

SERVING IN OBSCURITY: UNITED STATES REVENUE CUTTER  
SERVICE OPERATIONS IN THE GULF OF MEXICO DURING  
THE MEXICAN AMERICAN WAR 1846-1847

BY

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## ABSTRACT

Serving in Obscurity: The effectiveness of the US military improved, though in obscurity, with assistance of a Non-War Department organization, the U.S. Revenue Cutter Service, during the Mexican-American War.

R. Jay Lloyd

I intend to show how the use of the Revenue Cutter Service (RCS) in the Mexican-American War increased the effectiveness of the Army and Navy and provided the U.S. military another organization able to furnish resources not in the inventory of either service, but useful to and through the successful completion of the conflict. All the while, fading in numbers of total vessels in the service, and losing recognition from the other services for services rendered.

Beginning with a letter from President James K. Polk to the Secretary of Treasury, Robert J. Walker, directing the Revenue Cutter Service to the Gulf of Mexico reporting to the Army, not the Navy, until the end of hostilities with Mexico, eight RCS vessels preformed admirably. Little written material has been presented showing a broad range of contributions of the service. Navy depictions of the war seldom mention the other services, especially the RCS.

I intend to show how the RCS contributed to the war effort and worked with the other services.

Although not military, or part of the United States War Department, Revenue Cutter Service vessels of the Treasury Department, effectively operated and participated with various units and vessels of the Army and Navy while providing resources not in the others inventory, increasing the effectiveness of the U.S. military forces and providing additional resources to prosecute the War. The downside of this was the fact that little is written on the untiring participation of the RCS. My project will focus on the role of the RCS and contribute to written works of the War, previously, but not solely presented.

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## Preface

During the Mexican-American War, 1846-1848, the United States Revenue Cutter Service (RCS), the precursor of the United States Coast Guard, took part in the conflict. Directed by the Secretary of the Treasury, R. J. Walker, a squadron of cutters sailed under secret orders from various ports on the Atlantic and Gulf coasts. Captain John A Webster commanded the squadron.

The United States Revenue steamers *Legare*, *McLane* and *Spencer*, along with the schooners *Woodbury*, *Ewing*, *Forward* and *Van Buren* were selected to form the Gulf squadron. The cutters *Bibb*, *Morris*, *Polk*, and *Wolcott* departed their homeports shortly after notification for action in the Gulf of Mexico.

The Mexican-American War reached a fault line in American History. New weapons and technologies, political intrigue and aspirations, national pride and national arrogance played instrumental parts in the preparation and prosecution of the war and peace. The U.S. invading another country cast political questions throughout the government and the people. The build up of the Army and the Navy proved to be astounding in its quantity and time frame.

As frequently occurs, the smallest of the components of a major war are often overlooked. I refer to the U.S. Revenue Cutter Service, today's U.S. Coast Guard. Established August 4, 1790 the Revenue Cutter Service worked under the Customs Department for the Secretary of Treasury enforcing the customs law of the United States. Unlike the other military services, with the exception of the state militias (National Guard), the RCS had not been disbanded in the late eighteenth century. The RCS made a name for itself assisting in rebuilding the Navy and by participating in the Quasi-War with France, the War of 1812 and the Seminole Indian Wars in conjunction with the Army and Navy and was ready for the Mexican-American war.

In Texas, beginning in 1821, American settlers poured into the country with the support of the Mexican government. Mexico at first welcomed the settlers, but as their numbers grew and they began to greatly outnumber the Mexicans in the Texas territory, the government tried to halt the flood of unwanted immigrants into their country. This proved to be an impossible task for Mexico.

In 1836 the President of Mexico, General Antonio Lopez de Santa Ana, marched north from Mexico City with a large army to get rid of the unwanted settlers, he met and crushed Texas resistance at the Alamo and then at Goliad.



Shortly thereafter his victorious army was caught taking their afternoon siesta at San Jacinto and suffered total defeat by Texans under the Command of General Sam Houston. Captured, Santa Ana was returned to Mexico with terms for peace. One of those terms was the Independence of Texas.

The Texas issue remained painful subject until 1845. The area between the Rio Grande and the Nueces Rivers known as the "Nueces Strip" was disputed territory. In 1845 the Lone Star Republic was annexed by the United States. The American believed they had control south to the Rio Grande, the Mexican believed the border at the Nueces River. An outraged Mexican Government protested but to no avail.

President James K Polk, using the newly coined Manifest Destiny, set to accomplish his 1844 presidential agenda. His plan included the acquisition of the Oregon territory from England, the acquisition of California from Mexico and extending the United States across the continent. Only Mexico stood in his way.

General Taylor crossed the Nueces and camped on the north bank of the Rio Grande. A skirmish and two battles occurred before Polk got the word. American blood was spilled. An outraged Polk went to Congress and asked Congress to declare war against Mexico. War was declared on May 18, 1846.

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

As tragedies occur, the Mexican-American War of 1846-1848, proves to still have people recall the words of U.S. Grant; "I ... to this day regard the war ... as one of the most unjust ever waged by a stronger against a weaker nation." He wrote this in his memoirs during the last days of his life.<sup>1</sup>

The fight for Texas independence begun in 1836 led to the Mexican American War. Upon annexation of Texas by the United States on July 4, 1845, war between the two nations became all but inevitable. Diplomatic overtures placed strained relations on the countries. In January 1846, Washington promulgated orders for the Army and Navy to prepare itself for possible war.<sup>2</sup>

Zachary Taylor crossed the Nueces River south of Corpus Christi, Texas and advanced to the Rio Grande, while the U.S. Home Squadron moved to stations off the Mexican coast. General Steven W Kearney marched troops

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<sup>1</sup> Ulysses S. Grant. *Personal memoirs of U.S. Grant*, 2 vols. (New York, NY: Charles Webster & Co., 1885-86) 1: 53.

<sup>2</sup> Richard V. Francaviglia. *From Sail to Steam*. (hereafter *Sail to Steam*) (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1991) 153.

from Fort Leavenworth Kansas to California via Santa Fe, New Mexico to bolster the troops there and Pacific fleet Commodore, John D. Sloat prepared his Squadron for war. The Mexican government claimed the land of Texas north to the Nueces River while the United States claimed the land south to the Rio Grande River. U. S. naval ships of the Home Squadron effectively put up a blockade to the ports of the Mexican gulf coast.<sup>3</sup> Mexico protested the movement of the U.S. Army to the Rio Grande as well as the ships off its Gulf coast. Mexico took exception to the maneuvers and intentions, making war a certainty.

The political situation in Mexico was turmoil. The Mexican government took the annexation of Texas as an insult and a blow to their national pride. They saw no way, except for American withdrawal from the area bounded by the Rio Grande and Nueces Rivers, or war as an answer to the issue.

Beginning in 1836 and through 1848 the Mexican government had no less than eleven presidents while during the same time; in the United States there were four. John Tyler assumed the presidency a month after William H. Harrison, died in office in 1841. In

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<sup>3</sup> Niles Register, (hereafter *Niles*), 1846.

hindsight, constant leadership at the highest levels of both governments proved a barometer of the outcome of the war.<sup>4</sup>

The coast of the Gulf of Mexico proved to be an obstacle that was overcome by specific planning by the strategists of all services. Working in shallow areas of the Gulf and making shallow river crossings posed problems for standard draft vessels, those that required more than ten feet of water in which to operate. During the war, severe fall and winter storms in the gulf caused losses to U. S. vessels that the Mexican Navy could not inflict.<sup>5</sup>

The geography of the Gulf coast made conditions bad, but the distances that impeded quick communications caused more serious problems for the military. Timeliness of messages and dispatches did not always occur, especially between Washington and units on the front. Communications in those times at such distances proved to be sporadic at best.

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<sup>4</sup> Michael C. Meyer, William L. Sherman and Susan M. Deeds, *The Course of Mexican History*, (hereafter *Mexican History*) (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1999) 708.

<sup>5</sup> *H. O. Publication 20*, (hereafter, *Pub 20*) (Washington, DC: US GPO, 1963) 219.

Before and through the War, the United States Revenue Cutter Service, part of the Customs Division of the Treasury Department, cooperated with the branches of the War Department and the U.S. State Department to an extent that deserves recognition. As early as 1838 the *Revenue Service Cutter (RSC) Woodbury*, based out of New Orleans, cooperated with the Army, Navy, and State Departments, as well as discharging the duties of the Revenue Marine Service for the Department of Treasury along the Coast of the United states between Chandeleur Island south of the Mississippi coast, to the Mexican border.

The service, at the out set of the war, received orders from the President, through the Secretary of the Treasury, to direct eight cutters to the Gulf Coast for operations.<sup>6</sup> (Appendix B) The orders directed the Cutters to New Orleans, then to report to General Zachary Taylor for further orders. In the event they could not find Taylor, they were to proceed and report to Admiral David Conner, Commander of the Home Squadron.

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<sup>6</sup> Department of Transportation, *Record of Movements: Vessels of the United States Coast Guard 1790-December 31, 1933*, (hereafter (DOT. ROM) (Washington, DC: Reprinted by Coast Guard Historian's Officer, 1989) 46-50.

During the war, four services, the Army, Navy, Marine Corps and Revenue Cutter Service (Note: today's Coast Guard) demonstrated the effectiveness of working jointly and in cooperation with each other. Although outnumbered by Mexican forces during the war, a smaller, more disciplined force proved to be a superior fighting force, in no small part, due to its professional Army and Naval officer corps and efficient use of joint service actions.

The joint operation at Veracruz deserves special mention, although not dealt with in detail in this work. The Army, Navy and Marine Corps in their joint actions of cooperation in landing troops, bombarding the city and eventually taking the city proved devastating to the Mexicans. The actions displayed that the combined efforts of the services working as a whole are capable of many things that singularly might prove difficult.<sup>7</sup>

The Mexican war is noted mostly for its land battles and the use of the Armies, but the naval services played

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<sup>7</sup> K. Jack Bauer, *Surfboats and Horse Marines; U.S. Naval Operations in the Mexican War, 1846-48*, (hereafter *Surfboats*) (Annapolis, MD: United States Naval Institute, 1969) 84-89; Samuel Eliot Morrison, "Old Bruin", *Commodore Matthew Calbraith Perry*, ( hereafter "Old Bruin") (Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Company, 1969) 216.

an instrumental role in the final victory. There is an interesting occurrence in this war as there are no major naval sea battles. There are skirmishes on the Pacific and Gulf of Mexico coasts resulting in Mexican losses of naval and merchant vessels; the Mexican Navy, heavily outnumbered, could not hope to compete with the U.S. naval forces. The possible use of possible use of privateers by the Mexican government issuing "Letters of Marque", caused concern among mariners of the U.S. merchant fleet and the U.S. government, proved to be of little or no real threat.<sup>8</sup>

The vessels of the RCS, directed by the Secretary of Treasury, Robert Walker under orders of President James Polk received their sealed orders May 16, 1846.<sup>9</sup> The vessels sent included 3 shallow draft steam vessels (the Navy had only two and they were deep draft of more than 12 feet) for use in the shallow waters, rivers and ports along the Gulf of Mexico Mexican coast. The Secretary issued orders to report to General Z. Taylor were; if he

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<sup>8</sup> Bauer, *Surfboats*. 30.; New Orleans Picayune, Various.

<sup>9</sup> Horatio Davis Smith, Elliot Snow, ed., *Early History of the United States Revenue Marine Service*, (hereafter, *Early History*) (Washington, DC: H.L. Polk Printing Co. 1932) 76.

could not be located the services of the vessels should to be offered to Commodore D. Connors, commander of the Home Squadron. These orders were to be carried out after reporting to the U.S. Treasury Collector of Customs in New Orleans, Denis Prieur.<sup>10</sup>

Throughout the war Prieur maintained his authority over the RCS vessels in the Gulf. The Secretary selected Captain John A Webster to command the RCS flotilla. The service, utilizing sail and steam vessels, provided convoy patrols, carried urgent dispatches and participated in the river blockades and landings along the Campeche coast. An issue of Naval and Revenue Cutter Service leadership was the extremely poor physical condition of the Cutters sent to the Gulf for service.

The Revenue Cutter Service did nothing spectacular during the Mexican American War. It served only on the Gulf coast. It saw no heated battles. During the Civil War, the Spanish American War and until it became the Coast Guard in 1915, the RCS, again and again, in peacetime and in time of armed conflicts, in a thoroughly

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<sup>10</sup> Ann Saba. Interview by author, 12 November, 2001  
Conversations of Customs Official of the Treasury  
Department in the 1840s with a Department of Treasury  
historian; Ms Saba provided the included information.



inconspicuous manner, continually proved its worth for the nation and has served it well.

Numerous records exist of the actions of the separate military services, War Department and Treasury Department. When joint actions occur, the service writing about the event rarely mentions another services involvement. The one service, most overlooked, by others and tragically by its own neglect, is the United States Revenue Cutter Service (which is today's Coast Guard). This work will endeavor to correct some of that neglect.

#### THE POLITICAL SITUATION

Late in April 1836, Antonio de Lopez Santa Anna signed two treaties with Texas President David Burnet. In effect the treaties established that Mexico would not again take up arms against the Texans quest for Independence. In addition, the Mexican army would be withdrawn to the South bank of the Rio Bravo (Rio Grande) River.<sup>11</sup> Further agreements between Santa Anna and Burnet stipulated that equal amounts of prisoners would be exchanged. In return for his own release, Santa Anna secretly agreed to have the Mexican cabinet receive a peace mission. Upon the mission's acceptance, formal

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<sup>11</sup> Meyer, *Mexican History*, 328.

recognition of the Lone Star Republic's independence, by the Mexican government, would be accepted. The Mexican cabinet balked and debated if Santa Anna's actions had not been treasonous. Since Santa Anna had been a prisoner when he initiated the treaties, any treaty he signed was deemed null and void by the Mexican cabinet. Therefore, Mexico did not extend formal recognition of Texas and refused to accept a Texas peace mission.<sup>12</sup> If they had recognized Texas and had accepted a peace mission, the Mexican government would have placed itself in a loser's position to any future claims on Texas, simply by admitting they held no claims on the territory.

In March of 1837, the United States recognized the independence of Texas. Texas remained independent from 1836 to 1845 as the Lone Star Republic. During that time relations between the United States and Mexico progressively deteriorated to such an extent, that by 1845 when the United States annexed Texas, war was inevitable.<sup>13</sup> On March 6<sup>th</sup>, 1845, Mexican Minister General Juan N. Amonte wrote to U.S. Secretary of State John C. Calhoun. In his letter he stated, ". . . the war is an

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 328-9.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 330.

act of aggression, the most unjust which can be found recorded in the annals of modern history.<sup>14</sup> Mexico, he claimed, could be expected to extend its rights to reclaim its land.

Many issues, such as who is in power today, in the years leading up to the war indicate problems within the Mexican government of stability policy included, how to address the U.S. threat. The nuances of the issues changed with governments. The expectations of political objectives, under constant changing governments and cabinets, proved difficult at best. A comparison between the Presidency of the United States and Mexico tells a persuasive story about governmental stability. Between 1836 and the Texas annexation in 1846, Mexico had six Presidents. By the end of the War, two years later, another three had served.

Jose Justo Corro	1836-1837
Nicolas Bravo	1839 to 1846 (various)
Javier Echeverria	1841
Valentin Canalizo	1844
Jose Joaquin Herrera	1844-1845 (interim)
Mariano Paredes Arrillaga	1846
Mariano Salas	1846
Pedro Maria Anaya	1847 and 1848
Manuel de la Pena y Pena	1847 and 1848 <sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> K. Jack Bauer, *The Mexican War 1846-1848*, (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1974) 16.

<sup>15</sup> Meyer, *Mexican History*, 708.

Not even mentioned is the charismatic, one legged hero of Mexico, General Antonio de Santa Ana, who served as President as often as he could; and way to often for a majority of the people.

In the United States during the same time period, four men served as President.

Martin Van Buren	1833-1841
William H. Harrison	1841 (died in office)
John Tyler	1841-1845
James K. Polk	1845-1848

A more stable government in the United States positively enabled the war effort as hostilities came to bear.

In 1845, newly elected U.S. President James K. Polk hoped for a peaceful settlement on the question of the Texas territory, although it was not necessarily required. Polk had an agenda that included western expansion. The issue of peace was doomed before it began. Former President, Andrew Jackson had urged the choice of a candidate, at the Democratic Convention that be committed to the Nations "Manifest Destiny". A term that politician and columnist John L. Sullivan coined in the "Democratic Review" in July 1845, Polk made no motion to hide it as his agenda. And, he followed through with that plan during his term in office. He secured the southwest for the United States and he acquired the

Oregon Territory and set a firm line, the 49<sup>th</sup> Parallel that divides Canada and the US.<sup>16</sup>

It became readily apparent that Mexican President, General Jose Joaquin de Herrera, was unable to persuade differently the members of his government who wanted war. The United States government made a mistake failing to understand the depth of feelings of the Mexican public and government over the loss of Texas. The loss of Texas proved to be a shattering blow to Mexican dignity and pride. It was the one issue, non-negotiable with the Mexican government.<sup>17</sup>

When the United States appointed John Slidell as minister to Mexico, Congress and the President gave him authority to adjust the questions in dispute. Upon arriving in Veracruz, Slidell wrote the Mexican government of his arrival. He received no answer from the Mexican government. Then he wrote of the border dispute, and concessions the U.S. government was willing to accept. In doing so, accepting the concessions offered, the Mexicans saw themselves caving in to there

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<sup>16</sup> [www.Whitehouse.gov/history/presidents/jpl1.html](http://www.Whitehouse.gov/history/presidents/jpl1.html)

<sup>17</sup> Bauer, *Mexican War*, 17; Justin Smith, *The War With Mexico. vol II, (hereafter WWM vol II, 86; Meyer. Mexican History. 330.*

own rejection of Texas annexation to the United States. Mexico rejected Slidell's mission forthwith.<sup>18</sup>

In attempts to demonstrate his desire for peace, Polk sought avenues that would lead to peace or show the public of his untiring quest for a peaceful resolution of the Mexican question. President Polk sought out Santa Anna in Cuba. He made attempts through emissaries to assist the former President and General to return to Mexico and establish a stable government favorable to the United States. Polk's representative to Santa Anna was Slidell's brother Alexander Slidell Mackenzie. Santa Anna contacted Herrera's successor, Mariano Paredes y Arrillaga, about the possibility of returning to Mexico, and possibly the government, after his exile in Cuba.<sup>19</sup> As events in Mexico developed, a growing number of people favored Santa Anna's reentry into some aspects of his former duties as a leader in Mexican politics and military affairs. Seizing upon the opportunity, Santa Anna

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<sup>18</sup> Smith, WWM vol II, 93.

