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THE ENVIROMENTAL IMPACT ON VOLUNTEER SOILDERS IN THE MEXICAN AMERICAN WAR

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THE ENVIROMENTAL IMPACT ON VOLUNTEER SOILDERS IN THE MEXICAN
AMERICAN WAR

by

Jean M. Hurst

B.A. Milliken University, 2012

A Research Paper
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Master of Arts

Department of History
in the Graduate School
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RESEARCH PAPER APPROVAL

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in the field of History

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JEAN M. HURST, for the Master of Arts degree in HISTORY, presented on FEBUARY 13, at Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

TITLE: THE ENVIROMENTAL IMPACE ON VOLUNTEER SOILDERS IN THE MEXICAN AMERICAN WAR

MAJOR PROFESSOR: Dr. Jose Najar

The Mexican-American War is largely overshadowed by historians of the War of 1812 and the Civil War. This conflict demands an in-depth examination as a unique historical event. Scholars of the Mexican-American War have largely limited their approach to underscore how social and political relations, among American military and political elite, shaped the conflict as a causeway to the American Civil War. To better understand the Mexican-American war it is necessary to understand it through the experiences of those volunteer solders living during this conflict. In addition, understanding the role the environment played in shaping the social and political relations between volunteers and regular soldiers, as well as their own understanding of national duty, is essential to recognize this conflict as more than simply a forerunner to the American Civil War. Thus, I examined primary journals, notes, letters as well as secondary literature to examine the relationship between environmental impact and volunteer solders. This paper explores the ways shifting social and geographical environments, throughout the war, sparked conflicts between volunteers and the regular forces, as well as the volunteers' conflicting ideas about national duty. The relation between the environment and the volunteer's action is clear in this paper and as such should be expanded upon in further research.

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INTRODUCTION

Mexican-American War

The Mexican-American War ended on February 2, 1848. This two year conflict, largely overshadowed by historians of the War of 1812 and the Civil War, demands an in-depth examination as a unique historical event. Scholars of the Mexican-American War have largely limited their approach to underscore how social and political relations, among American military and political elite, shaped the conflict as a causeway to the American Civil War. However, in order to better understand the Mexican-American War it is necessary to understand it through the experiences of volunteer soldiers living during this conflict. In addition, understanding the role the environment played in shaping the social and political relations between volunteers and regular soldiers, as well as their own understanding of national duty, is essential to recognize this conflict as more than simply a forerunner to the American Civil War. In this light, this paper explores the ways shifting social and geographical environments, throughout the war, sparked conflicts between volunteers and the regular forces, as well as the volunteers' conflicting ideas about national duty. This approach offers an alternative view of "manifest destiny" not as a blank motivation for expansionism, but as an individual struggle to define personal interpretation of what it meant to be an American.

The Historiography of the Mexican American war, illustrates that American historians focus on larger military and political struggles rather than the perspective of non-elite combatants. The American scholarship focuses primarily on a military approach¹, the issues of European style imperialism, and how it clashes with the idea of American Exceptionalism. As a result, the top down narrative approach, which ignores the environment's effect on volunteers and how it affected

¹ Military approach here meaning focusing on troop movements, weaponry and tactical advances, and Generals effect upon the outcome of battles.

their relationships with themselves and the nation during this unique conflict, dominates the historiography.

Generally historians' used of the military approach, underscore troop movements, weaponry tactical advances, and Generals' effect upon the outcome of battles during the Mexican American War. John Eisenhower's study is a "conventional"² or "decidedly American"³ view through the military approach to the conflict. This approach identifies an elite and recognizable historical figure. Eisenhower's work utilizes General Grant's perspective to examine the Mexican American War. For example "Ulysses S. Grant... call[ed] the Mexican War "the most unjust war ever waged by a stronger against a weaker nation...an instance of a republic following the bad example of European monarchies."⁴ This quote demonstrates Grants negative perspective of the military's in the conflict, projecting his view upon his troops and other soldiers of the war. General Grant's observes the conflict though an elite mindset, and how that view reflected his position on imperialism. Utilizing Grant's view separates the elitist view and "European" imperial politics that advanced the conflict. Eisenhower's narrative mainly identifies military figures, like Grant, to illustrate day-to-day experience of the Mexican-American War soldiers. In his book *So Far from God: The U.S. War with Mexico*⁵ argues against the idea of overlooking the Mexican American War as some kind of "forgone conclusion"⁶ insisting that it was a unique conflict worth recognizing for the military actions undertaken in the conflict. Any mention of environment or volunteer forces, within the study, is therefore limited to their military importance. This Military approach also projects the idea of unity within the military fighting for a democratic nation. This

² Charles Bennett, "Reviewed Work: So Far from God: The U. S. War with Mexico, 1846-1848" in *Western Historical Quarterly* Vol. 21, No. 3 (1990):364-5.

³ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁴ John S. D. Eisenhower, *So Far from God: The U.S. War with Mexico, 1846-1848* (New York: Random House, 1989), 17.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 21.

is a story told from the elite's view, quite literally looking down at a map of the conflict, rather than a multilayered view that includes volunteer's experiences.

The study of William T. Allison, Jeffrey Grey, and Janet G. Valentine, provide a more encompassing historical military approach to the Mexican American War in *American Military History: A Survey from Colonial times to the Present*. This approach compares the military history of the Mexican American War, in relation to other American wars with specific interests in the evolution of the American military machine. Again, this Military approach, focuses on the Military elite of the American forces, and their political relations. For example, the congressional inducement of General Taylor for president in 1848 by Abraham Lincoln, "presidential aspirations, General Taylor would be a better candidate for the Whigs."⁷ This book fits in concisely with the elite military and political view which dominates the historiography of the Mexican-American War.

American Military History utilizes both primary and secondary documents focused on military elites, and the political elite directly linked to the military staging during the Mexican-American War. None of these sources belongs to volunteer forces or the environment, outside of purely strategic importance. The book illustrates the way the Mexican American War has been understudied by United States historians. The sections covering the Mexican American War are brief and serve to highlight larger military strategic advances rather than the conflict itself. This allows such study to cover larger portions of American Military history, and in doing so, it collapses the Mexican American War and the War of 1812 and Civil War.

This historiography on Mexican-American War, from the Mexican viewpoint, focuses on elite political and military leaders: the same as the majority of American historical approaches.

⁷ William Thomas Allison and Jeffrey Grey, *American Military History: A Survey from Colonial times to the Present* (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2007), 46.

