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THE SAN PATRICIO DESERTERS IN THE MEXICAN WAR

ONE OF THE perplexing problems in the history of the Mexican War has been the account of a body of deserters from the American army which called itself the San Patricio Battalion. Many of these deserters were being tried and executed or severely punished as the troops of General Scott pushed into the heart of Mexico's capital. The account of the desertion of the San Patricios has been the subject of much debate, a great deal of it bitter, between historians with either a Catholic or Protestant point of view.¹ Many Protestant writers have been prone to use this event as an illustration of placing faith above patriotism, the desertions being laid at the door of the Mexican clergy who are charged with actively attempting to entice Catholic soldiers among the American forces, largely recent German and Irish immigrants, to leave the army of a Protestant power bent on the destruction of a Catholic nation and on the spoliation of the temples of the Catholic faith. Catholic writers have been quick to issue a full denial of such charges. To date most of the charges and countercharges concerning the San Patricio Battalion have been based almost exclusively on secondary evidence. The essential truth of the matter would appear to be obtainable only from the actual records of the deserters in the files of the United States Army. It is on these records that this article is based.

The San Patricio Battalion, called by the Mexicans *Legión de Estrangeros*, was an organization formed largely of deserters from the American army together with a sprinkling of other non-Mexicans resident in Mexico. Desertion from General Taylor's command began as soon as the American army encamped on the banks of the Rio Grande. General Ampudia, in command of the Mexican forces at Matamoras, scattered leaflets among the American troops calling upon the many English, Irish, German, French and Polish immigrants to abandon the American army and urged them not to "contribute to defend a robbery and usurpation which, be assured, the civilized

¹The three most important accounts of the San Patricio Battalion are: Sister Blanche Marie McEniry, *American Catholics in the War with Mexico* (Washington, 1937), especially chapter V, "The San Patricio Battalion"; Edward S. Wallace, "Deserters in the Mexican War," in *Hispanic American Historical Review*, XV, 374-380; and G. T. Hopkins, "The San Patricio Battalion in the Mexican War," in *Journal of the United States Cavalry Association*, September, 1913, 278-290.

nations of Europe look upon with the utmost indignation.”² Somewhat later the new Mexican commander, General Arista, offered anyone who would desert the American army a reward of three hundred and twenty acres of good land. General Taylor himself stated that “efforts are continually being made to entice our men to desert, and I regret to say, have met with considerable success.”³ Desertion became even more serious during and after the capture of Monterrey and for the first time the Mexican clergy were condemned as the instigators. *Niles Register* reported that priests were active among the immigrant soldiers and that the Mexican press hailed the deserters as Roman Catholics who, “following the impulses of their hearts, have passed over to our army to defend our just cause.”⁴

The San Patricio Battalion first appears as an organized unit of the Mexican army in the Battle of Buena Vista where it fought as a battery of artillery of eighteen and twenty-four pounders which were moved into position over extremely difficult terrain.⁵ In the campaigns of General Scott as he advanced inland from Veracruz through Cerro Gordo to Puebla and then on into the outskirts of Mexico City, the battalion is not mentioned. Evidence given later at the trial indicates that the battalion was being reorganized as infantry and also that the Mexicans simply did not trust the American deserters to fight at this time their former comrades-in-arms. However, as Scott’s army pushed its way into the suburbs of the capital the San Patricios were called upon to take part in its defense. The battalion was marched out to the convent of Churubusco with the Independencia regiment before it and the Bravo regiment following behind to insure that the Americans did not falter along the way. Once the battle had begun at Churubusco on August 20, 1847, the San Patricios appear to have fought like tigers, realizing the fate that awaited them if captured. It was reported that three times the Mexicans in the convent attempted to raise a white flag only to have it torn down and the fight continued by the San Patricios. In the report of the First Brigade of the First Division it was stated, “Of prisoners we paused to take very few although receiving the surrender of many. . . . Among them, however, we secured twenty-seven deserters from our own army, arrayed in the most tawdry Mexican uniforms. These wretches served the guns (the use of

² 30 Congress, 1 Session, *House Executive Document No. 60*, pp. 303-304.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 133.

