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THE AZTEC CLUB OF 1847

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THE AZTEC CLUB OF 1847
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In 1519, when Cortez and his mail-clad warriors were blazing their bloody trail through the jungles of Mexico, the Aztec chief, Montezuma, paced the marble floor of the temple in the royal city of Iztapalapan (Mexico City), and in his ears rang the sinister warning, "Cortez is coming!" Cortez came, and for the first time the Halls of Montezuma echoed to the footsteps of a white conqueror.

In 1847, a Mexican general paced the floor as did Montezuma more than three centuries before him, and the spacious Halls of Montezuma echoed the words, "Scott is coming!" The Americans had defeated him at Palo Alto, Monterey, Buena Vista and Reseca de la Palma. Heroic Vera Cruz and mighty Ulua, the pride of Mexico, had hauled down their flags. And now the Americans were marching on Mexico City.

The war between the United States and Mexico had been going on for slightly less than a year when General Winfield Scott's Army of Invasion began moving from Vera Cruz.

The road taken by the Americans was almost the identical route that Cortez took in 1519; it crossed the Tierra Caliente with its blistering heat and deep sand, to the foothills of Plan del Rio where it began the ascent of the mountains to the great Plateau of Anahuac.

At the foot of the Sierra Madre, the last step from Tierra Caliente to the great Plateau, the Battle of Cerro Gordo (Big or Fat Hill) was fought on April 18; the Mexicans were defeated and General Santa Anna fled to Orizaba.

Scott's army moved on through Jalapa (city of flowers) and down the steep hill beyond into a vast expanse of hills and gorges. Across swaying aerial bridges that spanned the abysses through which mountain streams dashed foaming over the rocks, up into the mountains and through the Black Pass at La Hoya, then a sharp turn and a winding ascent for about six miles to the log houses of Las Vigas where the troops stood a mile and a half above sea-level. After a few days in the vicinity of the dust-brown castle of Perote the march was resumed through country already brown with ripening wheat and barley; then into a desolate, arid region where steep, conical hills of bare limestone arose from a wide, sandy plain, and the only cheering sights were glimpses of silvery Orizaba against a background of black clouds where forked lightning played and danced; on to Ojo de Agua about thirty-five miles from Perote, where a large spring watered lush palmettoes and large meadows. Another eight or nine miles and the troops came to dark Nopalucan, overlooking its fertile valley; then a twenty-five mile march through a scenic wonderland brought them to the manufacturing town of Amozoc, about ten miles from Puebla.

Early one morning about the middle of May, after brushing aside Santa Anna's cavalry, the men of Scott's army, covered with dust from the dry, stony hills, marched into the city of Puebla - second city in

importance and the first in military fame in all of Mexico.

On July 8, General Pillow arrived at Puebla from Vera Cruz with several thousand men; General Franklin Pierce with 2,500 men and Brevet Lieutenant Colonel Samuel E. Watson with his battalion of Marines arrived on August 6, 1847.

After receiving these reinforcements, General Scott organized his army as follows:

Cavalry - Parts of three dragoon regiments
Artillery - Siege train, several field batteries and a rocket and howitzer battery
Infantry - First Division (Brevet Major General W. J. Worth), consisting of Brevet Colonel John Garland's brigade of the Second and Third Artillery (as infantry), the Fourth Infantry and a light battalion; Colonel N. S. Clarke's brigade of Fifth, Sixth and Eighth Infantry
Second Division (Brigadier General D. E. Twiggs), consisting of Brevet Brigadier General Persifer F. Smith's brigade of Mounted Riflemen, First Artillery (as infantry) and Third Infantry; Brevet Colonel Bennet Riley's brigade of Fourth Artillery (as infantry), Second and Seventh Infantry.
Division of Volunteers (Major General G. J. Pillow assumed command when General Patterson left for the United States) consisting of Brigadier General George Cadwalader's brigade of Eleventh and Fourteenth Infantry and the Voltigeur regiment; Brigadier General Franklin Pierce's brigade of Ninth, Twelfth and Fifteenth Infantry.
Division of Volunteers (Major General J. A. Quitman) consisting of Brigadier General James Shields' brigade of New York and South Carolina volunteers; Brevet Lieutenant Colonel Samuel E. Watson's brigade of a detachment of the Second Pennsylvania Regiment, and a detachment of Marines under the command of Major Levi Twiggs.

