

*The Influence of Antoine Henri de Jomini
on Winfield Scott's Campaign
in the Mexican War*

JAMES W. POHL*

THE NAME OF THE BARON ANTOINE HENRI DE JOMINI, IF FAMILIAR to military historians, is less so to those who specialize in other areas. A Swiss by birth and nationality, he went to Paris to study banking, which had been his family's occupation for generations. During his stay in that city he was caught up in the excitement of the Napoleonic wars; and shortly thereafter he forsook a career in finance and entered the French army. He proved to be a staff officer of considerable skill and soon became a competent assistant to Michel Ney, one of the more prominent marshals of France. After a relatively brief stay with the marshal, he moved on to serve Napoleon himself. In 1813, however, before disaster befell *La Grande Armée*, he quit the French command, in part because of unfair treatment at the hands of Pierre Alexandre Berthier, Napoleon's chief of staff. He then enrolled in the service of Czar Alexander. In this latter capacity, he reformed much of the Russian military establishment, bringing into existence both the War College and the General Staff.¹

Jomini was also a prolific writer—altogether he wrote twenty-seven volumes. His chief interest was recent military history, thus his predilection for the wars of Frederick the Great, the French Revolution, and Napoleon. His earliest work, *Traité des Grandes Opérations Militaire* (hereafter called *Treatise on Grand Military Operations*), was basically an examination of the campaigns of Frederick. The early volumes contained a number of flattering, but accurate, analogies between the campaigns of Frederick and those of Napoleon; and it was their publication which first attracted the emperor's attention. The young Swiss officer was only twenty-five years old

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¹A brief synopsis of Jomini's life may be found in Crane Brinton, Gordon A. Craig, and Felix Gilbert, "Jomini," *Makers of Modern Strategy: Military Thought from Machiavelli to Hitler*, ed. Edward Mead Earle (Princeton, 1971), 77-92.

at the time. It was in his maturity, however, that Jomini produced the work which is his monument and which has been called "the greatest military textbook of the nineteenth century"²—*Précis de l'Art de la Guerre* (hereafter called *The Art of War*).

Jomini's authority extended to America, and by the time of the Civil War, the hierarchy of the United States army was unquestionably under his influence. T. Harry Williams has pointed out that the United States Military Academy produced the overwhelming majority of commanders in the sixty biggest battles of the war.³ Furthermore, these commanders had been instructed both at West Point and beyond by the principal purveyors of Jominian doctrine—Dennis Hart Mahan, Henry W. Halleck, William J. Hardee, Silas Casey, George B. McClellan, and others. In fact, many of these educators also took part in the generalship of the war.

The consensus of opinion of what can fairly be called the American school of military historians is that by following the doctrines of Jomini, the commanders were influenced for ill. Such scholars as Professor Williams, David Donald, Russell F. Weigley, and Grady McWhiney maintain that a dedication to Jomini produced conservatism, indecisiveness, and bloodletting. Most of these writers contend that Jomini's rival Carl von Clausewitz held the key to success in modern war but that the German was rarely studied. Professors Williams and Donald, as well as the British military historian, the late John Frederick Charles Fuller, believe that Ulysses S. Grant was the truly great general of that war precisely because he did not follow Jomini. In fact Grant once confessed that he had never read the master, and Donald has held that the general became great because, by reason of his ignorance of Jomini, he became intuitively Clausewitzian.⁴

One will quickly perceive that the American reputation of Jomini rests in large part on the evaluation given to him by those close students of the American Civil War. That war was the most critical as well as the most

²Michael Howard, "Jomini and the Classical Tradition in Military Thought," *The Theory and Practice of War: Essays Presented to Captain B. H. Liddell Hart on His Seventieth Birthday*, ed. Michael Howard (New York, 1966), 14.

³T. Harry Williams, "The Military Leadership of North and South," *Why the North Won the Civil War*, ed. David Donald (Baton Rouge, 1960), 27.

⁴David Donald, *Lincoln Reconsidered: Essays on the Civil War* (2nd ed.; New York, 1966), 102. See also Russell F. Weigley, *Towards an American Army: Military Thought from Washington to Marshall* (New York, 1962), 57, 67, 75-76; J. F. C. Fuller, *The Generalship of Ulysses S. Grant* (London, 1929), 184, 218; Grady McWhiney, "Who Whipped Whom? Confederate Defeat Reexamined," *Civil War History*, XI (March, 1965), 5-27. For a more sympathetic view of Jomini see Liddell Hart, *The Ghost of Napoleon* (New Haven, [1934]), 104-118; Michael Howard, "Jomini and the Classical Tradition of Military Thought," 5-20.

political in the history of the Republic, and no one understood its implications any better than Abraham Lincoln. Lincoln's unyielding certitude as to the political origins of the conflict and his zealous determination to hold the issue of constitutional crisis before the American people led inexorably to his strategic concept of how the war should be waged. To Lincoln's mind, it had to be fought in a way which would result in the quickest victory. Because he was desperate, he believed such victory was possible only through invasion of the enemy's territory and through destruction of the enemy's army. Inevitably, Lincoln's dogma led to the type of warfare which was exemplified by Grant, that foremost soldier-advocate of speed and extermination.

It does not follow, however, that this political conviction produced the best utilization of the armies. It is well known, of course, that most Union generals viewed the situation differently. They saw the conduct of war from the military standpoint and not from the political. This is not to say that Lincoln's military philosophy was incompatible with the political requirements of the age. It may have been very compatible, but *raison d'état* does not necessarily argue for military correctness. Grant may have been the savior of his country, he may have satisfied Lincoln, and he may have been successful; but these circumstances do not alter the possibility that, in purely military terms, a better system of war may well have been available and that system may have been Jominian.

The questions which must be asked are these—why was Jomini held in such high regard by the professional officer corps of the United States army and why did the military textbooks reflect his doctrine? One answer to both questions, of course, is that more than any other military author, he best described the great age of war which had just passed. To most observers before Jomini, Napoleon's movements across Europe seemed erratic. His insistence on columnar attack seemed wasteful in view of the concept of the economy of force. His logistical support too often seemed hampered by what the German theorist, Dietrich von Bülow, would have considered to be overextended communications. Rarely, however, were these criticisms valid. With clarity of thought and facility of pen, Jomini destroyed these misconceptions. Sound tactical and strategic doctrine was, in fact, to be found in Napoleonic warfare.

There is perhaps another reason why Jomini was so highly regarded in the United States, a reason which has yet to be explored by military historians. Jomini was believed because he had been put to the test in an earlier American war, and he had not been found wanting. Furthermore, he had been tested by one whom many considered to be the greatest of all

American generals—Winfield Scott. Intelligent, brave, resourceful, daring, Scott never lost a battle in which he was the commander. Perhaps no other general in the history of modern warfare, save Marlborough, can be credited with such a record.

Scott studied at William and Mary rather than at West Point—at that time (he enrolled in 1805) the Military Academy was still in its infancy, having been founded only three years before. However, despite his lack of formal military training, Scott was a thorough professional. He both collected and read the major works on war.⁵ In the War of 1812, his professional sensibilities were revolted, as Washington's had been before him, at the sight of an ill-trained army. Not only were the militiamen ignorant of the very rudiments of war, but so were many of the regulars. Consequently, on becoming chief of staff of the army of the Niagara frontier, he reorganized the various staff departments in accordance with the prescribed recommendations which were to be found in the *Manuel Général du Service des États-Majors Généraux et Divisionnaires dans les Armées*. This manual, written by an adjutant general in the army of the Republic of France, Paul Thiébault, was basic to staff planning and was widely used in Europe; but it was not well known in American military circles. Scott's use of it is an early example of his proclivity toward the military system of France.⁶

Later, when Scott became a field commander, he trained both officers and men in maneuvers described in a Napoleonic drill manual. According to his principal biographer, he also took a copy of Jomini's *Treatise on Grand Military Operations* with him when he moved to the frontier. It had been published only eight years before. It is small wonder that when the British commander Phineas Riall saw Scott's troops forming at Chippewa, he gave that now famous cry, "Those are regulars, by God!" Regulars they were, and they were trained by a commander who was a disciple of what he was wont to call "the French school."⁷

⁵Scott to Benjamin D. Silliman, November 12, 1844, Winfield Scott Papers, Charles Winslow Elliott Collection (Manuscript and Archives Division, New York Public Library, New York, New York). In this letter Scott thanked Silliman for a copy of *Militia Romanorum*. He wrote that the volume "completes the classical part of my military library."

⁶Winfield Scott, *Memoirs of Lieut.-General Scott* (2 vols.; New York, 1864), I, 87. Thiébault's *Manuel Général du Service des États-Majors* was printed in Paris in 1813. Both Scott and his biographer, Charles W. Elliott, cite this work as Scott's authority. The present author believes, however, that Scott, in fact, used *Manuel des Adjutants-Généraux et des Adjointes Employés dans les États-Majors Divisionnaires des Armées* (Paris, 1800).

