

The Trail of a Walker

Paul C. Janke

AS THE STORY GOES, we learn of:

- ★ A MAN: SAMUEL HAMILTON WALKER
- ★ A TEXAS RANGER
- ★ A MEXICAN WAR
- ★ THE MAN WHO WAS DETERMINED TO INDUCE SAMUEL COLT BACK INTO THE ARMS BUSINESS
- ★ A WALKER PISTOL

Samuel Hamilton Walker was born in Prince George County, Maryland, February 24, 1817. On the first of June, 1836, at the age of 19, he volunteered as a private in the United States army to fight the Creek Indians in Alabama, and then the Seminole in Florida. In that fighting he was first introduced to the Colt Paterson repeating rifle.

At the close of the Seminole war and his enlistment term, Walker journeyed to New Orleans and then on to Texas, where he enlisted in the Texas Rangers under the command of Captain Billingsley.

One of the first battles in which Walker was engaged was at Palo Alto, which is located on the northeast side of the Rio Grande. Next the fighting moved across the river to Meir, where he was captured by the Mexicans and marched to the castle of Perote (a Mexican fort), along with several other prisoners. During this march they suffered many hardships: exhaustion, lack of food and water and vomitos (known today as Montezuma's revenge or Turista). Finally, after a time in prison, several of the group managed to escape, but most were retaken, including Walker. The escapees were tried and sentenced, the severity of the punishment being determined by a pot of black and white beans. Those who drew a black bean were to be shot, while those drawing a white bean were sent to prison. Walker, being one of the lucky ones, drew a white bean. After some time in prison Walker and eight other prisoners made a more successful escape across the Rio Grande and rejoined the services of the Rangers.

Many events were bringing together the history-making elements of this story: Texas, Colt, and Walker. The Texans under the command of General Sam Houston, Captain John C. Hayes, William B. Travis, and many other well-known leaders, had been fighting Indians and Mexicans for a number of years. On March 6, 1836, in the battle and fall of the Alamo, 192 Texans had fought to their deaths against a Mexican army estimated at 1,600 to 2,500 men, with estimated losses to Mexicans



over a thousand. Santa Anna was not satisfied with this victory and started north to take everything he could find in pursuit of the small army of Texans, who finally stood ground and fought the battle of San Jacinto on April 21, 1836. The Texans defeated Santa Anna and a treaty was signed, granting Texas freedom, but leaving Santa Anna free to return to Mexico.

In 1835, Sam Colt's revolving firearm invention had been offered to the public repeatedly, but was unrecognized as the best firearm of the time. Few were sold, and the inventor, Sam Colt, was losing heart.

Swante Swinson, a merchant in Austin, Texas, and a close friend of Colt, was presented a pair of the five-shooters. Mr. Swinson had the good sense to discover their value and was instrumental in producing their delivery to Captain Hayes, who approved them and induced the governor of The Republic of Texas to purchase a supply of the pistols. After arming Hayes and his rangers with the five shooters, the Rangers won many battles with the Indians and Mexicans. On the 8th of September, 1845, in Gonzales, Texas, a party of Mexicans were attacked and defeated, thus commencing anew the war with Mexico. In July, 1845, Texas had become a state of the Union and on the 3rd of November, a delegation of the Texans issued a solemn declaration of war to Santa Anna.

In November, 1845, the President of the United States ordered Major General Zachary Taylor to enter the war between Texas and Mexico. His command consisted of 4,049 officers, dragoons, artillery and infantry. They were dispatched to Corpus Christi on Aransas Bay. Their orders were to settle the confusion between the government of Mexico and Texas over the boundaries



Captain Samuel Hamilton Walker.

between the Nueces River and the Rio Grande, the Nueces being located at Corpus Christi and the Rio Grande approximately 100 miles south. Taylor also was ordered to destroy the Mexican army in the northern part of Mexico.

When Major General Zachary Taylor marched to the Rio Grande from Corpus Christi, Samuel Hamilton Walker, at the head of a company of Rangers, offered his services to the United States and was accepted, being assigned to keep the lines of communications open between Fort Brown and Point Isabel. On April 30, Walker informed Taylor of the intention of the Mexicans to surround the General's camp. This information led to a march on Point Isabel. The first battle of the war with Mexico was fought at a site north of Brownsville at Palo Alto on May 8, 1846.

General Zachary Taylor was in command, with Ulysses S. Grant at his side. At a later date, both Taylor and Grant became Presidents of the United States. When the bombardment of Fort Brown began, Walker volunteered to penetrate through the enemy lines and bring intelligence from the besieged, a duty which he executed with skill and energy. In this battle of the 9th and 10th of May, his performance was such to warrant him permission to form a regiment of mounted rifles, with a battlefield captain's commission.