⁴ *Niles Register*, October 16, 1847, pp. 103-104.

⁵ James Henry Carleton, *The Battle of Buena Vista* (New York, 1848), p. 83.

which they had been taught in our own service) and with fatal effects on the persons of their former comrades.”⁶ Another participant in the Battle of Churubusco reported that “our men were with difficulty prevented from killing them. . . . They looked meanly enough under the threats and fierce looks of our men who wanted to eat them up.”⁷ All accounts agree that the deserters put up a bitter fight until their ammunition was exhausted and there was no hope of extricating themselves. All also agree that their captors were loud in their demands for their immediate trial, and that “the Irishmen in our army, who had remained true to their colors, were the most clamorous for their execution.”⁸

In the Battle of Churubusco some eighty-five of the two hundred men who formed the battalion were taken prisoner. Those of the captured San Patricios who were deserters from the American army, seventy-two in all, were ordered to trial by court-martial by General Scott in General Orders 259 and 263. The trials were held under two courts, one sitting at San Angel with Colonel Bennet Riley of the Second Infantry as president, while the other sat at Tacubaya with Colonel Garland of the Fourth Infantry as president.⁹ The trials, the proceedings of which will be considered below, resulted in the condemning of all prisoners, except one, to death or to severe punishment. The sentences were reviewed by General Scott and many were commuted from death to whipping and branding, while in a very few cases the sentences of the courts were completely remitted. In all, fifty of the prisoners were hanged, while sixteen were sentenced “to receive fifty lashes well laid on with a raw hide on his bare back: to forfeit all pay and allowances that are or may become due him: to be indelibly marked on the right hip, with the letter ‘D,’ two inches in length: to wear an iron yoke weighing eight pounds with three prongs, each one foot in length, around his neck: to be confined at hard labor, in charge of the guard during the time

⁶ Report dated August 23, 1847, United States Archives, Army of the United States, (hereafter cited as U. S. Arch., AUS), Office of the Adjutant General, 27932-1895.

⁷ Journal of Henry M. Judah, ms., Library of Congress, Division of Manuscripts, entry for August 21, 1847.

⁸ Carleton, *op. cit.*, p. 83; 30 Congress, 1 Session, *House Ex. Doc. No. 1*, pp. 219, 344; Raphael Semmes, *The Campaign of General Scott in the Valley of Mexico* (Cincinnati, 1852), p. 316; Edward D. Mansfield, *The Mexican War* (New York, 1848), p. 280.

⁹ The records of the trials of the deserters are contained in two bundles of papers, U. S. Arch., AUS, Judge Advocate General’s Office (J. A. G. O.), EE525 (San Patricio Battalion, Tacubaya, Mexico), and EE531 (San Patricio Battalion, San Angel, Mexico).

the Army remains in Mexico: and then to have his head shaved and be drummed out of the service."¹⁰ One had his sentence changed to conviction for A.W.O.L., and was discharged with a loss of all pay; four had their sentences completely remitted, and one was considered outside of the jurisdiction of the court, never having been formally sworn into the army at all. The sentences were confirmed by General Scott in General Orders 281 and 283, and were carried out on various dates. Sixteen of the prisoners were hanged at San Angel on September 10, four at Mixcoac on the eleventh, and thirty were hanged on September 13 at Tacubaya within sight of the assault taking place against the Castle of Chapultepec. "Colonel Harvey . . . told them that they should live long enough to see the American flag hoisted upon the battlements of that fortress and no longer. In a few minutes our colors were raised, and after it was shown to them they were launched into eternity."¹¹ In connection with the executions at San Angel the clergy of the village are mentioned as pleading for the lives of the prisoners only to be told by General Twiggs that the crime for which they were being punished could be laid at the door of Ampudía, Arista and Santa Anna who had seduced the wretches from their duty. Seven of the sixteen hanged at San Angel were Catholics and their bodies were turned over to the priests for burial in consecrated ground.¹²