⁷Charles Winslow Elliott, *Winfield Scott: The Soldier and the Man* (New York, 1937), 90, 147, 162; Scott to James Monroe, November 19, 1814, Scott Papers (New York Public Library). The reference to "the French school" is from Scott to Monroe.

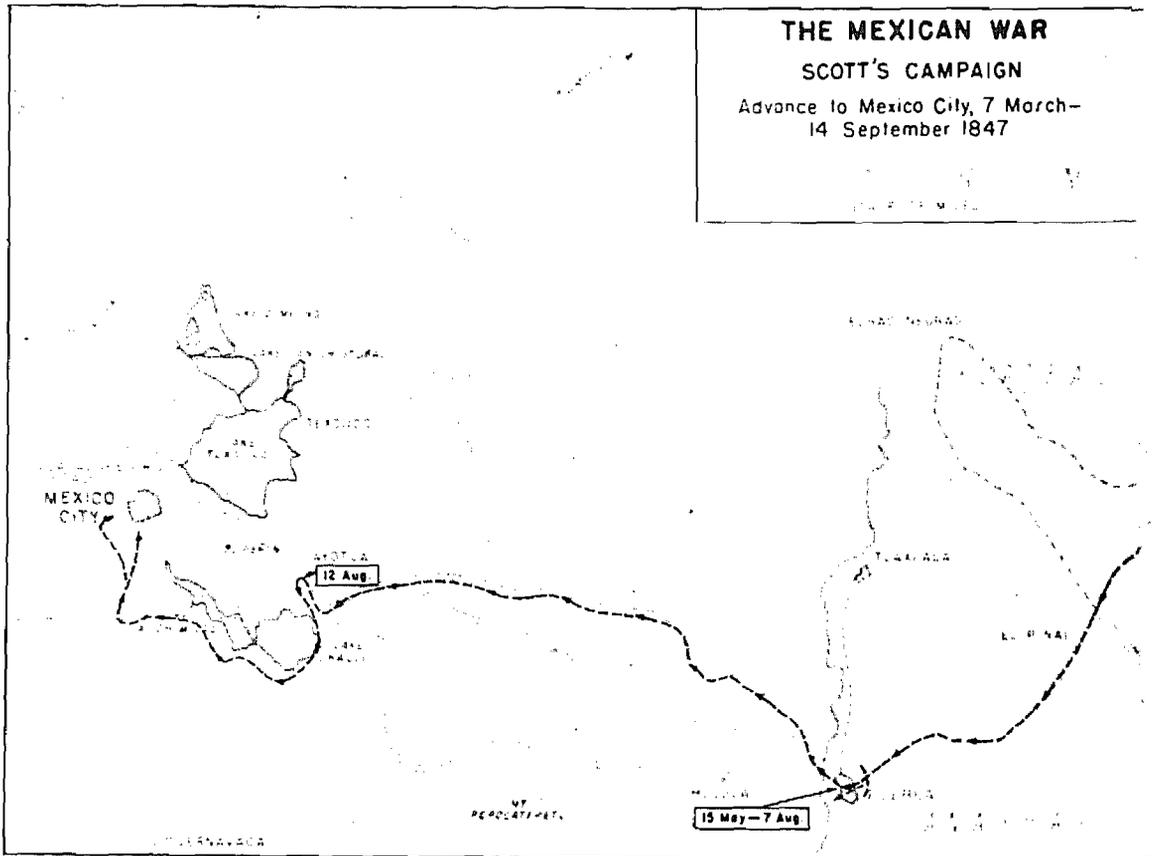
As early as 1809, when he was only a captain of light artillery, he asked the War Department to grant him leave so that he might take a "military tour" of England, Germany, and France; and, even at this early date, he clearly stated his preference for the French system. Such leave was finally granted in 1815, at which time he wrote that he hoped to be an observer of the armies of all nations but stated that his "predilection for France" would place him more often in that camp than in any other. He also expressed his wish to meet some of the legendary marshals. One may further see Scott's francophile tendencies by looking at his manual on infantry tactics which was published for the first time in 1835. It is little wonder that the manual contains subtle allusions to the French, for Scott even wanted to incorporate a number of French military terms into American army usage without benefit of translation.⁸

To appreciate fully Scott's dedication to Jominian principles, however, one must look beyond his written words and toward his generalship during the time that he exercised independent command over a major army. No better example is available than that of Scott's great campaign from Tampico and Vera Cruz into the Valley of Mexico and the capital. Jomini wrote that even before an army took the field in an offensive war, the general should study the theater of operations and make preparations. Scott did just that, spending long hours examining the routes of approach and the probable means of transportation. In a letter to Secretary of War William L. Marcy he wrote, "I have occupied myself, incessantly with the vast preliminary arrangements which can only be made at this place [Washington]." He conferred with the bureau chiefs who were at that time commonly but erroneously known as the General Staff, and he personally supervised the acquisition of horse, foot, and artillery. These preparations further followed Jomini's suggestion that a general should secure the advice and support of staff officers who would look to the army's welfare in the rear.⁹

The Riall quotation is variously given. The phrasing in the text is from Elliott, *Winfield Scott*, 162. In Arthur D. Howden Smith, *Old Fuss and Feathers: The Life and Exploits of Lt.-General Winfield Scott* (New York, 1937), 114, it is rendered, "Damme, these are Regulars!" Scott, himself, says that in addition to the recognition of regulars, Riall "added an oath." *Memoirs*, I, 129.

⁸Scott to William Eustis, July 14, 1809; Scott to Alexander J. Dallas, June 13, 1815 (quotation); Scott to Monroe, June 20, September 28, 1815; Monroe to Scott, June 13, 1816, Scott Papers (New York Public Library); [Winfield Scott], *Infantry Tactics; or Rules for the Exercise and Manoeuvres of the United States Infantry*, Executive Documents, 23rd Cong., 2nd Sess. (Serial 273), Doc. No. 121; Elliott, *Winfield Scott*, 385.

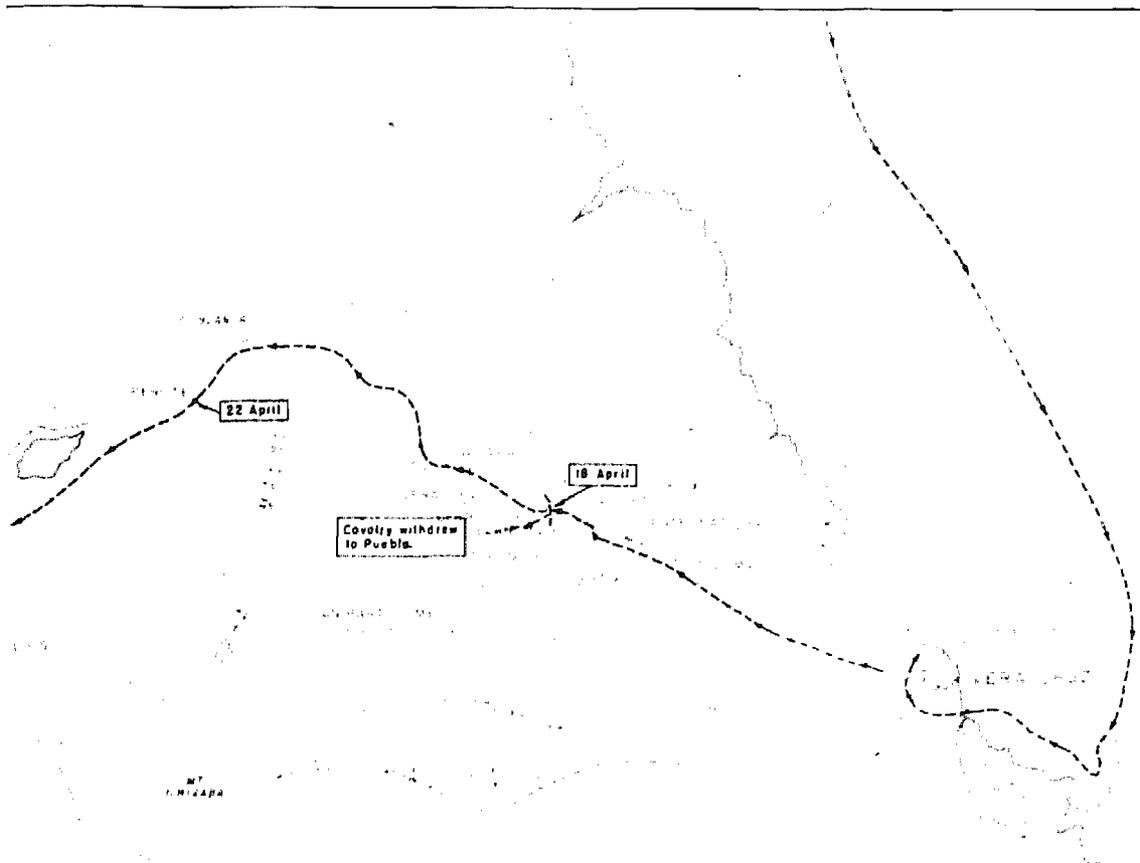
⁹[Antoine Henri de] Jomini, *The Art of War*, trans. G. H. Mendell and W. P. Craig-hill (West Point Military Library ed.; Westport, Connecticut, n.d.), 35-37, 44-45, 232-235; Scott to Marcy, May 21, 1846, Scott Papers (New York Public Library).



