

Volunteers from Exeter, New Hampshire, line up as they leave New England to fight in the war against Mexico.

15.6 War with Mexico

You might think that Texas and Oregon were quite enough new territory for any president. But not for Polk. The humorless, hardworking president had one great goal. He wanted to expand the United States as far as he could.

Polk's gaze fell next on the huge areas known as California and New Mexico. He was determined to have them both—by purchase if possible by force if necessary.

These areas were first colonized by Spain, but they became Mexican territories when Mexico won its independence in 1821. Both were thinly settled, and the Mexican gov-

ernment had long neglected them. That was reason enough for Polk to hope that they might be for sale. He sent a representative to Mexico to try to buy the territories. But Mexican officials refused even to see him.

War Breaks Out in Texas When Congress voted to annex Texas, relations between the United States and Mexico turned sour. To Mexico, the annexation of Texas was an act of war. To make matters worse, Texas and Mexico could not agree on a border. Texas claimed the Rio Grande as its border on the south and the west. Mexico wanted the border to be the Nueces River, about 150 miles northeast of the Rio Grande.

On April 25, 1846, Mexican soldiers fired on American troops who were patrolling along the Rio Grande. Sixteen Americans were killed or wounded. This was just the excuse for war that Polk had been waiting for. Mexico, he charged, “has invaded our territory and shed American blood on American soil.” Two days after Polk's speech, Congress declared war on Mexico.

To Mexico, the truth was just the opposite. Mexican president Mariano Paredes declared that a greedy people “have thrown themselves on our territory.... The time has come to fight.”

The Fall of New Mexico and California A few months later, General Stephen Kearny led the Army of the West out of Kansas. His orders were to occupy New Mexico and then continue west to California.

Mexican opposition melted away in front of Kearny's army. The Americans took control of New Mexico without firing a shot. “General Kearny,” a pleased Polk wrote in his diary, “has thus far performed his duties well.”

Meanwhile, a group of Americans led by the explorer John C. Frémont launched a rebellion against Mexican rule in California. The Americans

arrested and jailed General Mariano Guadalupe Vallejo, the Mexican commander of Northern California. Then they raised a crude flag showing a grizzly bear sketched in blackberry juice. California, they declared, was now the Bear Flag Republic.

When Kearny reached California, he joined forces with the rebels. Within weeks, all of California was under American control.

The United States Invades Mexico The conquest of Mexico itself was far more difficult. American troops under Zachary Taylor battled their way south from Texas. Taylor was a no-nonsense general who was known fondly as "Old Rough and Ready" because of his backwoods clothes. After 6,000 troops took the Mexican city of Monterrey, an old enemy stopped them. General Santa Anna had marched north to meet Taylor with an army of 20,000 Mexican troops.

In February 1847, the two forces met near a ranch called Buena Vista. After two days of hard fighting, Santa Anna reported that "both armies have been cut to pieces." Rather than lose his remaining forces, Santa Anna retreated south. The war in northern Mexico was over.

A month later, American forces led by General Winfield Scott landed at Veracruz in southern Mexico. Scott was a stickler for discipline and loved fancy uniforms. These traits earned him the nickname "Old Fuss and Feathers." For the next six months, his troops fought their way to Mexico City, the capital of Mexico.

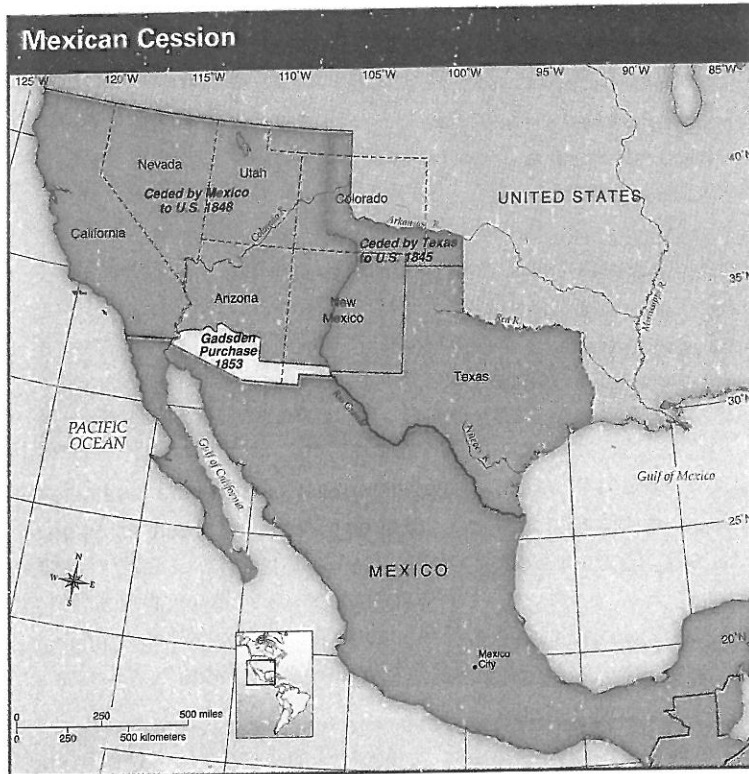
Outside the capital, the Americans met fierce resistance at the castle of Chapultepec. About 1,000 Mexican soldiers and 100 young military cadets

In this painting by Hal Stone, we see the American cavalry overwhelming the enemy in the Battle of Resaca de la Palma, Texas, in May 1846.



fought bravely to defend the fortress. Six of the cadets chose to die fighting rather than surrender. To this day, the boys who died that day are honored in Mexico as *Los Niños Héroes*—the heroic children.

Despite such determined resistance, Scott's army captured Mexico City in September 1847. Watching from a distance, a Mexican officer muttered darkly, "God is a Yankee."



As this map shows, Manifest Destiny was accomplished by the 1850s. The country stretched from the Atlantic to the Pacific, and the present outline of the United States was complete.

treaty was even more so. New Mexico and California together, they said, were "not worth a dollar" and should be returned to Mexico.

Other senators opposed the treaty because they wanted even more land. They wanted the Mexican Cession to include a large part of northern Mexico as well. To most senators, however, the Mexican Cession was a Manifest Destiny dream come true. The Senate ratified the treaty by a vote of 38 to 14.

"From Sea to Shining Sea" A few years later, the United States acquired still more land from Mexico. In 1853, James Gadsden arranged the purchase of a strip of land just south of the Mexican Cession for \$10 million. Railroad builders wanted this land because it was relatively flat and could serve as a good railroad route. With the acquisition of this land, known as the Gadsden Purchase, the nation stretched "from sea to shining sea."

Most Americans were pleased with the new outlines of their country. Still, not everyone rejoiced in this expansion. Until the Mexican War, many people had believed that the United States was too good a nation to bully or invade its weaker neighbors. Now they knew that such behavior was the dark side of Manifest Destiny.

The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo Early in 1848, Mexico and the United States signed the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. Mexico agreed to give up Texas and a vast region known as the Mexican Cession. (A *cession* is something that is given up.) This area included the present-day states of California, Nevada, Utah, Arizona, and New Mexico, as well as parts of Colorado and Wyoming.

By this agreement, Mexico gave up half of all its territory. In return, the United States agreed to pay Mexico \$15 million. It also promised to protect the 80,000 to 100,000 Mexicans living in Texas and in the Mexican Cession. (As you will learn in Chapter 17, most of these promises were not kept.)

In Washington, a few senators spoke up to oppose the treaty. Some of them argued that the United States had no right to any Mexican territory other than Texas. They believed that the Mexican War had been unjust and that the