On the morning of August 7, 1847, General Twiggs (Second Division) began the eventful march to the Mexican Capitol. One day apart, Quitman, Worth and Pillow followed him. The dust was annoying and the sun scorched for a time, but soon the troops entered a wide valley of rich fields, grazing herds, spacious haciendas and trim white churches. In the rear stood Mt. Orizaba and the nearer pyramid of Malinchi. On the left Mt. Popocatepetl and his consort, the Sleeping Woman (Iztaccihuatl), were partly obliterated by blankets of white clouds. At Rio Frio, a stiff climb of about five miles placed the troops on a narrow plateau which formed the summit - 10,500 feet above the sea. Before them, encircled by rough, bold mountains, lay the Valley of Mexico. Standing in the foreground were several volcanoes that had been crumbling for ages untold. Broad lakes shimmered and sparkled in the distance. The Vale of Anahuac was a velvet vista cut with ash-colored roads, gleaming canals and straight

rows of stately poplars, and studded with walled haciendas, rambling towns and cozy-looking villages. In the midst of this scene of breathtaking beauty slumbered the capital of Mexico, Venice-of-the-Mountains.

By August 12, Scott's leading division (Twiggs) had arrived at the adobe village of Ayotla in the Valley of Mexico, with the other divisions camped in the rear. On August 20, the Mexicans were defeated at Contreras and Churubusco and fled towards the capital with General Scott's army in pursuit.

An armistice was agreed to on August 23 and General Scott established his headquarters with General Worth's division at Tacubaya.

On September 6, Scott notified the Mexican commander that the armistice would cease within twenty-four hours as the peace commissioners could not reach an agreement and the Mexican forces had violated several of the terms of the armistice.

General Scott's army closed up on September 8; General Quitman moved to Coyoacan, one of General Twiggs' brigades took station on the Nino Perdido Causeway, one of General Pillow's brigades occupied the San Borja Hacienda and the other joined General Worth at Tacubaya and took part in the Battle of Molino del Rey which was fought that day.

General Scott called a conference on September 11 where it was decided to attack the Castle of Chapultepec (which was regarded as the key to Mexico City) and to endeavor to enter the City by the western gate.

The Castle of Chapultepec (which was used as the National Military Academy) stood on an isolated mound rising 150 feet above the valley. Although nearly precipitous on the northern, eastern and part of the southern side, the mound declines gradually to the west to a cypress grove planted by the Kings of Tenochtitlan and Texoco in the days of their grandeur. In this grove Montezuma once had his house and grounds. The grounds were enclosed by a high wall on the southern side and by the San Cosme Aqueduct on the northern side. In addition to its natural advantages, Chapultepec was garrisoned by several hundred Mexican troops, while in the fortifications proper and other temporary defenses surrounding the castle, heavy guns had been mounted.

American batteries shelled the fortress on September 12 and 13, and was followed by an attack on the southern and western side. The attack against the southern side was led by General Quitman, advancing along the road leading from Tacubaya. The attack against the western side was led by General Pillow from Molino del Rey through the cypress grove. The two columns were led by storming parties of selected volunteer officers and men. General Quitman's storming party was composed of men from the various units of his division and was commanded by Major Levi Twiggs of the Marine Corps. Ladders, pickaxes and crowbars were issued to another detachment of pioneers under the command of Captain J. G. Reynolds of the Marine Corps. These storming parties were supported by the battalion of Marines under the personal command of Lieutenant Colonel Watson, the brigade commander. Major Twiggs was killed while leading the attack and Captain James Miller

of the Second Pennsylvania Regiment assumed command of the storming party. The Mexicans put up a gallant and courageous defense but the Americans would not be denied. They stormed over the walls and parapets and overwhelmed the Mexicans.