Many statements have been made to the effect that the San Patricio Battalion was Irish and Catholic. Support is given to this statement by the name of the battalion, by its battalion flag described as "Saint Patrick, the harp of Erin and the Shamrock upon a green field," and by the name of its commanding officer, John Riley. Among many examples of such accusations is that of the *New Age*: "Another outstanding example of Roman Catholic disloyalty . . . occurred at the battle of Churubusco though modern historians are painfully silent concerning it."¹³ General Silas Casey, writing in the *Christian World*, stated that obstinate resistance offered to the Americans at Churubusco by the Mexican army "was caused by the presence of more

¹⁰ General Order 283, September 11, 1847, U. S. Arch., AUS, Office of the Adj. Gen., Mexican War, Army of Occupation, Miscellaneous Papers, R. G. 94, Box 7. This order concerned only the prisoners tried at Tacubaya. General Order 281 provided for branding on the cheek for the prisoners tried at San Angel, and from contemporary accounts it would appear that all the prisoners suffering the punishment of branding were treated in the latter fashion.

¹¹ *The American Star*, September 20, 1847.

¹² *Ibid.*; G. T. M. Davis, *Autobiography* (New York, 1891), pp. 226-229.

¹³ *New Age*, October, 1929, p. 608, as quoted in McEniry, *op. cit.*, p. 75.

than two hundred deserters from the American army composed mostly of Catholic Irish, who had been persuaded to desert by the instigation of the Catholic priests."¹⁴ *The Know-Nothing Almanac for 1856* commented that the battalion was "composed of Irishmen, deserters from our ranks," while the Reverend William Butler makes the flat statement that "the sectarian treachery of the Irish deserters might have proved to be overwhelming."¹⁵ The records of the War Department contain many letters from American Catholics, sensitive to these statements, inquiring into the truth of such accusations, and invariably the official reply was given that ". . . no report is found on file or of record showing the nativity or the religious denomination of these or of any deserters from the Army during that war."¹⁶

Sister Blanche Marie McEniry in her excellent chapter on the San Patricio Battalion assigns two motives to the desertion of its members from the American army—religious and pecuniary. It would only be candid to admit that the Mexican clergy undoubtedly made some efforts to persuade the Catholics among the invading forces to desert, but these efforts appear for lack of evidence to the contrary to have been unsuccessful. Equally unimportant, it would appear from the records, was the pecuniary motive, despite the many offers made to the American soldiers of land and money and good treatment. The true reason or reasons for the desertion may never be fully known, but the closest approach to the truth may be had through a thorough examination and analysis of the actual court-martial records of the prisoners, admitting always that each prisoner, with his life in jeopardy, put the best possible face on his reasons for appearing in a Mexican uniform bearing arms against his former comrades-in-arms.

Forty-three cases were tried by the court-martial at Tacubaya and twenty-nine by that sitting at San Angel. Each case was considered separately, the accused being given full opportunity to defend himself against the charge, common to all, "desertion to the enemy." Of this number four pleaded guilty, while the remainder pleaded not guilty. An examination of the records demonstrates the wide vari-

¹⁴ *Christian World*, XXIV (1873), 47, as quoted in William Butler, *Mexico In Transition* (New York, 1892), p. 93.

¹⁵ *Know-Nothing Almanac for 1856*, p. 18, as quoted in McEniry, *op. cit.*, p. 79; Butler, *op. cit.*, pp. 93-94.

¹⁶ Several letters of inquiry and the replies thereto are found in U. S. Arch., AUS, Office of the Adj. Gen., 27932-1895. Typical of the statements made is that of Daniel Maloney in a letter to the Adjutant General dated March 1, 1896, in which he stated that the desertion of the San Patricios did not prove the disloyalty of Catholics any more than "the treason of Benedict Arnold proves the disloyalty of Protestants."

ance in time of desertion, the earliest being that of James Kelley, Private, Company C, Fourth Infantry, who deserted at Corpus Christi, Texas, on November 15, 1845, and the latest being that of Lewis Prefier, Company C, Fourth Infantry, who left the American army on August 10, 1847, and who was surrendered by Mexican authorities on August 26.¹⁷ The majority of the deserters appear to have gone over to the Mexicans at two places, at Monterrey in late 1846 when Taylor's reduced forces were undergoing the boredom of occupation duty, and at Puebla in the early summer of 1847 when Scott paused to regroup his forces before pushing on to the capital.