Henderson's study on "why Mexico went to war with the United States in 1846, and why that war went so badly for Mexico"⁸ is a top down approach to the conflict. Henderson's aim is to examine the conflict through the analysis of political and social issues to understand the reasons for Mexico's defeat. The book employs modernization theory to analyze primary political documents and a biographical examination of Santa Anna including "defects of Mexico's 1824 constitution"⁹ and the nation's own issue establishing a viable government in order to depict what the state of Mexico was after their revolution. Again, this study takes primarily a top-down approach, only for Mexico's perspective as opposed to the U.S. There is little to no mention made of those who experienced the conflict.

John Schroeder's book, *Mr. Polk's War*, continues the top down approach focusing on the anti-expansionist movements of the Whig party against President Polk's presidency. Schroeder's work identifies key members of the Whig Party, including Lincoln, using their experiences to elaborate on the political disagreements pertaining to the Mexican-American War. The majority of the study focuses on the issues facing early anti-war supporters, including their interpretation of "nationality" which contradicted that of Polk. Polk version of nationalism attempted to propagate his desire for war by creating the situation that lead to hostilities between Mexican and American. In this way, Polk appealed the sense of 'national duty' to all Americans to defend the motherland. This book's approach is a clear reflection of the 1970's anti-war mentality literature; this is clear because of its praise for the anti-war movement rhetoric. Within the historiography, the book's approach is limited in addressing the conflict from any view outside of the anti-war movement.

⁸ Timothy J. Henderson, *A Glorious Defeat: Mexico and Its War with the United States, Volume XVII* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007), 5.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 29.

Amy S. Greenberg's book, *A Wicked War: Polk, Clay, Lincoln, and the 1846 U.S. Invasion of Mexico*,¹⁰ catalogs the pivotal political events surrounding James K. Polk's expansionist goals and the early ideology of the "white man's burden". Similar to *Polk's War* the study's approach focuses on the political "battle" around American policymaking, utilizing the numerous political sources ranging from cabinet records, speeches, and congressional debates.¹¹ The approach focuses around the political elites of President Polk and his political rivals. Numerous congressional records and correspondence provide Polk's motivations and the expansionist nature he embodied. The narrow view of President Polk's own expansionistic goals results in the study ignoring any none elitist perspectives.

Echoes of the Mexican-American War, utilizes a balance of American and Mexican experiences in the Mexican American War. The major focus of this work is the experiences of soldiers taking part in the battlefield. This is the first work to address the position of the conflict from a bottom-up perspective. However, its focus is not on the social motivation of soldiers, but on retelling of the battles of the Mexican-American War through soldiers' perspectives. The approach pushes for the recognition of how damaging the war was for service men by showing the enormity and complexity of it through primarily photographs, illustrations, and eyewitness accounts by soldiers throughout the Mexican-American War. Instead of the elite viewpoint, the approach in this study focuses on everyman soldier that "marched... in wool uniforms and shoes made to fit either foot."¹² The study used non-traditional sources, of the Mexican-American War, to illustrate the horrors of the conflict. While this does allow a view into the environment, the work

¹⁰Amy S. Greenberg, *A Wicked War: Polk, Clay, Lincoln, and the 1846 U.S. Invasion of Mexico* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2012), 12.

¹¹ John Schroeder, *Mr. Polk's War: American Opposition and Dissent, 1846-1848* (Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1973).

¹² Krystyna M. Libura, Luis Gerardo Morales, and Jesús Velasco Márquez, *Echoes of the Mexican-American War*, trans. Mark Fried (Toronto: Groundwood Books, 2004), 126.

does not delve into its larger impact focusing instead on soldiers' reactions to the struggle upon the actual battlefield.

METHOD

Primary Sources

Using primarily diaries, journals, period maps, and correspondence between soldiers and their families, as well as interviews, newspapers of the time, I examined the social views volunteer troops held during the Mexican American war. I examined the manner in which the environment, both physical and social, influenced these volunteer's experiences. By drawing from a variety of volunteer's experiences, especially those of the United States South, I've reconstructed a new understanding of the effect the environment played in volunteer's experiences, the regular forces, and their own ideas of nationality, nationalism, and national duty. Arriving in Mexico shifted volunteers' sense of duty. How such a difference in viewpoints manifested themselves between different volunteer regiments, in relations to the environment, emerges as positions become apparent in their narratives. These volunteers' sense of duty changed when encountering the environment of Mexico, the interaction with the land destroys and in some cases reinforces pre-held dispositions on nationality, and their own standing within the military.

DISCUSSION

Before examining the volunteer forces in relation to Mexico's environment, it is necessary to examine the history of the American military to understand the disposition and relation of volunteer forces during this conflict. The American forces in 1846 consisted of two distinct branches that acted in conjunction to form the military. Prior to 1802 American forces lacked a

supply of educated and experienced military service men and the military academies necessary to educate such forces. This led to complications in the War of 1812 when the, majority volunteer forces, became responsible for repeated crushing defeats due to inept leadership and discipline. Thus, the military practices in both social and technical implementation underwent a total redefinition to address the failures present in the War of 1812.

Congress began to address a military restructuring by funding the creation of institutions for strategic learning and the formulation of a “professional” fighting force.¹³ The officer’s corps, the backbone of the regular forces, came into fruition in the period between the end of the War of 1812 and the beginning of the Mexican American War. The regulars were enlisted men, commissioned by congress and subject to the new standards of “professional” warfare, based on Napoleonic tactics and martial discipline. Despite this advancement, congress refused to fund a large standing army sighting that a large standing military provided the opportunity for a military coup of the government. This fear held merit since a few years earlier Napoleon’s coup devastated Europe. The lack of funding left the armed forces with less than 30,000 regular trained men. Thus, in 1846 when war with Mexico began, President Polk called for 50,000 volunteer troops to supplement the small standing forces.¹⁴ During the Mexican American War 26,922, regulars and 73,260 volunteers served.¹⁵ The volunteers were militia, privately formed by township or city communities, the majority hailing from southern America states. Such units were shipped to staging areas where regular officers, in turn, deployed them in separate companies from those of the regular forces. The two factions, however, did not form a single unified fighting force. They remained distinct units during the two-year war.

¹³ Allison et al., *American Military History*, 145.

¹⁴ John Schroeder, *Mr. Polk’s War: American Opposition and Dissent, 1846-1848* (Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1973) 48.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 146.

For the regulars the military became a full career. Instead of understanding their role in relation to their “duty”, now as a job, there began to emerge a shift in their social view of a life in the military from one of low standing to an accepted career.¹⁶ Prior to the War of 1812, the military service was akin to a part time position, where in one’s private life and occupation took precedence. However, now there was a large regional-identity as individuals belonging to a specific state saw a closer relationship among themselves, such that a kind of animosity existed between the government and the different American peoples. This translated into a dislike for any system that promoted and represented the government such that association harmed the military.