<sup>19</sup> John Edward Weems, *To Conquer A Peace*, (hereafter *Conquer A Peace*) (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, INC. 1942) 194-95.

always a savior, decided the time was right for his return to Mexico.<sup>20</sup>

Santa Ana set to arrive in Veracruz on August 14, 1846 arrived two days late. Traveling aboard the British mail packet *Arab*, with Conner on board *Princeton* observing his arrival, Santa Ana's ship passed through the American blockade unmolested. Santa Ana was somewhat disappointed by a less than enthusiastic welcome, none the less he prepared himself to assume the roles of leadership to which he was destined. A month after arriving in Mexico, Santa Ana once again became Commander in chief of the Mexican Army. And true to the course he had set for himself, he became Mexico's president again on December 6, 1846. Mexico's future for a continuing war was complete of utter nonsense.<sup>21</sup>

#### THE PORTS AND COASTS OF THE GULF OF MEXICO

It is important to give a description of the ports coasts and weather of the area. Knowledge of these sets up an understanding of the occurrences of the war and how it progressed from a naval stand point.

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<sup>20</sup> John S.D. Eisenhower, *So Far From God*, (New York, NY: Random House, 1989) 116; Bauer, *Surfboats* 77, 89.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. 40; Bauer, *Mexican War*, 76-7, 89; Smith, *WWM* vol II, 219.; Eisenhower, *So Far From God*, 116.

There were two major ports utilized by the Navy and the Revenue Cutter Service in the Gulf of Mexico: Pensacola, Florida and New Orleans, Louisiana. The ports at Mobile, Alabama and Galveston, Texas served as secondary facilities as did Key West. In Texas, Brazos Santiago on the southern Texas coast, (Appendix M) above Matamoras, Mexico, served as the debarkation point of U.S. Supplies and troops into Mexico until Veracruz fell in March 1847.

Pensacola, Florida served as the Gulf of Mexico homeport of the U.S. Navy during the Seminole Indian Wars and during the Mexican war. Naval vessels needing repairs utilized the docking and repair facilities located there. In addition, it was the communications center for messages and dispatches to and from the Home Fleet. Supplies for the logistic requirements of the fleet were stored and distributed from Pensacola. As demand for services increased, Pensacola grew, but it did not play as important role in the war as New Orleans.<sup>22</sup>

New Orleans, the Crescent City, served as the central command point for the Army and the Revenue Cutter Service. New Orleans proved to be a port of adventure,

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<sup>22</sup> *Pensacola Gazette*, Various, 1846; *Niles*, June 28, 1848.



capitalism, imperialism and intrigue. Anything available anywhere in the world was available in the city and surrounding areas. Commerce and trade from, and for, over one half of the United States passed through New Orleans. Merchant sailing vessels from around the Gulf and from oceans and seas around the world off-loaded and loaded cargoes at a frenzied pace. The Mississippi River served the interior of the country, and New Orleans was the gateway, upriver and down river to all trade opportunities. During the war, owners of riverboats, and warehouses, along the river saw trade increase and profits soar.<sup>23</sup>

In 1846, vessels coming into the Mississippi River from the Gulf often utilized the South West Pass Entrance then proceeded upriver some 10 miles from its mouth to the pilot station. Pilotsville, later Pilottown, is located on the east bank of the Mississippi River just south of the channel cut that takes vessel to the Gulf at Southeast Pass and past the Balize community.

"The Balize," contained an anchorage area for vessels, warehouses with a few wharfs and also was the area where pilots boarded vessels for the trip up river.

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<sup>23</sup> Harold Sinclair, *The Port of New Orleans*, (New York, NY: Doubleday & Company INC.) 1942) 197.

(Appendix E) Steam tow boats from New Orleans began their tow upriver with sailing vessels unable to sail upriver. Also, lighters from New Orleans came down river to load and offload cargoes and provisions onto sailing vessels or the warehouses located there.<sup>24</sup>

In June of 1846 the RCS ordered Lt. Charles L. Harby to New Orleans to establish a depot for the cutters. Harby and two part time assistants set up the warehouse for supplies such as coal, stores and ammunitions for the fleet. (Appendix F) The foresight of the service to do this is admirable.<sup>25</sup>

Belize, in British Honduras, received a number of warships for supplies and logistics, but in most instances, "the Balize",<sup>9</sup> as referred to in this offering is the town and supply point at Southeast Pass of the Mississippi River in 1846.

To put in perspective the area in which the U.S. Navy and Revenue Cutter Service operated, a description of the Mexican seacoast and major ports is presented.

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<sup>24</sup> John Clark, "Putting Freedom on the Map: The Life and Work of Elisee Reclus." <http://dwardmac.pitzer.edu/AnarchistArchives/bright/recluse/voyage.html> (28 January 2002)

<sup>25</sup> Noble, *Historical Register USRCS Officers 1790-1914*, 30; New Orleans Picayune, 6-23-46, 2.

The United States Navy considered eight Mexican ports to be operable for the receipt of war goods. Matamoras, the northern port on the Rio Bravo (Rio Grande) fell into American hands at the beginning of the war in May 1846. Carmen, the most southern port on the Yucatan Peninsular next to Laguna de Terminos provided an excellent anchorage and port. It fell early during the Yucatan insurrection of the 1840's.<sup>26</sup>

Eight Mexican controlled ports were considered to be operable for the receipt of war goods. Matamoras fell into American hands at the beginning of the war in May 1846. Carmen on the Yucatan Peninsular fell early during the Yucatan insurrection. Five of the remaining six lay up shallow mouthed rivers. The five are Tampico, Soto la Marina, Tuxpan, Alvarado, and San Juan Bautista (often referred to as Tabasco in contemporary American accounts). In most cases, by placing a vessel off the mouth of the river, or inside its entrance effectively shuts the port. There were special problems to be surmounted on the blockading of Mexico's east-coast seaports. In foul weather this posed a problem because in the Gulf of Mexico the open coast provided very little

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<sup>26</sup> Smith, *WWM vol II*, 336; Francaviglia, *Sail to Steam*. 122; Bauer, *Mexican War*, 336.

protection from, and during, storms. The sixth, and most important, port to be considered was Veracruz.<sup>27</sup>

Veracruz is not a real harbor; it is a port protected by the Gallega Reef, on which the Castle of San Juan de Ulua is built. It offers slight protection to vessels moored in Veracruz, but it is capable of handling deeper draft vessels than other Mexican Gulf ports. The anchorage of Veracruz stretches 20 miles south of the city and is protected by low offshore islands and reefs. The port of

Veracruz and its anchorage's make it the primary Mexican seaport in the Gulf of Mexico. During the Mexican War, the U.S. Navy squadron controlled this area. However, blockade-runners were able to occasionally slip into Veracruz by running close to shore when the U.S. Navy vessels sought shelter to the south during heavy weather.<sup>28</sup>

Along the East Coast of Mexico, there are really only two seasons. Every year, April to October is the dry weather and the wet is from October to April. During the Mexican War, before a cure was devised, yellow fever

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 106.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 106.

(vomito) was rampant. Veracruz was particularly noted as a yellow fever area. Conversely, the dry season is October to April and brings the vicious northerly gales called "Northers" and "Blue Northers", they strike without warning and are among the most vicious known to mariners. Vessels have trouble riding them out in open anchorages and sometimes in protected areas.<sup>29</sup>

Five of the remaining six Mexican Ports; Tampico, Soto la Marina, Tuxpan (Rio Tuxpan), Alvarado (Rio Tlacotalpan/Papaloapan), and Frontera (Rio Grijalva) or San Juan Bautista de Villahermosa (often referred to as Tabasco in contemporary American accounts) lay up shallow mouthed Mexican rivers. In most cases, placing a vessel off the mouth of the river or inside its entrance effectively shuts the port. Special problems required common sense and ingenuity on the blockading of Mexico's east-coast seaports. In foul weather this posed a problem because in the Gulf of Mexico the open coast provided very little protection from storms except up the rivers or behind island group such as those at Anton Lizardo.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid 106.

<sup>30</sup> Morrison, *"Old Bruin"*, 185, 235.

The sixth and most important Mexican seaport in the Gulf to be considered is Veracruz.<sup>31</sup> Veracruz although not a true harbor; it is a port protected by the Gallega Reef, on which the Castle of San Juan de Ulua was built. It offered slight protection to vessels moored in Veracruz due to the running sea swell, but it was capable of handling deeper draft vessels than other Mexican Gulf ports. The anchorages of Veracruz, stretch 20 miles south of the city and are protected by low offshore islands and reefs.

The port of Veracruz and its anchorage's made it the primary Mexican seaport in the Gulf of Mexico. It is the place where Cortez landed when he entered Mexico in 1519. During the Mexican War, the U.S. Navy squadron controlled this area. However, Mexican and free-lance blockade-runners were able to occasionally slip into Veracruz by running close to shore when the U.S. Navy vessels sought shelter to the south during heavy weather.<sup>32</sup> Serious consideration of the weather in the Gulf of Mexico by the sea services and mariners required serious thought during the war. Hurricanes in late

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<sup>31</sup> Bauer, *Mexican War*, 106.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 109.

summer and fall along with the aspects of serious Northern winds in the winter provided the real possibility of serious damage to mariners and fleets. In fact the Navy did lose vessels and men to the winter storms of the gulf.<sup>33</sup> Along the East Coast of Mexico, there are really only two seasons, the dry season October to April and the wet season April to October. During the Mexican War, before discovering the cause of or a cure for yellow fever (vomito)<sup>34</sup>; the illness was rampant in the Gulf region. Veracruz, particularly noted as a yellow fever area, saw much sickness and many deaths before the advent of a Yellow Fever vaccine in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Conversely, the dry season is October to April and brings the vicious northerly gales called "Northers" and "Blue Northers", which strike without warning and are among the most vicious storms known to mariners. Steep waves generated by the storms develop quickly to heights of eight to twelve feet with a short, wave crest period, between them. Vessels have trouble riding them out in open anchorages and sometimes in protected areas. Commodore Perry experience one in March of 1847 during

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<sup>33</sup> Bauer, *Surfboats*, 52, 58-9.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, 24.

the Veracruz landing that he retorted was one of the worst storms he had ever experienced.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 96; Morrison. *"Old Bruin"*, 186-7.



## CHAPTER 2

### THE AMERICAN MILITARY

#### ARMY

In 1846 the United States Army consisted of approximately 8,500 men. The United States had a population at the time of approximately 8 million people. The army was small, augmented by state militia and volunteers. The hard core of the army, though small was efficient. The armies Officers were the hidden jewels that the world would find out about. The generals planned the campaigns brilliantly, but the battle the junior officers fought put the world on notice that the United States had an Army with which to be reckoned. The military academy at West Point, barely 40 years old, proved to be worth every penny ever spent on it. Although Congress repeatedly sought to take it out of the budget, the doggedness of those that wanted to keep it paid off for the army and the country.<sup>36</sup>

A drawback in the army during the war was the political intrigue of President Polk. He tried to do two this that he was unable to accomplish to the relief of the service. First he was set on appointing to senior

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<sup>36</sup> Douglas V. Meed, *The Mexican War 1846-1848*, (Oxford, Great Britain; Osprey Publishing, 2002) 21.

leadership who were Democrats and agreed with his political policy. General Taylor was not on his Christmas card list. Second, he tried to diminish the influence of West Point. The years took care of the first issue and the results of the war foiled any attempt to diminish the Academy.<sup>37</sup>

The Navy that the Army developed during the war must be noted. It was not a navy of fighting vessels, but a logistics navy. At the beginning of the war General Thomas S. Jessup, the Army Quartermaster General saw the need for vessels to transport the troops, some 50,000 strong and supplies for them to the scene of the conflict. His task was daunting, but he proved capable of providing what was needed. By the end of the war the U.S. Army had the largest Navy in the country, if not the world at that time.<sup>38</sup>

Troops, supplies and material flowed down the Mississippi River destined for Mexico. A method of transport to the war front had to be established. Jessup and his staff bought and leased every vessel they could

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<sup>37</sup> Richard Bruce Winders, *Polk's Army*, 65.

<sup>38</sup> Erna Risch, *Quartermaster Support of the Army, 1775-1939*, (Washington, DC; Center for Military History, 1989) 237.

find. Some unscrupulous people were able to unload worthless vessels in the beginning of the war, but gradually, inspections got better and the Army succeeded in buying reputable craft. They bought row boats, barges, sailing and steam vessel.<sup>39, 40</sup>

#### NAVY

The Navy had three fleets at the beginning of the war, the U.S. West Indies Squadron, the U.S. Africa Squadron and the U.S. Home Squadron. At the time of the war the Home Squadron was commanded by Commodore David Conner. He had a very good fleet; however it lacked one thing, steam vessels to fight a war in shallow waters. The numerous ships of the U.S. Navy proved to be a deciding factor in what was basically a non-naval war.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Charles D. Gibson and E. Kay Gibson, *Marine Transportation in War: The U.S. Army experience 1775-1939*. Vol. I. (Camden, ME: Ensign Press, 1992) 97.

<sup>40</sup> For a list and account of Army actions and events during the war, the following books have exceptional information and extensive bibliographies: *The Mexican War, 1846-1848* by K. Jack Bauer; *So Far From God*, by John S.D. Eisenhower and *The War with Mexico*, by Justin H. Smith.

<sup>41</sup> Philip Syng Physick Conner, *The Home Squadron under Commodore Conner in the War With Mexico*, (hereafter Commodore Conner), (Philadelphia, PA: L. R. Hammersly & Co., 1898) 7. The book, written by Conner's son, contains countless letters between Conner, the Secretary of War and Treasury, Perry and the ships of the fleet.

The overwhelming numerical superiority kept; the small Mexican fleet bottled up with a blockade (Appendix A), would keep privateers' away and only neutral merchant ship active access to ports. An overlooked issue is that the Mexican Gulf Coast has many shallow waters that proved difficult for sailors used to deeper water.

#### REVENUE CUTTER SERVICE

At the beginning of the war, the Revenue Cutter Service (RCS) had 14 cutters in its entire fleet. The RCS going into the war had eleven sailing vessels and five ill-starred steam cutters. Of the steam-cutters two would see action in the gulf, the *McLane* and the *Legare*. The other cutters, *Dallas*, *Spencer* and *Polk*, found that the expectations of the new power plants left a lot to be desired in reliability. The issue of steam engines being built as a new source of power for ocean going vessels was not in question; it was the reliability of the engines, mechanical and propulsion gear that is needed to make a craft seaworthy. The *Polk* leaked so badly it was never used. The *Spencer* was used as a lightship, at Hampton Roads when it was found it would be too expensive to properly fit her for sea. The *Bibb*, returned to

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The book is the basic research manuscript in most naval books about naval actions of the Mexican American War.

Baltimore for repairs after intentionally beaching because it was leaking so badly during its trip to Mexico. Modern engineers have voiced their opinions that it is amazing that all of them did not just blow up due to their boiler design, especially with no safety valves on them.<sup>42</sup>

#### THE AMERICAN FORCES

The United States Army and Navy were heavily involved in maritime operations during the Mexican-American War. Likewise, the Marine Corps and Revenue Cutter Service participated and supported the War effort as required and in a spirit of joint cooperation. Captain Alexander V. Fraser, the senior man at the RCS saw the war as an opportunity for the service to take its place alongside the Army, Navy and Marines.<sup>43</sup> In reality, the total combined U.S. forces were presented with no other choice for the senior military leadership than to work jointly and support each others missions. Joint

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<sup>42</sup> J.W. Parker, "The Revenue Cutter Service", *Nautical Research Journal*, vol IV, 8-52, No. 8, 121; Robert M. Browning Jr., "The Lasting Injury: The Revenue Marine's First Steam Cutters", *The American Neptune*. Winter 1992. 25-37.

<sup>43</sup> Stephen H. Evans, *The United States Coast Guard 1790-1915: A Definitive History*, (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1949) 39.

cooperation in processing the war was demanded by necessity. Time after time, the joint use of elements of other services as integral parts during various operations is noted.

As an example, the Army was landed by the Navy at Veracruz. The Army used naval personnel and guns, ashore, during the bombardment of Veracruz. The guns were commanded by an Army officer. Marines marched with Scott's army from Veracruz to the Hall of Montezuma in Mexico City. The Revenue Cutter *Forward* patrolled offshore during the invasion. All for one combined forces operation.<sup>44</sup>

The Revenue Cutter Service participated with the Navy during operations and blockades on the Campeche coast. It assisted the Army with logistic support, convoy escort, and scout and dispatch duties. All the while, the cutters were instructed by the Secretary and the Customs Official in New Orleans to look out for the interests of the Treasury Department.

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<sup>44</sup> DOT, ROM, 103.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE MEXICAN MILITARY

#### ARMY

Various leaders, including a number of former presidents, led the Mexican Army during the beginning of the war, with varied results. In addition, a fractious Mexican Army fought for positive recognition. The Army of approximately 29,000 which quickly rose to 45,000 men, mostly conscripted, was extremely large for the time. It was in fact, a large national police more than an army.<sup>45</sup> Mexico at the time had a population of 27 million people which gave it a large pool to draw troops from for the War.

European military experts considered the Mexican Army, one to reckon with from size alone. However it suffered from serious problems, among them forced conscription. Although a few professional soldiers served, the main portion of the men that made up the bulk of the army tended to be poor Indians and numerous convicts that could not make a living elsewhere. Leadership in the Mexican Army came from the elite of the country, and in most cases considered effective by

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<sup>45</sup>Scheina, *Latin America's Wars*, 196.