Because one must assume that most competent general officers would take these early precautions, it is necessary to examine Scott's actual conduct of the war in light of the teachings of Jomini.

Jomini emphasized that control of the sea and the seizure of enemy ports were essential in all wars of coastal invasion. Without both, it would be virtually impossible to maintain a steady flow of supplies. Doubtless, Jomini had in mind the experiences of Wellington in the Peninsular Campaign; in fact, throughout the work he sporadically alludes to the English experience in this regard.¹⁰ Scott, in turn, determined that his staging areas would be in Mexico and believed Tampico to be "a more favorable position

¹⁰Despite Jomini's obsession with the Peninsula, his index refers to it specifically only once and to Wellington's experiences there only twice. The author does not suggest that the following references to that campaign are complete, but he offers them for the benefit of the serious student of that phase of the Napoleonic wars: Jomini, *The Art of War*, 24, 26, 28-29, 67, 75, 131, 147, 188, 219, 316, 323-324, 348.



. . . than Point Isabel.” This decision was in keeping with Jomini’s statement that “it will always be prudent to have a second base in the rear.”²¹¹

Tampico, however, was only a subsidiary consideration, for Jomini had further declared that a major requirement of a coastal invasion was the seizure of a fortified harbor. This necessity rested on the possibility that one’s troops might be required to withdraw rather hastily. Wars of national invasion, he asserted, were always unpredictable; therefore, if the enemy should mount a successful counteroffensive, the invading army should be able to return to the sea “which is at once its line of retreat and its base of supplies.” The fortified position would sustain the troops until such time as their evacuation would take place by the fleet, which ultimately would become their “only possible line of retreat.” Scott, of course, had such a port

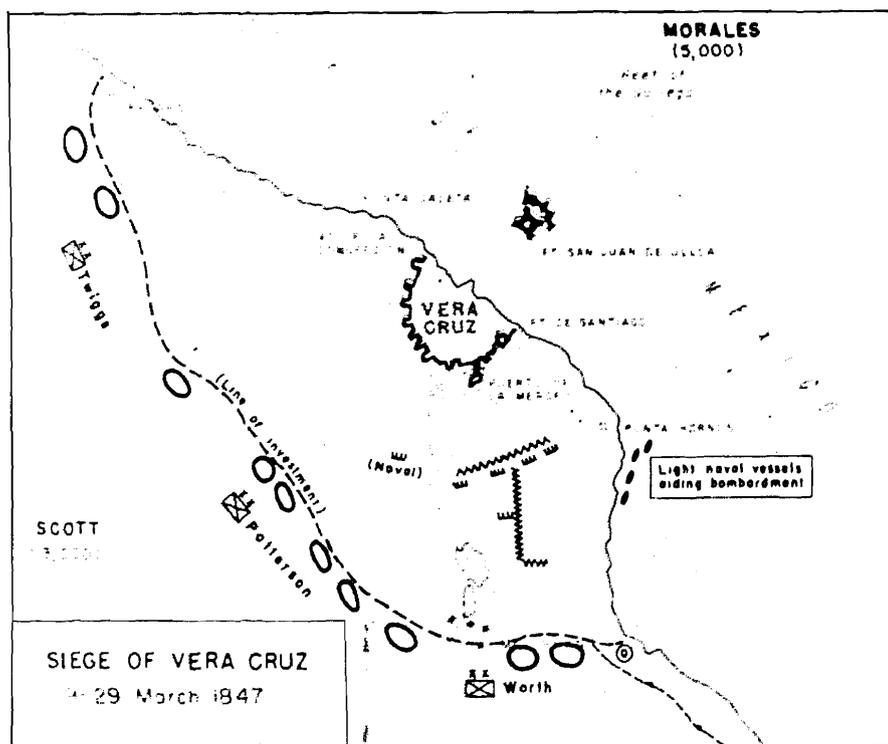
²¹¹Ibid., 26, 70 (quotation), 75-76, 132, 158-159; Scott to Zachary Taylor, December 20, 1846, Scott Papers (New York Public Library).

in mind in his selection of Vera Cruz, which had the additional geographic advantage of lying on a nearly direct axis with the best available route for the march to the enemy capital. That requirement was also noted by Jomini.¹²

The entire Vera Cruz operation had a Jominian tone to it. Of course, the city was indispensable to the future of Scott's operations, but capturing it presented certain problems. The Fortress San Juan de Ulloa, which sat in the harbor, was a formidable one. Although it is true that the French had captured it in 1838, they had done so only with difficulty. Since that time the fortress and its defenses had been much improved. Its construction contained the regular angular features of which the great military engineer, Sébastien de Vauban, would have approved and which gave it internal strength. In addition, it was supported by two lesser forts which anchored either end of the harbor and which, in turn, were connected by a ribbon of high wall that could be easily defended. To add to its impressive defensive character, coastal artillery was interspersed throughout the area and so set as to thwart the hopes of an aspiring invader in his attempt to secure landing beaches.

Jomini had warned that, "since the invention of artillery," amphibious invasions were always faced with the prospect of failure. Consequently, he

¹²Jomini, *The Art of War*, 60, 75 (second quotation), 76, 80-81, 229-230 (first quotation).



urged deception and suggested the creation of a beachhead where the landing party could be debarked as a body and where its own artillery could be quickly retrieved. Because Scott recognized the seeming invincibility of Vera Cruz if directly attacked, he followed the master's advice.¹³

By landing south of the city, Scott avoided contact with the defenses in his initial phase; but he could not long ignore them. If the expeditionary force were not to fail on the sandy banks of the Gulf, the city's capture was essential. Scott could not mount an inland march if he did not have a base for logistic support, nor, for that matter, could he allow a sizeable garrison to threaten his line of communications. Neither advance nor retreat was possible without this port. The manner of its capture is the important matter here. Scott's procedure is well known and needs only the briefest recapitulation. He sealed the rear of the city with seven miles of cannon, and he refused to permit the inhabitants, civil or military, to leave. The plan was successful, and Vera Cruz surrendered in a matter of days. Although Scott probably could have taken the city by siege and without the intensive bombardment, he wanted to avoid disabling his army during the coastal fever, or "vomito," season—hence his interest in the rapid reduction of the city.¹⁴

One may argue that an assault would have resulted in a rapid capture. General W. J. Worth, in fact, urged such tactics, but Scott rejected the proposal on the grounds that it would be almost as costly to his army as disease. In his opinion, it would be a slaughter, and he simply could not take the loss if he was to have an army of sufficient size to march into the interior. Perhaps Scott recalled Jomini's warning regarding assaults of this type. The theoretician specifically pointed to the problems inherent in similar movements against Berg-op-zoom in 1747 and Port Mahon in 1756. In both cases, the losses were appalling. Furthermore, Jomini contended, a protracted siege was unthinkable if those being besieged could call on a succoring army in the area. Justin Smith estimated that a militia force of 20,000 was available near Vera Cruz if Governor Juan Soto, supposedly an able man, could have raised it in time. In Smith's words, "it seemed reasonable to count upon succor."¹⁵

¹³Ibid., 158 (quotation), 226-227, 229; Nathan C. Brooks, *A Complete History of the Mexican War: Its Causes, Conduct, and Consequences* (reprint; Chicago, 1965), 296-299; "Description of the City of Vera Cruz and Castle of San Juan de Ulloa," in [anonymous], *Complete History of the Late Mexican War. Containing an Authentic Account of All the Battles . . .*, 68-70, printed with Brooks, *Complete History of the Mexican War*.

¹⁴Scott to Marcy, March 23, 1847, quoted in Brooks, *Complete History of the Mexican War*, 302-306.