The shift towards “professionalism” was also a shift in redefining the nation’s view of the military. The “professional” view was in part a social reconstruction of the military as a servant to the nation’s goal and a position of pride. Thus, the new regulars wanted to distance themselves from the volunteer forces. For some, the volunteers represented a lower social standing in the hierarchy of the armed forces, a place of shame due largely to the militia’s history of poor performance in battle. The new military were trained officers and soldiers, while volunteers were untrained and undisciplined militia who had demonstrated in the War of 1812 their inability to conduct properly themselves on the battlefield. Regulars also held a specific interest in demonstrating the new effectiveness of their modern military approach for fear of failure. To fail meant to support those individuals who opposed the idea of an expanding military. As such, the Mexican American War was a test they had to pass, if not they would lose the chance to “professionalize” the military. However, it was unclear what kind of problems would emerge when military command placed volunteer companies under the direction of regular forces since in

¹⁶ Schroeder, *Mr. Polk’s War*, 46.

the eyes of many officers “the volunteers [were] undisciplined and unruly in comparison to the regulars.”¹⁷

Volunteer militia, however, held nearly the exact opposite view of both themselves and the regular forces. The American militia was a long-standing staple of the Republic, a volunteer force, to them, represents independence from the government capable of protect the nation and their independence if necessary from an oppressive governmental body. Not unlike how the nation itself was born that is by a military effort, which overthrew the English government leading to the founding of the nation. Militias were created at the level of state or county. These were entities ideally representing a force similar to present-day National Guard; however, their effectiveness and cost eventually lead to their degradation within American society. By 1846, the volunteer militias were largely ceremonial in function, formed along political or private interests.¹⁸ Thus, militias could form at any time to representing political groups, minorities, or social classes. In this regard, militias behaved more akin to modern day gangs rather than a properly organized military force.

By the 1840’s militias were clubs with elaborate military rituals and eminent respectability within their society.¹⁹ Sydenham Moore, captain of the Butta Rangers serving in the Mexican American conflict, noted this perspective in his journal. “May 26th received a sent elected me to the company by the zig ladies of the Meanp’s school, the friend to white grove and a symbol decor given to the volunteers for the last Easter. To attend a ball and also in short offhand attended by any self... after dinners the enthusiasm and nationalism is high all seemed to partake of the

¹⁷ Paul Foos, *A short, offhand, killing affair* (North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 5.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 31.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 56

excitement in truth it is very much like a regular mother drink event.”²⁰ In this Sydenham is elected to the militia’s head position, at a ball, and presented with the company’s standard, by a “well thought of”²¹ lady’s society while carrying on a discussion of politics with. While a simple enough exchange, this highlights the offhanded affair commonplace in volunteer forces, the process no more interested in military organization or placement than one might expect from a parade committee.

Volunteers were more a self-interested group defining their own goals and values regarding service instead of overall military and national interests. The volunteers served because it was the honorable act for a citizen of America, that honor being in serving their nation and by extension their community. The community then provides the sought after “honor” for those who serve the honorable role in effect rewording service for “nationalism.”²² This link between the individual’s “honor” and “nationalism” is one key reason volunteers did not associate well with the regular forces. Regulars, in the volunteer’s perspective, were acting for pay instead of “honor” and thus were not fighting for the same ideals of nationalism they themselves represented. This manifests throughout the conflict as individual troops’ desires clashed over larger military objectives, where a volunteer force would object to being isolated from the “important” conflicts. Their service was, in many ways, a self-serving enterprise, with militia forces who recognized themselves as citizens first, and members of the combined military second. Orders from a regular officer were considered insulting, believing in the right to “withdraw their membership when they saw fit”²³ These two

²⁰ Sydenham Moore, *Diary, May 27th 1846-1847*, Alabama Department of Archives and History, “Diary Kept by Sydenham Moore during the Mexican American War”, <http://digital.archives.alabama.gov/cdm/ref/collection/voices/id/2712>, accessed November 2016, 4. Hereinafter, ADAHSM.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 4

²² *Ibid.*, 30.

²³ *Ibid.*, 33.

contradicting understandings of duty, country, and professionalism continued even as these forces invaded Mexico in 1846.

The Mexican American War began on April 25, 1846, following a cavalry attack over the disputed territory along the Rio Grande. Provoking the war was in fact President Polk's goal, a vital step towards the implementation of "Manifest Destiny" the American colonialist dream of the period.²⁴ The expansion westward to reach the Pacific, alongside the ideology of the white man's burden, must have been key in ushering the United States into the Mexican American War. In addition, these two factors must have contributed ideologically a great deal among the volunteer forces. Following the initial conflict, President Polk issued a call for 50,000 volunteers to bolster the army. Due to the call upon their national duty and "honor", many volunteers enlisted as a part of their duty under the "white man's burden."²⁵ However, some volunteers needed incentivizing. Whether through "the promise of raiding and plundering"²⁶ or through the dehumanization of Mexicans, the incentive became tangible, not a metaphor, of expressed ideas of "the white man's burden."²⁷ Even then, there were instances in northern states, such as in New York, responsible for expending political capital to fill volunteer lists, forcing, "drunks, ne'er do-wells and downright criminals into service."²⁸

Despite the necessities of industrialized areas, like New York, to fill volunteer rosters, the majority of volunteers came from rural communities in the southern American states. These volunteers enlisted primarily from a sense of duty, rather than coercion reflecting the majority responsible for the "honorable" view of service. Volunteers reasoning that "the country needs

²⁴ Eisenhower, *So Far from God*, 7.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 10.

²⁶ Paul Foss, *A short, offhand, killing affair* (Durham: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 133.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 77.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 78.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 77.

[their] service,”²⁹ and as such, it was their duty to serve. The reason for Southern volunteers to enter the conflict, then, will be contrasted with the environmental experiences within the campaign, to demonstrate how the environments effected large segments of volunteer forces. Nationalism brought many volunteers into Mexico praising “volunteer’s contribution”³⁰ to their nation and the nation’s destiny. At arriving in Mexico, however, volunteers came into conflict with the unexpected environment acting as a catalyst to self-examine their views on nationalism and Manifest Destiny.

Syndenham Moore, commander of The Butta Rangers a cavalry unit out of Greene County Alabama, had to confront his ideas about national duty while volunteering for the Mexican American War.³¹ As pointed out, southern areas, such as Alabama, were responsible for those individuals serving for ‘honor’. Moore, as well as his 62 privates and 2 noncommissioned officers made several mentions of their duty prior to their departure in June 1846.³² Following a call from the governor to “gather the men”³³, the Moore’s unit sets out for New Orleans arriving on the 6th. There, he and his regiment were informed of the change from 6 months service to 12 months noting, “if his country calls he will answer, even if it pains [me]”³⁴ demonstrating the ideas of self-sacrifice inherent in “the white man’s burden.” From here the rangers boarded a steam ship headed for “Buenos Dautengu”³⁵ and from there by train to Santiago, visiting the Rio Grande, and meeting with General Taylor.