Later in 1846, Walker left Texas and returned to Maryland, where, in November, he took up his quest to induce Samuel Colt to build a revolving pistol for the army. After many letters and visits, along with problems with the Ordnance Department in Washington, it was settled that Colt was to receive a contract to build one thousand revolving pistols, which were to be delivered to the American armed forces fighting in the Mexican war. It was decided that the pistols were to be marked with company letters A to G and numbered from 1 to 152 for each company. Sam Walker was to receive the pistols designated to Company C. Sam Walker then returned to Texas. He and his C Company were destined to Vera Cruz.

General Zachary Taylor divided his command into three divisions: first division, Brigadier General David E. Twiggs; second, Brigadier William E. Worth; and third division, Volunteers to Major General Butler. Intelligence from Monterey by confidential messenger informed General Taylor that the Mexicans had a force of regulars of not more than 2,000 or 2,500; and on the 20th of August, General Worth began his march to Monterey. Three miles outside of the city, having met no resistance, he was informed by his spies and scouts that the Mexicans under the command of General Pedro Ampudia had about seven thousand regulars and about three thousand irregulars. This called for reinforcements for General Worth. On one of the rare occasions where firearms are mentioned in an account of a battle relates to Major Benjamin McCulloch of the Texas Rangers under the command of Zachary Taylor. McCulloch was leaving for Monterey with sixteen of his men, and about mid-afternoon they had dismounted on an opening of green grass to rest when two Comanches rushed in among the horses picketed close by. By their wild yells they stampeded the horses, with the exception of Major McCulloch's and that of Captain Cheshire, who immediately mounted and took chase. As they came up to the Indians, the Indians stood and fired a volley of arrows, one striking McCulloch's horse, causing him to dismount. McCulloch could not bring one of the Indians for an advantage shot; meanwhile the other Indian was creeping around trying to level on McCulloch. Cheshire took his rifle and fired, but it was a miss. McCulloch

charged close enough to let loose with his repeater (which evidently was a Paterson) began firing. Two shots did not fire and on the third try, the revolver broke. Cheshire reloaded, wounding one of the Indians, and the Indians finally retreated, leaving the horses. Not a good showing for Colt's pistols that day!

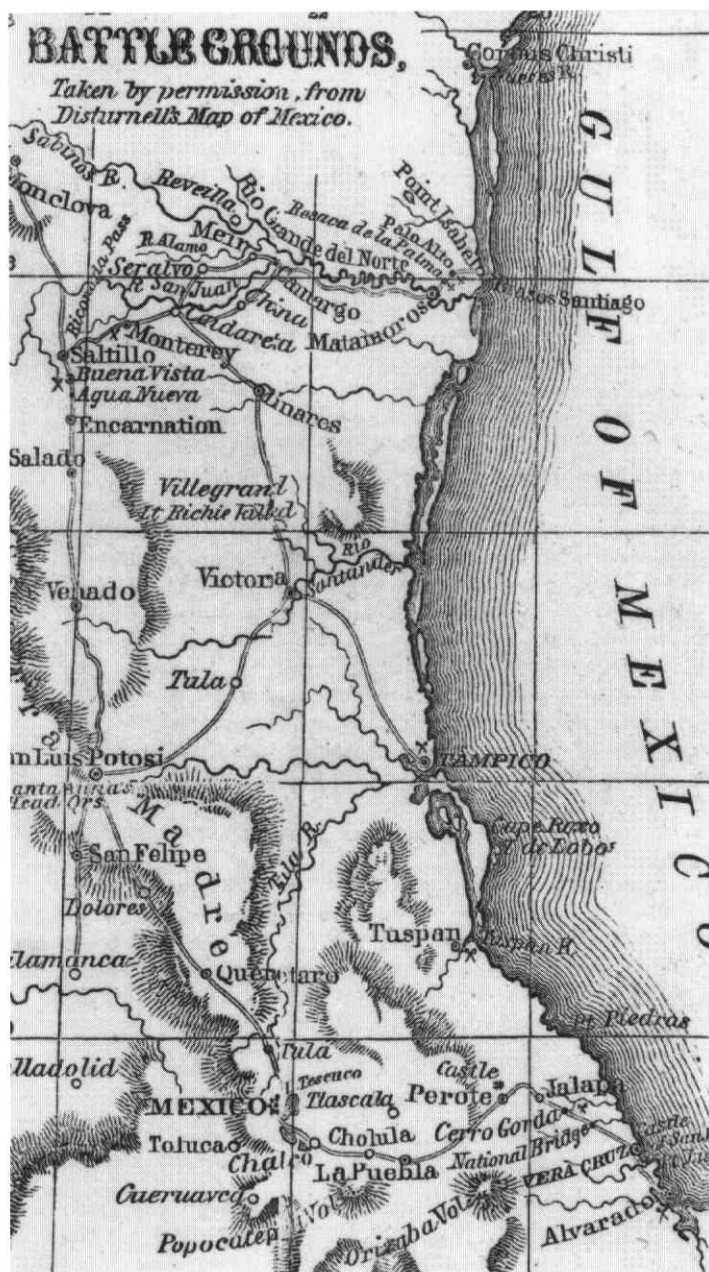
In another incident on the approach to Monterey, General Henderson arrived with two regiments of Texas Rangers under Colonels Hayes and Ward. They were ordered to clean muskets, rifles and pistols, reload and prime. Again, there is rarely a reference as to what type of arms the Mexican army or the Americans used. With approximately one hundred thousand American forces¹, and twice that number in the Mexican service, there should be more records of the weapons used. It is noted, however, that most troublesome to the American were the "rancheros," mounted horsemen armed with lances.