European professionals. There was a military school in Mexico, but well below the caliber of West Point. A deep division existed between most of the officers and enlisted forces, which on the battlefield caused problems and losses for the Mexican Army.<sup>46</sup>

The problem of Mexican armament cannot be over emphasized. They had no factories for the production of arms and ammunitions. Their rifles were the British Brown Bess and some Baker Rifles. Their cavalry used twelve foot lances and short barreled carbines (*escopetas*) that worked well. The artillery was effective, few in number, cumbersome and took considerable time to deploy. While on the surface this armament seems to be sufficient to sustain a war, Mexican gunpowder was in a word, "dreadful".<sup>47</sup> Mexico had no factories that produced quality gunpowder. The gunpowder the Mexicans would have preferred to use was not available due to the very effective American naval blockade.

From the beginning fights at Palo Alto May 8, 1846 and Resaca de la Palma, May 9, 1846, in South Texas, the Mexican Army did not obtain one military victory outside

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid, 196.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, 196.



the state of California. There were a few skirmishes the Americans lost, but only at the beginning of the war. Zachary Taylor's victory at Buena Vista would possibly have resulted in an American loss had not Santa Anna, for some unknown reason, abandoned the field on the third day of the fight on April. The Mexican Army suffered grievous losses in all of the major battles fought on Mexican soil.<sup>48</sup>

#### NAVY

The entire Mexican Navy consisted of 16 vessels, which included two major steam frigates, the *Guadalupe* (775 t) and the *Montezuma* (1,111 t). The two vessels would have been formidable if they had been deployed. On the minus side, they could not hope to compete with the combined forces of the U.S. Navy and Revenue Cutters. Before they could be put into action, they slipped their mooring in Alvarado, May 18, 1846 and made for Havana, Cuba. Various sightings reported them in Havana.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Numerous books and records exist on the exploits of the Mexican Army during the war. *The War With Mexico, Vol. I&II*, by Justin Smith and *The Mexican National Army, 1822-1852*, by William A DePalo, Jr., are excellent.

<sup>49</sup> London Times, July 6, 1846, 6.

While not an overwhelming force, the remaining Mexican naval force had to be seriously considered when making plans that included naval activities. The remaining Mexican warships ranged in size from 27 to 295 tons. The Mexican Navy could not be dismissed and bore serious consideration by U.S. naval planners and strategists, not so much for outright sea power but possible commerce raiding of U.S. supply vessels. This proved true, even after the two principal ships, built in England, slipped from the Alvarado River moorage on May 18, 1846, and fled to Havana, Cuba.<sup>50</sup>

Two shallow draft steam vessels were contracted and under construction with Brown and Bell in New York City for delivery to the Mexican Navy in 1847. The U.S. Government stepped in after the war began, speeded up deliver and took delivery in 1846. The vessels, renamed by the U.S. Navy, became known as the *Spitfire* and *Vixen*. The vessels participated in considerable action in the shallow Gulf coast waters during the war and proved to be of great worth for the war effort. It is good that the Mexican Navy did not take delivery of the vessels before

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<sup>50</sup> Niles, July 14, 1846; Smith. *WWM* vol II, 195; Bauer, *Surfboats*, 22; Appendix 1.

the start of hostilities or the U.S. Navy could have suffered from these two vessels.<sup>51</sup>

Naval leadership of the Mexican Navy at the time of the war was considered excellent. However, with such a small navy, little of consequence was expected. There are three Mexican admirals require to be noted for their leadership. Their capable of leadership against a superior force is most noted in their resurgence of the Navy after their trouble with the French. One must remember that after the "Pastry War" (1838-39) with the French, where the French took or sank all of the Mexican Navy, the Mexican Navy started anew in 1839 in acquiring vessels and rebuilding. Since there were no shipbuilding facilities in Mexico, the Mexican Navy needed to purchase ships built elsewhere, usually the United States or Great Britain. The two large steam frigates were built in England, with British capital. The British stock holders of the vessels seeing a very good chance for their loss called in their debt and the vessels returned to their owners.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid, 26.

<sup>52</sup> Schiena, *Latin America's Wars*, 169; Bauer, *Surfboats*, 261; Robert L. Schiena, "The Forgotten Fleet: The Mexican

Don Jose Maria Merlin, a civilian interested in the Navy, became very involved with the development of the Mexican Navy. He was the head of the Esecuela Nautica in Veracruz. The Mexican Navy appeared to be in a very a good state of readiness due to the work of Senor Merlin. Prior to the war, he contributed large amounts of his own money to fund the shipbuilding programs of the Navy. He had ships built in New Orleans for the Navy. He also established a naval school in Veracruz that supplied the Navy with skilled mariners capable of competing with any in the world. When the war started, the Mexican Navy and their maritime community had capable mariners for most any vessel and position available. What they did not have was the quantity of qualified ordinary seamen and Naval Officers the American Navy possessed.<sup>53</sup>

Tomas Marin proved to be an able leader as did Luis Díaz Quiroz, the Minister de la Marina. Marin was a Captain at Alvarado and kept the American out of the port on two major incursions. Juan Lara Bonifas, the port

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Navy on the Eve of War, 1845", (hereafter *Mexican Navy*)  
*The American Neptune*, vol XXX No. 1, January 1970. 48.

<sup>53</sup> Enrique Cardenas DeLaPena, *Semblanza Maritima del Mexico Independiente y Revolucionario*, vol. I, (hereafter *Semblanza*) (Mexico, D.F: Secretaria De Marina, 1970) 107.

chief for Alvarado also deserves credit for his leadership of the five forts guarding the entrance to the port.<sup>54</sup>

On the eve of the war, the Mexican Navy had capable men and mariners for the skill positions required for ships. They did not have the numbers of men and ships to make them a real threat to the American Navy. The list of the skills required for them to adequately man the vessels included; Officers, carpenters, machinists (for the steam vessels), sail makers, gunners and cooks. The ordinary seaman billets, while requiring mostly unskilled labor such as common sailors, artillerymen and infantrymen, proved to be more difficult to fill on the Mexican naval vessels. There were at least 38 officers in the Mexican Navy and approximately 12 midshipmen in 1845.<sup>55</sup>

In 1845 the Mexican Navy consisted of two departments; the Department of the South in the Pacific Ocean, and the Department of the North in the Gulf of

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid, 107,135,123; Juan De Dios Bonilla, *Historia Maritima De Mexico*, (Mexico 9. D.F. Editorial "Litorales." 1962) 291.

<sup>55</sup> Robert L. Scheina, "The Forgotten Fleet: The Mexican Navy on the Eve of War, 1845" *The American Neptune*. vol XXX No. 1., January 1970. 48.

Mexico. The entire Mexican fleet consisted of 16 vessels; two stationed with their Pacific fleet and the remaining 14 stationed with fleet in the Gulf of Mexico. Two of the vessels were steam powered vessel while the rest were sailing vessels.<sup>56</sup>

#### MERCHANT MARINE

The Mexican merchant marine service proved to be woefully inadequate to fight a war of this magnitude. The vessels Mexico did employ for trade were mainly coastal craft. The vast majority of export and import goods required to fight a war were handled by larger foreign flag cargo vessels. During the war, the US fleet effectively blockaded the Mexican ports. What few vessels that successfully ran the U.S. blockade made money, but risked significant penalties if caught.

#### PRIVATEERS

The Mexican government authorizes the issuance of "letter's of manqué" on June 25, 1846; a day later President Paredes issued regulations regarding the issuance of the letters. The issuance of commissions to be privateers, by the Mexican Congress proved to be

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<sup>56</sup> Smith, *WWM*, vol II, 438; Bauer, *Surfboats*, 32, 260.

sticky for the Mexican Government.<sup>57</sup> The Mexican government claimed by issuing the letters just, in a time honored tradition, of equaling the odds and exempting the privateers of being tried as pirates. In addition on September 11, 1846, they offered for the privateer's troubles; no port duties and a 25% reduction of payment of normal import taxes of captured goods and materials. Additional ports of entry of goods into Mexico were added. The success of the ports of, Soto la Marina, Tecaluto and Tuxpan cannot be determined because only two unknown Spanish vessels reportedly outfitted themselves as privateers.<sup>58</sup>

The United States countered that it would hold the privateers as pirates, and try them as such. The U.S. also warned that disposing of its captured property would be most difficult and result in serious consequences. The United States fleet was to be an inviting target for privateers. The escort of the U.S. Merchant, Navy and Army logistic vessels by the U.S. Navy and U.S. Revenue Service Cutters proved to be the deterrent that Commodore

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid, 244; Bauer, *Mexican War*, 112.

<sup>58</sup> Bauer, *Mexican War*, 112.

Conner and Captain Webster believed it would provide  
against warships and privateers.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Smith, *WWM* vol II, 191-2.



## CHAPTER 4

### THE PREPERATIONS OF WAR

The Navy did not have enough ships or men for the tasks required. What has received little attention is the fact that the forerunner of the United States Coast Guard, the United States Revenue Cutter Service<sup>60</sup> assisted the Navy in its operation.

The Mexican war is noted mostly for its land battles and the use of the Armies, but the Navy also played an important part in final victory. The Marine Corps had its regular contingent of troops on the Navy ships throughout the War and they accompanied the Army in the assault on Chapultepec castle. The one service seldom mentioned, that served in obscurity during the Mexican War is the United States Revenue Cutter Service.

The *Woodbury* was the first Revenue Cutter to join the conflict with Mexico as it waited for the Revenue cutter squadron. *Woodbury* stationed in the Gulf, cruised the waters between Sabine and Chandeleur Island from March 1838 until hostilities broke out. In mid July of 1845,

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<sup>60</sup> Irving H. King, *The Coast Guard Under Sail*, The original name in 1790 was the U.S. Revenue Cutter Service and officially sanctioned in 1863 by Congress. Over the years some people sought to have the name amended to U.S. Revenue Marine Cutter Service, but it was never officially recognized, 5, 112.

General Taylor ordered the Whitehead to carry dispatches and make reconnaissance runs for the Army. The ship took on supplies for the Army at Port Aransas in March and then escorted General Taylor's convoy to Port Isabel. After hostilities broke out, *Woodbury* offloaded Taylor's supplies, and then set up a blockade of Matamoros at the mouth of the Rio Grande River.<sup>61</sup>

Secretary of Treasury, R. J. Walker, sent orders to Captain John A Webster, U.S. Revenue Marine, May 19, 1846 with orders. The orders were strictly confidential to Webster.<sup>62</sup> They were very detailed and in the first paragraph said:

"Sir: The Revenue laws of the United States having been extended over the state of Texas and war with the Republic of Mexico existing, it is deemed advisable to concentrate a number of Revenue vessels between the Rio Grande, or Rio del [sic] Norte and the Mississippi Rivers, which at the same time shall attend to their legitimate duties, by keeping a vigilant eye over the interests of the Revenue, and be held in readiness to cooperate with the other branches of the public service, by employing the force on board, as may be directed. With this view, the President has directed the Revenue Steamers *McLane*, *Spencer*, and *Legare* and schooners *Woodbury*, *Ewing*, *Forward*, and *Van Buren*, be assigned to that service and placed under the direction of the Commanding General of the Army of Occupation for the

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<sup>61</sup> DOT, ROM, 130.

<sup>62</sup> H. Smith, *Early History of the United States Revenue Marine Service*, 75.

purpose of conveying men, supplies, or intelligence, to and from such points as he may direct, and should necessity require, of aiding with the forces employed on board in prosecuting the war".<sup>63</sup>

Walker acknowledged Webster's ability and knowledge to perform his mission and duty as the reason he had been chosen to command the flotilla.

Webster was informed that the vessels had received their orders and were underway to meet him at the mouth of the Mississippi River. Once the vessels had rendezvoused, Webster was ordered to,

"... receiving on board all the men and provisions which may offer, you will repair with them, as near as practicable to the position of the army, and communicate to the Commanding officer of the nearest Military post, expressing your readiness to co-operate with him, exhibiting your instructions."<sup>64</sup>

Webster was informed that he was to choose the vessel he wanted to be the head of the flotilla. Webster chose the *Ewing* as his flagship.<sup>65</sup> He was to set up his office and issue all correspondence and requisitions from that vessel. He was to use prescribed means to obtain food for his crews and supplies for the vessels. Webster

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid, 75.

<sup>64</sup> King, *The Coast Guard Under Sail*, 130; Smith. *Early History of the United States Revenue Marine Service*, 75.

<sup>65</sup> King, *The Coast Guard Under Sail*, 130.

was given full authority over the squadron to effect transfer of enlisted sailors and to issue acting appointments in the officer corps, as needed, by observing prescribed regulations.

Webster was given an order that appears strange and very difficult for him to carry out. Walker's order about contact with the Navy appears to have been test to show that while a naval force, it was a force belonging to the Department of Treasury, not the Department of War. Walker wrote;

"Should you fall in with the Commodore of the Naval forces employed in the Gulf of Mexico, you will report to him, the readiness of the Revenue vessels to perform any service he may require, provided it does not interfere with the execution of any order you may have already received from the commanding officer of the Army, or his agents, and not violate any of the special instructions here given you."<sup>66</sup>

Webster took the action required of the orders issued to him from his cutter *Jackson*, and was underway within two weeks from his homeport of Newport RI for service in the Gulf of Mexico.

The steamer *Spencer* was unable to complete the mission. Upon departure for the Gulf of Mexico, *Spencer* developed irreparable boiler problems and returned to Philadelphia. All of the other listed vessels proceeded

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<sup>66</sup> DOT, ROM, 130.

as ordered. *Legare* arrived in the Gulf and did active duty until it developed the same problems *Spencer* earlier developed and returned home.

Initially, upon arrival in the Gulf of Mexico, the Cutters were involved in carrying supplies and dispatches. On August 16, 1846, the *Legare* and *Ewing* received on board 1,000 rifles for the Army. The rifles were delivered to General Taylor after being landed at Port Isabel, Texas. The Army at the battles of Monterey and Buena Vista utilized the rifles transported by the Cutters.<sup>67</sup>

On November 30, 1846, Captain Nones received a letter from the Secretary of the Treasury expressing his gratitude for his action at Frontera, Alvarado and Tabasco. The *Forward*, and the *McLane* (Captain Howard), had captured the Mexican steamers *Pentrita* and *Tebasguena* along with the brig *Rentville* and schooner *Campeche*. The Navy in the same campaigns had four vessels, the Steamer *Vixen*, the Schooner *Nontaga* and Gunboats *Reefer* and *Bonita* in company with the Revenue vessels. The Navy

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<sup>67</sup> DOT, ROM, 98.

captured the Mexican vessels *Coosa*, *Telegraph*, *Laura*, *Virginia*, *Amado*, *Tonante*, and *Plymouth*.<sup>68</sup>

The Revenue Cutter *Forward* won the praise of Navy Commodores Perry and Conner for its commanding officer, Captain H.B. Nones, actions of skill and gallantry for actions at Alvarado and Tabasco. In addition they noted the Revenue steamer *McLane*, Captain W.A Howard, for its efficient blockade of Tabasco for several months.<sup>69</sup>

The fleet while in the Gulf of Mexico, protecting the interests of the Revenue, was employed in co-operating with the Army and Navy, in maintaining the blockade of Mexican ports and in facilitating the transmission of intelligence to and from the war fronts. The President initially made the disposition of a part of the force, because at the beginning of the war the Navy did not have any shallow draft steam vessels available. A number of Revenue Cutter deployed were shallow draft steam vessels suitable for actions in the shoal and shallows of the Mexican coast.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid, 98.

<sup>69</sup> Smith, *Early History of the United States Revenue Marine Service*, 77.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid, 77.

In May of 1846 the Navy acquired two side-wheel Steamers lying at the New York shipbuilding firm of Brown and Bell. Ironical as it is, the two 188 foot vessels had been originally built for the Mexican Navy for use in the shallow waters of the Mexican Gulf coast. Their names were *Vixen* and *Spitfire*.<sup>71</sup> Three other vessels being built for the Mexicans, 59 feet in length, were also purchased by the Navy from Brown and Bell. They were named the *Bonita*, *Petrel* and *Reefer* and reportedly saw more action during the war than any other Navy vessels.<sup>72</sup> However, the vessels did not start arriving in the Gulf until mid-July 1846.

There were four naval operations of note during the Mexican War. Efforts of the Navy squadron in the gulf were utilized to capture Alvarado, Tabasco, Tampico and Veracruz. The Revenue Cutter Service assisted in two of these operations, Alvarado and Tabasco. They served on the periphery at Tampico and Veracruz as couriers.

There were two attempts to take the port town of Alvarado, an important place for entry of war supplies

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<sup>71</sup> Bauer, *Surfboats*, 109.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid*, 112.

after Veracruz was closed,<sup>73</sup> The first attempt was in June of 1846 the other was in October. The first attempt failed because of the lack of shallow water vessels and the grounding of the flagship, *USS' Cumberland*. After the first U.S. attempt failed, the Mexicans installed five batteries, consisting of 36 guns, to guard the mouth of the Alvarado River. Included in the defenses were the three largest vessels of the Mexican Navy. They were moored in the river between its mouth and the town.

The second attempt in October 1846 followed the arrival of the cutter *McLane*. With the arrival of the vessels, the Navy began its second attack on the afternoon of October 15. The *Vixen* and the Revenue Cutter *McLane*, in two columns began the journey to the mouth of the river, each towing a group of slower, non-mechanized vessels. The slower *McLane*, towing the *Forward*, ran aground and her tows became tangled and confused in the towlines. The *Vixen* passed the river bar, but with only five guns total onboard, was no match for the Mexicans ashore and afloat. Admiral Conner called off the attack and withdrew.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid, 113.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid, 113; King, *The Coast Guard Under Sail*, 132.