¹⁵Scott, *Memoirs*, II, 423-424; Jomini, *The Art of War*, 194; [Antoine Henri de]

After seizing Vera Cruz as a base of operations, Scott looked to his first objective point en route to the capital: Jalapa, a city which lay inland seventy-four miles on the National Highway. It was perfectly situated as the next base of operations because animals and forage were available there. Reportedly, there were wagons there as well, and Scott was in short supply of all of these commodities. Finally, the city lay just above the fever belt, and Scott was eager to get his army to a more salubrious climate. His choice of Jalapa was quite in keeping with Jomini's directions. In taking the initial objective point, the mentor advised that the line of operations not only should produce the clearest direction to the final objective but also should offer the greatest advantages for the advancing army. It may appear that Scott deviated from Jomini's instructions to follow the route offering the least danger. Yet, would any other road have offered less danger? The terrain was favorable to the defenders, but no traversable alternate route, which would have given a better chance for survival, was really available to Scott. All things considered, the chosen route was probably the least dangerous after all.¹⁶

In an even more important respect Scott followed the strategist's advice. Jomini was emphatic in his assertion that the line of operations should move against either the center or an extremity in the zone of operations. Unless one's command were so large that it could overwhelm the entire zone, the general must follow this maxim even in the face of possible advantageous defensive dispositions of the enemy.¹⁷ Scott, of course, maintained his thrust against the zone's center.

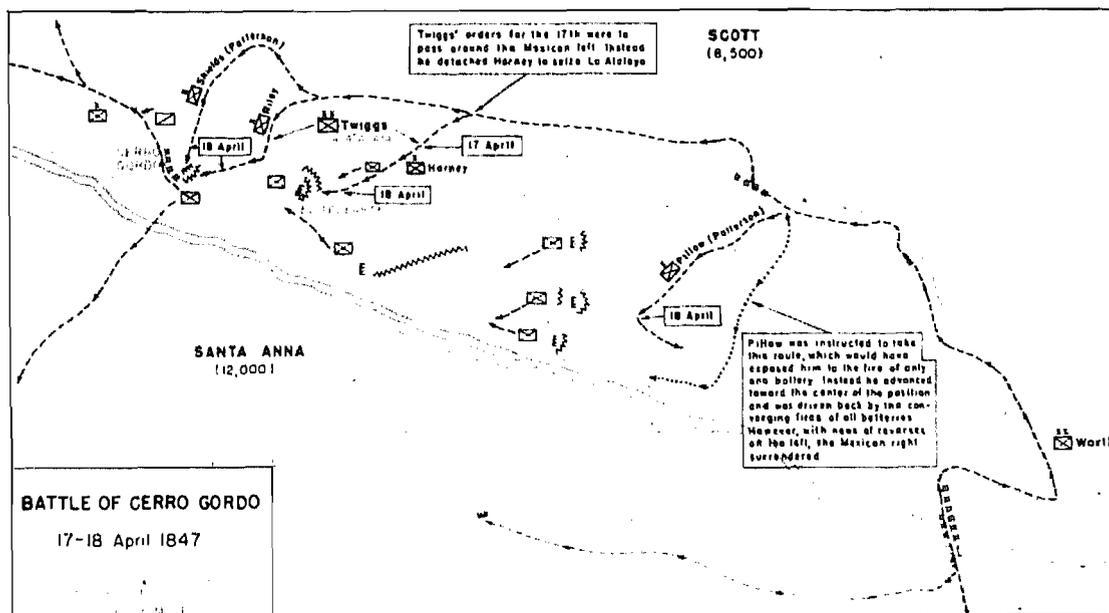
Failing to halt the American advance at the National Bridge, Scott's adversary, General Antonio López de Santa Anna, set up his next major position on an excellent piece of defensive terrain immediately to the front of

Jomini, *Treatise of Grand Military Operations: Or a Critical and Military History of the Wars of Frederick the Great, as Contrasted with the Modern System. Together with a Few of the Most Important Principles of the Art of War*, trans. S. B. Holabird (2 vols.; New York, 1865), I, 165-166. Justin H. Smith points out that the British consul expected such troops. Justin H. Smith, *The War with Mexico* (2 vols.; Gloucester, Massachusetts, 1963), II, 22.

¹⁶Scott to Zachary Taylor, April 24, 1847, Scott Papers (New York Public Library); Jomini, *The Art of War*, 60. Lack of transportation delayed Scott as it later delayed his reinforcements. See Franklin Pierce, "Diary," July 1, 6, 13, 1847, Franklin Pierce Papers (Manuscript Division, Library of Congress; microfilm, University of Texas, Austin).

¹⁷Jomini defined a zone of operations as "a certain fraction of the whole theater of war, which may be traversed by an army in the attainment of its object." *The Art of War*, 91. This zone may possess one or more lines of operations, but only strategic lines are the truly important ones for they "connect the decisive points of the theater." Ibid. See also *ibid.*, 104-105.

the village of Cerro Gordo, and approximately sixty-six miles from Vera Cruz. The ground had not been previously organized to any extent, but its strengths were so obvious that little needed to be done except to erect normal field fortifications.¹⁸ Essentially, the ground was composed of two mutually supporting hills and two ridge lines extending over a mile in length. The National Highway, which ultimately ran through the village, easily came with-



in effective artillery range of the second ridge line and the hills. All three had the additional advantage of flanking both sides of the road. Furthermore, the ridge line nearest the American advance served as a natural defense for the other positions. If all of these features were not satisfactory enough, Santa Anna's right was covered by a deep ravine through which flowed the Río del Plan. These topographical properties meant that if the tips of the ridges and the brows of the hills were manned, neither flank nor rear could be attacked without great difficulty. Essentially, Santa Anna only needed to maintain his right flank by organizing the ridge line nearest the approaching Americans, and to cover the road to his front with artillery

¹⁸For a detailed schematic of the operation discussed in the next few paragraphs, see the "Survey of the Mexican Lines of Defence at Cerro Gordo and the line of attack of the American Army under Major General Scott on the 17th and 18th of April, 1847, by Major Turnbull and Captain McClellan, United States Army," Winfield Scott Papers (Special Collections Division, University of Arizona Library, Tucson).

from the other promontories. It was a splendid position and one wonders if his memory did not recall a rather similar defense at Buena Vista.

It was, of course, mandatory that Scott stay on the highway. Roads are essential for logistical support and for the conveyance of heavy weaponry. Hollywood war movies notwithstanding, armies do not move unimpeded overland. If Scott was to beat Santa Anna, he needed his artillery; and if he was to have his artillery, he must have the road. Or must he? As with the case of Vera Cruz, Scott's tactics are well known and only a brief synopsis of events is needed. Scott's engineers found a trail which moved to the Mexican left. It actually skirted all positions, even though it lay dangerously close to the effective range of the guns on the second ridge. Scott improved the trail to the extent that it could sustain the transport of his own artillery. In addition, he planned to send two infantry columns by this route, and they would, in turn, converge upon the village of Cerro Gordo, thus cutting off Santa Anna's line of retreat. In short, Scott would have his artillery properly placed and would have severed his enemy's line of communications in one swoop. In order to divert the enemy, he struck at the first ridge line with what turned out to be considerably more than a feint, as he simultaneously dispatched the two columns toward the enemy's rear. The maneuver would have brought a decisive victory had not General David E. Twiggs prematurely attacked the Mexican strength on the hilly area rather than continuing his advance to a point where he would have joined the command of General James Shields. Twiggs's impetuosity permitted a Mexican withdrawal.

It is everywhere agreed that Scott's maneuver was superb. The question is, how much did it correspond to Jomini? Scott employed several Jominian principles here. First, his strategem was based upon two concepts which the mentor termed divergent and concentric lines. Divergence was to be used when the enemy defenses were dispersed, as Santa Anna's were. Jomini believed that such lines normally would be interior because of the greater ease with which one could concentrate one's forces. While Scott's lines were obviously exterior, in the battle's decisive moment they were as near to being concentric as possible; and the concentricity was the direct result of the divergence. Jomini preferred concentric lines because "they tend to concentrate a scattered army upon a point where it will be sure to arrive before the enemy."¹⁹ It is hard to believe that Jomini would have disapproved of Scott's maneuver, especially inasmuch as the American employed another Jominian principle—the use of temporary lines by which one must

¹⁹Jomini, *The Art of War*, 93, 115 (quotation).

protect one's own flanks. By his feint, his rapidity of the march, and his clear understanding of Santa Anna's strengths, Scott obviously accepted the premise. Furthermore, the divergence and temporary alignment did not alter one jot the basic requirement that the principle strategic line of operations be maintained. It was maintained even though Jomini himself admitted that the whole zone of operations was likely to be a secondary consideration during warfare in mountainous terrain.²⁰

One might wonder if Jomini would not have been a bit nervous to see Scott's concentricity achieved by eccentric means. The theoretician probably would not have quarrelled with the plan in view of his comments on turning movements. While Jomini believed turns were often decisive, he readily admitted that "many maneuvers of this kind have failed against some commanders and succeeded against others." He strongly recommended that they not be used "in the presence of Frederick, Napoleon, or Wellington." Without detracting from Scott's generalship, it is reasonable to believe that Santa Anna did not fit into the list including such illustrious captains. It may be safely assumed that Scott would have been somewhat more reluctant to perform such a maneuver against a more skillful opponent.²¹

After the battle of Cerro Gordo, Scott established a base camp at Jalapa. He moved thence to Puebla, which he occupied with relative ease. In both cities, Scott dealt with the civil noncombatants with the greatest possible humanity. Reports of atrocities in Zachary Taylor's army horrified Scott, and he resolved, as early as Tampico, that there would be no place for such terror in his own command. General Order Number 20 promised swift retribution to any American soldier who abused the Mexican citizenry. His pleasant relation with the people was enhanced by his excellent rapport with the Church. Possibly, he recalled Jomini's admonition that "a fanatical people may arm under the appeal of its priests." The theoretician stressed conciliation and harmony when an invader was deep in enemy territory. "When the invasion is distant and extensive," he warned, ". . . its success will depend more upon diplomacy than upon strategy."²²

²⁰Ibid., 116-119, 147-149.