During this deployment, Moore first noted the change in environment and its effects are observable. First in the ship and, then, during the train transportation, he notes the way in which

²⁹ Moore, *Diary, May 27th 1846-1847*, ADAHSM, 5.

³⁰ William Moore, *Diary, 1847-1848*, ADAHSM, 11.

³¹ Moore, *Diary, May 26th 1846-1847*, ADAHSM, 5.

³² Moore, *Diary, May 27th 1846-1847*, ADAHSM, 7.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Moore, *Diary, June 15th 1846-1847*, ADAHSM, 11.

³⁵ Moore, *Diary, June 24th 31st, 1846-1847*, ADAHSM, 11.

officer's bunk are separated from "their men", finding annoy the idea of dividing his men, a point which illustrates the gang-like-mentality among the volunteer forces. As he reaches the Rio Grande, Moore's disappointed is reflected in the way he experienced the great river. He remarked on that Rio Grande that "it [was] not as large as I expected, and a dirty stretch pushes out where we road our horses."³⁶ His language here changes from the previous cheerful writing when he refers to his troops or his original appointment; instead, the wording becomes brief where he notes that the Rio Grande does not live up to his idea of it. Here the reality of the Rio Grande is contrasting with the "importance" it has in this conflict, and more importantly to his forces. If the service does not live up to the ideals of their "honor" then these volunteer forces are, in their view of the conflict, wasting their time in service. He also notes the way Mexicans seem to delight with the river, comparing the river to those in Alabama, and noting the way in which these people's lives will "blossom like the Rose"³⁷ once America shows them the way use the environment to reinforce the necessity of their actions in this conflict.

Following a meeting between General Taylor Moore and his forces, they moved to encamp in the city of Carnago, near the San Juan River. Moore describes the "impressiveness" of the town, noting the modern style buildings, and the "sea of tents" that stretch out to the south.³⁸ His force remains in encamped from June 25th to August 31st when his unit moves a fourth a mile away from town, and the regulars, into a town of 2000 inhabitants bordering "a stale muddy river."³⁹ Comparing troop movements and Moore's journal, the unit is stationed along an offshoot of the San Juan River near Alhambra Rock.⁴⁰ During the month of August, the heat leaves the river low

³⁶ Moore, *Diary, July 18th 1846-1847*, ADAHSM, 21.

³⁷ Moore, *Diary, Aug 29th 1846-1847*, ADAHSM, 34.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 35.

³⁹ Moore, *Diary, Aug 30th 1846-1847*, ADAHSM, 350.

⁴⁰ Allison et al., *American Military History*, 145.

and the water muddy. The town, itself, is made up of adobe houses with the only exception a Catholic style church adorned with the “stars and stripes.”⁴¹ Moore notes that it is “disgraceful”, in a way, for the town to be “untouched” by the conflict, and still be flying the American flag, summarizing that there was no battle in taking the town, and questioning if the Mexican’s have any “national pride.”⁴² Again, reaction to the environment sparks a corresponding shift for Moore’s writings. While the city of Carnago inspires him long remarks of the architecture and beauty of the land, his final entries creates bitterness and internal-self-conflict, again, with his ideology honorability about the conflict. The flag above the church in small town is in direct contrast with his belief, and thus sparks resentment for its attack on his ideology.

Moore continues to express his disapproval of the environment, noting the lack of suitable barracks within the town forcing his men to camp out on the ground. The following week, Moore noted a heavy rainfall that caused a mudslide destroying several tents and leaving several of his “boys’ sick from the damp conditions, coupled with the loss of shelter. Despite the harsh conditions by September, the Butta Rangers grew accustomed to the area, though its position continues causing Moore annoyance. His writings become shorter and more agitated when he and his unit are overlooked for conflict noting how “my blood boiled”⁴³ when a regular officer dismissed his concerns and those of his men. Compounding the statement is the requirements of the town and communication. Moore describes the distance from his camp to the town housing the regulars as a “hard day’s ride.”⁴⁴ In other words, that for each letter, order, or supply run, the rangers had to travel in the blistering heat over rough roads only to be turned down and treated as, in Moore’s view, inferior to the regular forces upon arrival.

⁴¹ Moore, *Diary, Aug 31st 1846-1847*, ADAHSM, 36.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 36.

⁴³ Moore, *Diary, September 1st 1846-1847*, ADAHSM, 37.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 37.

The positioning of his forces thus forcing him to interact with an environment which compounds the hostility of his military superiors. On September 14th, in a letter to his wife, he speaks on “the regret of being apart from her,”⁴⁵ this is in contrast with his remarks where he assured her that the duty to his nation would be enough. However, now, he mentioned the “hostile land” making note of the “harsh weather,” and the loss of his first man to dysentery.⁴⁶ At this point the writing shifts, no mention is made of “national pride” or any comment upon the war in general. He notes discontentment at being left in the outskirts, growing resentment between the regulars and his own command, attempting to remove a “yellow belly” officer to be replaced with a competent “Alabama” officer.⁴⁷ At this point, he begins making a clearer distinction between the regulars and the volunteers, noting the troop’s placement in the out-of-the-way town noting a similar position held by his men. He also begins referring to state pride, or personal pride, rather than a broader national one. Moore falls back into the more individualistic, gang mentality of the volunteer militia instead of his forces place within the larger military framework. Moore links the environment he is in with the regulars and in turn with the American government. His disdain for them can be understood as a distain for the nation. The environment is hostile and harming the rangers, those responsible are the regulars and by extension the National government. As such, the nation is to blame in a stark contrast to the honor and nationalism mentioned previously when overserving the Rio Grande.