Subsequent to the defeat, Commodore Perry suggested offsetting the impact of the disappointment that they immediately mount an expedition up the Tabasco River and then seize the city of Tabasco that lays approximately 75 miles inland. The fleet departed its anchorage on October 16<sup>th</sup> for Tabasco. Included in the fleet with the *McLane* was the Revenue Cutter *Forward* (Captain H.B. Nomes).<sup>75</sup>

On October 23<sup>rd</sup>, the Admiral shifted his flag to the *Vixen* and moved up the Tabasco. The *McLane*, as at Alvarado, again ran aground crossing the bar and became stranded with its tow. This time however, resistance was not as heavy as it had been at Alvarado, and the expedition moved ahead. Accompanied by *Forward*, there was light, but continuous Mexican resistance as the force proceeded inland.<sup>76</sup> The following day Perry ordered the flotilla out of the river having met his objectives at the beginning of the expedition. He then ordered the *Forward* and the *McLane* to form a harbor blockade of the river and protect American merchant vessels in the area.

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid, 117.

<sup>76</sup> A.C. Ramsey, *The Other Side: Notes for the History of the War Between Mexico and the United States*, (New York, NY: Burt Franklin, 1970) 443.

Upon completion of this task, Perry departed for his homeport at Anton Lizardo.<sup>77</sup>

In November of 1846 Commodore Conner occupied Tampico, Mexico's second most important seaport in the Gulf. The Navy, with the assistance of Revenue Cutters as only couriers took the shallow entrance port city of Tampico November 14, 1846. An important note is the entrance to Panuco River leading to Tampico; there was a reported eight-foot controlling draft clearance. If the winning of the port of Tampico achieved anything; it was good for troop morale, it proved to be the staging point for the Veracruz operation and it produced as many Mexican gunboats captured as Conner had been able to procure from the Navy Department.<sup>78</sup> Touted as an important seaport, it was barely that in 1846.

The most significant naval operation of the war was Scott's operation at Vera Cruz. Leaving the coast undefended, Santa Anna led his troops to battle against Taylor in northeastern Mexico. Why he would leave the Gulf where he had enjoyed so much success in the past? Many historians ask the question. Santa Anna later denied

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<sup>77</sup> King, *Coast Guard Under Sail*, 117.

<sup>78</sup> Bauer, *The Mexican War*, 120.

that his decision to march on Taylor's troops was based on an intercepted dispatch from Scott. He also maintained that he was not aware of the impending attack on Veracruz by Scott. In February of 1847 General Scott left Texas for an invasion of Veracruz. In the late afternoon of March 9, 1847 United States forces landed south of Veracruz in a magnificent amphibious landing. There was no loss of life during the operation. During the naval campaign, Revenue Cutters were used as couriers and for offshore patrol duties. Moving north and meeting no resistance, the American Army surrounded the port city. After a ferocious bombardment, Veracruz fell to Scott on March 29, 1847 and the port city guarding the National Highway to the capital of Mexico was in American hands.<sup>79</sup>

The war was exciting for a few of the Cutters; but for the most part it was boring patrols, tedious blockades, logistical support and incessant courier work. Intermittently cutters came and went, but the original flotilla served their country and service well. However, the war took an enormous toll of the cutter fleet that began the war. The *McLane* and the *Spencer* were

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<sup>79</sup> Bauer, *Surfboats*, 78-92. DOT, ROM, 103.

transferred to lightship duty. The *Wolcott*, *Bibb*, *Forward* and *Legare* were transferred to the Coast Survey where their workload could be lightened. The *Van Buren* was in such sad shape that it only brought \$200.00 at public auction. The *Polk* was transferred to the Navy for use as a Marine Hospital, later it was used for target practice for a new type of naval gun. The *Woodbury* received orders to Staten Island, NY. There it was dismantled and sold for \$550.00 on June 1<sup>st</sup>, 1847.<sup>80</sup> The story is not glamorous.

During the Mexican War, there was little glamour, just a lot of hard tedious work preformed by a group of men of the Revenue Cutter Service. The two masters, Army and Navy were served well. In U.S. Naval accounts, little mention is made of the Revenue Marine Cutter Service during their operations. The war over, the service returned its Cutters to their peacetime mission of Revenue Marine duties.

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid, 50.

## CHAPTER VI

### REVENUE CUTTER ACTIONS

The actions of the Revenue Cutter Service vessels in the Gulf included convoy, patrol, courier, logistic, law enforcement and combat missions in conjunction with Army and Navy units. The easiest way to explain the duties preformed are to divide the Gulf into three areas and indicate the vessels involved and the duties included.

The Mexican American War is the first war in which the United States utilizes steam-powered warships. The Navy started the war with two steamers, the *Princeton* and *Mississippi*; the RCS started the war with three, the *McLane*, *Legare*, and *Spencer*. They were old, used and nearing the end of their service life.<sup>81</sup> The Treasury Department in 1842 developed and asked Congress for approval and money to build the vessels. Through trial and error, they developed the steam vessel into a formable tool of peace and war. The Navy learned from the mistakes of the Revenue Cutter Service in their development of the steam vessels.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Bauer, *Surfboats*, 7-10.

<sup>82</sup> Browning, "The Lasting Injury", *The American Neptune*, Winter 1992, 26-33.

All of the vessels assigned to the Revenue Cutter flotilla preformed in the northern are of the Gulf in one capacity or another. Primarily though, the vessels used for the most part in the northern area were sailing vessels. The Steamers of the Navy and RCS collectively participated in actions from Tampico south and east to Carmen off the Yucatan Peninsular. The Revenue Cutter Steamers principally saw action on the Campeche coast. Primarily, the use of the steam vessels provided the maneuverability impossible for sailing vessels. The use of steam vessels proved their worth during attacks across river bars and up swift moving rivers. It was an intelligent use of the steam driven cutters and steam vessels the RCS and Navy had and would change surface warfare allowing vessels to go where previously it had not been prudent or possible.

The area off of the South Texas coast and between Soto de Marina in northern Mexico and Anton Lizardo south of Veracruz saw Revenue Cutters, that were sailing vessels, performing missions such as convoy, patrol and dispatch duties. The actions of the Navy in this area did not include the assistance of Revenue Cutters other than for those mentioned. It is noted that there is

little note in U.S. Navy records and accounts to indicate the presence of the Revenue Cutter Service.

Along the Campeche coast of Mexico, the steam vessels *Legare* and *McLane* proved the most useful in the war effort. The *Spencer*, the third steamer received orders to proceed to New Orleans to join the flotilla. *Spencer* developed engine trouble off of Charleston SC and returned to port for repairs. The cutter did not participate further in the war.<sup>83</sup>

A noteworthy side bar is the Revenue Cutter *Morris*. Captain Green Walden, commanding, received orders as the entire Squadron did, to fully man his ship and to "lay in a full supply of munitions and naval stores." Sailing under sealed orders in May 1846, he opened his orders as directed and read basically the same orders as the other cutters with one exception; the orders for *Morris* were unlike the others in that he was not directed to New Orleans.<sup>84</sup>

The orders for the Revenue Cutter *Morris* directed it to report to the Director of Customs at Key West for Duty. The orders of the ship found in a log book stated,

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<sup>83</sup> King, *Under Sail*, 131.

<sup>84</sup> DOT, ROM, 112.

"*Morris*" was "to cruise in the waters adjacent to Key West and in the Gulf, speak [to] all vessels that she came in sight of, look out for blockade-runners and Mexican privateers, and co-operate with the navy in prosecuting the war with Mexico." <sup>85</sup>

The ship being a shallow draft and fast sailing vessel received orders to patrol the Gulf west of Key West. *Morris* complied with these orders and patrolled the area as directed until October 11, 1846 when it was caught in a fierce hurricane and destroyed. Old timers described the hurricane as "memorable," and, "one of the most destructive hurricanes ever experience in those waters."<sup>86</sup> The ship was a total loss, but no lives were lost thanks to the heroic efforts of two of its crewmembers, David Webster and John (Jack) Young. By cutting away wreckage and fouled rigging they prevented the ship from being pulled under during the height of the storm. The vessel being destroyed, the crew were paid off and discharged November 20, 1846. Records indicate that no vessel replaced the cutter immediately. That

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<sup>85</sup> Z.K. Harmon, *Maine Daily Argus*, (hereafter *Daily Argus*) Aug 24, 1846; DOT, *ROM*, 112; King, *Under Sail*, 131.

<sup>86</sup> *Daily Argus*, August 24, 1846.



seems logical since the Service was running short of cutters.

#### USRC WOODBURY FROM TEXAS INDEPENDENCE TO THE MEXICAN-AMERICAN WAR.

The Revenue Cutter *Levi Woodbury*, upon completion of launching, rigging and taking on stores departed L.H. Duncan shipbuilders of Baltimore MD, during late March, 1837 and proceeded to New Orleans for assignment to duty by the Collector of Customs. For the next 10 years the *WOODBURY* became a prominent part of the United States presence from Chandeleur Island off of the Mississippi Louisiana coast to the mouth of the Sabine River. By 1842, the area included the waters to the Rio Grande River, and extended as far south on the coast as Veracruz, Mexico. The vessel maintained a presence in the area until August 1846 when the vessel was deemed unfit for sea duty and ordered to Staten Island for disposal.<sup>87</sup>

*Woodbury* upon launching proceeded to New Orleans via Pensacola. Upon arrival in Pensacola the ship received official orders to convey Army Officers to the Sabine River and then return to Pensacola. Upon completion of

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<sup>87</sup> DOT, ROM, 46-50.

the orders issued from Pensacola, *Woodbury* continued on to New Orleans for assignment of duties and to prosecute orders as directed by the Collector of Customs.<sup>88</sup>

Information reached New Orleans on March 28, 1838 that the Steamer *Columbia*, out of New Orleans, received gunfire from a Mexican Naval force off of the Texas coast while displaying the American flag. Captain Farnifold Greene, after conferring with the Collector of Customs, wrote the Secretary requesting that he proceed with *Woodbury*, "to afford protection to our merchant vessels."<sup>89</sup> The following day the Collector directed Greene to proceed and patrol the area between Chandeleur Island off of the Mississippi Louisiana boundary and the mouth of the Sabine River on the Texas-Louisiana border. In doing so he directed Green that,

"in the event of any vessel sailing under our flag, being unlawfully attacked, by an armed force, you will render such aid and protection as may [be] in your power."<sup>90</sup> He sailed shortly after that to carry out his orders. In his journal, Captain Green stated he would; cooperate with U.S Naval forces in

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid, 46.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid, 46.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid, 46.

connection with the difficulties between Texas and Mexico..."<sup>91</sup>

On October 1, 1838 the Secretary of Treasury sent a letter to the Secretary of the Navy transferring *Woodbury* to the Navy for the purpose of augmenting Naval forces in the Gulf during the, "present emergency." A week later, all of the officers of the Cutter were placed on leave until further ordered. A navy crew then manned the *Woodbury* until December of the same year when it was returned to and manned by a Treasury Department Revenue Cutter Service crew.<sup>92</sup> (Appendix J)

The tour of duty for *Woodbury* proved intriguing. As a bystander of the 1838-39 "Pastry War" it witnessed the French bombardment of the Fortress of San Juan de Uloa until it surrendered. While running dispatches to Veracruz, it was detained and then collided with a French man-o-war. Upon seeing the damage his ship had caused, the French's Rear Admiral C. Benden, allowed the vessel to proceed to Veracruz for repairs.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid, 46; Noble, *Historical Register USRSC Officer. 1790-1914*, 28; King, *Under Sail*, 130.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid, 46.

<sup>93</sup> Scheina, *Latin America's War*, 169; DOT, ROM, 46-7.

The Navy evidently had promised the Department of Treasury that upon completion of its need for the *Woodbury* it would affect any repairs required to keep it in shape. From December 23, 1838 until December 29, 1839, the two departments played the shuffle game. Who's going to fix it, who's going to pay for it, and when? It took six months for the Navy to realize that they could not repair the vessel in their Pensacola facility. Thereafter, it proceeded to Baltimore for repairs where upon completion of its maintenance on December 29, 1841, it returned to New Orleans for duty under command of Captain H.B. Nones. Owing to the lifespan of *Woodbury*, it is evident that the yard period in 1839 contributed to the significant length of service.<sup>94</sup>

Upon the *Woodbury's* return to New Orleans, it again took up its Customs duties and from time to time relayed important United States diplomats, money and messages to Veracruz. Officials of the Treasury Department and the Collector in New Orleans began to logistically plan for any difficulties that might arise. With the Texas question of independence along with the push for Texas statehood, trouble mounted in the Gulf of Mexico. The

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid, 46-47.

ship sailed the waters doing its duty as a customs representative until hostilities became evident in 1845.<sup>95</sup>

The *Woodbury* under the command of Captain Winslow Foster, in all respect, went into action in June of 1845, a year before war was declared. The Secretary of the Treasury informed Captain Foster to cooperate with General Zachary Taylor and the Army of Occupation in preparation of a conflict with Mexico. The cooperation that began between the Army and the Revenue Cutter Service at this time is a blueprint of the joint cooperation that occurred with regular frequency and need over the course of the war.<sup>96</sup>

In retrospect the course of the war showed joint operations working astonishingly well. Surprising is the in-service conflicts between senior officers of the Army and Navy. To point out a few are the Kearney-Fremont, Scott-Taylor and Conner-Perry feuds. They appeared to be inner-service and intra-service. The Army-Revenue Cutter Service venture proved to be very effective as first witnessed by the cooperation of the two services on the Texas coast.

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid, 47.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid, 47; Smith, *USRCS*, 76.

*Woodbury's* orders from the Treasury Secretary stated, "You will with the utmost dispatch proceed to Galveston Texas. On your arrival you will cause the original of this order to be delivered to Major Donelson, charge of the affairs at Texas, and await his instructions."<sup>97</sup> In addition, Captain Foster was directed to take aboard *Woodbury* all of the stores and ammunition that his vessel could safely carry, as well as to ensure that four months of ships supplies made its way into storage for the vessels further use at the Belize. These orders indicated how serious the situation with Mexico had escalated during the summer of 1845.<sup>98</sup>

Between June and December, 1845 the *Woodbury* with Major Donelson on board surveyed the entire coast west of the Mississippi River. They sought out ports and supply points for a pending war. Major Donelson periodically relayed the found information to Taylor. In January, 1846, the ship returned him to Corpus Christi, the camp of General Taylor.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> DOT, ROM, 49.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid, 49.

<sup>99</sup> DOT, ROM, 47.

During February, Captain Foster received a letter from (William H Chase) stating that General Taylor wanted the *Woodbury* off of Aransas Pass, Texas on March 1, 1846. The ship needed to be completely outfitted and supplied to include a full compliment of arms and ammunition. Foster proceeded to Galveston where he received a full set of provisions. His attempts to reach Aransas Pass a directed failed due to extremely bad weather and low tides in the area. He reached Aransas Pass on March 2, 1846 and reported to Taylor.<sup>100</sup>

General Taylor explained to Foster his intentions for *Woodbury*. The ship would escort his convoy of ships to Brazos Santiago (Laguna Madre). Taylor also reportedly thanked Foster in advance of his appreciation for the assistance of the cutter in providing prompt assistance and protection for his logistical supply line and transports. The army detailed Major Monroe of the Army Artillery to be in charge of the logistical movement of supplies to the harbor of Brazos Santiago (Port Isabel). General W.W. Bliss, Assistant Adjutant General, wrote to Foster, saying that he would allow him to take the correct course of action to ensure success of getting

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid, 48.

the required supplies to the Brazos. Bliss also stated he wanted Foster in the Brazos not later than the 26<sup>th</sup>, if possible.<sup>101</sup>

Foster received orders dated February 5<sup>th</sup> to change command of the vessel. Captain William B. Whitehead received orders to assume command of the *Woodbury*. Foster wrote the Secretary of Treasury and asked to retain command of the Cutter until the mission the ship undertook with the Army, in the changing and setup of camp from Corpus Christi to Brazos Santiago concluded.<sup>102</sup>

*Woodbury* departed the Brazos during the early part of April, and proceeded to Southwest Pass. On May 16, 1846, after assisting the Army for more than a year in preparations for war the ship received the same orders the other cutters received, to attach itself to the RCS Gulf Squadron.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid, 48; The entrance to the Laguna Madre is the is the Brazos Santiago. Port Isabel sits on the west bank of Laguna Madre near Point Isabel; House Ex. Doc. 167, 29<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Session 5, and House. Ex. Doc. 60. 30<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Session, contains most of Taylor's Army's documents on his move across Texas from Louisiana to Fort Texas at Brazos Santiago; Bauer, *Surfboats*, 15.

<sup>102</sup> DOT, ROM, 49.

<sup>103</sup> DOT, ROM, 49.



On May 27, 1846, Captain William B. Whitehead assumed command of the vessel. Ten days later he wrote a letter to the Secretary reporting the poor condition of the vessel. He stated in his report, "I found the ship in miserable condition."<sup>104</sup>

The ship, under Whitehead, took a cruise to the Brazos Santiago area in June. Whitehead was directed to report to Taylor and assist naval or army vessel in transporting and transferring stores to and from the docks at Port Isabel. He was reminded that should his assistance not be needed by the Army, he was to cooperate with the Navy. In late June the ship departed the Brazos Santiago location and returned to its homeport.<sup>105</sup>

Upon arrival at the Belize on July 7, 1846 *Woodbury* received a report that it was entirely unfit for further duty and was deemed not seaworthy. However, one last wartime mission remained for the old ship. On July 11, 1846 the ship sailed for the Brazos Santiago anchorage. The ship reformed its assigned duties in working with the Army and Navy. On its last mission, a little bit of

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid, 49.

<sup>105</sup> DOT, ROM, 49.

excitement changed what would have been an otherwise routine mission?

One of the last official duties of *Woodbury*<sup>106</sup> saw members of its crew put down a mutiny of Indiana Volunteers on the troop ship *Middlesex*. A number of the soldiers were ill, and a few died of unknown causes. Despite the medicine chest of the *Woodbury* being sent to the *Middlesex*, on the 25<sup>th</sup>, the sickness continued. In view of the continuing sickness, the soldiers mutinied that evening. The mutineers threatened to kill the Captain; they held him responsible for the deaths of their friends and their companion's illnesses. On July 26, 1846, Captain William B. Whitehead directed Lieutenant William B. McLean to restore order on board the vessel. McLean took one petty officer and five men of the crew of the *Woodbury* to accomplish the mission. McLean and his men completed their task and put the men in question ashore at Port Isabel.

