

= Charles A. May =

Charles Augustus May (1818 ? 1864) was an American officer of the United States Army who served in the Mexican War and other campaigns over a 25 @-@ year career . He is best known for successfully leading a cavalry charge against Mexican artillery at the Battle of Resaca de la Palma .

May spent most of his career in the Second Regiment of Dragoons , but also had a brief stint in the First Regiment of Dragoons . As a lieutenant , he participated in the Second Seminole War , where he was responsible for the capture of an important tribal chief . During the Mexican War , he commanded a squadron during Zachary Taylor 's expedition , and saw action in the Battles of Palo Alto , Resaca de la Palma , Monterrey , and Buena Vista . He distinguished himself in those actions and was eventually promoted to the rank of brevet colonel , with a permanent rank of major . May later served in various parts of the American frontier , including during the Bleeding Kansas crisis .

He resigned his commission in 1861 and took a job as a railroad executive in New York City , but died three years later . His name is included in a verse that commemorates Mexican War heroes from Maryland in the state song , " Maryland , My Maryland " .

= = Biography = =

= = = Early life = = =

May was born in Washington , D.C. on August 9 , 1818 , the son of a doctor in a prominent Baltimore family . He received a civil education , but applied for a commission directly to President Andrew Jackson , who was impressed by his soldierly appearance , bearing , and skill at horsemanship . In 1836 , he entered the United States Army as a second lieutenant in the Second Regiment of Dragoons . During the Second Seminole War , May was responsible for the capture of King Philip (Ee @-@ mat @-@ la) , the Seminole nation 's principal chieftain . He was promoted from first lieutenant to captain on February 2 , 1841 .

= = = Mexican War service = = =

On March 8 , 1846 , after a final attempt to pressure Mexico to settle on a boundary for Texas , Secretary of War William L. Marcy ordered Brigadier General Zachary Taylor to move his army , which included May 's dragoon squadron , to the Rio Grande . Taylor 's destination was the river 's north bank , directly opposite the Mexican town of Matamoros , which stood at a natural choke @-@ point and controlled access to well @-@ traveled routes to the south . When Taylor refused to leave the region , Mexican cavalry ambushed a dragoon detachment under Captain Seth B. Thornton on April 25 , 1846 , which officially commenced hostilities . On May 8 , 1846 , the two main forces met at the Battle of Palo Alto , where May 's squadron was held in reserve and mounted an unsuccessful cavalry charge .

= = = Battle of Resaca de la Palma = = =

Searching for more favorable terrain , the Mexican commander led his army five miles to the south . On May 9 , 1846 , the pursuing American element met them at the Battle of Resaca de la Palma . General Taylor 's force received heavy fire from a battery of eight Mexican artillery pieces , which halted its advance . Taylor ordered Captain May to lead his unit , a squadron consisting of D and E companies of the Second Dragoons , to silence the enemy guns . May told his men to " Remember your Regiment and follow your officers ! " Today , the phrase is the unofficial motto of the 2nd Cavalry Regiment , which traces its lineage to May 's unit .

He led his cavalry squadron on the charge and , despite heavy casualties , secured the objective and silenced the guns before being forced to withdraw due to a lack of infantry support . The dragoons also captured one of the Mexican commanders , General Rómulo Díaz de la Vega , on the

gun line . With the Mexican artillery out of action , the 8th Infantry Regiment and 5th Infantry Regiment were able to maneuver forward and eventually drove the enemy from their positions . Of approximately eighty men , the dragoons lost one lieutenant , seven privates , and twenty @-@ eight horses , with an additional ten privates wounded . Colonel David E. Twiggs , the regimental commander , commented that " After the unsurpassed , if not unequalled charge of Captain May 's squadron , the enemy was unable to fire a gun . " In his official after @-@ action report , Taylor wrote that " The charge of cavalry against the enemy 's batteries on the 9th , was gallantly led by Captain May , and had complete success . " After the battle , May received two brevets to the rank of lieutenant colonel .