As to the racial composition of the San Patricio Battalion no categorical statement can be made for, as has been indicated, no records were kept. However, of those tried, twenty-four would appear to have Irish surnames, although it is obviously impossible to be accurate concerning surnames, which are reliable for proving neither nativity nor religious persuasion. Only one prisoner identified himself to the court during the trial as an Irishman while another proclaimed himself a Scot.¹⁸ Some of the prisoners attempted to claim status as British subjects, declaring that the British consul in Mexico aided them with payments of twenty-five cents to a dollar a day until his funds for such purposes were exhausted. Many of the prisoners were of German extraction. In fact, two of the German deserters required interpreters as they knew no English.¹⁹

The court records are equally vague as to any religious motives that may have persuaded the prisoners to desert. Only two indicated that a priest had anything to do with their desertion, one stating that he was taken prisoner by a priest and two lancers while another stated that he was wounded and was taken to a Mexican hospital by a Dutch priest where he fell into enemy hands.²⁰ Of all the prisoners only one mentioned that a pecuniary consideration had anything to do with his desertion, pleading that conditions were so bad in the House of Correction where he was confined that when

¹⁷ Kelley, Case 20, U. S. Arch., AUS, J. A. G. O., EE525; Prefier, Case 41, U. S. Arch., AUS, J. A. G. O., EE525.

¹⁸ Thomas Riley, Case 3, U. S. Arch., AUS, J. A. G. O., EE531; William A. Wallace, Case 4, U. S. Arch., AUS, J. A. G. O., EE531.

¹⁹ Frederick Fogel, Case 1, and John Klager, Case 2, U. S. Arch., AUS, J. A. G. O., EE525.

²⁰ Auguste Morstadt, Case 16, U. S. Arch., AUS, J. A. G. O., EE525; John A. Myers, Case 8, U. S. Arch., AUS, J. A. G. O., EE531.

the Mexicans offered him two hundred dollars and a new suit of clothes to join the San Patricios he took it to protect his life.²¹

What, then, was the principal excuse offered by the members of the San Patricio Battalion for their desertion? It was neither religion nor monetary reward; indeed, it may be summed up in one word—drink! Of the seventy-two prisoners tried by the two courts, thirteen of whom offered no defense at all, thirty used the excuse that they wandered away from the American lines while in a state of intoxication and were subsequently captured by the Mexicans. Such words as “druken frolic” appear frequently in the records. The few others offered widely varied excuses, some stating succinctly that they had decided to go home and were on their way when captured by the Mexicans.

Perhaps a clearer picture may be obtained of the proceedings of the trials and of the history and motives of the members of the San Patricio Battalion if a few actual cases are examined. Certainly the outstanding figure in the trials was that of the commanding officer of the battalion, Colonel John Riley, formerly a sergeant in Company K, Fifth Infantry.²² The official records show that Riley enlisted as a regular at Fort Mackinac, Michigan, on September 4, 1845. His earlier history is somewhat obscure, although it is believed that he was a deserter from the Sixty-sixth Regiment of the British army, and that he had fled his regiment when it was stationed in Canada. It is certain that prior to his enlistment in the American army he worked for two years on the Michigan farm of Charles M. O'Malley, who reported to General Scott that Riley gave him more trouble than all his other workers, particularly as O'Malley was the local justice of the peace and Riley “was always at variance with everyone he had anything to do with.”²³ Riley deserted the American army at Matamoras on April 12, 1846, having received a pass to attend church within the town and never having returned. Captain M. E. Merrill of Riley's company testified in Riley's behalf, after the prisoner had pleaded not guilty to the charge of desertion, declaring that he had been in the company about eight months and during that time had never been subject to disciplinary action. Another prisoner, H. R. Parker, testified that Riley had been instrumental in procuring good

²¹ Frederick Fogel, Case 1, *doc. cit.*

²² John Riley, Case 27, U. S. Arch., AUS, J. A. G. O., EE531. Also listed as Reily and O'Riley.

