

Hezekiah Thomas
Mexican War Service

On May 13th 1846, after only having a few hours of debate, the United States Congress declared war on Mexico. During the war, inventions such as the telegraph created new means of communication that updated people with the latest news from the reporters, who were usually on the scene. By getting constant reports from the battlefield, Americans became emotionally united as a community. News about the war always caused extraordinary popular excitement.

At the breaking out of the war the Stockton Artillerists, of Mauch Chunk, Carbon County offered their services in the Mexican War, and was accepted by Pennsylvania Governor Francis R. Shunk.

Pennsylvania sent only two volunteer regiments to serve in the Mexican War: The 1st Pennsylvania regiment, under the command of Col Francis M. Wynkoop of Bucks county; and the 2nd Pennsylvania regiment, under the command of Col William B. Roberts of Fayette County.

The Stockton Artillerists already had a reputation for patriotism, with roots in the Revolutionary War, was an organized corps several years prior to the Mexican War. Their first captains of the Stockton Artillerists were John Leisenring, their next Joseph H. Siewers, Esq., and lastly James Miller.

During the last days of December 1846, the Stockton Artillerists were enrolled into Company K of the 2nd Pennsylvania Infantry Regiment (Volunteers). On December 20th 1846, ⁱ Hezekiah enrolled as a private into the newly formed Company K by Captain Miller. ⁱⁱ The officers were: Captain James Miller; First Lieutenant, Hiram Wolf; Second Lieutenant, Robert Klotz; Second Sergeant, James McKean, Jr.; and First Sergeant, Thomas R. Crellin.

A few historians believed Company K were assigned to the Camargo Mexico, a municipality in present day state of Tamaulipas on the Mexican border at Rio Grande City, Texas. This region was occupied by American Forces since July 14th 1846. But by early September 1846 the Camargo region was deemed unsuitable for Scott's invading force into Mexico. To be sure of success, Scott's concept demanded an amphibious assault force, to be assembled on an island off the Mexican coast. Lobos Island in the Gulf of Mexico was selected as the launching point for the invasion and more than 200 ships ferried soldiers who camped on the coral beaches and prepared for the assault on Mexico.

ⁱ Another muster-in roll card indicated Hezekiah joined in Mauch Chunk on December 24th 1846.

ⁱⁱ Pages 629 and 630, Chapter VII, Carbon County in the Mexican War, History of the Counties of Lehigh and Carbon in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, by Alfred Matthews and Austin Hungerford, Illustrated, Publishing, Everts and Richards, 1884, Press of J. B. Lippincott and Company, Philadelphia.

Carbon Country had formed a large committee of citizens and friends, who at their own expense, furnished transportation, food, and clothing for the Companies trip to Pittsburg. On December 24th 1846, Company K, accompanied by the committee and friends proceeded on their route to Pittsburgh. About 15 miles into their westward trip, on their arrival at Tamaqua Pennsylvania, they were met by the deputy secretary of the commonwealth, Henry Petrikin of Bellefonte, Centre County. The secretary had an order countermanding their acceptance into the 2nd Pennsylvania Regiment Volunteers, because the 2nd Regiment was full.

A meeting was held, and it was unanimously decided the company should proceed to Philadelphia, where they would offer their services to the President, James Polk. Leaving Tamaqua for Philadelphia, Company K travelled through Pottsville Pennsylvania, where the people of that town gave them a warm welcome.

After remaining in Philadelphia a few days they were accepted, and they continued on their route to Pittsburg. Company K was accompanied by Hon. Asa Packer, who helped pioneer railroad construction, and who generously assisted in paying for their transportation. ⁱⁱⁱ William H. Butler, a prosperous businessman also accompanied Company K on their trip to Pittsburg.

