Official Military Reports
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the story to the emperor, who told it to the King of France, and soon Europe was enjoying the situation.

The coming of Fox into power and the recognition of the independence of the colonies paved the way for peace. Before it was finally concluded the empress was invited twice more to intervene, once conjointly with the King of Prussia, but in the end there was no need of her services.

In refusing to recognize an American diplomatic agent before a definitive treaty of peace was made, Russia meant no offense to the United States. During the whole time that Dana was at St. Petersburg the empress was still regarded as a mediatrix. To have received him officially would have compromised Russia, and wounded the pride of England without in the least advancing the interest of the United States. Whatever could be granted unofficially was offered. American ships and merchants were invited to come, and were assured of as much protection and as many opportunities as those of any other nation. Russia demanded that Dana's credentials should bear a date posterior to the recognition of independence of the colonies by England. This point America could not concede, and out of regard for England and her position as mediatrix the empress could not do otherwise but insist. It was best to put off official relations until some future time.

FRANK A. GOLDER.

OFFICIAL MILITARY REPORTS[1]

IN regard to the trustworthiness of diplomatic papers a wholesome degree of skepticism prevails, but historical documents of another class are perhaps viewed by many with too much awe. The standard of honor among soldiers is no doubt very high, and, perhaps for that reason, it seems to be supposed quite generally that a faithful study of the military reports prepares one sufficiently to write the history of a campaign. This is by no means the case, however; and possibly a few remarks based upon our war with Mexico may be thought useful.

Both intentional and accidental misrepresentations occur in the reports, and the former are of two kinds—the legitimate and the illegitimate. It was legitimate for a general, bearing in mind that probably his statements would soon become known, to consider their effect on the officers concerned, the army in general, the gov-

[1] As this paper is merely suggestive, there seems to be no need of supporting it with proofs. These, moreover, if presented in full, would nearly double the length of what is expected by the editor to be very brief; and, finally, it is the writer's intention to bring them forward before very long in another place.

ernment, the public at home, the enemy, and the world at large. It was desirable to satisfy, as nearly as this could be done, the demands of the officers, and these were not always reasonable or just; to maintain the spirit of the troops, their confidence in their leaders and their hope of triumph; to gratify the authorities and the people, and thus ensure a hearty support of the war; to mould public opinion abroad, in order to maintain the honor of the nation, excite an inspiring reflex influence, and strengthen the financial credit of the country; and, finally, it was necessary to conceal from the enemy whatever facts could be useful or encouraging, and represent the army as invincible. To gain these ends more or less misrepresentation was needed.

Among the illegitimate sources of intentional error was the desire of officers and generals to be regarded as abler and more heroic than in fact they were; and Trist, the negotiator of our treaty of peace, described this wish on the part of many volunteer leaders as almost a mania and undeniably a very serious evil. There is ample reason to believe the substantial accuracy of his charge, General Pillow's case ranking probably at the head in this respect. A strong rivalry existed between regulars and volunteers, and this could hardly fail to affect a general's views, if he chanced to command both. There were friends to please and enemies to punish. An officer sometimes entertained a special desire to compliment a regiment that he had formerly commanded; and every kind of influence except a direct offer of money was apparently used to obtain favorable mention from the reporting generals. As for the unintentional mistakes, they arose primarily, of course, from errors of observation and memory, a lack of data, and misinformation in the statements of subordinates. No commander can see everything in an affair of any importance, or remember all that he sees.

General Taylor received great credit for his reports, but they were written, in fact, by the assistant adjutant-general of his army, W. W. S. Bliss, who was a finished artist in discreetly omitting and sagaciously emphasizing. Bliss never lied and never told the truth, one may almost say. At the battle of Palo Alto there was an opportunity to rout the Mexicans completely by a decisive bayonet charge, but the opportunity was not improved. This is the more surprising because, only the day before, Taylor had formally notified his army that the infantry, which made up almost the whole of it, would be expected to depend in the coming battle upon the cold steel; yet the report makes no reference to this mystery. The explanation is that Taylor, contrary to the advice of his best officers,

had unnecessarily insisted upon taking with him a large train of loaded wagons, and he feared that, should he charge the Mexican infantry, Arista's heavy force of cavalry—which had already made one lunge at the wagons—might be able, aided perhaps by a portion of the foot, to get at them. In reporting upon the battle of the next day—Resaca de la Palma, as we call it—Bliss failed entirely to explain how the American victory came to pass. Perhaps he did not know, and perhaps he thought it better to focus public attention upon the events directly supervised by Taylor. The chief operations that occurred at Monterey under the general's immediate orders can best be described by the unscientific but expressive word "mess"; but the official accounts do not reveal this fact. With reference to Buena Vista Braxton Bragg, one of the principal heroes, stated to a correspondent that the truth would never become known except from private letters; and he did quite a little himself to bring it out in that way.

Scott for his part made both the unintentional and the legitimate errors and probably invaded the other field also. He stated once in general orders: "In the reports of battles and other operations, in the face of the enemy, omissions and mistakes have been common, and, in fact, with the best intentions, unavoidable." His inspector-general said once that had the commander-in-chief told the full truth in his account of the battle at Cerro Gordo about Pillow's proceedings, the military career of that gentleman would have ended; and certainly it should have ended. After the capture of the City of Mexico Scott failed to give Worth credit for having entered the capital on September 13, and thus left Quitman to enjoy that distinction, though Worth's report lay before him. This was probably a mere oversight; but it helped to make trouble between the commander-in-chief and his able lieutenant. The list of errors could be extended almost indefinitely, but these cases are numerous enough to illustrate the principle. Our practical conclusion is that one must obtain trustworthy information from other sources, and with this correct and supplement the official statements. It may be well to add that reports are not always correctly printed—even by the government. Those relating to the battles of September 8 and 13, 1847, for instance, contain fifty-eight slips worth noting.

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PALMERSTON AND LOUIS NAPOLEON

ONE of the most familiar episodes in English political history during the nineteenth century is the dismissal of Palmerston from