²¹Ibid., 186. It is an historical rarity for two great generals to meet each other on the same field. Only occasionally does one find the pairing of a Gustavus Adolphus and a Wallenstein, of a Napoleon and a Wellington, of a Grant and a Lee. If one were to measure a general's quality only by the capacity of his opponent, one would be required to ignore Napoleon's turning maneuver at Ulm because it was used against Mack, or Frederick's flanking assault at Rossbach because it was directed against Soubise, or Turenne's turn through the Vosges because he employed it against a diverse command. These maneuvers are all models of generalship. Scott's is no less.

²²Scott to Marcy, January 16, 1847, Scott Papers (New York Public Library); Jomini,

Apart from his personal sympathies, Scott simply had to maintain the affection, or at least the forbearance, of the local population because he had already determined to hold his position in Puebla. The campaign had taken its toll. Both sickness and expiring enlistments had contrived to reduce his effective force. In view of the depletion of his own complement as well as the growth of Santa Anna's force, he decided on a bold move. He would temporarily cut his line of communications, at least to the base camp at Jalapa, and bring forward those troops stationed there.²³

It may appear that this decision removed Scott from the realm of Jominian warfare. A major criticism levelled against Jomini by contemporary historians is that he was overly addicted to the rules of war, and, unquestionably, one of his foremost precepts called for the maintenance of a secure line of communications. The strategist alluded to its necessity throughout his works and dedicated a considerable portion of his magnum opus to it.²⁴ Contrary to the disapproving arguments of his critics, however, Jomini was not rigid in his maxims. Regarding base camps and critical life lines, he wrote, "In general, we cannot expect to find in an enemy's country safe positions suitable even for a temporary base; and the deficiency must be supplied by a strategic reserve. . . ." Scott, of course, had just such a reserve in the new troops which were to reach him in force by August.²⁵ To the casual observer, therefore, Scott may seem to have abandoned a cardinal tenet of the master, but, in fact, he was merely being a particularly apt pupil.

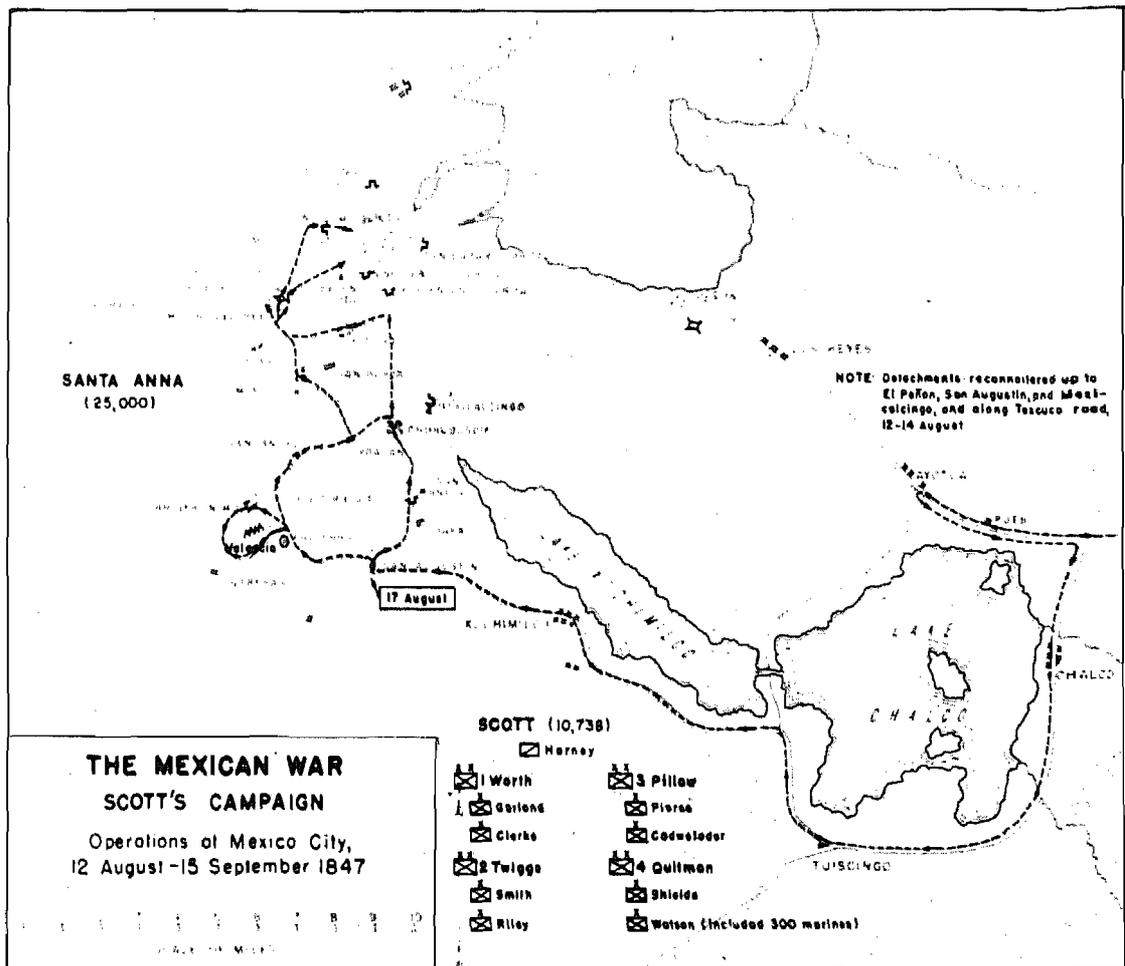
Upon receipt of the reinforcements, Scott again assumed the offensive and moved toward the capital. Inasmuch as the city of Mexico rested in a basin ringed by a defensible perimeter of substantially higher ground, Scott's campaign took on an all-or-nothing quality when he moved into the valley. His fearless advance occasioned the Duke of Wellington's now famous verdict that "Scott is lost." To be sure, the general's position was

The Art of War, 21 (second quotation), 26 (first quotation). Scott, *General Order Number 20*, Tampico, February 19, 1847, in [Henry Lee Scott, *General Orders and Circulars, 1847-1848*] (Mexico [various cities], 1847-1848), Latin American Collection, University of Texas Library, Austin.

²³Ephraim Kirby Smith to Wife, July 7, 1847, E. Kirby Smith, *To Mexico with Scott: Letters of Captain E. Kirby Smith to His Wife*, ed. Emma Jerome Blackwood (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1917), 183-184; Winfield Scott, "Official Despatch, No. 29," in Brooks, *Complete History of the Mexican War*, 351.

²⁴Jomini, *The Art of War*, 70 ff.

²⁵Jomini, *The Art of War*, 120-121. General Pierce's reinforcing column ran into some action from irregulars, but his movement was not greatly impeded; and he was able to join Scott without sustaining many casualties. Pierce, "Diary," July 17, 20, 21, 22, 24, 25, 1847.



difficult. He could not withdraw without severe loss, nor could he advance on the capital without equal or even greater loss. The Americans were heavily outnumbered, and communications, while slightly restored, were tenuous. To add to the already somber situation, one must remember that the defensive position is always stronger than that of the offensive, as Carl von Clausewitz emphasized.²⁰ Thus, the American force seemed doomed.