They went by way of Baltimore to Cumberland by railroad, and from the latter place over the Alleghenies in nine stage coaches to Brownsville. From there Company K proceeded by boat to Pittsburgh. Arriving on January 1st 1847, the men were mustered into the 2nd Pennsylvania Regiment service by Lieut. H. B. Field. Company K numbered eighty-four, while some of the original members had dropped out, others was added along the route; two being taken after the company reached Mexico. ^{iv} It was the last company accepted, and the first on the ground to be mustered into service as a part of the Second Pennsylvania Regiment, under the command of Colonel William B. Roberts of Fayette County Pennsylvania, Lieutenant-Colonel John P. Geary, and Major was William Brindle.

After being mustered the 1st and 2nd Pennsylvania Regiments shipped for New Orleans, arriving Monday, January 18th 1847. The regiments and Company K encamped about seven miles below the city, on Andrew Jackson's famous battle-ground during the War of 1812.

Company K pitched their tents, and everything passed pleasantly for several days. Until heavy rainfall commenced, and by one o'clock at night Saturday the 23rd, there was fifteen inches of water over the entire camp-ground. The troops were obliged to seek shelter where best they could.

ⁱⁱⁱ Asa Packer's cost amounted to over nine hundred dollars, and several hundred dollars more went for other expenses. No part of this outlay was ever refunded by the government.

^{iv} Two men, Michael Hasson and George White, were enlisted respectively at Jalapa and Puebla, Mexico

There was no house within a mile of the camp except that of a French planter, which had already been converted into a hospital. The several companies dispersed, some going to the city and others to the nearest houses and huts they could find, to which, in most instances, they were denied admission, and therefore suffered much from the wet and cold. Soon after the rainy night, the Company K of 2nd Pennsylvania Regiment were ordered on board the transport ship "Ocean," and sailed for Lobos Island, located midway between Tampico and Vera Cruz Mexico.

While the Pennsylvania 1st and 2nd Regiments were on board their ships, nearing Lobos Island on February 19th 1847, General Scott arrived at Tampico, and proceeded to General Patterson's headquarters. General Scott found about 9,000 men at Tampico, prepared to embark. Four brigades, under Generals Twiggs, Pillow, Shields, and Quitman were organized, and prepared for the invasion.

On February 13th 1847, after an exceedingly rough trip, encountering heavy gales, the 1st and 2nd Pennsylvania Regiments landed on Lobos Island, and where attached to Major General David E. Twigg's 2nd Division of Regulars, who were part of General Scott's "Army of Invasion."

The 1st and 2nd Pennsylvania Regiments remained on Lobos Island for about two weeks, when they were ordered to Vera Cruz, and attached to Major General Patterson's 3rd "Volunteer" Division, 2nd Brigade under the command of Brigadier General Gideon J. Pillow of Tennessee.

On March 2nd 1847 General Scott and his army sailed from Lobos Island for Veracruz with two regular divisions, and a division of volunteers commanded by Major General Patterson of Philadelphia. In Patterson's division were three brigades led by Generals Gideon J. Pillow of Tennessee, John A. Quitman of Mississippi, and James Shields of Illinois.

When the invasion began on March 9th 1847, the 1st and 2nd Pennsylvania Regiments were attached to Paterson's 2nd Brigade under command of General Pillow. Shiploads after shipload of soldiers were rowed ashore in specially-built surf-boats to the sands of Collado Beach, located immediately to the south, and in view of the great walled city of Veracruz. The next day, March 10th, while the thermometer stood at 109°, the soldiers took part in skirmishes among the sand-hills of nearing Veracruz.

Historians refer to this engagement as the Siege of Veracruz or Battle of Veracruz that lasted for twenty days; March 9th to the 29th 1847. Afterward, both the castle of Veracruz and the castle of San Juan d'Ulloa, located in the city's harbor, were besieged and constantly bombarded for nearly three weeks by both land and naval forces. Finally, on March 29th 1847, after severe casualties had been inflicted on both the military and civilian population, Veracruz capitulated.