Receiving orders, on November 21st, the Butta Rangers marched away from the small town, at last. Moore again noted a “contempt and frustration in the situation in which [he has] found [himself] and that in which [he] was on that day [he] was surrounded by friends calculating if any

⁴⁵ Moore, *Diary, September 1st-14th 1846-1847*, ADAHSM , 38-55.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 38-55.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 41.

good justice would reach us as [he] left my lonely tent, on the banks of the Rio Juan far from my family facing only the sea.”⁴⁸ With the change in location, the full effect of the unit’s period in the village is observable. Moore and his unit have gone from a group of firm believers in American nationalism, and the possibility of Manifest Destiny, into isolationist attitudes. Their goals shift from lifting-up Mexicans into a new world to treating them with “Outrage for them [Mexican’s] to have such a country, for the Mexicans are too lazy to till the soil.”⁴⁹ From January 6th following through the rest of his tour Moore makes note of a few towns comparing them to the first he saw along the Rio Juan, however, his record-taking process has changed significantly thanks to his early experiences along that first village at most mentioning a single church in which is held Christmas mass. Moore no longer dedicates pages to describing town or the environment; he simply notes the continued heat and harshness of Mexico. The environment around, now, only reinforces his changed views of the war and indeed his personal views on his nationalism. Moore now rejects the view of nationalism presented by America during this period isolating his nationalism to his own state, and those he regards as still possessing the “honor” he values. This is shown in his later attempts to replace his senior officer with “a good man from Alabama, someone who can be trusted.”⁵⁰ Moore and the Butta Ranger’s experiences with the harsh Mexican environment reshaped their volunteer motivations to such a degree that the “honor” they sought was now incompatible with their nation, shrinking into the more narrow communal behavior implicit in the volunteer forces creation.

In contrast to Moore, and the Butta Rangers Lt. William Preston served as a volunteer in the Kentucky 4th regiment entering the war in November of 1847. Preston, however, holds on to

⁴⁸ Moore, *Diary, Nov 28th 1846-1847*, ADAHSM, 62.

⁴⁹ Moore, *Diary, January 6th 1846-1847*, ADAHSM, 78.

⁵⁰ Moore, *Diary, Dec 18th 1846-1847*, ADAHSM, 71.

the nationalist views throughout the entirety of his service along with the ideology of “the white man’s burden” focusing on the “barbaric” Mexican people in comparison to their “beautiful” land to support his ideology.⁵¹ The environment reinforces his beliefs instead of shaking them as they did with Moore. Preston’s service begins on the journey, via ship, from New Orleans to Punto Gordo, and then into the battle of Verra Cruse, [sic] with little detail for the conflict itself. His journal notes the aftermath of the battle of Verra Cruse from which his company departs heading “eleven miles beyond Cerro Gordo and sixteen from Plan del Rio... march[ing] into a camp ground three miles from Jalapa. A cold and searching rain fell during the whole march...adding to the suffrage of the elevation.”⁵² Prior to the march, Preston describes the “most beautiful” land he has seen, however, following the march with heavy rains his only remark is to the man found frozen in the rear of the wagon, the “Clothing giving no warmth”⁵³ and the fear of being chilled to death. Following this, his unit reaches Jalapa, the “paradise of Mexico.”⁵⁴ While in Jalapa Preston makes a note of the local burros reputing the Mexicans for their use of such animals, insisting the superiority of American horses, and the “Spanish stallions.”⁵⁵ An interesting observation perceived nationalism, for America, but also in the recognition of a European power, which he holds separate from the Mexican people. Indeed, he takes note to associate the rough environment, roads, altitude, with the Mexican nation, while separating any beautiful land from that same label.

This view persists. In April of 1848 in Alameda, Puebla, he describes in detail buildings in the “Spanish style, with regular streets and handsome houses”⁵⁶ noting the “barbaric tastes” were unable to distract from the beauty of Alameda, Puebla. His journal continues these associations,

⁵¹ William Preston, *Journal in Mexico: dating from November 1847-1848* (S.L.: printed by author, s.d.), 27.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 14.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 28.

reflecting a refusal to see the Mexican people as more than a hindrance to this beautiful land. While he repeatedly speaks to the beauty of the land, it is always marked by the “regrettable”⁵⁷ presence of the native Mexican people. The environment when welcoming is wasted on the Mexican’s, while when it is harsh or unwelcoming, it is due to the Mexicans’ failure to properly utilize the land. Preston’s observations of the environment then, are suspect in many regards. He often makes repeated mention of geographical landmarks, rivers, mountains, and rich farmland, but instead of being shaped by the environment, he is shaping them in his own view. In this way, the environment serves Preston’s views; he is shaping the beautiful lands, and less developed farms to conform his idea of superiority. His “honor” is coupled with such a strong sense of superiority, and such a connection to the ideas of the time, he is recording the environment only in so much as it supports his view.

However, Preston’s subjective view does not dominate the narrative. William Carpenter, a Kentucky volunteer, from Louisville, demonstrates another unique experience through the lens of the wars environment. Reporting to New Orleans within the week of his enlistment, Carpenter was shipped to Brazos, an island along the Gulf of Mexico. He notes the island “is very low and very level, and so destitute of soil that no grass or weeds grow on it... There were no wells, but for water we dug little holes in the sand... It was brackish, but we used it, for want of any other.”⁵⁸ Carpenters notes of the island include only one building in use to the quartermaster, leaving the Kentucky unit to made camp along the beach, open to the wet sprays of the sea, and the limited supplies. He continues to describe as “the rainy season commenced. The days usually clear, and after dark it commenced raining, accompanied with vivid flashes of lightening and terrific peals

⁵⁷ Ibid., 28.

⁵⁸ William Carpenter, *Travels and adventures in Mexico: in the course of Journeys of upward of 2500 miles, performed on foot; giving an account of the manners and customs of the people, and the agricultural and mineral resources of that country* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1851), 15.

of thunder, which frequently ended by giving us a through drenching.”⁵⁹ During his station on the beach, Carpenters journals are brief referring only to the continued hardships the weather and lack of fresh water provides, souring his as well as the company’s spirits. Three weeks following their station along the beach, the Kentucky volunteers moved up along the Rio Grande towards Burrata. Carpenter notes “the land was rich and easy of cultivation, and would, by proper tillage yield the farmer a rich return for his labor ; but it seems as though all its occupants wished for in this world was enough to eat from day to day, never thinking of providing for the future.”⁶⁰ This passage hints towards a similar view held by Moore in the opportunities the land offers, and the failure of the native Mexican has to capitalize on them. However, Carpenter does not quantify his statement regarding nationalism, rather viewing the environment from a monetary view noting, “the rich wealth” of the land for men to settle. While his view is similar to Preston’s at a glance, he never denigrates the Mexicans via the rich land, but instead simply bolsters his own sense of nationalism and future prospects through it.

However, during the following days the continuous rains changed Carpenters view of the Mexicans. The harsh weather influenced his changing views his views of the culture surrounding him. As the Kentucky volunteers arrive in a small village above Burrata, he notes, “the houses were miserably built hovels, not capable of protecting the inmates from the pelting rain.”⁶¹ A view in stark contrast to the earlier passages before the rain, were the Mexicans home were largely overlooked, save for a passing mention of their location next to the farmable land. The constant rain and harsh travel seem, as in the case with Moore and Preston, to have exasperated Carpenter, who in turn has turned his aggression upon the Mexican people, and the regulars, when he notes

⁵⁹ Ibid., 18.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 19.