Scott knew, however, that he must have the capital to end the war. Santa Anna's reputation was based on its maintenance, and in recent months that reputation had sagged. If the war were to be won, it would have to be over Santa Anna's failure to defend a position which he had publicly declared to be impregnable. Scott's evaluation of the situation was

²⁰Smith, *The War with Mexico*, II, 89, 148 (quotation); Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. J. J. Graham (3 vols.; New York, 1968), II, 148.

in keeping with Jomini's view that "under a weak prince, in a republic, and still more in wars of opinion, the capital is generally the center of national power."²⁷ Furthermore, Scott had no intention of flying into the teeth of his enemy's defenses. As with Vera Cruz, the design required prudence as well as audacity. The most direct route to the city was by way of the National Highway, but that approach was defended by a strong point known as El Peñón, which was well placed and well manned. Three other routes, all indirect and all difficult, also led to the city. Scott determined to take the southernmost of these routes. It ran south of marshes, rills, and two sizeable lakes, Chalco and Xochimilco. Hence, his right wing would be temporarily covered, taking care of the Jominian warning that flanking marches are inadmissible if "so chosen as to present the flank to the enemy."²⁸

He preceded his march with a feint toward El Peñón and diversions along the other routes, but he did not split his force. Rather, he moved en masse again in accordance with Jomini's rule that during the approach, an army taking divergent routes, especially in difficult country, offered the possibility of being defeated in detail. At the point where Scott broke his direct approach and assumed his flanking movement, he was about two days' march from the enemy. Curiously enough, Jomini recommended that no such maneuver take place unless the armies are "separated by about two marches."²⁹ When Santa Anna learned of the presence of the American army to the south, he was dismayed and had to alter completely his plans, pinned as they were on the defense of El Peñón and the main road. Scott had produced a major surprise once again in keeping with the principles of Jomini.³⁰

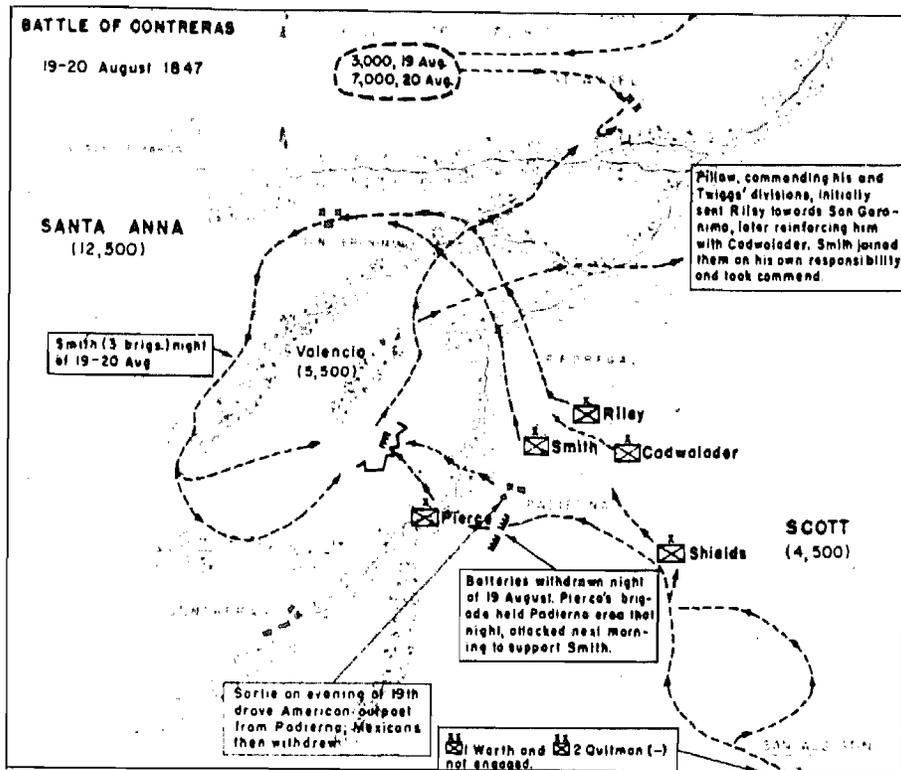
After achieving his early objective, Scott was south of the city and at this point sought to flank the village of San Antonio, which was defended by heavy artillery. Its approaches were especially difficult because of the prevalence of much marshland. Again, Scott employed his engineers, hoping to move his own artillery to the hamlet's flank. Planning to contain his ad-

²⁷Jomini, *The Art of War*, 97.

²⁸Ibid., 127 (quotation), 153-154.

²⁹Ibid., 127.

³⁰Jomini wrote, "A surprise does not consist simply in falling upon troops that are sleeping or keeping a poor look-out, but that it may result from the combination of a sudden attack upon, and a surrounding of, one extremity of the army. In fact, to surprise an army it is not necessary to take it so entirely unawares . . . but it is sufficient to attack it in force at the point intended, before preparations can be made to meet the attack." Ibid., 191. One must not confuse the terms *attack* and *assault*. Scott was clearly attacking.



versary, Santa Anna ordered General Gabriel Valencia with additional artillery to Coyoacán and Churubusco, towns which lay directly to the north of San Antonio. Instead, Valencia moved to Scott's left, and at Contreras another battle was fought.

Scott also had a general who altered orders. General Gideon Pillow, contrary to Scott's wishes, moved against Valencia's force, which was well stationed on high ground. Pillow soon found himself in a box. By the time Scott arrived on the scene, the situation was serious. Noting that Santa Anna, who reluctantly and angrily supported Valencia from Toro hill, was capable of advancing in force, Scott ordered a brigade into the San Geronimo woods—a quick thrust that temporarily blocked a possible advance by Santa Anna. Darkness then fell but on the morrow General Persifor Smith assaulted Valencia's rear, while another American force maintained, rather casually at times, the block against Santa Anna. With Smith behind, Scott before, and the fluctuating block on the flank, Valencia's force was soon dispatched. The battle was unplanned and undesired, but Scott added another victory to his growing list.³¹

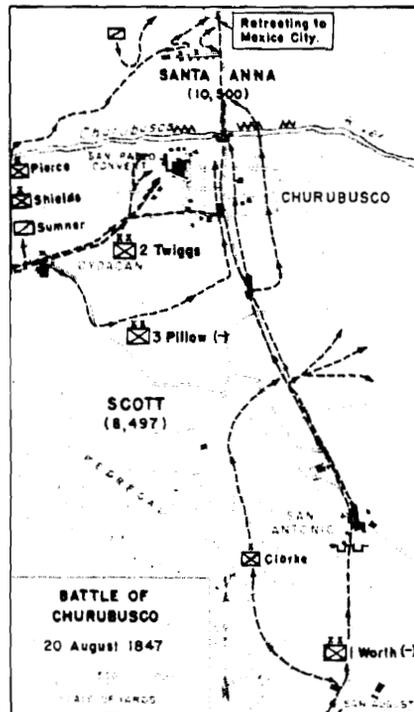
³¹For a general description of factual materials relating to movement, arms, and terrain here and in the following discussion, see Smith, *The War with Mexico*; Brooks,

Jomini wrote that not all battles would be planned; therefore, a superior general's *coup d'oeil* often was required to carry the day. Planned or unplanned, however, the theoretician stated that the decisive area in any battle was that point "which combines strategic with topographical advantages." Furthermore, if the enemy assumed a close formation, the center was the least favorable area for the attack. Pillow did not know or understand this simple maxim, but his superior did. Scott correctly sought out the enemy's flank and rear. As it turned out, not only did he find both of them, but they were precisely at those points which Jomini believed to be the most easily exploited. "Better results," the strategist noted, "may follow from maneuvers to outflank and turn that wing which is nearest the enemy's line of retreat."³² The decisive action took place in that area which Santa Anna, only the day before, had chosen as the route for withdrawal. The insubordinate Valencia's refusal to heed the order cost him his command. Scott's choice of the point for the critical blow was fully as Napoleonic in its conception and execution as Jomini could have desired.

In frustration and frenzy, Santa Anna moved to defend Churubusco, which was interposed between San Antonio to the south and the city of

Complete History of the Mexican War; and The West Point Atlas of American Wars, ed. Vincent J. Esposito (2 vols.; New York, 1959), I, 15-16.

³²Jomini, *The Art of War*, 170-171 (first quotation), 183 (second quotation), 185-189, 306 ff.



Mexico to the north. Churubusco's main military feature was the Churubusco River, which flowed almost laterally west to east and emptied into Lake Xochimilco some 1,000 yards to the Mexican left. The river could be crossed at a *tête de pont* which lay at the juncture of the river and the highway. The highway practically bisected the town. About 250 yards southeast of the *tête de pont* was an effectively supporting convent. Perhaps 1,800 yards to the Mexican right lay a poor road which led out of the southwestern village of Coyoacán. Scott's main objective, of course, was the highway to the rear, but the formidable defenses collaborated to make its seizure difficult.