After four days of fierce fighting in Monterey, on September 24, 1846, General Ampudia sent a proposition to General Taylor, which resulted in a surrender after some negotiation.

During one of my visits to Monterey, I stopped by one of the antique shops which I had visited before and noticed in the rear of the shop on the floor a cannon barrel, approximately five feet long and with about three inch bore, in very nice condition with exception that the trunions had been broken off. Questioning the owner about this, he told me that he had purchased it a scrap yard outside of Monterey and that there were a large number in a large junk pile. He gave me directions to get there and, being inquisitive, I went out to see them. I found a large number of cannon barrels of various sizes, then noticed that all the smaller ones had the trunions knocked off. Could this mean that they had been used in the war, captured by the U.S. and made unservicable?

Seeing that the war in the northern regions of Mexico would not bring about peace with Santa Anna, the commanders in Washington decided to move upon the capital, Mexico City. General Winfield Scott was selected to command this phase.

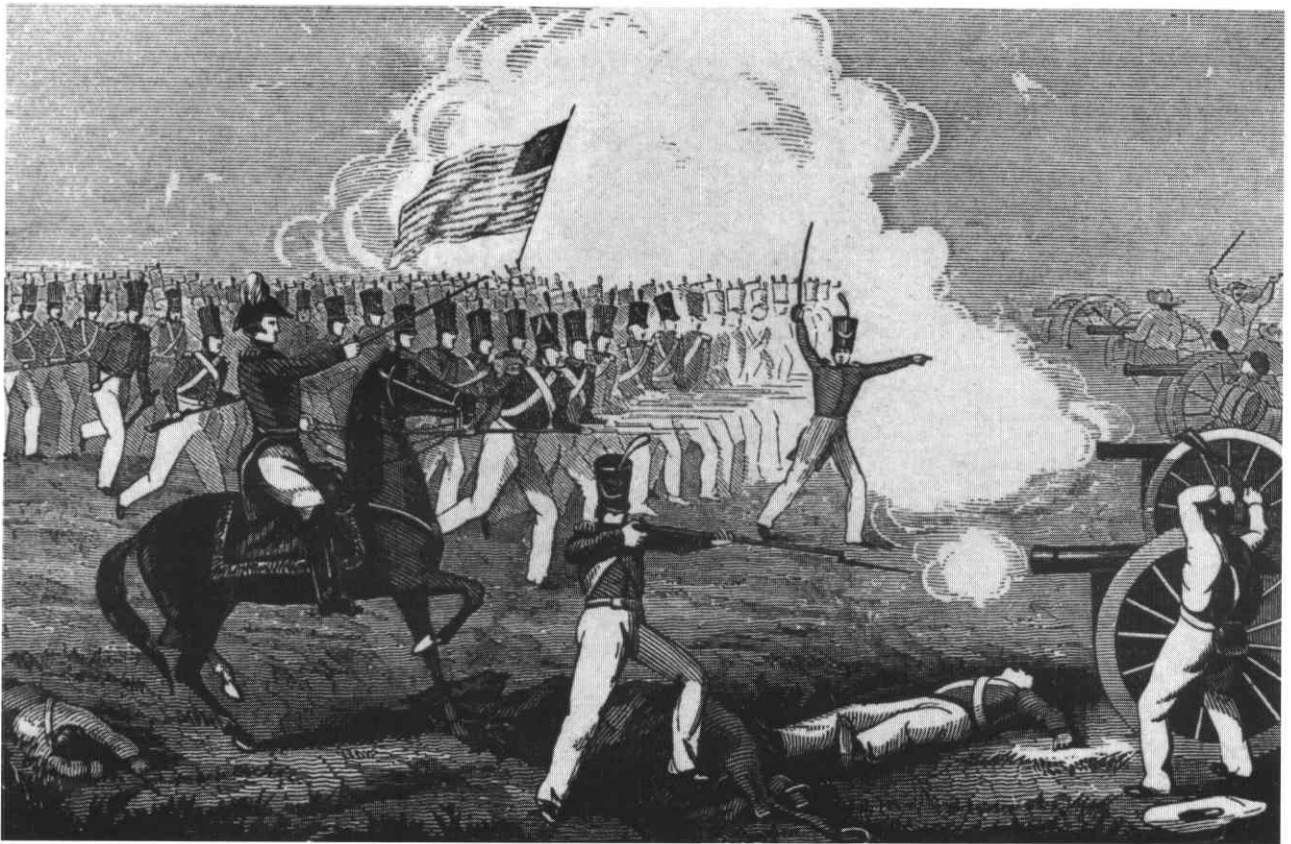
After much wrangling in Washington as to which route would be best to take, it was decided to go by sea, rather than land, to Vera Cruz. On the 30th of November 1846, Scott sailed south from New York with his command and arrived at the Rio Grande on the 1st of January 1847. He soon found that his forces were not sufficient for the invasion of Vera Cruz and was forced to call upon Taylor, Twigs, Patterson, Quitman, and Pillow, who were already in the vicinity, for assistance. That force now numbered more than twelve thousand, with Sam Walker being one of the men under Scott's command. The following engagements led to the battle in which Sam Walker was killed, still awaiting his Colt