²³ Charles M. O'Malley to General Scott, n. d., U. S. Arch., AUS, Office of the Adj. Gen., Mexican War, Army of Occupation, Misc. Papers, R. G. 94, Box 7.

treatment for American prisoners many of whom were left to forage for themselves after being taken well behind the Mexican lines, although Parker was forced by the court to admit that Riley later told such Americans as came in contact with him that they could not find enough to eat unless they joined the battalion.

In his own behalf Riley testified that he was captured at Matamoras and taken before General Ampudía to whom he stated through an interpreter that he was a prisoner-of-war and not a deserter and as such was confined in the barracks for nineteen days being paid six cents a day and provided only with bread and water. He complained to Ampudía that he was a British subject and should be treated as such. He was at various times closely questioned about the composition of Taylor's army, but refused to answer. On May 30 he was offered a commission as a lieutenant in the Mexican army, but refused to take up arms against his "brothers and countrymen." Riley was threatened twice with shooting as an alien to both nations engaged in the conflict, and finally decided to save his life by consenting to serve in the Mexican army. When asked if he would serve as a private soldier in the Mexican forces, Riley told the court that he had replied that "I have never served as a private soldier in my lifetime with the exception of seven months and seven days in the American ranks, and that I would rather serve as an officer against my brothers and countrymen than to suffer death." Riley declared that he had attempted to rejoin the American army at Monterrey, but failed in his attempt to do so. The court listened to Riley's account without much sympathy and condemned him to death by hanging.²⁴ Riley, along with the others whose sentences were commuted by General Scott to lashing and branding, was saved by a strict interpretation of the law, for as they had deserted the American army before a formal declaration of war was made by Congress the death penalty was deemed improper. *The American Star*, an English-language newspaper published in Mexico as a semi-official organ during the American occupation, stated that although Riley could not be hanged "all that could be awarded him was well delivered," and that "he did not stand that operation [the lashing by a Mexican muleteer] with the stoicism we expected."²⁵

Riley was not saved from his punishment despite the effort made in his behalf by a group of "citizens of the United States and

²⁴ John Riley, Case 27, *doc. cit.*

²⁵ *The American Star*, September 20, 1847.

foreigners of different nations in the City of Mexico” headed by James Humphreys, a British subject and a surgeon in the Mexican army. This group signed a petition asking for Riley’s release or at least his protection from the anger of the American troops “as his life is most in danger.” The petition went on to declare that Riley had been ordered by the Mexican officials to arrest all United States citizens in Mexico City so that they could be banished from the country, and he had deliberately failed to carry out his orders.²⁶

Riley was among those prisoners confined in the ruins of Castle of Chapultepec during the remainder of the occupation, and his name is included among those of the San Patricio Battalion whom General Scott ordered discharged as the army prepared to leave Mexico in 1848. Riley’s subsequent career is as obscure as his early one. He is reported in one case as having later filed suit against the United States in the United States District Court at Cincinnati for five thousand dollars damages for having been flogged and branded. The court found against Riley in short order and made him pay the costs of the trial.²⁷ In another case it is stated that after peace was restored between Mexico and the United States Riley returned to the Mexican army where he was given the rank of colonel, and within two months became involved in a conspiracy to overthrow the government, for which he was imprisoned and later expelled from Mexico.²⁸

Although the account of Riley’s life can be told in more detail than that of the others, it is by no means typical of the stories told by the majority of the prisoners during their trials. Many of them spoke of talking personally with Santa Anna. Patrick Dalton, who was Riley’s lieutenant in the San Patricio Battalion, stated to the court that the Mexican leader had requested him to take a post with the artillery and that he had served in that branch until the infantry battalion had been formed.²⁹ Santa Anna was reported by another deserter, Abraham Fitzpatrick, to have offered him a commission in the Mexican army which he refused.³⁰ The court was told by Andrew Nolan: “Then I came to Mexico and was brought before Santa Anna. He asked me if I was agoing to soldier. I told

²⁶ Petition, n. d., U. S. Arch., AUS, Office of the Adj. Gen., Mexican War, Army of Occupation, Misc. Papers, R. G. 94, Box 7.