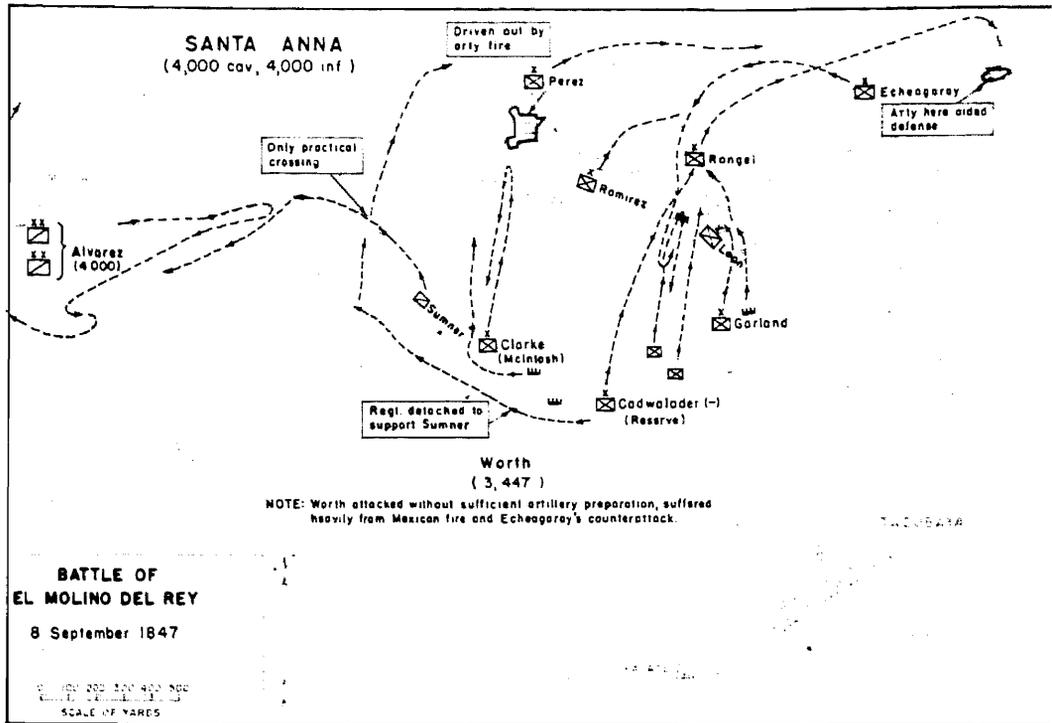
Naturally, Scott wanted to lessen the defenses, so when he received a reconnaissance report that the San Antonio garrison was moving to Churubusco and that the convent was only lightly defended, he sought to cut off the probable reinforcements by seizing that building. However, the reconnaissance was in error, and General Twiggs met a heavy volley as he approached the walls. Simultaneously and against Scott's wishes, General Worth grappled with the enemy at the *tête de pont*.³³ For a time, at least Scott was stymied.

In the early stages of this battle, Scott's performance was the least creditable of the campaign. It was also the least Jominian because that theoretician abhorred assaults on strongly fortified positions before their defenses were properly reduced. But if Scott stumbled, his recovery followed the master's teaching. Holding his position as best he could, Scott ordered Shields and Pierce to skirt the town by way of the smaller road. Their mission was to cut the main highway, thus isolating the Mexican force. Referring specifically to a *tête de pont*, Jomini wrote, "whenever it can be passed either by the right or the left, the enemy army will be compelled to abandon it or run the risk of being invested in it." The American maneuver met stiff resistance as the forces approached the road; however, when Worth affected another crossing on the enemy's right, the task was completed.³⁴ Clearly, it was not until the bridgehead was attacked from the rear that the Mexican defense failed. If Scott almost lost at Churubusco, it must be recognized that in part it was because he had ignored Jominian

³³Smith, *The War with Mexico*, II, 112-114. Smith writes that reconnaissance and prisoner interrogation indicated the presence of only one and two guns respectively. *Ibid.*, 113.

³⁴Jomini, *The Art of War*, 141 (quotation), 193. A wounded Franklin Pierce wrote, "That I escaped seems to me now almost like a miracle." Pierce to his wife, August 26, 1847, Pierce Papers. For factual details of the battle see Smith, *War with Mexico*, II, 111-119; [anonymous], *Complete History of the Late Mexican War*, 81-89; *West Point Atlas*, I, 16.

principles. When he was successful, it was because he remembered them. After Churubusco, Scott agreed to an armistice and negotiations with Santa Anna. Historians have speculated as to why he did so, but surely one reason is because Scott welcomed an opportunity to lick his wounds.³⁵



By the time hostilities resumed, Scott had moved his army to Tacubaya, which was about four miles southwest of the city of Mexico. About a mile and a half to the north of Scott was the Molino del Rey defensive complex. Some thousand yards northeast of Molino del Rey was the strongly defended garrison of Chapultepec, which in turn was about two miles north of Tacubaya. Realizing that Chapultepec offered the last best defense for the city, Santa Anna chose to anchor its only reasonable approaches; therefore, he strengthened Molino del Rey. Meanwhile, Scott received information which persuaded him that Molino del Rey offered a prize. Reportedly, it housed a cannon foundry, which, at that moment, was producing guns for the city's final stand. Regrettably, the intelligence was in error, but it persuaded Scott

³⁵Scott to Santa Anna, August 23, 1847, Scott Papers (New York Public Library). General Orders Number 262, Headquarters of the Army, Tacubaya, August 24, 1847, Pierce Papers. Pierce wrote, "In my judgment the Army, full of ardor and confidence, was humanely and wisely restrained." Pierce to his brother, August 27, 1847, *ibid.*

to take the position. Before he did, however, he had General Twiggs feint toward Mexico City's southern extremity. This feint was in keeping with Jomini's view that a detachment, normally an undesirable use of troops in his opinion, could be used "to draw the enemy in a direction where you wish him to go, in order to facilitate the execution of an enterprise in another direction."⁸⁶ The ruse worked and Santa Anna detached a large force to cover Twiggs.

While Scott supervised the larger operation, General Worth commanded the troops on the left in the Molino del Rey region. The action, while tactically decisive, was bloody and costly. Even though the Americans carried the day, they did not do so without paying a heavy price. As one might expect, bitter recrimination between Worth and Scott followed. Because of Worth's prominent role in this engagement (he even commanded the artillery), it is difficult, if not impossible, to measure Jominian influence upon Scott in this battle other than by his decision to employ the feint.⁸⁷

Despite the regrettable circumstances attending its capture, the seizure of Molino del Rey meant that Chapultepec's last artificial support was shorn. The stronghold remained, however, a magnificent defensive structure. Looming like a giant, it commanded the entire western approach to the city. Atop its steep and stony slopes stood a fortified castle, which in earlier days housed the viceroys. In the years of the republic, it had been converted into a military academy. Its adjacent topography made it virtually impregnable except from the west or the south. Chapultepec was particularly imposing because it added to the natural defenses of the capital. Surrounded as it was by the marshy remains of ancient lakes, the city could only be entered by way of fortified causeways.⁸⁸

Historians and soldiers have debated whether or not Chapultepec had to be seized in order to take the city. Three southern routes were available over the causeways, but each was defended by a *garita*, or fortified emplacement. To use cannon or to maneuver against the *garitas* would have been very difficult in the boggy terrain. To complicate matters further, even if Chapultepec were reduced, the question of the *garitas* remained because two of them defended approaches on the causeways to the city's west.⁸⁹

⁸⁶Jomini, *The Art of War*, 202.

⁸⁷For factual details of the battle see Smith, *War with Mexico*, II, 140-147; [anonymous], *Complete History of the Late Mexican War*, 90-92; *West Point Atlas*, I, 16.

⁸⁸For details on Chapultepec see Smith, *War with Mexico*, II, 147-159; [anonymous], *Complete History of the Late Mexican War*, 92-100; *West Point Atlas*, I, 16.