A map of part of Mexico, with the battlegrounds marked with small crossed swords.

pistols. Colonel Colt's reentry into the arms business and the production of the Walker pistols by Eli Whitney is another story, already well documented, and will not be repeated here.

Having completed all his preparations, Scott concentrated his army at the island of Lobos, and embarked them on board one hundred transports for Antonio Lizardo, where they arrived on the 7th of March 1847. The fleet immediately made an inspection of the coast and decided to make a landing on the beach due west of the island of Sacrificios. In short order four thousand five hundred men were distributed in 67 conveyances. In the interval, the steamers and gun boats had stood close in to the shore to cover the landing. No enemy had yet appeared. General William Worth, then in



The battle of Palo Alto, May 8th, 1846, with U.S. forces under command of General Zachary Taylor.

command, promptly stationed his men on the beach. That night the Americans bivouacked on the sand. The Mexicans still made no attack, but occasionally through the night fired a volley of shots.

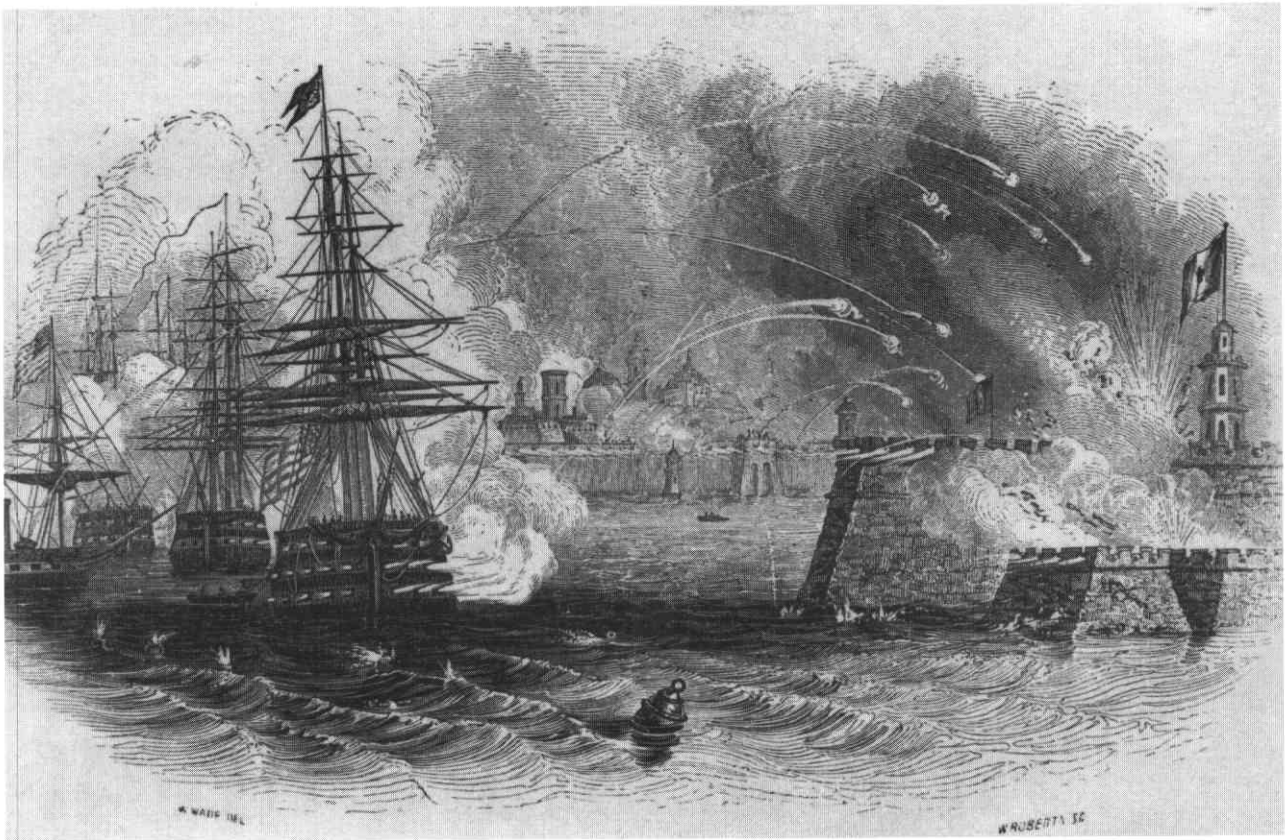
The city of Vera Cruz, comprised of some seven thousand population, several thousand buildings and many houses, was surrounded by an old castle wall, but depended upon the Castle of San Juan for its protection.