#### REVENUE CUTTER ACTIONS ON THE U.S. GULF COAST AND THE NORTHERN GULF OF MEXICO

*Ewing*, *Van Buren* and *Wolcott* all reported to New Orleans and received orders from Captain Webster. The vessels, all sailing vessels, worked the northern Gulf

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid, 50; King, *The Coast Guard Under Sail*, 132.

coast from Pensacola to the Rio Grande and offshore south to Anton Lizardo some 10 to 15 miles south of Veracruz.

*Ewing's* original orders are somewhat interesting in that they directed Captain G. W. Moore to proceed to Corpus Christi and report to the Army if he received no orders in New Orleans. He was received in New Orleans and given orders that directed him to proceed to Brazos Santiago in company with other Revenue Cutters of the Gulf Squadron.

Captain Webster designated the *Ewing* as his flagship as he departed New Orleans in Mid-August of 1846.

*Ewing* received on board, as did her sister ship *Legare*, 1000 rifles to be delivered to General Taylor's army in Port Isabel. The rifles arrived in time to be used at Monterey and Buena Vista.<sup>107</sup> Webster retained his flag on board *Ewing* until the ship reached a location off of Soto de la Marina, Mexico after the stop at Brazos Santiago.

Throughout the trip he witnessed logistic, patrol and

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<sup>107</sup> Smith, *Early History*, 77. Note; Smith says it happened, other authors addressing the topic write it was heard or reported. DOT, ROM, 109-110 and 146-147. Both *Ewing* and *Legare* report being at the Brazos Santiago in mid August, but no mention of cargo is evident in the record. It does make sense that the rifles could have been offloaded at Port Isabel and transferred to an Army steamer for the trip upriver to Carmargo, Taylor's supply depot for the Monterey campaign.

convoy duty; off Soto del la Marina, Webster shifted his flag to the *Van Buren* for the return trip to the Belize. Upon the *Ewing's* return to the Balize in September, it received orders to remain ready to sail immediately.<sup>108</sup>

Carrying dispatches, the ship sailed for Tampico on December 10, 1846. The ship delivered its dispatches and received orders from General Gates, Commanding the Army at Tampico. On December 16, 1846, the ship was ordered to assume a position immediately below the town so as to be able to bring their guns to bear if the enemy used the road to Tampico. *Ewing* maintained the positions for two days, without enemy contact, before being relieved of its duty.<sup>109</sup>

The ship departed Tampico on December 18<sup>th</sup> and arrived at Southwest Pass of the Mississippi River on the 28<sup>th</sup>. Entering the Pass, *Ewing* ran aground, later the cutter freed itself and proceeded to New Orleans. Apparently sustaining damage upon entering port, *Ewing* did not sail again until February 8, 1847 when repairs were completed.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid, 301.

<sup>109</sup> DOT, ROM, 147.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid, 147.

The mission of the ship again included carrying dispatches to the Army. General Patterson, Commanding a Tampico reported to Captain Moore that he had no need of his services after delivery of dispatches whereupon he departed for the U.S. Naval Anchorage located at Anton Lizardo. Moore reported to Scott in person asking for any instructions. Moore also advised Commodore Conner that he and his ship were available for duty and that he was in, "...readiness to execute any requisition for the good of the service." Moore served at Scott's pleasure until March 15, 1847 when the latter directed him to carry dispatches and mail and then return with the same.<sup>111</sup>

Captain Foster, having relieved Captain Webster as the Revenue Cutter Squadron Commander, issued new orders to Moore upon his return to Southwest Pass. He directed the *Ewing* to New Orleans then to proceed to New York for transfer of the vessel to the Coast Survey. Moore wrote Conner and Scott separately letting them know of the circumstances and the reason he did not comply with the orders that had given him and the *Ewing*.

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<sup>111</sup> DOT, ROM, 147.

Captain Thomas C. Rudolph, of the *Van Buren* received the same orders as that of the other members of the squadron. Upon taking on the required stores and crew, Rudolph sailed for Sand Key Light in Tampa Bay to open his orders. Sailing on May 28, 1846 the ship was hit by lightning soon afterwards that same day. The lightning struck the fore-royal mast causing the ship to return to port for repairs. Upon completion of repairs, the *Van Buren* again headed for Florida, and then to the Balize for further orders. The ship arrived there on July 31, 1846 in company with the *Forward*.<sup>112</sup>

Duties for the *Van Buren* consisted of patrol, convoy and dispatch duties as carried out by the other sailing vessels in the squadron. The areas from Veracruz north and around Tampico saw much of this patrolling ship. The ship, executing its mission, did little of note to inflame a story. It did the boring, dull duty required of a team player. By performing its mission *Van Buren* assisted in the joint cooperation of the services by just doing its very boring job of being -- on watch.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> DOT, ROM, 147,301.

<sup>113</sup> DOT, ROM, 301.

On return to Southwest Pass from the Veracruz area, the ship received an inspection for seaworthiness. Captain Rudolph and a carpenter of the Louisiana Pilots, found the vessel unfit for sea on October 4, 1846 after a through inspection. With its duty done, the ship sailed to New York from Southwest Pass on November 11, 1846. In 1847 the *Van Buren* sold for \$200.00.<sup>114</sup>

USRC *Oliver Wolcott*, Captain Lewis C. Fatio, commanding, came under the same orders as the other sailing vessels of the squadron. The vessel stationed out of Mobile Alabama did most of its duty between the Mississippi River and Pensacola with occasional trips to Veracruz and the mouth of the Rio Grande with little action to note.<sup>115</sup>

An incident for misconduct appears when Fatio was released from the service September 1 1846 by Secretary R.J. Walker. A previous incident in January 1846, when the *Wolcott* was driven ashore by a storm in Pensacola Bay and costing \$877.00 in damages seems to be the beginning of the process of Fatio's relief. In addition, Captain Fatio had failed in his duties to take important

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid, 301.

<sup>115</sup> DOT, ROM, 70; King, *Under Sail*, 132.

documents and dispatches from the Navy Department to Commodore Conner. Fatio being negligent in his duties was summarily dismissed from the service. In a letter from the Secretary to Fatio, Walker wrote,

"I am directed by the President to apprise you that your name has been stricken from the rolls of the Revenue Marine Service."<sup>116</sup>

Fatio served as a Captain from May 2, 1841 until dismissed in 1846.<sup>117</sup>

Further records are somewhat obscured or missing for the time between September 1, 1846 and June 12, 1849 when the *Wolcott* was transferred to the Coast Survey.<sup>118</sup>

#### RCS ACTIONS ON THE CAMPECHE COAST.

The *Forward*, *Legare* and the *McLane* are the RCS vessels that saw hostile action during the Mexican American War. Individually and sometimes collectively they saw action on the Campeche coast. (Appendix I)

The *Forward*, a 139 ton topsail schooner with a length of 89 feet, a beam of 21 feet and an 8'6" draft, carried one

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<sup>116</sup> DOT, ROM, 71.

<sup>117</sup> Noble, *Revenue Officers*, 22.

<sup>118</sup> DOT, ROM, 71.



18-pounder and four 9-pound cannons was commissioned in 1842. (Appendix G) *Forward*, commanded by Captain H. B. Nones, departed from Wilmington, Delaware on May 23, 1846 for its duty in the Gulf. On June 18<sup>th</sup> the cutter arrived at Southwest Pass.<sup>119</sup>

Webster directed Nones to proceed the following day and report to General Taylor for further instructions. Nones and Lieutenants Jones and Scott, saw Taylor and received instructions to proceed south as far as Soto la Marina to interrupt Mexican seagoing logistics. The ship departed Brazos Santiago on June 30<sup>th</sup>. Until the end of August, *Forward* sailed between the Balize, Galveston, Soto la Marina and Brazos Santiago performing dispatch, convoy and blockade duties.<sup>120</sup>

On August 23, 1846 *Forward* was ordered to report to Commodore Conner at Tampico for duty. Nones reported coming to anchor at the Anton Lizardo naval anchorage September 9, 1846. Four days later on September 13<sup>th</sup>, Captain Webster arrived on *Van Buren* and relieved Captain

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<sup>119</sup> Record Group 26, National Archives, Log of *USRC FORWARD*. (hereafter RG 26, *FORWARD*) October 1846; DOT, ROM, 98.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid, 98-99.

Nones from command for disobedience of orders.<sup>121</sup> He transferred the duties of Commanding Officer to Lt. John McGowan. On September 16, 1846, Webster did an about face and restored Nones to command of the *Forward*. In the meantime on September 15<sup>th</sup>, the *Forward* was transferred to the Navy with orders to report to Commodore Conner. Acting CO Lt. John McGowan had already reported to Conner the status of his vessel and that the *Forward* was awaiting Navy orders.<sup>122</sup>

In the meantime Santa Ana returned to Mexico City via Vera Cruz on the English mail packet *Arab*. A month after returning to Mexico he assumed command of the Army on September 14, 1846. By December 6 he was elected President for one of the eleven times he held the office. The United States would pay in blood for its failure to see that Santa Ana had no intentions of honoring the promise he made to shorten and end the war.<sup>123</sup> The war continued, regretfully.

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<sup>121</sup> No reference to exact charges located

<sup>122</sup> DOT, ROM, 99, 503. An interesting note is that the Navy did not put any Naval Officers on *FORWARD* when it was transferred to the Navy this time.

<sup>123</sup> Bauer, *Surfboats*, 40; Smith, *WWM*, vol II. 486.

OCTOBER 1846; SECOND ALVARADO AND TABASCO

The orders for the *Forward* sent it to the Gulf of Mexico in company with the *Ewing*. Leaving just eight days after receipt of the orders on May 16, 1846 and completing a vigorous shipyard stay in Philadelphia, *Forward* received praises from the Secretary of Treasury. On May 23, 1846, the *Forward* departed for New Orleans with orders to report to the Collector of Customs, Denis Preiur. The ship arrived at Southwest Pass June 18, 1846. The ship received orders from the RCS flotilla commander to proceed to the Rio Grande and report to General Zachary Taylor. Captain Webster's orders were specific but gave Captain Nones a number of courses to follow upon arrival to the Brazos Santiago;

"Should he [General Taylor] require any assistance from the Cutters, I particularly request that every facility may be shown to aid and assist the Army. Should General Taylor refuse your aid, proceed as far as Tampico or Vera Cruz, in case you fall in with Commodore Connor, report to him and offer to him the use of the Cutter *Forward* and at the same time express your wishes to render any duty necessary for the benefit of the Government."<sup>124</sup>

Upon arrival at the Brazos, Captain Nones accompanied by two of his officers, Lieutenants Jones and Scott visited Taylor and received orders to sail and patrol south of

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<sup>124</sup> DOT, ROM, 98.

the Rio Grande to Soto le Marina and capture any Mexican vessel he came upon. Taylor went on to indicate he did not want any enemy cargo coming ashore and supplying the Mexican forces on the coast south of Matamoras.<sup>125</sup>

The Captain Nones on the Revenue Cutter *Forward*, a schooner rigged sailing vessel, did patrol duties from the Balize to Brazos Santiago and back again with intermittent trips to patrol into Mexican waters as far south as Tampico and Anton Lizardo. Such patrols occurred between July and September 1846. On September 15, 1846 the *Forward* received orders to transfer the vessel to the Navy and to report navy officers or crew on board to Commodore Conner for further orders. It is interesting to note that the *Forward* maintained its regular crew and did not take a Navy crew on board.

The Revenue Cutter Service participated in two actions with the Navy that proved to be the most significant actions of the war, besides the Vera Cruz amphibious landings. There were three attempts to take the port city and river anchorage at Alvarado before success was achieved. While on the other hand two

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid, 98; Noble, *Historical Register*, Noble notes four Scotts [p. 64] none of which served during the MA War and 10 Jones [p. 38] of whom, James Hemphill, John M. or Richard S. may have served on *Forward* during 1846.

attempts were made at the entrance of the Tabasco River and the port city of Frontera. The incursions were up to about 75 miles upriver.

During the second attempt at Alvarado and later during the Frontera attack, the RCS participated with the vessels steam vessel *McLane* and the sloop *Forward*. The second attack on the port of Alvarado was made during October 1846. The first attempt the previous August by the Navy had resulted in failure. Commodore Conner's was determined to have a successful second trip. He gathered his fleet at the Anton Lizardo anchorage where he planned and practiced for his trip to an invasion at Alvarado.<sup>126</sup>

The invasion of the Alvarado tentatively was to begin at daylight on the 14<sup>th</sup>. The Commodore was determined to take the fort in this attempt. His failure on the first try still stung his ego and he was out to avenge the failure. Preparing the previous day he had dispatched his fleet from the anchorage, twenty five miles north, at Anton Lizardo. The RCS vessels *McLane* and

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<sup>126</sup> Fitch Taylor, *The Broad Pennant*, (New York, NY: Levitt, Trow & Co., 1848) 287.

*Forward* were part of the force Conner intend to use for the invasion.<sup>127</sup>

During the evening of October, 13th the weather was too heavy to permit transferring the needed men to assigned boats or the expedition. On the 14<sup>TH</sup>, weather permitted the exchange of men as was need to the smaller steam boats and sloops of the expedition. At midnight on the 15<sup>th</sup>, the *Mississippi*, the flagship, lit off her steam plant and was underway by 0200. The other steamers did the same, including the *McLane*. As the *McLane* left its anchorage it took up its tow of three sailing vessels (schooners), the *Reefer*, *Petrel* and *Forward* and six boats loaded with marines. The *Vixen* took up its tow of two schooners, the *Nonatna* and *Bonita* and six boats loaded with marines.<sup>128</sup>

Early in the morning of the 15<sup>th</sup> the *Mississippi* arrived off Alvarado and began a bombardment of the forts at the entrance of the river. Little effect was achieved due to the long range the ship had to fire from. During the morning the two columns of ships arrived off the bar.

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid, 299; DOT. ROM, 99.

<sup>128</sup> Taylor, *The Broad Pennant*, 301.

At a signal from the flagship, the *McLane* and *Vixen* began their trip across the bar at Alvarado.

The two columns as previously mentioned, at 0700 on October 16, 1846, started their tow into Alvarado.<sup>129</sup> Alvarado, while guarded with a sometimes vicious little river bar entrance, contained an important anchorage and moorings for the Mexican maritime forces, naval and merchant. Coupled with three fortifications on the west side of the entrance and one on the east side, it remained a threat to the American designs for the area. The major drawback to entering Alvarado was the low controlling depths of the river entrance. Even at high tide, a vessel drawing ten feet of water sometimes had difficulties safely crossing the river bar. In August there had been two forts, in October there were three on the west bank and an additional one on the east bank of the entrance because the Mexicans had set up additional forces and fortifications at the mouth of the River. This occurred after the aborted attempt of August 1846, during Connors first attempt to take the port.

The second attack was supposed to take place during the morning of October 15<sup>th</sup>. Conner's went aboard,

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid, 298.

transferred his "broad pennant", to the *Vixen* (Captain Forrest). The attack started off with the *Mississippi*, the flagship, approaching in to a position just outside of the port and opening fire with their cannons on the Mexican positions and forts at the river entrance. They did little damage, if any to the Mexican positions. Their gun accuracy was good, but not good enough to inflict the damage required to seriously disrupt any Mexican gunfire.<sup>130</sup>

In the early morning hours the two lines of American ships approached the river bar from the north. As they neared the river bar, the *Vixen*, with Commodore Conner on board, did an unexpected 90 degree turn to port (eastward). Upon seeing this, the *McLane* veered off to the starboard (westward) and headed back out to sea, unable to find out why the *Vixen* had altered course.<sup>131</sup>

The state of the tide indicated that a morning crossing for the safety of the ships. The tide was in and a crossing of the bar was feasible. *McLane* was an old and tired ship. It was worn out and sluggish, but it was capable of doing the crossing with the tows entrusted

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<sup>130</sup> Taylor, *The Broad Pennant*, 299.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid*, 298.



to it. An onshore light wind was experience. As the tide turned, the bar would experience rougher waters during an ebb tide.<sup>132</sup>

A second attempt was made at approximately 1500 that same afternoon, and in the same order as previously mentioned. The tide was out with a brisk offshore wind blowing. The *Vixen* and its tow cleared the bar and proceeded up the Alvarado River. Approximately one half hour behind the *Vixen*, came the *McLane* and its tow on the starboard side of the inbound channel. The *McLane* grounded as it crossed the bar. The ship reportedly had a draft of about 10'-6" at the time of grounding. It was fighting a 4 knot current on the Alvarado River. That the tired old RCS veteran got as far as it did was truly amazing. Captain Howard must be given credit for his vast seamanship skills. At its grounding, great confusion among the three vessels being towed occurred. The vessels dropped their tow lines and proceeded back out into open water as best they could as did the six launches with troops in them. Within a half hour the *McLane* was free

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<sup>132</sup> See tide tables of Alvarado River, October, 1846. Appendix C.

of its grounding and returned to again establish its tow and proceed in to attack.<sup>133</sup>

The pilot aboard *McLane*, a Scotchman named Jim McNeil had warned of the area being dangerous during that part of the season. McNeil had been the pilot on the ill-fated *Truxam* when it grounded at Tampico and eventually was destroyed. No mention is made as to any punishment for McNeil other than the Navy and those present were not pleased with his conduct. One thing of evidence is the considerable amount of cannon and gunfire aimed at the *McLane* and the ships in tow: there were no casualties from Mexican gunfire. Spectators from foreign nations were on hand to witness the event.<sup>134</sup>

Conner on *Vixen*, seeing the problem on the bar, by this time had led his line of ships into the harbor, past the forts. He asked the Commanding Officer of the *Vixen* what he thought. Captain Forrest of the *Vixen* gave him his opinion of the situation and how he would proceed from their position as it was currently held. Conner did not agree with his recommendation of "go ahead and fight

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<sup>133</sup> The Daily Picayune, 2. November 11, 1846; Taylor, *Broad Pennant*, 300.

