangers under the leadership of the notorious nineteen-year-old Mabry B. "Mustang" Gray, a man described as being, "a moral monstrosity," to hunt down those responsible. Having witnessed the murder of his parents in 1840 at the hands of bandits, Gray had also seen "hellish outrages" committed upon his sister before she too was killed. His subsequent thirst for blood could not be quenched.<sup>30</sup>



Throughout the summer of 1847, guerrillas and irregulars under the command of General Canales and General Carvajal continued to fight against the American occupation of Northern Mexico. In July, General Carvajal led about two hundred and fifty men between Matamoros and Linares and confiscated some \$25,000 worth of tobacco, sugar, corn, soap, and other commodities from American merchants. The robbing of American supplies continued until General John Ellis Wool issued new orders that no supplies would be moved in the future without substantial military escorts.<sup>31</sup>

As General Winfield Scott opened a second front and made his way with a large American army from Vera Cruz to Mexico City, his forces and supply lines were constantly subjected to hit-and-run operations by Mexican guerrilla and irregular forces. In October 1847, American volunteers committed violence against the town of Huamantla in the state of Tlaxcala, following the death of Texas Ranger Samuel Walker.<sup>32</sup>

The overall outcome of the Mexican-American war was determined largely by regular military forces. However, another war within the war was waged by irregulars, guerrillas, and *rancheros* from Mexico, as well as by U.S. volunteer forces, which included Texas Rangers. Although these elements contributed only marginally to the outcome of the larger struggle, they did account for a significant number of lives lost, both military and civilian. U.S. Dragoon Samuel Chamberlain described guerrilla warfare during the Mexican War as “a silent, secret slaughter that went on endlessly behind the lines, and struck more terror in American hearts than any one battle.”<sup>33</sup> The U.S. volunteers to some degree countered Mexican guerrilla activities by disobeying orders and committing outrages against the Mexican population. The total loss of life and property during this chapter of the Mexican War may never be known. However, the violence committed by both sides created an enduring legacy of suspicions and animosities, which, some may argue, continue to this day.

## Endnotes

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