At sunrise the steamer *Spitfire* ran in close to the shore and commenced a bombardment, which was immediately returned. The troops began moving toward the town and surrounded it. By the 12th the maneuver was completed. During the proceedings one of the coastal hurricanes took over, lasting several days.

General Scott summoned the city to surrender, and, in due form, Morales (who was governor of the castle as well as the city of Vera Cruz), received the summons for both, declining Scott's offer for their surrender. The battle opened, and the siege was now pushed with great force. By the 25th, the batteries had been increased to ten heavy guns, nine mortars and two howitzers. The American ships in the meantime kept up the tremendous fire on the town and the castle, but the fortress maintained the combat without flinching, firing on the fleet at sea and the troops on the ground. By the evening of the 25th, the European consul in Vera Cruz applied to General Scott to let the women and children leave the

burning and crumbling town. The American general refused, stating that he had given due notice of what was to come, and full consideration had been given before the bombardment. The consul admitted that the city was half in ruin. On the morning of the 26th, Scott received a flag of truce, making overtures of surrender. By late night of the 27th the treaty was signed, and by then the city and castle had surrendered to the Americans. Five thousand soldiers became prisoners on parole, all the arms and ammunition were given up to the Americans, and the garrison was permitted to march out with the honors of war. The loss to the Americans was slight: ten officers killed and a few private soldiers. The exact loss to the enemy was never known.

At the close of the Vera Cruz victory, General Scott received word that the Mexicans had no intention of asking for a peace settlement. After waiting several days on the Commander-in-Chief, a decision was made to march on to the capital of Mexico City. At this time the command was some eight thousand strong, and on the 8th of April, General Twigg's division began to move; the other divisions followed rapidly. After leaving the plains, the Americans met and defeated the enemy at Cerro Gordo in a strong position, located forty-five miles from Vera Cruz. Santa Anna, after his defeat at Cerro Gordo, massed fifteen thousand men and installed batteries along the various vantage spots on the highway.



The bombardment of Vera Cruz, with its castle, September 20-27, 1847.

After the American command made a new reconnaissance, it was decided to make a new road and bypass all the enemy installations and save lives. However, there were numerous engagements with the enemy on the route to the capital. Two months after the battle of Vera Cruz, the Americans stood at the gate of the capital; however, many problems arose: supplies not getting through from Vera Cruz due to the Mexican armed forces, guerrillas, thugs and banditos, along with American recruits who had joined to serve for one year and their time being up. Also, the ever-present sickness caused by the Vomitos did not abate.

During this delay, Samuel Walker again came into action with his C Company. He and his command were stationed on the route from Vera Cruz to Mexico City to keep this route open. There was now a pause in the active operations; the Army remained in Puebla from the 17th of May to the 7th of August. The reason to halt was twofold: first, the United States had hopes for a peace settlement, and second, Scott's inefficiency with his forces. Owing to sickness, death, and the discharge of volunteers, his army had dwindled down to five thousand effective fighting men. Along with the lack of supplies, he was stalled. In the meantime, the government in Washington became aware of the necessity of placing more men in Mexico, and a bill was passed to enlist ten new regiments as fast as they could be raised and sent to

the site of the war in Mexico.