Immediately after the fall of the fortress, General Quitman's forces moved directly to the city of Mexico by way of the Tacubaya Causeway and the Garita (gateway) Belen. Dirty and dusty, the blood-smeared column, charged the Garita Belen and captured it shortly after noon, and then pushed a short distance into the city. The enemy's rifle fire from the houses and streets was so severe that the troops were forced to withdraw to the gate. During the night, the city was evacuated by Mexican troops and at dawn on September 14, 1847, a white flag came to the Belen Gate, the bearers bringing a request for General Quitman to take possession of the city. General Quitman then marched his command to the Grand Plaza, and shortly thereafter cross-belted United States Marines were calmly patrolling the Halls of Montezuma. General Quitman's division (to which the marines were attached) was thus accorded the honor of being the first American force to enter Mexico City and of raising the United States flag over the National Palace - the Halls of the Montezumas. Thus the explanation and the justification for the motto inscribed on the colors of the United States Marine Corps: "From the Halls of Montezuma" - words that our Marines first wrote in their blood on the heights of Chapultepec.

The United States Marine Corps played a gallant and conspicuous part in the Mexican War. In addition to their participation in the invasion and conquest of Mexico, the marines of the Home Squadron had participated in Commodore Perry's expedition up the Tobasco River and had captured Frontera and Tobasco; marines participated in the capture of Tampico, and shared honors with the Army and Navy in the attacks and capture of the fortress (Ulua) and the city of Vera Cruz. A second battalion of marines, under Major John Harris, sailed from New York in March 1848 to cooperate on shore with the Home Squadron, on the Isthmus of Tehuantepec. Upon arrival at Vera Cruz the armistice had been concluded and Major Harris was ordered to garrison Alvarado with his battalion.

On October 13, 1847, a group of officers of General Scott's army held a meeting in Mexico City with a view of forming a club and opening a club house for the entertainment of its members and their guests while in the city. The Aztec Club of 1847 was founded on this date, and Major General Quitman, commanding the Fourth Division, U. S. Volunteers, was elected the first president. The original home of the Club was the handsome residence of Senior Boca Negra, former minister to the United States from Mexico.

1st Lieutenant Robert C. Caldwell, of Lieutenant Colonel Watson's battalion, was the only Marine officer in the original membership. Included in the original membership were Brigadier General Franklin Pierce, Lieutenant Colonel Joseph E. Johnston, Captains Joseph Hooker, John B. Magruder and Robert E. Lee, Lieutenants Ulysses S. Grant, George G. Meade and George B. McClellan.

Brigadier General Pierce later became President of the United States; Lieutenant Grant became the General of the Northern Armies and President of the United States; Captain Robert E. Lee became the leader of the Con-

federate Army, Captain "Joe" Hooker was destined to win fame at Chancellorsville, and Johnston at Shiloh. Hancock and Longstreet fought together at Churubusco; at Gettysburg they were on opposite sides.

A constitution was adopted on January 13, 1848, and new officers were elected. An initiation fee of \$20.00, payable in advance, was decided upon at that time, and General Winfield Scott and Chaplain John McCarty were elected honorary members.

At the time the United States forces withdrew from Mexico in 1848, the Club had a membership of 160 members, including the two honorary members.

In 1871, the constitution was amended whereby any officer who had served in any part of Mexico during the period of the Mexican War would be eligible for membership. In 1883, the constitution was further amended to admit to membership deceased officers who had served in Mexico during the war and were never members, such officers to be represented by the nearest blood relation. The constitution was altered in October 1889 by adding the words "Navy and Marine Corps" in the second line of Article II, on membership, so as to read: "as an officer of the Army, Navy, and Marine Corps."

2nd Lieutenant Charles G. McCawley, of Lieutenant Colonel Watson's battalion of marines (brevetted 1st Lieutenant for gallant and meritorious conduct), and 2nd Lieutenant John L. Broome, of Major Harris' battalion of marines, were admitted to membership in 1890; 2nd Lieutenant Thomas Y. Field, of Lieutenant Colonel Watson's battalion of marines, was admitted to membership in 1891. Lieutenant James Longstreet and Lieutenant William T. Sherman, of the U. S. Army, and five officers, of the U. S. Navy, were also admitted to membership in 1891.

2nd Lieutenant George R. Graham, of Major Harris' battalion, and six U. S. Navy officers were admitted to membership in 1891 under the resolution of 1883, being represented by the nearest blood relation.

The Aztec Club of 1847 was incorporated under the laws of the District of Columbia, under date of December 29, 1892.

It is claimed that with the exception of the Order of Cincinnati, the Aztec Club of 1847 is the oldest of the patriotic societies of the United States.

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