<sup>134</sup> The Daily Picayune, 2. November 11, 1846; Morrison. "Old Bruin". 192.

like hell and ordered the ships about and the attack abandoned. It must be observed that the *Vixen*, drawing about seven feet of water struck bottom twice crossing the bar that day.<sup>135</sup>

The Reverend Fitch Taylor, a Navy Chaplain, seeing the action from the deck of the *Mississippi* noted how far to the right of the channel the *McLane* appeared. He stated that if the *McLane* had taken a course closer to the middle of the channel he would most likely have made it across the bar.<sup>136</sup>

#### TABASCO

Following the misadventure at Alvarado in which he accepted with what he called "deep mortification" Commodore Conner and his second Commodore Perry set about a plan to give the crews of the vessels something to think about. They put into motion a plan to attack Frontera at the mouth of the Rio Grijalva the work themselves 75 miles upriver to the town of La

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<sup>135</sup> DOT, ROM, 100.

<sup>136</sup> Taylor, *The Broad Pennant*, 303.

Villahermosa de San Juan Bautista in the Mexican State of Tabasco.<sup>137</sup>

Conner's took his "blue pennant" and returned to Anton Lizardo while Perry with his "red pennant" took basically the same squadron that had attacked Alvarado and headed for the Rio Grijalva at 2100 on October 16, 1846. For five days he encountered heavy weather while sailing east. The fleet examined river entrances and even stopped a couple of merchant vessels illegally doing business with the Mexicans.<sup>138</sup>

Encountering heavy weather on the way to Tabasco, one of the navy ships, *Reefer*, got separated from the flotilla and was unable to join in on the attack on the morning of 24 October. Using basically the same formation used at Alvarado with *McLane* in the lead and towing of one group of ships and cutters and *Vixen* in the lead and towing most of the other vessels the bar crossing around noon on the 23<sup>rd</sup>. *Vixen* and the tow successfully crossed a moderate bar with fair depth. *McLane*, as at Alvarado grounded. Perry seeing this referred to him as "... the

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<sup>137</sup> The Rio Grijalva is often referred to as the Tabasco River and the town of Villahermosa is referred to as Tabasco. We will refer to them as Tabasco and the Tabasco River in this paper.

<sup>138</sup> Morrison, "*Old Bruin*", 194-195.

inept skipper of the *McLane*".<sup>139</sup> The tow, *Nonata*, was able to disconnect from the grounded ship and proceeded up the river under sail. The barges full of troops were cast free and were rowed successfully against a four knot current to the town of Frontera.<sup>140</sup>

Vixen under command of Perry arrived off of Frontera and stated that all of a sudden he had captured a number of steam and sail vessels and the town itself. The next morning, October 24, 1846, Perry left Frontera at 0900 and proceeded up river. Twenty four hours later the flotilla passed the Devils Bend in the river, a place that could have been difficult to pass if the troops at Fort Acceahappa had wanted to make it so. They passed unmolested. About noon the vessels arrived off the town of Tabasco. Perry after ensuring the fleet anchored less than half a musket ball distant from the shore and in line of battle, asked for the town to surrender. In the

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<sup>139</sup> Morrison, "Old Bruin", 195.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid, 195; DOT, ROM, 101. The National Archives could not locate the log books from *McLane*; DOT, ROM. can add little except that the cutter grounded. The same type of information available for the Alvarado landing was not forthcoming on the Tabasco expedition in newspapers. No mention of bar or river pilots could be located for the Tabasco expedition.

time the fleet arrived in town, they captured five merchant vessels there.<sup>141</sup>

An intermediate request for surrender was answered with a go ahead and fire. Perry sent a Capt Forrest ashore with a landing party. Some small arms fire was received. Perry ordered the party to return to the vessels at dark. The vessels remained undisturbed through the darkness. At dawn Capt Forrest again went ashore as the ships were receiving sporadic fire from the shore. A truce was conducted under a white flag. Perry agreed to stop firing upon the town and troops and hoisted a white flag on his ship. As the merchant vessels started drifting down the river enroute to Frontera, the Mexican Army again opened fire, killing one and wounded two. The ships proceeded down to Frontera successfully. After silencing the fire of the Mexican Army, the flotilla arrived there during the evening of 26 October the <sup>142</sup>

During the land engagement at Tabasco; Lt McGowan and Lt W. F. Rogers of the Forward landed with 15 men in company with Captain Forrest and his landing party

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<sup>141</sup> DOT, ROM, 100; Conner, *Commodore Conner*, 441.

<sup>142</sup> DOT, ROM, 100.

marines.<sup>143</sup> As they were leaving, Mexican Army units opened fire on *Forward* and other vessels of the flotilla. The ship returned fire with round and grape shot doing what was described in the ships journal as, "...with terrible effect for 20 minutes."<sup>144</sup> During the fight, one of the merchant vessels came by the *Forward* and tied up to the ship under the protection of its guns. By 1200 Perry ordered a "cease fire" as the vessels drew out of range of the Mexican gunfire.<sup>145</sup>

Perry would later write a letter praising all of his commanders at Tabasco, all that is except Captain Howard of the *McLane*. The letter in part read:

"While I am gratified in bearing witness . . . to the valuable services of the Revenue Schooner "*Forward*" in command of Captain Nones, and to the skill and gallantry of her officers and men, it gives me infinite pause to be compelled, by a sense of imperative duty, to say that Captain Howard of the Revenue Cutter Steamer "*McLane*" managed his vessel with so little discretion that he placed her aground in a most dangerous position, by which serious obstacles were thrown in the way of the expedition; and had it not been for the preserving efforts of Captain Forrest, I doubt she would have been extricated from her perilous situation".<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid, 101, 510; Noble, *Historical Register*, 46, 62.

<sup>144</sup> DOT, ROM, 101.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid, 101.

<sup>146</sup> King, *Under Sail*, 135.

Perry and Howard had had many disagreements and this is surely revealed in this letter.<sup>147</sup>

On October 31<sup>st</sup>, Captain Nones received orders to remain at the mouth of the Tabasco River near the town of Frontera, blockading the river, to protect and render assistance to all American and to provide protection and shelter to neutral vessels. For this operation he would command the *Forward* and the *McLane*. The *Forward* departed Frontera for Anton Lizardo on November 21<sup>st</sup> and arrived there two days later.<sup>148</sup>

The *McLane*, a 369 ton steamer with a length of 161 feet, a beam of 17 feet, and an 9'9" draft carried four 32-pound cannons was commissioned in 1843, and in serious need of repair when ordered to the Gulf Squadron. In spite of *McLane's* age, there was one aspect that made the ship an ideal vessel for the mission, it was steam powered and perfect for working up rivers and in the inlets that dotted the southern Mexican coast. Captain William A. Howard received the same orders the other Captains of the Gulf Squadron vessels received. He completed his tasks of preparation and proceeded on May

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid, 135.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid, 101.



27, 1846 for New Orleans, stating that the delay was due to his being unable to obtain a crew to man the vessel as required. Thirty six days later the ship entered the mouth of the Mississippi River and moored at Balize.<sup>149</sup>

The ship, upon inspection after mooring, required boiler repair in New Orleans. The Squadron Commander, Captain Webster kept Secretary Robert Walker informed with numerous letters on the *McLane* and the other cutters conditions and readiness for service. In July and August 1846, Webster advised Walker of the boiler repair and the readiness of the ship to transport troops to Port Isabel. In late August, the ship arrived at Brazos Santiago. There he received orders from the Army to, "keep up a close blockade as far as Tampico."<sup>150</sup> He complied with the orders until September 13, 1846 when Howard wrote Webster that he had joined Commodore Conner and the naval squadron in Tampico.

Once in Tampico *McLane* was ordered to the Balize. Having only three days fuel for steaming, and being unable to devise a rig for sailing that distance, *McLane*

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<sup>149</sup> DOT, ROM, 106; Donald L. Canney, *U.S. Coast Guard and Revenue Cutters 1790-1935*, (Annapolis MD: Naval Institute Press, 1995) 20.

<sup>150</sup> DPT, ROM, 106.

could not leave port. Coaling was always an issue in the logistics scheme of things during the war. It is unclear how the *McLane* shows up at Frontera for blockade duty, but it is available for such duty during the October, 1846 Tabasco expedition by Conner.<sup>151</sup> On December 16, 1846 Secretary Walker wrote to Howard to return to New Orleans and dismantle the ship. On April 15, 1847 Walker again wrote to Howard and directed him to return to New Orleans. He also threatened to relieve Howard of his command if he did not comply with his orders.

On May 12, 1847 Howard answered the letters. He reported the arrival of the *Ewing* and the letters of April 15. He also acknowledged the receipt of the December 16<sup>th</sup> letter on March 3<sup>rd</sup>. He proceeded to give the circumstances of his reporting and not reporting for approximately six months.

"... I was blockading, alone, the River Tabasco, and being an important point, I did not consider it m duty to leave the station without informing Commodore Conner that he might replace the vessel or give permission to leave. Commodore Perry will be

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<sup>151</sup> Whether or not Howard wrote the Secretary is hidden in shadows. This is one instance that is peculiar on communications between parties. One thing is clear, the Department of Treasury wanted to maintain some form of control over the cutters and demanded that the Captains of the vessels do so.

here tomorrow, and as he depends upon this vessel to tow a part of the expedition up to the attack of San Juan Beutista, I presume I shall not be censured for detaining the vessel three or four days for such a purpose. I shall proceed immediately after, with all possible dispatch to New Orleans. For seven months no communications have been received from the United States by this vessel and no opportunity has afforded to reply to the communications of the Department."<sup>152</sup>

A month later, on June 13, 1847 the *McLane* arrive at the mouth of the Mississippi River. He informed the Secretary that he had sailed from Anton Lizardo on June 4<sup>th</sup>, stopping at Veracruz to pick up dispatches from the Army.

Due to the terrible condition of the boilers and machinery they were sold in New Orleans for \$1,800 on December 3, 1847. Shortly thereafter the Department had *McLane* assume the duties of a floating light stationed at New Orleans.

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<sup>152</sup> DOT, ROM, 106.

## CHAPTER VII

### CONCLUSION

The war provided excitement for a few of the Cutters, but for the most part it proved to be boring patrols, tedious hours of blockades, mundane logistical escort support and incessant courier work. Intermittently cutters came and went, but the original flotilla served their country and service. And, they served it by working jointly with the Army and Navy. The Cutter *Forward* did duty with the Navy upon a request of the Secretary of War. However the war, use and time took an enormous toll of the cutter fleet that began the war. The *McLane* and *Spencer* were transferred to lightship duty. The *McLane* served in such miserable shape that the navy continually berated the ship. There were even instances whether it was doubtful if the ship could make it home to New Orleans for repairs so it could go to its own decommissioning. The *Wolcott*, *Bibb*, *Forward* and *Legare* were transferred to the Coast Survey where their workload could be lightened. The *Van Buren* was in such sad shape that it only brought \$200.00 at public auction. The *Polk* was transferred to the Navy for use as a Marine Hospital, later it would be on the receiving end of naval

gunner, as a target. Only the *Forward* continued with the Revenue Cutter Service through out the war and would not be sold until 1865.

Actions of the Revenue Cutter Service during the Mexican-American War could be broken down into three areas of operation in the Gulf of Mexico. The first is the area from Pensacola Florida to an area off Soto la Marina fifteen miles south of the mouth of the Rio Grande River. The second is the area between Soto la Marina and south to Anton Lizardo approximately 20 miles south of Veracruz. The third and final area is the Campeche Coast from Anton Lizardo east to Carmen in the state of Yucatan. The missions performed by the RCS in conjunction with the Army and Navy, while not a cause of the victory over Mexico, none the less contributed to that victory.

The fact that the RCS participated jointly is noted. The *Woodbury* contributed for years on the Texas and Mexican coast before the war began. The ship and the missions it carried out between 1836 and 1847 included custom duties, dispatch duties and convoy duties, collisions and near gunfights to mention only a few.

Actions performed by made it an integral part of the story of Texas Independence and the Mexican-American War.

Between the U.S. naval anchorage at Anton Lizardo and Carmen on the Yucatan, the rivers and ports saw considerable cooperation of the Navy, the Marines and the Revenue Cutter Service and even the Army at Alvarado. Attacks on coastal towns and maintaining control of the lagoons, coastal canals and larger rivers inland precluded the use of those rivers for internal and external logistics by the Mexican military.

During the Mexican American War, in naval actions there was little glamour. A score of naval vessels were lost to the weather and to accidents while others were lost to age. There were no tremendous and glorious naval sea battles. On the other hand those insignificant actions of support and cooperation proved that different services can successfully overcome perceived notions that the combined services could not, would not; cooperate in prosecuting actions to overcome an enemy. In the case of the Revenue Cutter Service, they served in obscurity. It can be noted in a remark by Commodore Conner's of how the service was and is perceived. He said ..."with some assistance from the revenue service"... that the blockade

from the Rio Grande to the Coatzacoalcos river (located between the Alvarado and Tabasco Rivers) was implemented. He mentioned nothing of other joint actions. It seems to be the normal reactions of the Navy, and for a long time. But slowly the cloak of obscurity is being lifted.<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> Smith, WWM vol II, 194.

## APPENDISIS

- A. From the Home Squadron --- Conner's Order
- B. Revenue Cutters of the Mexican American War
- C. Tide table for Alvarado and Veracruz --- October 1846.
- D. Tide table for Carmen and Frontera --- October 1846.
- E. 1844 Map of the Mississippi River Delta.
- F. German Painting, "Die Balize an de Mundung des Mississippi".
- G. A painting of the USRC *Forward*.
- H. A painting of Crossing the bar at Tabasco.
- I. Campeche Coast Map of Gulf of Mexico.
- J. USRC *Woodbury*.
- K. USCG *Forward*. A sail maker's view.
- L.
- M.
- N.



## APPENDIX A

### FROM THE HOME SQUADRON

We subjoin a copy to the instruction of Commodore Conner to the commanders of vessels in the home squadron, showing the principles to be observed in the blockade of the Mexican ports. The ports already under blockade, are Vera Cruz, Tampico, and Alvarado:

INSTRUCTIONS to be observed by officers commanding vessels of the home squadron,

in enforcing blockade of ports of the east coast of Mexico.

1. No neutral vessel, proceeding towards the entrance of the blockaded port, shall be captured or detained, if she shall not previously have received from one of the blockading squadron, a special notification of the existence of the blockade. This notification shall be, moreover, inserted in writing on the muster roll of the neutral vessel by the cruiser which meets her, and it shall contain the announcement, together with the statements of the day, and the latitude in which it was made.
2. Neutral vessels which may be already in the port before the blockade of it, shall have full liberty to depart, with or without cargo, during fifteen days after that upon which the blockade is established.
3. The ports of Vera Cruz and Tampico will remain entirely free for the entrance and departure of neutral non-commercial mail packets.

Mexican boats engaged exclusively in fishing, on any part of the coast, will be allowed to pursue their labors unmolested.

In its present political condition, the flag of Yucatan is to be respected.

D. CONNER

Commanding, home squadron

United States ship *Cumberland*  
Off Brazos Santiago, May, 14, 1846<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> Niles, June 20, 1846, 256.

## APPENDIX B

### REVENUE CUTTERS OF THE MEXICAN AMERICAN WAR (1846-1848)

*USRC Bibb* --- 409 ton Steamer, 160' x 24' x 9'3" - 9'9"  
draft. Armament consisted of 1 long 18 pounder and  
3

32 pounders. Built by Charles Knapp, Pittsburgh,  
PA, 1845. Transferred to the Coast Survey, 1847.

*USRC Ewing* --- 170 ton Schooner, 91'6" x 22'9" x  
9'2"draft. Armament consisted of 6 12-pounders.  
Built in Baltimore, MD, 1841. Transferred to the  
Coast Survey, 1848.

*USRC Forward* --- 150 ton Topsail Schooner, 89' x 21'2" x  
8'6" draft. Armament consisted of 1 or 4 18-  
pounders and 4 9-pounders, (Bauer states 6 12-  
pounders). Built by William Easby, June 1842,  
Washington, DC, 1842. Sold at Baltimore, October  
1865.

*USRC Legare* --- 364 ton Steamer, 140' x 24' x 6'5"  
draft.  
Armament consisted of 1 18-pounder, 1 9-pounder and  
2-4 pounders (Bauer adds 1 12-pounder). Built by R. &  
G.L. Schuyler, New York, (Bauer states H.R. Dunham &  
Co., New York) 1844. Powered by a 120 h.p.,  
Horizontal back-acting, 36" diameter x 32" stroke  
steam engine with Ericson's propellers later  
replaced by Loper's propellers. Transferred to the  
Coast Survey, November 12, 1847.

*USRC McLane* --- 369 ton Steamer, 161' x 17' x 9'9" draft.  
Armament consisted of 4 32-pounders. (Baurer states  
6 12-pounders). Built by Cyrus Alger, Boston, MA,  
Boston, MA, 1844. Powered by 2 high-pressure  
horizontal, 24" diameter x 36" stroke steam engine  
side wheels. Converted to a lightship in New  
Orleans, LA, December 1847.

*USRC Morris* --- 112 Topsail Schooner, 78' - 80'6" x 20'6" 21'3"x 7'1" - 7'8" draft. Armament unknown. Built by New York Navy Yard, 1830. Driven ashore by a hurricane October 11, 1846 near Key West FL. Sold to W. Brown and repaired.

*USRC Polk* --- 400 ton Steamer, dimensions unknown. Armament consisted of 5 32-pounders. Built by J.R. Anderson, Richmond VA, 1845. Converted to Braque 1848 (machinery transferred to *USRC Jefferson*) and sold 1854.

*USRC Spencer* --- 398 ton Steamer, 111'8" x 22'9" X 9'3" draft. Armament consisted of 4 12-pounders, 1 18-pounder and 1 9-pounder. Built by West Point foundry, Cold Springs, NY, 1844. Powered by 2 high-pressure horizontal 24" diameter x 36" stroke steam engine side wheels. Converted to a lightship, 1848.