As supplies and reinforcements were pouring into the area, Colonel McIntosh, at the head of eight hundred men, on May 5, 1847, on the road from Vera Cruz to Mexico City, was attacked by guerrillas. Thirty wagons and two hundred mules were lost. After heavy fighting, the enemy was repulsed but McIntosh lost thirty men and a number were wounded.

On the 25th of September, Santa Anna, attended by a force of about eight thousand infantry and cavalry, appeared before Puebla, and the American garrison in the city was besieged for several days by the irregular forces of Mexicans. Santa Anna demanded an evacuation of the city. This was promptly refused.

The Mexican leaders immediately began a furious cannonade on the Americans. The fire was returned by Colonel Shields. On the first of October, Santa Anna, finding the besieged were not to be reduced except by a blockade, had learned that a valuable train of supplies had started from Vera Cruz, destined for the American Army. So he withdrew two thousand cavalry and infantry and marched to intercept the train. Brigadier General Joseph Lane was on his way from Vera Cruz to the capital, marching at the head of two regiments with several companies of mounted men. Five pieces of artillery were included to fight the guerrillas, who had, during the past two months, continued to annoy the army



General Winfield Scott. Born Jan. 13, 1786, he was one of the greatest American generals, commanded at Vera Cruz and Mexico City.

trains. On the eighth of October the command attacked a large body of the enemy at Jumantra and gained a complete victory, which, however, was saddened by the loss of the heroic Captain Samuel Hamilton Walker. In this action, Captain Walker, one of the most distinguished of the noted Texas Rangers, was killed. He was more distinguished for a barbarous desperation of adventure, than for the true chivalry of war.

On the 18th of October, 1847, Santa Anna resigned the supreme power into the hands of Pena y Pena, president of the Supreme Court of Justice. On the 2nd of February, 1848, the treaty of peace was signed at Guadalupe, the American commissioner notified the secretary of state that the treaty was complete, and on the 19th of June, 1848, two years and two months from the onset of the war, the people of the United states were notified.

Records show that during the conflict with Mexico from late in 1845 to the time of the withdrawal of forces in June, 1848, the United States, Texas and the volunteer Texas Rangers numbered over one hundred thousand fighting men. The entire loss of lives from the invasion of Mexico was no less than twenty-five thousand men, over fifteen thousand horses, and material and supplies well into the hundred thousand of dollars. This does not take



At the battle of Buena Vista, February 23, 1847.

into account the disabled and wounded.

On the bright side, the United States gained over six hundred thirty thousand square miles of territory, including New Mexico and lower California. This does not include the territory of Texas, for this territory was taken from Mexico after the battle of San Jacinto. It was hotly argued in Washington by the politicians as to what use this territory would be to the United States, since hardly a white man had ever entered this area of wilderness nor a hunter placed a foot on its soil.

Thus ended the Mexican war and the adventurous life of Samuel Hamilton Walker, who induced Samuel Colt to go back into business and manufacture the famous Colt revolvers.

Sam Walker never received the C Company Colt Walker pistols, even though they were in Ordnance in Vera Cruz. However, many of the five hundred Colt Walkers that were located there saw service before the close of the war, one being Walker C Company #42. At the end of the conflict, it was turned in at the Vera Cruz Ordnance Depot, shipped back to the States, and placed in Ordnance stores in Baton Rouge. Possibly the troublesome loading lever latch was modified at that time. After reissue to a detachment of soldiers who were to go up the Mississippi to St. Louis, then on west to fight

Indians, it disappeared. By the act of Congress in February, 1847, each regular soldier and each volunteer who died or was discharged by wounds or regularly discharged, was entitled to a warrant of 160 acres each of public land, or fixed a price of \$100 in scrip for each 160 acres.