⁶¹ Ibid., 19.

“anger” at the regular officers for running drills, something he was previously excited about when first camped on the island. Later during a trip through what he describes as “where the Mexicans, to be well off”⁶² he notes a rising anger at the lack of “hospitable and formal housing”⁶³ noting the need to “pay for the *alcalde* room that he slept in.”⁶⁴ Again, in the face of a harsh environment, his thoughts shift from the grander ideas that brought him into the conflict, and towards individual monetary concerns. The stagnation and lack of combat continues to breed such shifting in the narrative with volunteer forces. The more isolated and harsh the environment, the more resentment and dissatisfaction with the regulars grew and the grander ideas of nationalism fade. Instead, as the harsher environment comes into contact breeds a return to selfish ideologies unique to each volunteer, even if their situation was not wholly unique.

Continuing this trend, John N. Richardson served as a member of the Boon Company from 1846-47 in the Mexican American War. The Boon Company comprised of 100 enlisted men and several noncommissioned officers, a similar set up to the previously mentioned Butta Rangers. The Boon Company has no official record in the regular forces serving during this period and a passage from the journal depicts them as another volunteer force such that for the sake of this study. On Dec 2, 1849, Richardson makes note of the new encampment alongside “Tennessee and Indiana V troops (the “V” shorthand for volunteer)”⁶⁵ Given his own company’s set up along with them, it is fair, given what it was known about the separation of regular and volunteer forces, to recognize Boon Company was one such volunteer force. In addition, the lack of any commissioned officers within their own Company something commonplace in volunteer regiments

⁶² Ibid., 19

⁶³ Ibid., 19.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 19.

⁶⁵ John N. Richardson, *Mexican War Diary Attributed to John N. Richardson, 1847-1848*, GA51, Special Collections, University of Texas at Arlington Library. http://library.uta.edu/usmexicowar/collections/pdf/usmw-GA51_Richardson-Diary.pdf, 18. Accessed November 2016. Hereinafter, SCUTALD.

due to their militia beginnings. His only mention of any higher military figure are vague references to “General Taylor’s”⁶⁶ forces, which his own company seems to be marching behind, at least “two days”⁶⁷ given the descriptions of battlefields they enter onto only following the end of hostilities. Thus, for the purposes of this section, and with the evidence provided, Boon Company is a volunteer force.

Like Carpenter, Richardson’s journal begins with open praise to the landscape, prompted by the company’s travel across the Rio Frio River, located west of San Antonio in the southern area of Texas. His focus, however, is on the additional architecture of the land, specifically the “national bridge...a most beautiful bridge with six arches about thirty feet high...[running between] two high hills on both sides.”⁶⁸ Richardson continues to praise the architecture of the bridge as well as providing a detailed examination of the fortifications with their “three foot thick walls”⁶⁹ and “artillery”⁷⁰ positions for several pages. Noting the “ingenuity and arch construction [and how it allows for the] Mexican scouts”⁷¹ to overlook their location. His tone continues to be one of outright praise as the company moves into one of Santa Anna’s summer residence “beautiful piece of paradise”⁷² located 15 miles from Cero Gordo. Describing the trip to reach this location through the creek due to the Mexican defenders having destroyed another bridge, he notes was “a marvel of construction.”⁷³ Richardson’s regiment is like Moore, Carpenter, and Preston’s held away from combat, however, unlike those forces his experiences with the environment are overall pleasant. As such the resentment brought about by the harsh living conditions expressed in the

⁶⁶ Ibid., 19.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 19.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 9.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 10.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 12.

⁷¹ Ibid., 13.

⁷² Ibid., 15.

⁷³ Ibid., 15.

other men's journals do not twist his views as they have previously, instead serving to impress upon him both the land and by extension the Mexican people responsible for its care. With no direct hardship, he also does not find a target in the regular forces, finding a need to blame or denigrate them. The environment is the catalyst by which he experiences the war, and so long as it is not combative so too is he.

His next notations beginning with striking camp and moving into "the coldest and chilling rains"⁷⁴ as the company moved up a steep mountainside. However, by that night's camp, when he returns to the shelter of his tent, his journal returns its focus to noting the nearby town's construction of a "cotton cottage", noting the "water power being conducted through the stone, and the best I ever have seen."⁷⁵ However, more interesting is the note he makes in regards to "the water is as good as I have tasted in Mexico," interesting given that till this mention, supplies and drinkable water have not been mentioned. Indeed, aside from architecture and the beautiful landscapes, the journal appears to be overlooking the negative aspects of the campaign. This is especially interesting given that in the same journal entry, Richardson makes note of two deaths in the regiment, keeping in mind that he wrote the name of every member of the regiment at the beginning of his journal. His mention of the travel is likewise conspicuous, as aside from a notation of distance, the actual travel and condition is neglected, save for notable architecture of bridges and roads. Instead, it is not until a week later, in the move through the mountains that any mention aside from praise for the land's geographical beauty is made. Again, this seems to indicate that the overall positive environment has likewise instilled a positive reflection of the campaign on Richardson, despite the basic hardships inherent there in.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 17.

⁷⁵ Ibid 20.

That optimistic tone all but vanishes in the following passages. On the 6th of December, Richardson describes another favorable valley and into a “poor little village water very poor, lumber altogether pine.... Length of the march 12 miles.”⁷⁶ This marks the first note of poor living conditions, and is immediately followed up by a brief mention of another death; however, this is prefaced with “supposed to have been murdered by the Mexicans.”⁷⁷ Consider that previously death in and out of battle was not prefaced in Richardson’s journal. However, here following a new recordable negative environment his writing changes to a more accusatory manor. Like how Moore’s own writing shifted when the Butta Rangers were stationed in such a small village, and how Carpenter’s writing likewise became more aggressive towards the Mexican’s as the environment turned sour. This pattern continues as once the Boon Company is station outside a besieged city and forced back into hospitable environmental conditions, the tone of the writing shifts into the negative once more. Where previously Richardson dedicated pages to noting architecture, his focus shifts to listing off the dead and dying of his forces. At the same time, he also begins to shift his reference to the Mexicans noting them “killing each other from drunkenness” and “deserting taken some of the best horses belonging to the dragoons along with several artillery pieces.”⁷⁸

While his writing does revert as some passages to mindful commentary on the beauty of the environment the Boon Company moves into. For example, a new valley area he remarks as “table land” for the flat expanse, coupled with the small pockets of pine in-between two mountain ranges, making note of the area as “the most beautiful valley [he] ever saw in [his] life, extended as far as the eye could reach in every direction.”⁷⁹ These points of admiration take on a new tone.