²⁷ J. Jacob Oswald, *Notes of the Mexican War* (Philadelphia, 1885), pp. 426-427.

²⁸ Memorandum, n. d., U. S. Arch., AUS, Office of the Adj. Gen., 27932-1895.

²⁹ Patrick Dalton, Case 6, U. S. Arch., AUS, J. A. G. O., EE531.

³⁰ Abraham Fitzpatrick, Case 43, U. S. Arch., AUS, J. A. G. O., EE525. Lieutenant James Longstreet spoke in Fitzpatrick’s defense at the trial.

him no. I was then sent to the soldiers' quarters and Colonel Moreno told me that everyone took arms. I told him that I did not want to soldier. I was kept confined in the quarters and did not get a bite to eat for three or four days—so they forced me to put on the uniform.” Nolan mentions Colonel Moreno who appears to have been the Mexican officer in charge of recruitment and general supervision over the “Legion of Strangers.”³¹ Many of the prisoners ascribed to his brutality the fact that they were found in arms in Mexican uniforms. One stated that “Moreno was the principal one to entice men to enter the Mexican service,” while another stated that Moreno had compelled him to put on a Mexican uniform “by starvation and abuse not knowing any other recourse to turn to.”³² Another accused Moreno of breaking his collarbone with a rifle to enforce enlistment in the “Legion of Strangers.”³³ Colonel Moreno was also successful, according to a number of accounts, in persuading American soldiers to put on Mexican uniforms to escape attack on the street. Several stated that they had been severely stoned in the streets of Mexico City, and had put on a Mexican uniform as the only escape from that treatment.³⁴ Others stated that they put on a Mexican uniform merely to acquire some clothing for, as one put it, they had clothing “scarce fit to cover our nakedness.”³⁵ In one account of the battle of Churubusco it is stated that Colonel Moreno was among the prisoners captured, but there is no subsequent record which includes his name.³⁶

Some of the prisoners put forth the argument that they had been lured into the San Patricio Battalion under the false representation that it was merely to perform escort duties, conducting women and children, especially foreigners, out of the danger areas. As such the “Legion of Strangers” attracted some non-American foreign members in the legion. Two of these men, Welden and O’Connor, British subjects resident in Mexico, were captured along with the Americans at Churubusco and turned a sort of state’s evidence in the trials, thus

³¹ Andrew Nolan, Case 22, U. S. Arch., AUS, J. A. G. O., EE531. “Legion of Strangers” was the term most frequently employed during the trial for the battalion of deserters.

³² William Oathouse, Case 18, U. S. Arch., AUS, J. A. G. O., EE531; Edward McHerron, Case 20, U. S. Arch., AUS, J. A. G. O., EE531.

³³ Marquis T. Frantiers, Case 6, U. S. Arch., AUS, J. A. G. O., EE525.

³⁴ E. g., Roger Hogan, Case 32, U. S. Arch., AUS, J. A. G. O., EE525, who stated that he could not go into the streets in American clothing “without being pelted with stones or beaten and at risk of being killed”

³⁵ Alexander McKee, Case 26, U. S. Arch., AUS, J. A. G. O., EE531.