= = = = Battle of Monterrey = = = =

After Resaca de la Palma , Mexican forces were cleared from the Texan side of the Rio Grande , but additional operations were required to force Mexico to agree to the border . The Mexican commander , General Mariano Arista , withdrew his forces to Linares , with Taylor in pursuit for sixty miles before returning to Fort Brown for reinforcements . He then marched against Monterrey . The heavily fortified city had a 10 @,@ 000 @-@ man garrison under Arista 's replacement , General Pedro de Ampudia , but its supply line running south to Saltillo was vulnerable . Lacking the heavy artillery needed for a siege , Taylor planned a double envelopment , with one division executing a turning movement to cut the supply line and attack from the west and south , and his other two divisions assaulting the north side of the city .

May 's squadron was attached as a direct @-@ reporting unit to the newly promoted General Twiggs ' 1st Texas Division , which was to be committed to the north side of Monterrey . On September 21 , Taylor launched his attack on the city , but failed to synchronize his two forces . Poor Mexican leadership allowed the Americans to avert disaster , and after some intense urban fighting , General Ampudia offered Taylor an eight @-@ week ceasefire that was highly favorable to the Mexicans . Taylor accepted , which caused President James K. Polk , furious at the agreement , to transfer most of his forces to Winfield Scott .

= = = = Battle of Buena Vista = = = =

On February 20 , 1847 , May led a reconnaissance force that included an attached company of Texas Rangers under Major Ben McCulloch and artillery section of six @-@ pounder guns under Captain J.M. Washington . During the mission , the advanced element encountered small units of Mexican General José Vicente Miñón 's cavalry brigade and spotted a dust cloud to the south , presumably produced by a much larger force . Lieutenant Samuel Sturgis was captured during a reconnoiter before May 's force caught up with the advanced element , spotted more Mexican lancers , and took up defensive positions . After scouting parties failed to locate the main enemy force , May 's unit returned to camp to report to General Taylor . After riding 80 miles in 24 hours , the only fire encountered was from the American sentries as May 's force re @-@ entered friendly lines .

Three days later , on February 23 , 1847 , after having moved to better defensive terrain , General Taylor 's force was met by General Antonio López de Santa Anna 's numerically superior army just south of Saltillo for the Battle of Buena Vista . May 's squadron was reinforced with Troops A and E of the First Dragoons and a squadron of Arkansas cavalry under the command of Captain Albert Pike . The American line was thrown into jeopardy when Colonel Bowles of the Second Indiana Regiment ordered his unit to retreat for reasons unknown . With skillful artillery support from Washington 's guns , the situation was restored by the Second Illinois Regiment and rallied Indianans . At that point , Taylor arrived with May 's dragoons and the First Mississippi Rifles under Colonel Jefferson Davis , which halted General Anastasio Torrejón 's cavalry . Miñón 's brigade of 1 @,@ 500 Mexican lancers flanked the American line and assaulted the supply trains guarded by the Kentucky and Arkansas cavalry , and in the process killed former governor Colonel Archibald Yell . The dragoons counterattacked Miñón 's flank and routed the Mexican lancers . May was wounded

during the action . On May 24 , 1848 , he was promoted from brevet lieutenant colonel to brevet colonel for his gallantry , backdated to the day of the battle .

= = = Later years = = =

After the Mexican War , May was posted to several different parts of the American frontier , including California , New Mexico , and Texas . He served with the First Regiment of Dragoons in the Kansas Territory during its violent abolitionist clashes . On March 3 , 1855 , he was promoted to major and exchanged positions with another officer to return to his old unit , the Second Dragoons . On October 27 , 1855 , the regiment marched to Texas , under the command of Albert Sidney Johnson .

May resigned his commission as a brevet colonel on April 20 , 1861 , and moved to New York City , where he served as the vice president of the Eighth Avenue Railroad . He died there on December 24 , 1864 at the age of 46 . He had a history of heart problems and poor health dating back to at least 1850 .

May was described variously as a courageous , sometimes reckless , and unpopular officer . Samuel Chamberlain , who served in the First Dragoons and wrote scathing descriptions of most of his contemporaries , was most critical of May . Chamberlain believed May had received unjustified praise for his actions at Resaca de la Palma and referred to him as the " Murat of America " and an " ass in the lion 's skin " . In 1861 , James Ryder Randall referred to " dashing May " alongside other Mexican War heroes from Maryland in a poem that later became the state song , " Maryland , My Maryland " .