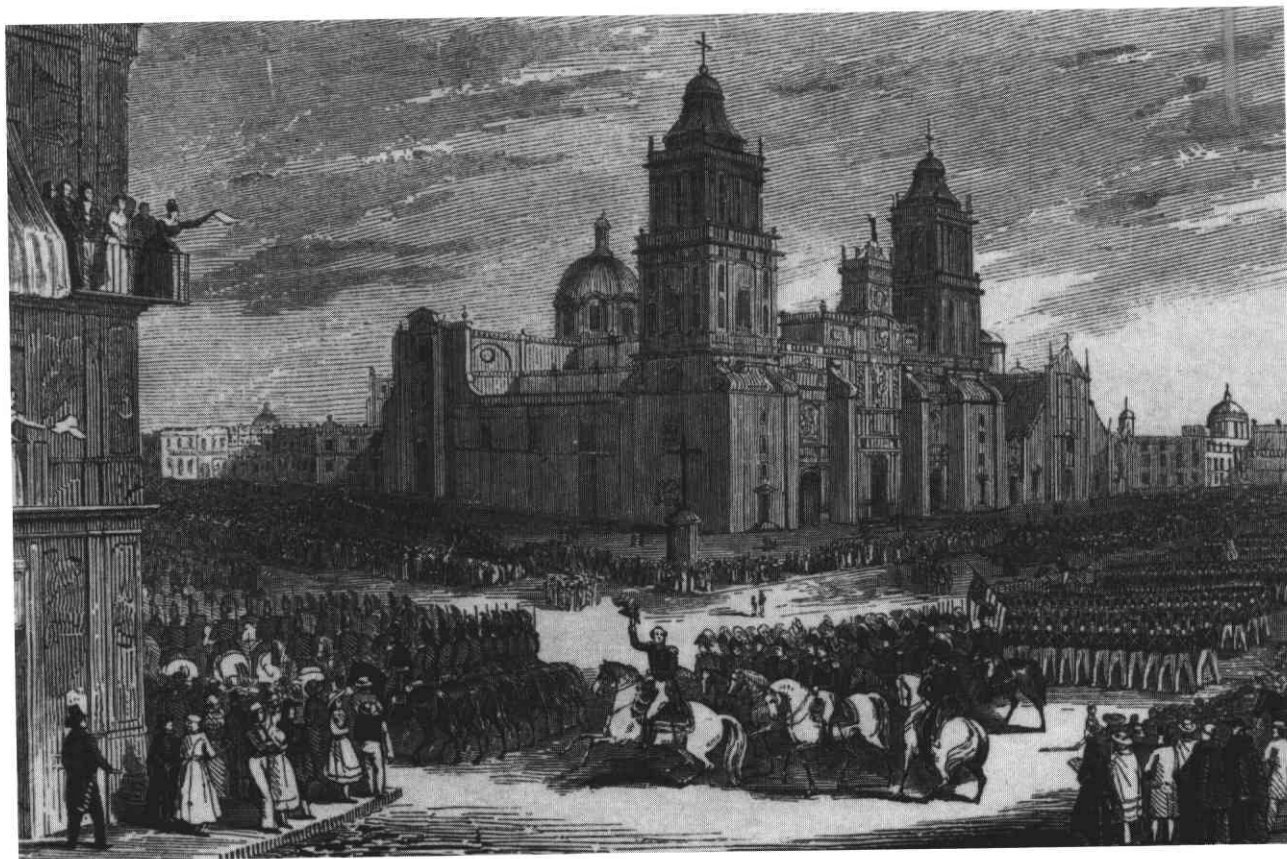
Now for the question: Did the soldier with the C Company Walker desert, go home, or did illness bring him to a small farm outside of Findley, Illinois? This is where the C Company Walker #42 was found in 1954.

It now rests on the gun-room wall in Houston, Texas, silent, but what a story it could tell! Its last adventure was a fight between two old-time gun collectors, with Janke as the referee. If you don't believe it, ask Paul Mitchell. But THAT's another story! [Keep reading! – Ed.]

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

NOTES

1. The total strength of the U.S. forces employed in Mexico from April 1846 to April 1848: foot, 54,243; horse, 15,781; artillery, 1,792, for a total of 71,816. This does not include Texas Rangers. Men lost: 17,906 killed in battle, discharged for wounds, died of wounds, died of disease, deserted. Again, does not include Texas Rangers.



Entrance of the American army into the Grand Plaza at Mexico City.

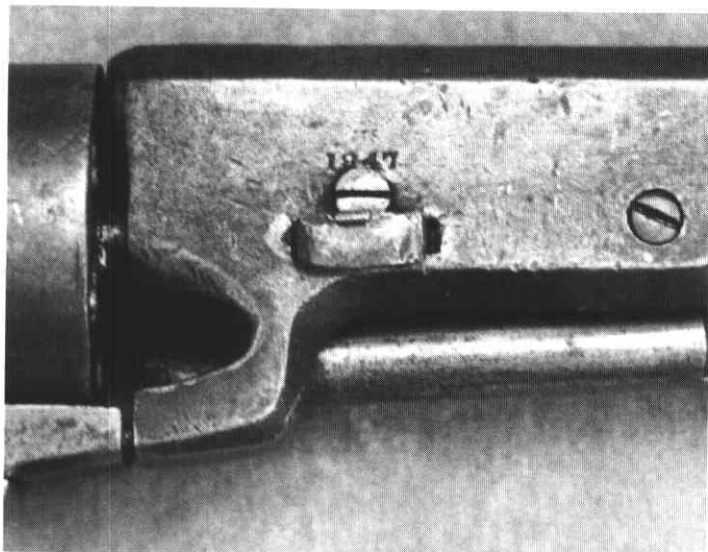


C Company No. 42 Colt Walker revolver.