³⁶ Judah, *Journal, doc. cit.*, entry for August 21, 1847.

enabling the courts to record firsthand evidence of the membership in the San Patricios in each individual case.³⁷

The fate of the San Patricio prisoners was forcefully brought to the attention of the Army of Occupation by General Scott in General Order 296, dated September 22, 1847. After warning the army against straggling and drunkenness, General Scott went on to state that the Mexicans would attempt “to entice our gallant Roman Catholic soldiers who have done so much honor to our colors, to desert” Then, referring directly to the San Patricio Battalion, General Scott continued: “Let all our soldiers, Protestant and Catholic, remember the fate of the deserters taken at Churubusco. These deluded wretches were also promised money and land; but the Mexican government, by every sort of usage, drove them to take arms against the country and flag they had *voluntarily* sworn to support, and next placed them in front of the battle—in positions from which they could not possibly escape the conquering valor of our glorious ranks. After every effort of the General-in-Chief to save by judicious discrimination, as many of these miserable convicts as possible, fifty have paid for their treachery by an ignominious death on the gallows!”³⁸ The last reference to the San Patricios in the records of the Army of Occupation is contained in General Order 116, dated June 1, 1848, which states in part that “the prisoners in confinement at the Citadel known as the San Patricio prisoners will be immediately discharged” and then proceeds to name the sixteen men so confined.³⁹

Can a final conclusion be drawn from the court-martial records of the members of the San Patricio Battalion? Unless further light on the subject may be thrown by documents existent in Mexico,⁴⁰ it would appear that these records do indeed offer the final source of information concerning this controversial question of desertion from the American army. These records fully support the conclusion reached by Sister Blanche Marie McEniry that the battalion was not exclusively Catholic nor Irish although it did contain elements of both.

³⁷ Welden's name is also given as Wilton in the records, which also indicate that both Welden and O'Connor testified together at the trials at San Angel for a day or so after which Welden appeared at the trials at Tacubaya while O'Connor remained at San Angel.

³⁸ General Order 296, September 22, 1847, U. S. Arch., AUS, Office of the Adj. Gen., Mexican War, Army of Occupation, Misc. Papers, R. G. 94, Box 7.

³⁹ General Order 116, June 1, 1848, U. S. Arch., AUS, Office of the Adj. Gen., Mexican War, Army of Occupation, Misc. Papers, R. G. 94, Box 7.

⁴⁰ The author has a rather vague recollection of seeing one or two items relating to this matter while doing research in another subject in the Archivo General de la Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores.

Her conclusion that the battalion was largely European by birth is not fully borne out by the records, although many of the prisoners were undoubtedly not native Americans. Further she states, "As to the Catholics who found their way into the company, they were not there because of their religion, but in spite of it." No evidence was presented at the trials which would lead one to believe that attempts by the Mexican leaders or clergy to entice Catholics within the American army met with any marked success, nor did the promises of good treatment and the reward of plots of land appear to have much effect. The records of the courts-martial reveal a rather sordid story of a group of men who individually and for various reasons, the predominant one offered being drunkenness, wandered away from the American lines only to fall into the hands of the Mexicans. As prisoners of the Mexicans these men were subjected to all varieties of pressures and inducements to force or attract them into the "Legion of Strangers." For some, such as Riley and Dalton, it was the promise of food to satisfy their hunger, or clothing, even a Mexican uniform, to cover their nakedness. Some sought the protection offered by the wearing of the uniforms to avoid attack in the streets where apparently the American prisoners were permitted to wander, while others appear to have been forced into the San Patricios by the threats or actual administration of physical violence. As far as the records of the trial permit us to fathom their motives, it can be firmly established that neither a feeling of religious confraternity nor the prospect of pecuniary reward was the principal cause for either the original desertion from the American army or the subsequent joining of the battalion by any of the San Patricios. As a whole, the San Patricios appear to have been a group of bewildered and ignorant men, for the most part incapable of realizing, until faced with the prospect of expiating their crime with their lives, the enormity of the crime they committed when they donned enemy uniforms and took up arms against the forces from which they had deserted. That they fought under a shamrock banner and carried the name of St. Patrick was due to their commanding officer, Riley, and not to either the national origins or religious persuasion of more than a few of them. With the answers to the principal questions concerning their motives offered here, the story of the San Patricio deserters in the Mexican War may, perhaps, cease to be a subject of further controversy among Catholic and Protestant writers, and be relegated to its proper position as a footnote to American history.

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