*USRC Van Buren* --- 112 ton Topsail Schooner, 73'4" x 20'6" x 7'4" draft (6'4" - 7'4" forward, 8' - 9'8" aft). Armament is unknown, (Bauer states 4 12-pounders). Built in Baltimore, MD, November, 1839. Sold in New York, 1847.

*USRC Woodbury* --- 120 ton Schooner, 73'4" x 29'6" x 7'4" draft. Armament consisted of 4 12-pounders and 1 6-pounder. Built by L.H. Duncan, Baltimore, MD, 1837. Sold in New Orleans, LA, 1 June 1847.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> Jack Bauer, *Surfboats and Horse Marines*; Donald L. Canney, *U.S. Coast Guard and Revenue Cutters*; Stephen H. Evans, *The United States Coast Guard 1790-1915*; Robert Schiena, *The Forgotten Fleet*; Justin Smith, *The War With Mexico*; The following information appears to be complete and substantiated in the included works, using the information from the above authors. Canney's work is especially complete. Where there is a great disparity, that reference is noted.

# Appendix C

Alvarado

Veracruz

LATITUD : 18 Grados 47.0000 Minutos  
 LONGITUD : -95 Grados 46.0000 Minutos  
 ZONA DE TIEMPO : GMT -6.  
 NIVEL DE REFERENCIA: Bajamar Media Inferior.

Octubre 1846

DIA	HORA	PIES	METROS	DIA	HORA	PIES	METROS	DIA	HORA	PIES	METROS
1	0:24	1.0	0.29	2	0:44	0.9	0.27	3	1: 4	0.8	0.23
	7:31	0.7	0.21		6:33	0.5	0.15		6:49	0.2	0.08
	8:12	0.7	0.20		10:49	0.6	0.20		12:24	0.7	0.21
	16:55	-0.2	-0.07		18: 1	-0.2	-0.06		19: 1	-0.1	-0.03
4	1:23	0.6	0.19	5	1:40	0.5	0.17	6	1:54	0.5	0.16
	7:16	-0.0	-0.00		7:47	-0.3	-0.08		8:22	-0.5	-0.14
	13:41	0.7	0.23		14:53	0.8	0.25		16: 6	0.9	0.27
	20: 0	0.0	0.01		21: 0	0.2	0.07		22:11	0.4	0.13
7	2: 4	0.5	0.17	8	2: 6	0.6	0.19	9	10:39	-0.5	-0.15
	9: 3	-0.6	-0.17		9:48	-0.6	-0.18		20:49	1.0	0.31
	17:21	0.9	0.28		18:43	1.0	0.29				
	23:41	0.6	0.18								
10	11:36	-0.4	-0.11	11	12:39	-0.2	-0.06	12	13:46	-0.0	-0.01
	22:15	1.1	0.32		23: 2	1.1	0.33		23:37	1.1	0.33
13	14:55	0.1	0.03	14	0: 4	1.0	0.32	15	0:23	1.0	0.30
					16: 1	0.2	0.06		6:43	0.7	0.20
									10: 6	0.7	0.22
									17: 0	0.3	0.08
16	0:35	0.9	0.27	17	0:40	0.8	0.25	18	0:37	0.8	0.23
	6:39	0.5	0.17		6:42	0.4	0.13		6:54	0.2	0.08
	11:36	0.8	0.23		12:38	0.8	0.24		13:34	0.9	0.26
	17:50	0.3	0.10		18:35	0.4	0.12		19:19	0.5	0.14
19	0:38	0.8	0.23	20	0:48	0.8	0.23	21	1: 2	0.8	0.24
	7:14	0.1	0.03		7:38	-0.0	-0.01		8: 5	-0.1	-0.04
	14:29	0.9	0.28		15:25	1.0	0.30		16:21	1.1	0.33
	20: 5	0.6	0.17		20:58	0.7	0.21		22:10	0.8	0.24
22	1: 4	0.8	0.25	23	9: 9	-0.2	-0.07	24	9:50	-0.2	-0.07
	8:35	-0.2	-0.06		18:17	1.2	0.37		19:29	1.2	0.38
	17:17	1.2	0.35								
25	10:39	-0.2	-0.06	26	11:37	-0.2	-0.05	27	12:45	-0.1	-0.03
	20:58	1.3	0.38		21:53	1.2	0.38		22:23	1.2	0.36
28	14: 0	-0.0	-0.00	29	6:15	0.7	0.23	30	5:25	0.5	0.16
	22:45	1.1	0.34		7:17	0.7	0.23		10: 3	0.7	0.22
					15:18	0.1	0.03		16:37	0.2	0.06
					23: 5	1.0	0.30		23:24	0.9	0.27
31	5:43	0.3	0.08								
	11:51	0.8	0.24								
	17:52	0.3	0.10								
23:42	0.8	0.24									

# Appendix D

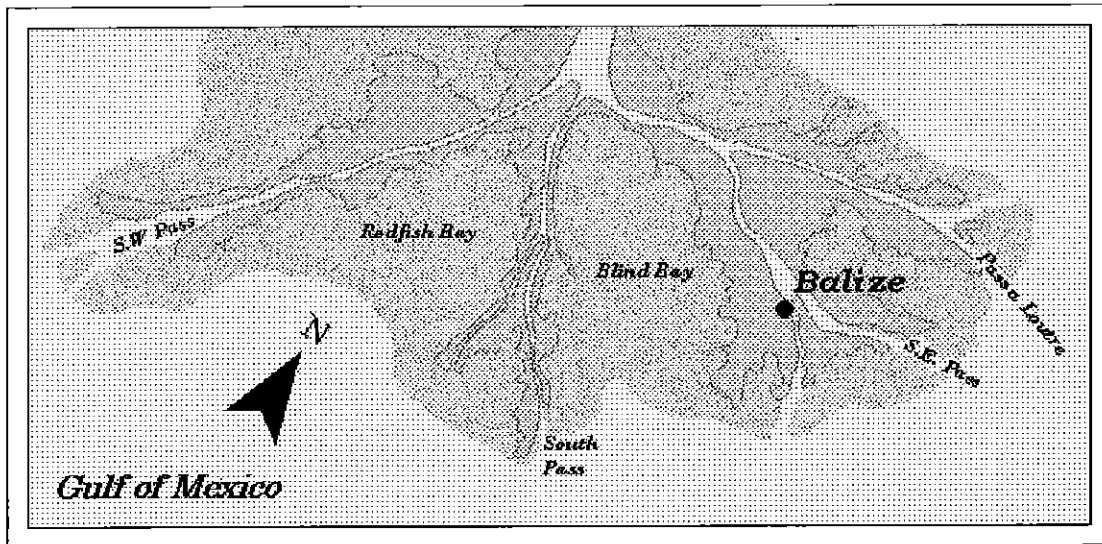
Ciudad del Carmen Campeche

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 LONGITUD : -91 Grados 50.0000 Minutos  
 ZONA DE TIEMPO : GMT -6.  
 NIVEL DE REFERENCIA: Bajamar Media Inferior.

Octubre 1846

DIA	HORA	PIES	METROS	DIA	HORA	PIES	METROS	DIA	HORA	PIES	METROS
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	8:57	0.8	0.24		5:23	0.4	0.12		6:6	0.1	0.05
	16:51	-0.2	-0.07		10:37	0.7	0.22		12:21	0.7	0.23
					17:50	-0.2	-0.05		18:45	-0.1	-0.02
4	0:51	0.7	0.21	5	1:14	0.6	0.19	6	1:37	0.6	0.19
	6:46	-0.1	-0.03		7:28	-0.3	-0.10		8:14	-0.5	-0.16
	13:34	0.8	0.24		14:36	0.8	0.26		15:40	0.9	0.26
	19:36	0.1	0.02		20:20	0.2	0.07		20:57	0.4	0.13
7	1:59	0.7	0.20	8	2:19	0.7	0.22	9	2:32	0.8	0.25
	9:7	-0.6	-0.19		10:3	-0.6	-0.19		10:58	-0.6	-0.18
	16:50	0.9	0.27		18:2	0.9	0.27		19:17	0.9	0.27
	21:26	0.6	0.18		21:47	0.8	0.23		21:25	0.9	0.26
10	0:59	0.9	0.27	11	12:46	-0.3	-0.09	12	13:46	-0.1	-0.04
	11:51	-0.5	-0.14		23:26	1.0	0.30		23:37	1.0	0.31
	23:26	0.9	0.29								
13	14:51	0.0	0.00	14	15:51	0.1	0.03	15	6:42	0.7	0.20
	23:42	1.0	0.31		23:47	1.0	0.30		8:47	0.7	0.21
									16:41	0.2	0.05
									23:58	0.9	0.29
16	6:42	0.6	0.17	17	0:10	0.9	0.27	18	0:20	0.9	0.26
	11:5	0.7	0.20		6:33	0.4	0.13		6:40	0.2	0.07
	17:23	0.2	0.07		12:31	0.7	0.21		13:25	0.7	0.23
					18:1	0.3	0.10		18:35	0.4	0.12
19	0:29	0.8	0.26	20	0:41	0.8	0.26	21	0:57	0.9	0.27
	7:3	0.1	0.02		7:34	-0.1	-0.02		8:11	-0.2	-0.05
	14:12	0.8	0.24		15:0	0.8	0.25		15:54	0.9	0.27
	19:7	0.5	0.16		19:36	0.6	0.19		20:2	0.7	0.22
22	1:16	0.9	0.28	23	1:32	1.0	0.30	24	1:40	1.0	0.32
	8:52	-0.3	-0.08		9:36	-0.3	-0.09		10:21	-0.3	-0.10
	16:57	0.9	0.28		17:59	1.0	0.29		19:0	1.0	0.31
	20:22	0.8	0.25		20:36	0.9	0.28		20:46	1.0	0.30
25	1:51	1.1	0.34	26	2:18	1.1	0.34	27	0:31	1.1	0.32
	11:7	-0.3	-0.10		11:58	-0.3	-0.09		2:48	1.1	0.33
					22:58	1.1	0.32		12:56	-0.2	-0.07
									22:12	1.0	0.32
28	2:12	1.0	0.29	29	5:17	0.8	0.23	30	5:14	0.5	0.15
	3:6	1.0	0.29		7:29	0.8	0.24		9:9	0.7	0.21
	14:3	-0.1	-0.04		15:13	-0.0	-0.01		16:17	0.1	0.03
	22:26	1.0	0.31		22:45	1.0	0.30		23:7	0.9	0.28
31	5:36	0.2	0.07								
	11:25	0.7	0.21								
	17:13	0.2	0.07								
23:30	0.9	0.27									

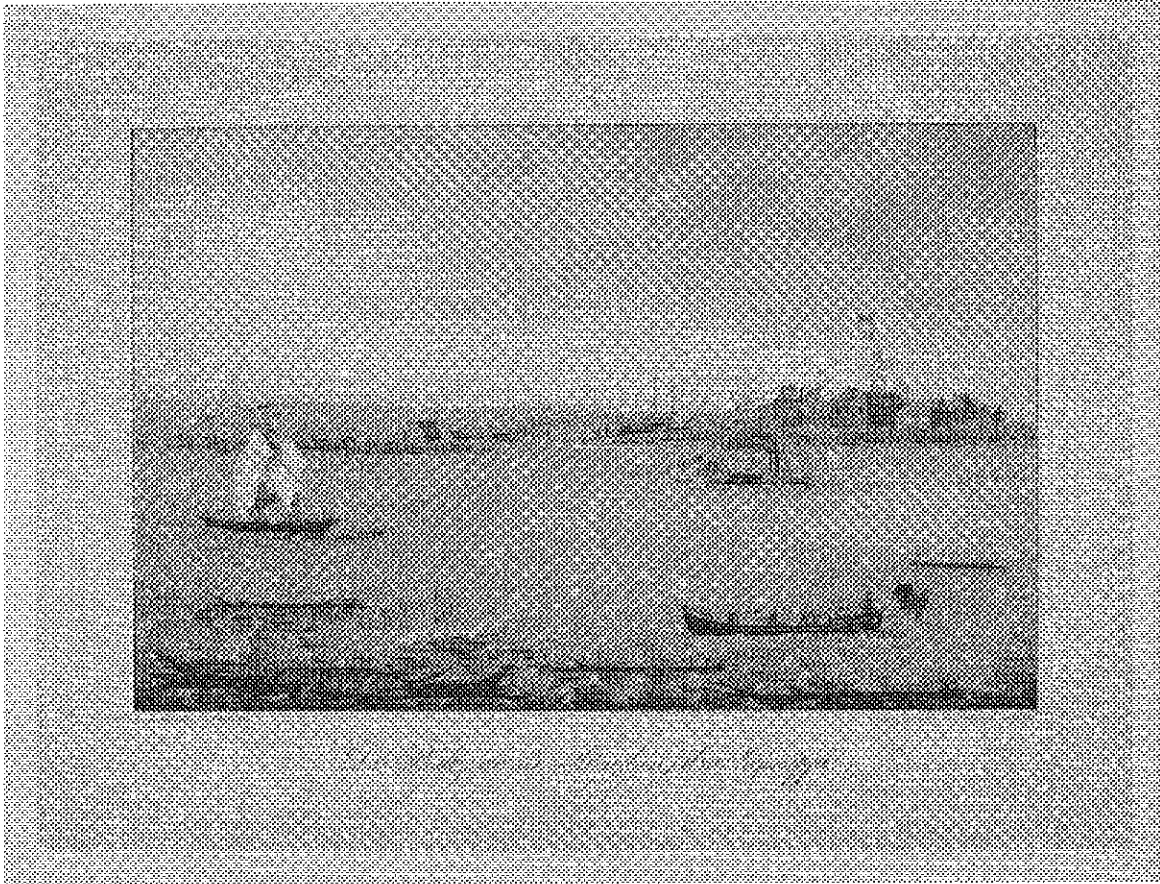
## Appendix E



The Passes of the Mississippi and "The Balize".<sup>156</sup>

<sup>156</sup> <http://www.usnlp.org/OurNavy/Maps>; The entrances of the Mississippi Rive from the Gulf of Mexico have four entrances as indicated in this 1844 drawing. From left to right they are Southwest Pass, South Pass, Southeast Pass that forks just above its dumping into the Gulf and Pass du Loutre to the East. The location of the Balize is noted. This map is adopted from existing map and descriptions of the area by Charles Saenz, 2007.

## Appendix F



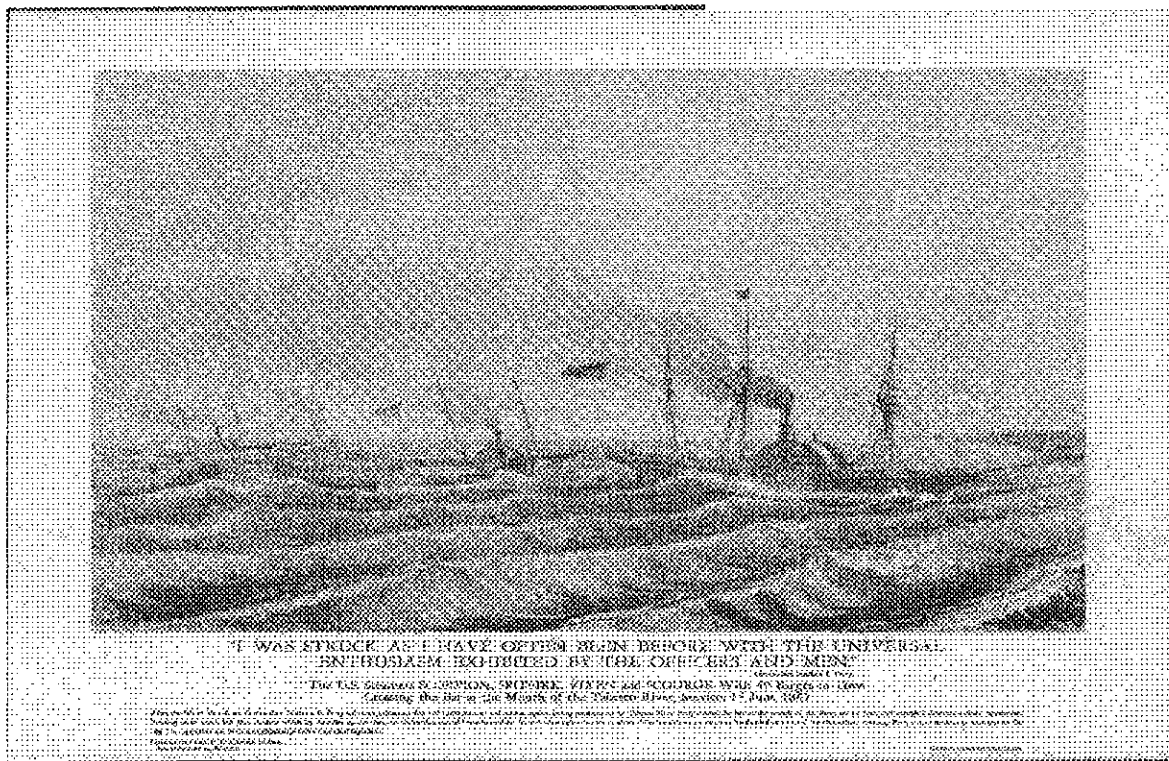
German painting "Die Balize an de Mundung des Mississippi".

This German painting of "The Balize" around 1835 is an indication of a sparse and rugged way of life. It is this community, founded by the French, which served as the logistical center of the Revenue Cutter Service during the Mexican American War in the Gulf of Mexico. Residing here were also the bar and river pilots. Steam tow boats from New Orleans would tow sailing vessels upriver to load and off load their goods from around the world. Located here was the depot of Lt. J. Harby that supplied supplies, ammunition and coal to the cutters.<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> <http://www.nypl.org> Digital Image ID 54541. "Die Balize an de Mundung des Mississippi". Colored lithograph 1828-35. Paul Wilhelm, Duke of Wurttemberg (German 1797-1860). 29.9x42.2 cm.