THE REST OF THE STORY

As Paul Harvey would say, "Now for the rest of the story". Some of you might remember a Colt collector by the name of Charley Ferguson. During the early part of 1940, I had the pleasure of meeting Charley: at that time he was doing field work in the valley along the Rio Grande for a chemical company specializing in pest control. Charley's home was in Decatur, Illinois, and he worked out of Chicago. Most of his tests were conducted in the morning, giving him plenty of free time in the afternoon which he spent searching for antique arms. One of his pet pastimes was to take a newspaper, and old percussion pistol, a screw driver and a pair of pliers,

venture to the town square and set up shop, proceed to dismantle the pistol. It did not take long before he had an audience, and not much longer before someone would ask him what he was doing. Charley's reply was that he always wanted to fire an old cap and ball revolver and he was trying to find out if this one would be safe to fire, and the reason he was out here was that the light in his hotel room was not good, along with his eyesight being the same. Almost certainly that someone would say "I know a man who collects old guns," or someone would say "there is a gun show on the east side that deals in antique guns," or "I have an old gun at home just like that." Well, when Charley left the valley he had a trunk



The 1847 date on C Company Walker No. 42.



"C Company No. 42" on the Colt Walker.

full of antique guns. On his way back north he stopped by my home in Houston for a visit. I purchased one of the five dragoons he had, and I informed him that the following weekend there was a gun show in Ohio and we decided that we would drive up and attend that show, which we did. We met Paul Mitchell there, also a gun collector, a very close friend of Charley, living in the same town as Charley, Decatur, Illinois.

A gun shop owner and a friend of Paul Mitchell told him that he knew where a Walker pistol was located but he never was able to talk the owner out of it, giving this information to Paul, who shared it with Charley, and the two set a date to make a trip and try their luck. However the date they decided upon did not fit with Paul's schedule, so a later time was picked. Charley, taking this upon his own, decided to make this trip without Paul. He located the place where the Walker was, and after visiting with the owner for what seemed a long time, decided that he was not making any progress in acquiring the gun, so decided to use another approach. He excused himself and told them that he was an alcoholic and he must go out to his car and have a drink before he lost control. Well, that is what he did, went to his car, took a long drink and then doused some on his coat, returned to the house and after some loud talk and that reeking odor of whiskey, the owner told him the only way they would part with the gun was that they would like to have a good shotgun, so good hearted Charley gave them one hundred dollars and returned home to celebrate and have a few drinks. Well, the next morning he went down to Paul Mitchell's business to show him the Walker. Paul, being in the restaurant business, was in the butcher shop cutting meat for the daily menu. He stopped, looked at Charley, holding the butcher knife as if thinking seriously just where to start cutting. After several minutes of serious arguing, Charley told Paul to just take the Walker. Paul refused, then more heated words, and it finally came to agreement to let a third party have the gun and a price was established. I became the third party and wound up with the C Company number 42 Walker pistol. This closed the book on a very old friendship between two old collectors. And now you have heard the rest of the story.

REFERENCES

- Edward D. Mansfield, *The Mexican War, a History of its Origin*. New York, A.S. Barnes, 1848
- Charles J. Peterson, *The Military Heroes of the War with Mexico*. Philadelphia, Wm. A. Leary & Co., 1849
- Samuel C. Reid, *The Scouting Expeditions of McCulloch's Texas Rangers*. Philadelphia, Keystone Pub. Co., 1890
- John S. Ford, *Origin and Fall of the Alamo, March 6, 1836*. San Antonio, Texas, Johnson Bros. Prtg. Co., 1896.
- G. W. Smith & C. Judah, *Chronicles of the Gringos*. U. of New Mexico Press, n.d.



Captain Walker's tombstone in San Antonio, Texas. It has been told to me that a man named Lance??? brought the bodies of Walker and Gelespie to San Antonio by wagon in 1847 and buried them there. IOOF: Independent Order of Odd Fellows. FL&T: Faith, Love, Truth.

We regret that it was not possible to include George Shumway's article, "The Spirit and Art of Mannerism on Arms" in this issue of the *Bulletin*.