After the surrender of Veracruz, Hezekiah's 2nd Pennsylvania Regiment commander, Colonel William B. Roberts, laid dying. The second in command, Lieutenant-Colonel John P. Geary, was then promoted to Colonel and made commander on the regiment. Major William Brindle was also promoted as the 2nd Pennsylvania regiment's Lieutenant-Colonel. The regiment was then assigned from Patterson's 2nd Brigade commanded by General Pillow to the 1st Brigade commanded by John A. Quitman.

General Scott left a small force to garrison the city of Veracruz, and immediately began marching inland with the bulk of his troops. At the same time he sent a division of volunteers, under command of General Quitman, south along the coast to secure the town of Alvarado.

On April 18th 1847, near a mountain called Cerro Gordo, or El Telégrafo, the Americans engaged in battle with Santa Anna's troops, who had erected defenses overlooking the Rio del Plan and the road to Jalapa some 12 miles away. During the following months, General Scott began reinforcing his army, before proceeding to Mexico City. By August 13th he was at the village of San Agustin, only nine miles south of the capital. On August 19th and 20th 1847 American troops clashed at the villages of San Antonio, Contreras, and Churubusco. But in some of the fiercest fighting of the war, the Mexicans were once again unable to halt the American advance.

These battles pushed the Mexican Army back to within 2 miles of Mexico City. The Mexican forces' defensive line was the castle at Chapultepec, the earthwork fort at Casa Mata 2,000 yards to the west of Mexico City, and the fortified stone buildings of Molino del Rey, which was half way between the American forces and Mexico City.

..."I regret having been obliged, on the 20th (August), to leave Major General Quitman, an able commander, with a part of his division - the fine 2d Pennsylvania volunteers and the veteran detachment of U. States marines - at our important depot, San Augustin. It was there that I had placed our sick and wounded; the siege, supply, and baggage trains. If these had been lost, the army would have been driven almost to despair; and considering the enemy's very great excess of numbers, and the many approaches to the depot, it might well have become emphatically the post of honor..."^v

^v Headquarters of the army, Major-General Winfield Scott, near Mexico City, to William L. Marcy, Secretary of War, at Washington, D.C., Dispatch communicating Scott's official report of the Battles of Contreras and Churubusco.

On September 6th 1847, as negotiations following the battle of Churubusco began breaking down, a large number of Mexican troops were observed around a group of low, massive stone buildings known as El Molino del Rey or King's Mill. This led up to one of the bloodiest engagements of the war, which occurred on September 7th 1847, at a hill called El Molino del Rey near Mexico City.

The battle of El Molino del Rey resulted in driving the Mexicans from their positions near the base of Chapultepec Castle guarding Mexico City from the west. At dawn on September 12th 1847, the Americans began an artillery barrage against Chapultepec. As the bombardment on Chapultepec proceeded, the American forces organized into two storming parties numbering 250 hand-picked men. The artillery attack was halted at dark, but resumed at first light on September 13th.

At 0800 of September 13th 1847 the bombardment was halted, and the American forces began their charge on Chapultepec Castle. Following this battle, Hezekiah laid severely wounded in the right arm.^{vi}

The Carbon County Company K of the Pennsylvania 2nd Regiment participated in nearly all of the active engagements from Veracruz to the city of Mexico, and its conduct and services were most creditable. After nineteen months of active service, the remnant of the company returned to Pittsburgh, where all of the men were honorably discharged on July 28th 1848.

Twenty-three of the original Company K soldiers' were buried in Mexico. Other, like Hezekiah Thomas, was wounded, while others would die of disease after returning home. The war reduced the ranks by killed, wounded, and diseased to less than one-half of the original number.

Company K arrived back in Mauch Chunk, Carbon County, on July 20th 1848, after having been tendered ovations and receiving the congratulations and hospitalities of the people in Easton, Bethlehem, and Allentown. The company was disbanded, and now its members are widely scattered.

^{vi} Another muster roll card said it was his left shoulder that was injured.

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