⁷⁶ Ibid.,20

⁷⁷ Ibid., 20

⁷⁸ Ibid., 45-46.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 22

While as before the land, architecture, and the like were ascribed to the Mexicans as much as the beauty. In the following passages, the writing makes no effort to connect the native population with the architecture and lands. Along with this, enemy forces are most often referred to as the Mexican army, or even as soldiers. Rather Richardson repeatedly refers to them as “gorillas” whenever engaging with them. While a common military term, it is not utilized to refer to hidden enemy combatants or hit and run tactics, as he uses such terms even when the forces are held in a defensive set of “bulwarks”⁸⁰ across a narrow river from his own forces. Whereas before he remarked upon death in a clinical fashion, following long encampments, he begins to record in more detail how the men die “entertaining the hope of living to the last moment,” and “Pass from the world shrunken appearing petrified.”⁸¹ Details earlier ignored in favor of noting upon a favorable environment.

Richardson demonstrates an interesting reversal to our previous volunteers, in that his greatest reaction is not necessary to the negative environment, but to the positive ones. Several times following even these harsh moments, Richardson slips back into long-winded examination of the scenery and agriculture when these elements are fair. His previous reprimands about the native people reverse into complements for local clergy and their “magnificent cathedrals.”⁸² As such in Richardson, one can see the effect a positive environment has upon the will and recording of the war itself, such that any one journal could not cover the full experience, given the environment for that volunteer could vary radically from one to the next. By extension, regiments of regulars with their more regulated supplies and barracks lack the raw experiences present in the

⁸⁰ Ibid., 85.

⁸¹ Ibid., 67-68.

⁸² Ibid., 89.

varied relations between volunteers and the many areas of the war. Another result of this harsh environment was the disease brought about by these harsh conditions.

“The land is beautiful...but she hides disease in every cranny”⁸³ an accurate assessment of the Mexican-American campaign. The geography of the Mexican American war made disease part of the environment and unified every volunteer force serving in the conflict. Of the 104,556 men who served in the Army, regulars and volunteers 15,000 American soldiers lost their lives, of which only 1,700 were killed in action.⁸⁴ The overwhelming 13,000 American soldiers remaining died to disease or other environmental hardships within Mexico’s territory.

During the Mexican American War, death by disease was part of the environment as noted by Moore’s description of his first view of “a sea of tents, filled with disease.”⁸⁵ To Preston’s mention of lifting the frozen dead from the carriage, every volunteer dealt with death. In addition, the rate of death was due in part to the locations of volunteer forces in regards to regular forces in two ways. Primarily the accommodations made for the different ranks of soldier. Efforts were made to grant regular’s locations “nearer major forts”⁸⁶ and sources of clean well water, and access to regular resupply of medical and provisional requirements. In contrast, volunteers were directed to make camp in small outlying towns, or on the beaches depending on the weather.⁸⁷ Locations far away from the regulars to avoid complications between the two forces motivated often produced by the two group’s hostile view of one another. Separating volunteers into smaller communities, where supplies and environmental hardships were rampant caused as Moore remarks “shadow of disease which seemed to follow them.”⁸⁸

⁸³ William, *Journal in Mexico*, 60.

⁸⁴ Bennett, “Reviewed Work: So Far from God”, 362.

⁸⁵ Moore, *September 1st-14th*, ADAHSM, 63.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁸⁷ Benjamin Scribner, *Glimpse at life in Camp 1847* (Philadelphia: Grigg, Elliot and Co., 1847), 26.

⁸⁸ Moore, *Diary, Aug 29th 1846-1847*, ADAHSM, 35.

Outlying farming villages held deposits of topsoil necessary for crop production, and a steady supply of water, usually in the form of small rivers as observed in Moore's and Richardson's journals. However, with the heavy rains such soil broke loose becoming mudslides, which flooded into volunteer camps. Not only did this damage tents, bedrolls, and the volunteers themselves, the added distance and lack of resupply left volunteers more exposed to the elements and less able to recover. One Calvary volunteer from Kentucky notes, "in six months he had lost about two hundred men by death; that at this time he had but forty-two men for duty, the rest being in the hospital, or languishing from disease, and that from a single company."⁸⁹

Storms also sent overflowing waste down through the tent camps and wells spreading feces and excrement, both human and animal, causing dysentery to run rampant through volunteer camps. With inadequate shelter, the elements perpetuated breeding grounds for the easy spread of disease. Once flooded, the wells were useless to any that wished to avoid contaminating themselves, and the small river would be a mix of mud and waist following the storm. To get fresh water, for cleaning or consumption, fresh new wells would have to be dug out, or the contaminated ones had to be cleaned. This left volunteer forces for sometimes days without a clean alternative hastening the spread of contamination. Removing the infection was also not possible, due to the isolated locations of many such camps. Such as in the case of Preston. The sick or wounded were "loaded into wagons and carried along with the company"⁹⁰ The same wagons used to carry supplies, which in turn would be exposed to the same contamination as the sick. Even those sent back to the United States following the conflict "returned home with impaired health... shattered

⁸⁹ Preston, *Journal in Mexico*, 15.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 25.

with a disease, contracted in a strange country and a hot climate which, in a few years after the war, had taken from their homes more than one-half of those who returned.”⁹¹

Mentions of Smallpox, Measles and Gout appear throughout the volunteer journals. One volunteer notes, “there is small chance of recovery here. The disease may be partially overcome, but to regain strength, when but little deduced, is almost impossible...in this dry air ant place.”⁹² The volunteer in this passage refers to a larger town near the mouth of the Rio Grande, and how marching through the “marshy water”⁹³ left the men with wet boots and dirty smelling trousers for the rest of the march. Reaching the town, the hospital is set a good deal away, already packed with the dead and dying, something one volunteer describes as “unsurprising,” as his own troop loses their first casualty to smallpox. Volunteers stricken with disease are quickly ushered out of their companies if possible, discharged back to the field office and hospital. However, due to the distance of several of these volunteer camps, and the period it takes for messages to arrive, most are “found dead in [their] tents.”⁹⁴ For those few that obtain a discharge the harsh climate and travel usually cost them their lives, extreme heat, and cold coupled with inadequate shelter leave the common volunteer simply unable to cope with an illness.

The organization of the “seas” of tents for troops’ placement compounded the issue of disease within even moderately organized volunteer camps. Spaced “just far enough for a man to walk between”⁹⁵ these tent cities formed a breeding ground for disease. After a rain the dry earth below said tents, if not washed away, would stagnate, pooling standing water under tents where the hot sun could not directly reach them. Given the heat most volunteers spent as much time as

⁹¹ J. Jacob Oswandel, *Notes of the Mexican War 1846-48* (Philadelphia: s.n., 1885), 4.