## Appendix G



Crossing the Bar at Tabasco<sup>158</sup>

<sup>158</sup> Morrison, "Old Bruin", 230-32; Often this picture is interpreted as the *McLane* and *Forward* crossing the Tabasco River Bar. *McLane* and *Forward* did participate in the October 1846 attack, but a picture was not drawn or painted of the attempt. The picture above is rendered during the second attempt at Tabasco, June 14, 1847. The *McLane* and *Forward* are not in the picture above and attempts to prove otherwise are unfounded.



## Appendix H

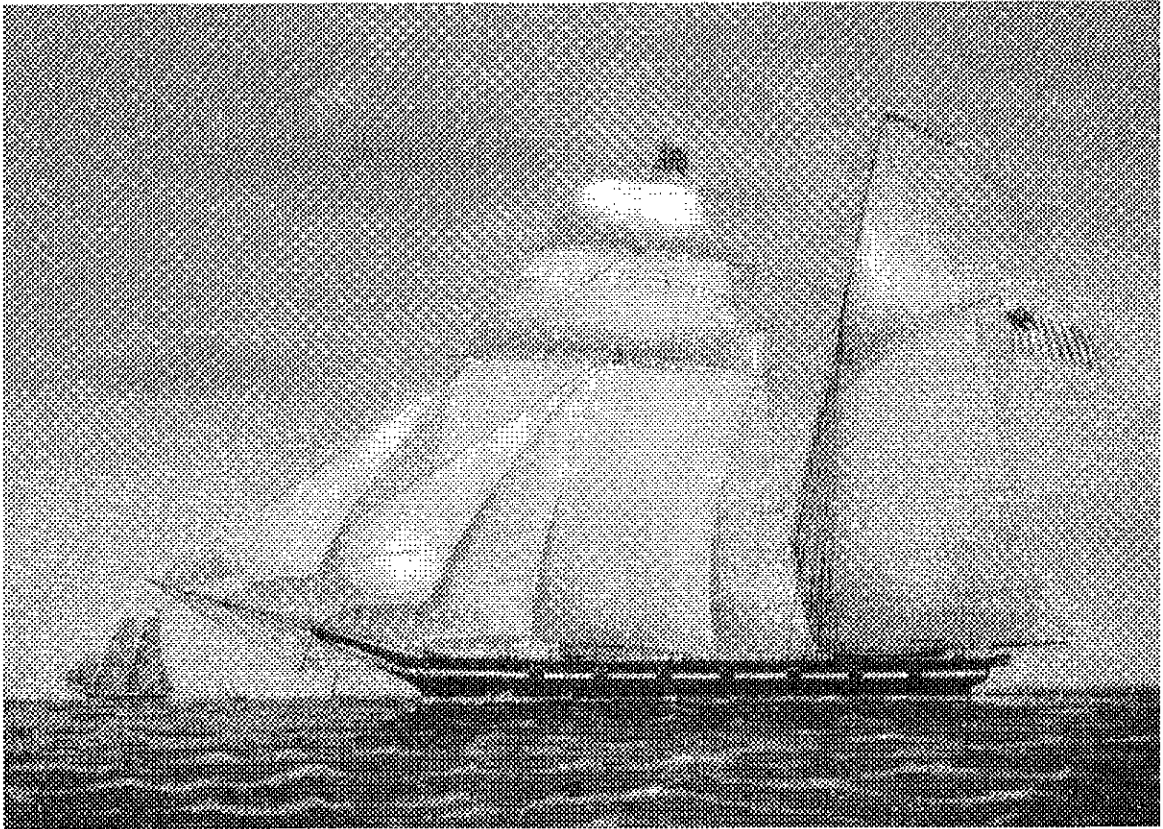
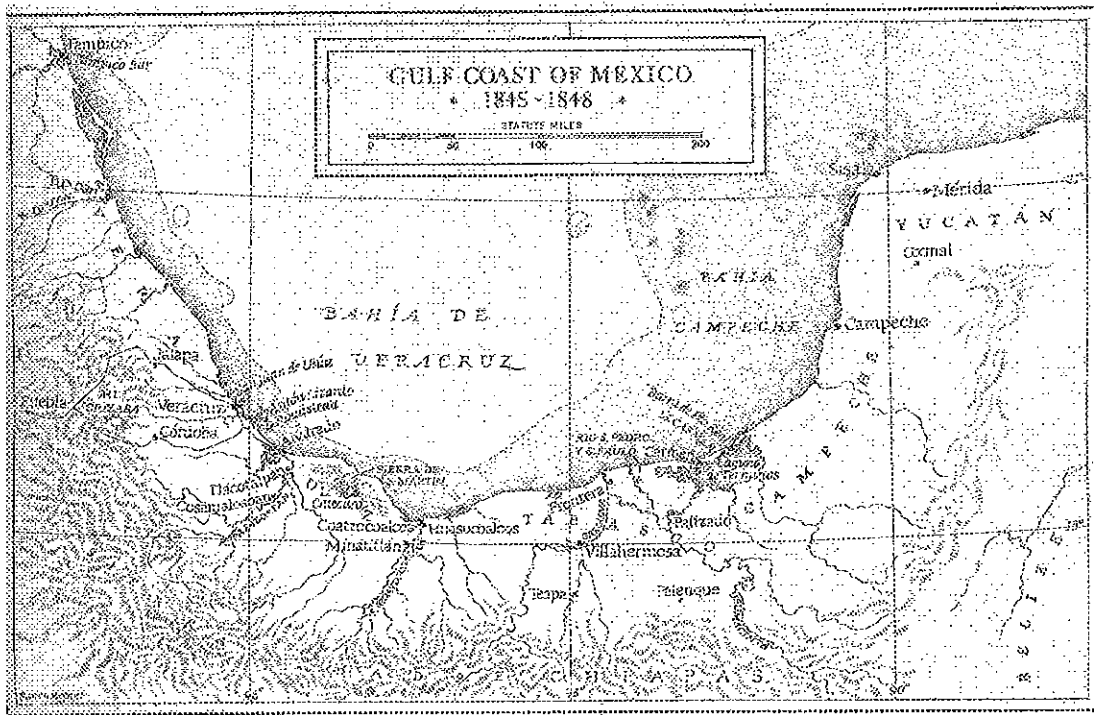


Figure 1 USRC *Forward*<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> [www.uscg.mil/history/](http://www.uscg.mil/history/)

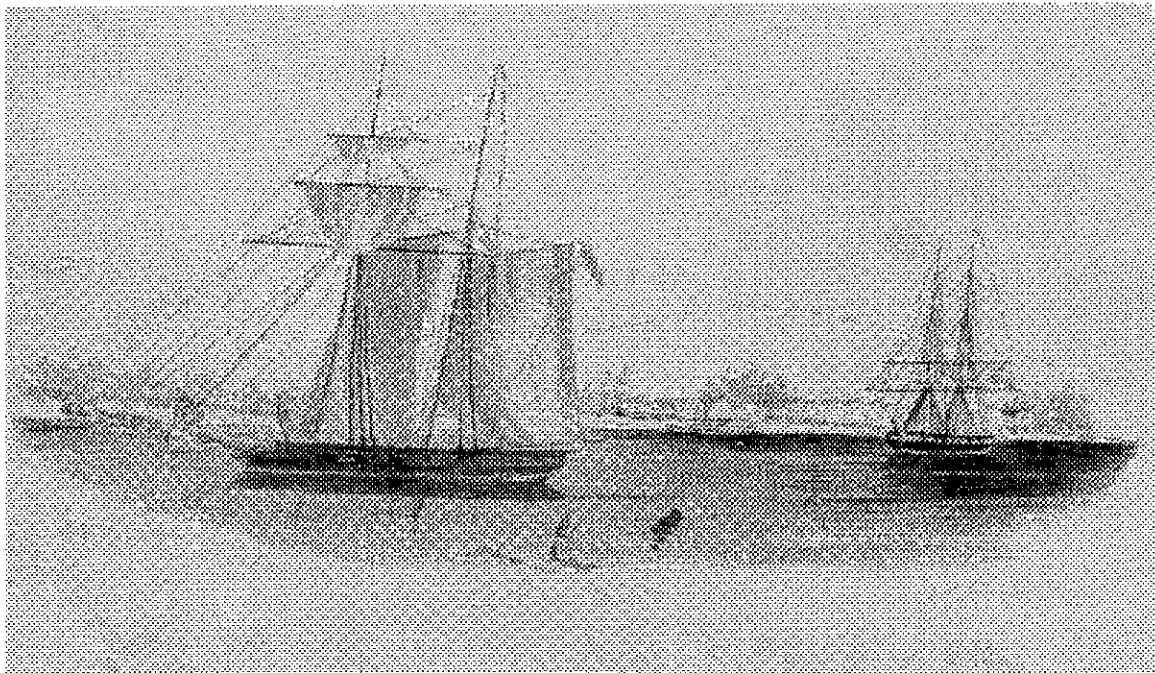
# Appendix I



The Campeche Coast of the Gulf of Mexico<sup>160</sup>

<sup>160</sup> Morrison, "Old Bruin", 184.

## Appendix J

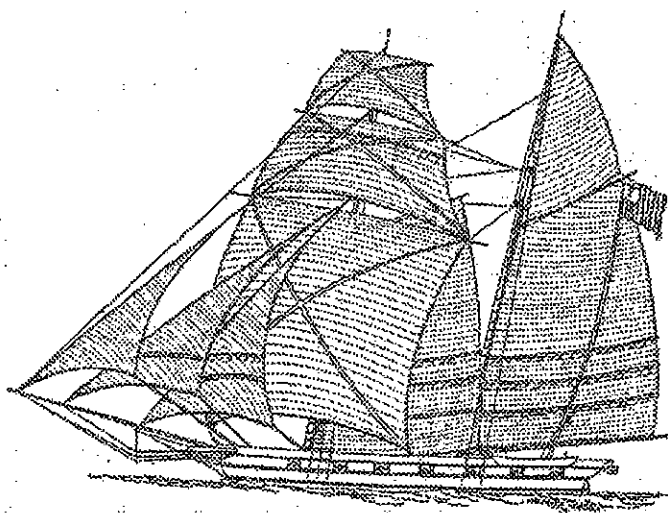


USRC Woodbury, the workhorse of the Gulf Coast. From 1836 until 1847 the Woodbury exemplified the meaning of "commitment to duty" serving mainly in the western Gulf of Mexico.<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> <http://www.tsl.state.tx.us/exhibiting/navy/woodbury/jpg>  
326-2007 4:50pm.

## Appendix K

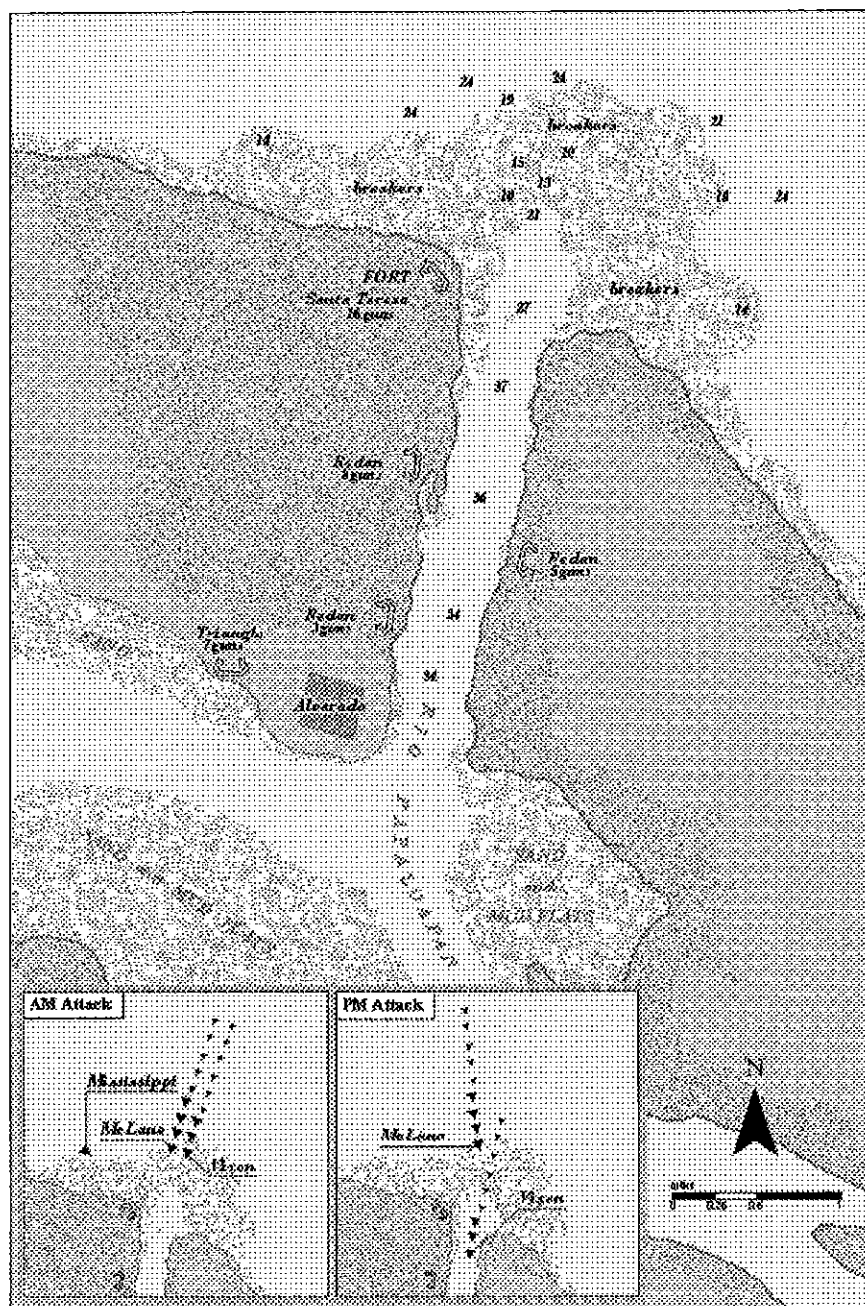


USRC *Forward*. This view is taken from a sail maker's pattern.<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> Canney, *US Coast Guard and Revenue Cutters, 1790-1935*, 20.

## Appendix L

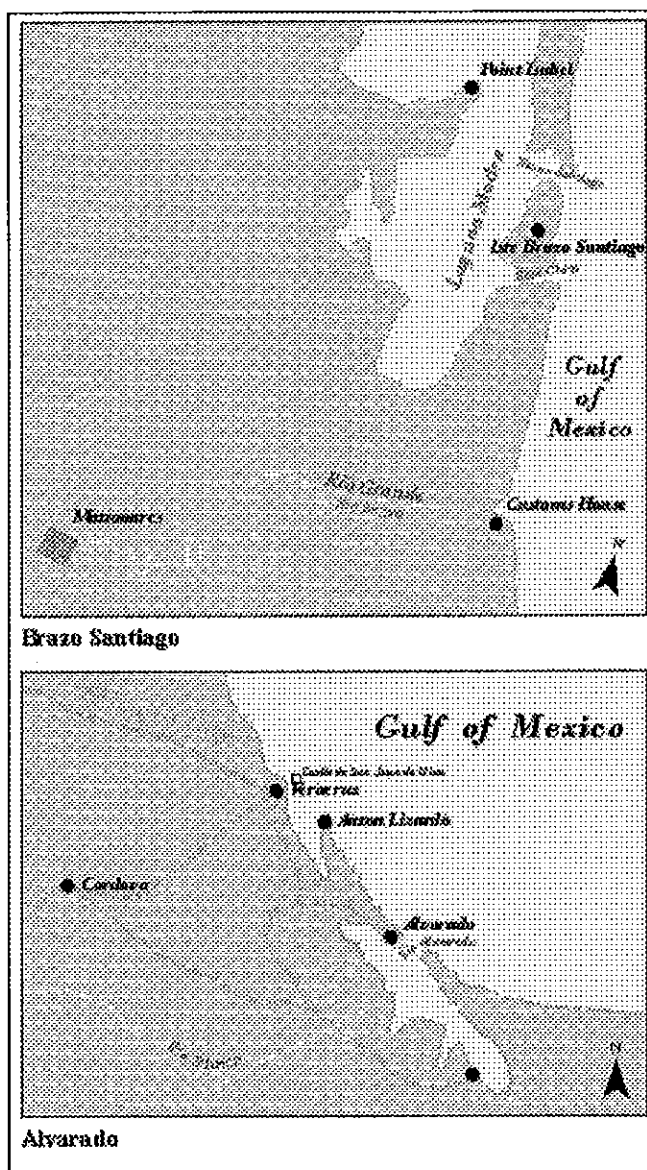
Alvarado Mexico<sup>163</sup>

<sup>163</sup>Morrison, "Old Bruin", 184; Arista, Correct Map of Mexico, UT Arlington Special Collection. This map and chart was developed from existing maps and adapted to

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show the port of Alvarado in October 1846 and the plans of the attack as mentioned by Taylor, *The Broad Pennant*, 301. Using the information given in Taylor's account the two inserts, of the 0700 attack and 1400 attack, the ships are placed in an order that most likely occurred. It is not factual because log books do not give a specific compass course. The conditions of the river entrance, the winds for the day and the state of the tides consulted; the illustrations show what most likely occurred. Maps and charts are drawn from existing maps and modified by Charles Saenz, 2007.

## Appendix M



Luguna Madre and Alvarao: A representation of General Arista's Map capture May, 1864.<sup>164</sup>

<sup>164</sup> General Mariano Arista's *Correct Map of Mexico*, Special Collection, University of Texas, Arlington; General Mariano Arista's *Correct Map of Mexico* captured at Resaca de la Palma, May, 1846. This map was adapted and reproduced from drawings of the author by Charles Saenz, 2007.

## Appendix N

### Abbreviations:

Adm.	Admiral
CO	Commanding Officer
Col.	Colonel
Como	Commodore
Gen.	General
Lt	Lieutenant
RCS	Revenue Cutter Service
RMCS	Revenue Marine Cutter Service
ROM	Record of Movement
USCG	United States Coast Guard
USN	United States Navy
USRCS	United States Revenue Cutter Service



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