⁹² Scribner, *Glimpse at life*, 24.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁹⁴ Moore, *September 1st-14th*, ADAHSM, 62.

⁹⁵ Scribner, *Glimpse at life*, 30.

possible under shade, and thus near these contaminated pools. Dysentery, one of the most lethal infections during this war, is a gastroenteritis afflictions resulting from bacteria eating through the lining of the intestine, said bacteria is often a result of unclean drinking water or living conditions, like those found in the tent cities during this campaign. Richardson describes the effects one of his number in detail following the man's death. "Thomas Waugh departed this life after an illness of seven days he died with an inflammation of kidneys and bladder and a stoppage and blood mixture of the urine produced from the frequent use of muscles during his illness and previously do to intoxication."⁹⁶ Richardson goes on to describe the necessity of removing his body, and the sad state of their "tent city"⁹⁷ as more of his boys died to the disease.

A wet roll may not seem a danger, however, when pressed against wet earth, instead of upon a raise bunk, the bacterial grown can and does lead to infection and Dysentery. Within the Mexican territory, common rains bred a perfect environment for disease and death to manifest. The rapid deployment of troops pushed even highly mobile forces to make camp in such inhospitable environments. Evacuation of contaminated volunteers, due to the location, was all but impossible. Thanks to that, the environment effectively killed six times more volunteer soldier than the entire Mexican army.

In this environment of disillusionment and death, violence, and disorderly conduct within the volunteer forces became prevalent resulting in the death of native Mexicans and subsequent punishments of volunteer soldiers. The environments effect on volunteers' ideology and isolationist mentality fueling anger, manifesting in actions against native peoples, given the inability to make any meaningful action against regular superiors, of the hospitable climate. Thus, the internal violence is a byproduct of the environment volunteers found themselves in. Moore

⁹⁶ Richardson, *Mexican War Diary*, SCUTALD, 64.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 65.

noted two times when he was in town, where a volunteer soldier had killed either a “fellow soldier” or a “native Mexican” followed by an execution.⁹⁸ Similarly, Preston noted that in a divided camp, a “shot was fired in the night resulting in a small panic. By the next morning two Tennessee volunteers were dead.”⁹⁹ In both cases, regulars came down upon volunteer forces widening the anger and divide already existing between the forces. Richardson likewise makes note of a commotion within the divided elements, remarking how two sentry’s horses were “shot on in the shoulder while his horse was shot in head, forced to put the beast down.”¹⁰⁰ The necessity of stationing of volunteers so far from a proper chain of command led to isolation not only ideology but position to the point friendly fire events were commonplace in volunteer regiments. Volunteer forces eager to fight, and lacking the “honor” of combat results in dangerous groups that ironically become the much-disorganized mobs the regulars originally associated them with. The location of forces in relation to one another creates an environment for such violence to excel. Another example from Richardson comes in the lack of supplies when the “cart loaded with beef was unavailable secured with the Tennessee regiment ahead.”¹⁰¹ In this case, the crucial location given the Boon Company was without supplies and at that time attempting to barter for it with a local Mexican village. The following day two men succumbed to disease, and Richardson’s anger towards the regulars becomes more apparent. This anger which turn into violence is as much an effect of the environment as the disease.

The final environment to discuss to understand volunteers experiences in the Mexican American War, and by extension the war itself, is the battlefields. At the actual prospect of entering the battlefield most, like Moore, appear ecstatic to, “at last meet Santa Anna in a great

⁹⁸ Moore, *Diary, Aug 26th 1846-1847*, ADAHSM, 28.

⁹⁹ Preston, *Journal in Mexico*, 12.

¹⁰⁰ Richardson, *Mexican War Diary*, SCUTALD, 54.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 53.

battle.”¹⁰² The same eagerness is represented in the other volunteer forces, which fits right into their desires for “honor” and individual ideology. Directly following an engagement, his journals simply record the dead, and wounded, sparing little in the way of high ideals of their burden or destiny. Following entries paint a very stark contrast to a glorious honorable image. Just as Moore was first disappointed in the Rio Grande so too are volunteers with the battlefield once it was over. Richardson remarks upon the “broken walls of the city and ground littered with bits of shrapnel... a barren ugly scar that reaches just into the city.”¹⁰³ In a similar fashion, Carpenter remarks following one battle “why are we here...burnt fortifications and an underwhelming cattle fence.”¹⁰⁴ Even Moore following his service in the rear-guard remarks “I feel satisfied now that my return home will suffer no interruptions. And leave this arid filthy place.”¹⁰⁵ The battlefields instead of reinforcing their ideology call it more into question. These volunteers look to the land to answer why they are fighting. They look to the environment round them to answer what they gained from all the suffering, and as Robinson remarks, “why are we here?”¹⁰⁶ The burnt out walls the cracked lands do as much to hammer home the cost of the war as any other element.

CONCLUSION

Looking to the environment is necessary to understand the Mexican American War. Volunteers came into the conflict with ideological beliefs in “Manifest Destiny” and “the white man’s burden” but through the exchanges with the environment of the war those beliefs changed, and thus the understanding of the conflict, too. Moore goes from a believer in the duty to his

¹⁰² Moore, *Diary, Sep 28th 1846-1847*, ADAHSM, 78.

¹⁰³ Carpenter, *Travels and adventures in Mexico*, 34.

¹⁰⁴ Richardson, *Mexican War Diary*, 38.

¹⁰⁵ Moore, *Diary, Sep 28th 1846-1847*, ADAHSM, 81.

¹⁰⁶ Richardson, *Mexican War Diary*, 38.

nation, to simply wishing to return to his home, along with ideas of isolationism brought about by his very real physical isolation in service. Preston thoughts mirror the belief of “the white man’s burden” but through his experiences forms a contempt for the Mexican people. Carpenter meanwhile contrasts both men’s experiences demonstrating the effect a positive experience with the land can have upon service, and his views of the War. Finally, Richardson who gained respect for the Mexican people thanks to his experiences with the beauty of the land, and architecture on display. Each of these men demonstrate a unique view and shifting ideology during the conflict, as well as the unique part which Mexico as a land plays in the examination of the conflict. The environment has a noticeable effect on volunteers during this conflict. Without observing this from land, disease, and troop positions it is impossible to observe the conflict and by extension its effect on American ideology. Thus, to fully study the Mexican American war the environmental effect on volunteer solders is not only readily observable, but also further study is necessary.

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