⁸⁹For an examination of some histories which over the years have alluded to this debate, see Brooks, *Complete History of the Mexican War*, 411-412; Edward D. Mans-

Because of the alternate approaches and possibly in view of the acrimony which grew out of the Molino del Rey episode, Scott called a council of war and asked for recommendations. The advice was divided with a sizeable majority holding that the southern route was preferable. Scott chose otherwise. His reliance on his own judgment rather than on that of his officers would have been endorsed, incidentally, by Jomini, who wrote, "In my opinion, councils of war are a deplorable resource, and can be useful only when concurring in opinion with the commander. . . ." ⁴⁰

We do not know precisely why Scott chose to attack by way of Chapultepec. His official report and his memoirs declare only that he chose to avoid the obstacles to the south "and to seek, by a sudden inversion to the southwest and west, less unfavorable approaches."⁴¹ One can only infer his deliberation, but there were four good reasons to avoid the southern route, and they are all found in Jomini. Attacks on cities, the mentor wrote, should be governed by four basic considerations. "1st, with the strength of the works; 2d, with the character of the ground on which they are built; 3d, with the fact of their being isolated or connected; 4th, with the *morale* of the respective parties."⁴²

With regard to the first consideration, Scott's movements along the nearest southern causeway would cause his forces to be met not only at the *garita* but also at an even more important fortification known as the Citadel.⁴³ Two objections may be raised which would apparently deny this fact as an important military consideration. First, the Citadel also covered the lower causeway on the west; and, second, the position was no more difficult to attack than that of Chapultepec. The answer to these objections lies in Jomini's second point. If Scott moved directly from the south, he would expose his own rear; and the chance of withdrawal would be minimal

field, *The Mexican War: A History of Its Origin and a Detailed Account of the Victories* . . . (New York, 1848), 292-293; Raphael Semmes, *The Campaign of General Scott, in the Valley of Mexico* (Cincinnati, 1852), 335-336; Smith, *The War with Mexico*, II, 149-150; Robert Selph Henry, *The Story of the Mexican War* (Indianapolis, 1950), 357-358; Otis A. Singletary, *The Mexican War* (Chicago, 1960), 95-96; Seymour V. Connor and Odie B. Faulk, *North America Divided: The Mexican War, 1846-1848* (New York, 1971), 128.

⁴⁰Singletary, *The Mexican War*, 96; Jomini, *The Art of War*, 52-53.

⁴¹Report Number 34, Headquarters of the Army, National Palace of Mexico, September 18, 1847, in Scott, *Memoirs*, II, 509-510.

⁴²Jomini, *The Art of War*, 192. In Jomini's table of contents the title of the chapter dealing with this matter reads "Cities"; on the chapter itself, the title becomes "Fortified Places."

⁴³To follow the present author's speculations in this and the following paragraphs the reader may find the *West Point Atlas*, I, 16, useful.

should that maneuver prove necessary. Of course, he could cover his withdrawal if he left a sufficient force at Tacubaya or Piedad (another village to the east); but he could ill afford that luxury because his army was down to 7,200 men. He needed all the troops he could muster for the offensive. It is perhaps unnecessary to cite Jomini when stating a truism, but the scholar stated it plainly—if one were suddenly placed on the defensive, one needed “an unobstructed line of retreat.”⁴⁴ If Scott's rear or flank were threatened at Tacubaya by the troops of Chapultepec, there would have been no acceptable excuse to be found in the annals of generalship.

As to the next consideration, if Scott attacked by way of the south, he would have had to assault over lines which permitted neither dispersion nor maneuver. Jomini condemned the use of such a tactic as “hazardous.” Furthermore, the Mexican force would have been strengthened by being better able to defend its center as opposed to its wings. Jomini's doctrine of the strength of interior lines would clearly be to the Mexican advantage.⁴⁵ Besides, if it later became necessary to seize the Citadel, at least the western approach offered some small ground for maneuver.

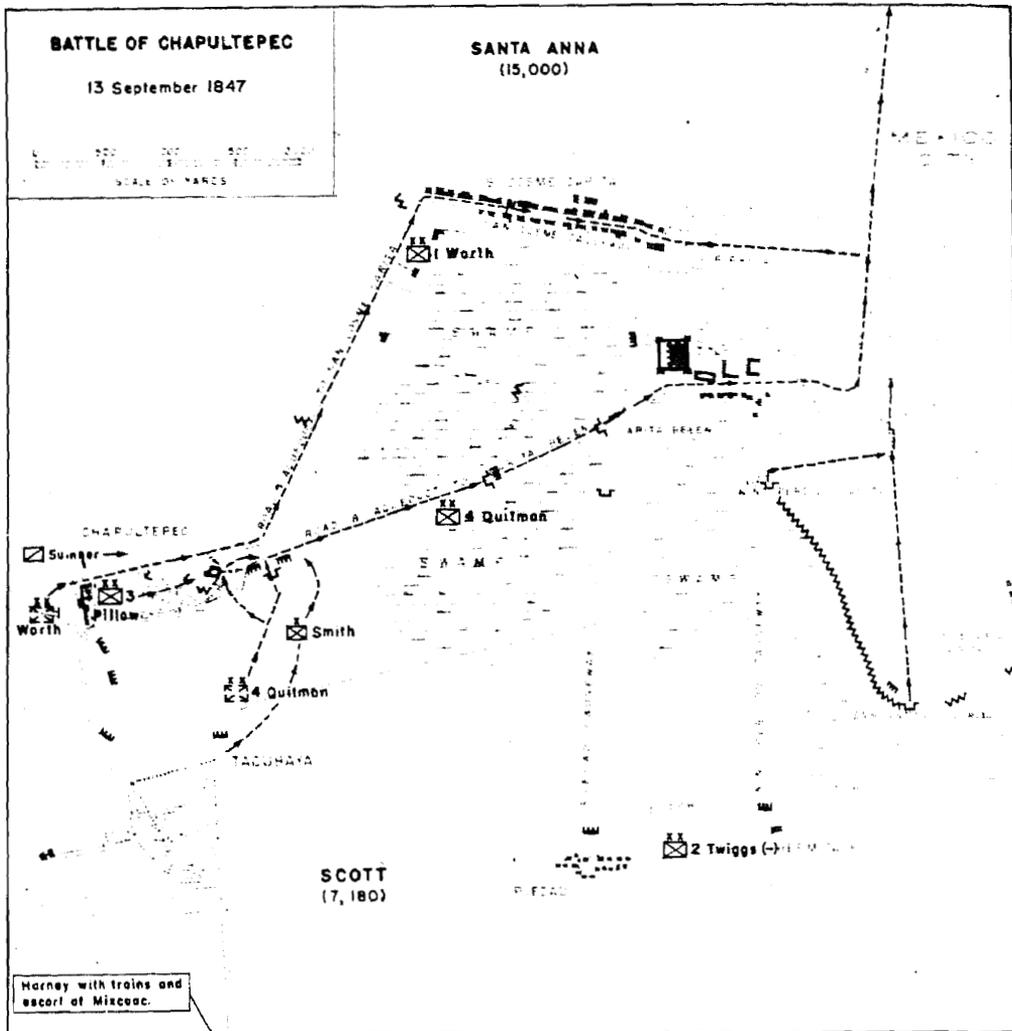
Yet another factor arguing for the western approach is this—a southern route demanded the movement of American troops not only along direct lines but also along divergent lines. While not utterly opposed to this latter procedure, Jomini was wary of it. If such a maneuver took place, however, Jomini stated his absolute requirement that it result in a merger of troops. The merger was essential because an objective was not likely to be taken without an assault, and an assault was probably foredoomed unless delivered en masse on a prescribed point. The possibility of such a delivery was extremely improbable over the southern approach. Rather, a more predictable result would be street fighting in separated units. In Jomini's words, “The division of armies into numerous detachments has sometimes been carried to so great an extent, and with such poor results, that many persons now believe it better to have none of them. It is undoubtedly much safer and more agreeable for an army to be kept in a single mass. . . .”⁴⁶

Finally, another consideration arguing for the attack on Chapultepec had to do with the *morale* of the attacking army. While the Americans had sustained casualties, they were still very confident. Even in the last two engagements, the enemy had lost more men than they. That result does not coincide with the generally accepted rule of thumb that, in normal cir-

⁴⁴Jomini, *The Art of War*, 165.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 195.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 198-199.



cumstances, the attacker will lose more than the defender. Scott probably believed, therefore, that he could take Chapultepec if for no other reason than the *esprit* evident in his force. Again, to quote Jomini, “the *morale* of an army and its chief officers has an influence upon the fate of a war. . . .”⁴⁷

But if sound military doctrine called for the seizure of Chapultepec, accomplishing the task was another matter entirely. Scott’s chief interest was in capturing it without sustaining a heavy loss. His little army simply

⁴⁷Ibid., 294. Jomini continued, “For example, the impetuous attack upon a hostile line of twenty thousand brave men whose feelings are thoroughly enlisted in their cause will produce a much more powerful effect than the attack of forty thousand demoralized or apathetic men at the same point.” Ibid.

could not take many casualties. Fortunately for the American cause, Santa Anna had so dispersed his command that Chapultepec was not defended by a full garrison. Still, the position had height and artillery. To help offset the effects of the enemy guns, Scott used his own. His purpose was simultaneously to knock out his opponent's ordnance and to weaken the walls. Jomini, of course, had urged this procedure of silencing the enemy's guns.⁴⁸ Scott was particularly successful in this endeavor, for his fire destroyed the best cannon the enemy had.

Because Scott cut the fort's line of supplies, Santa Anna was reluctant to attempt reinforcements; and, besides, the Mexican general was still disturbed by the feint. Consequently, Chapultepec was undermanned when Scott's assault came. The assault again conformed to Jomini's rule that it must be started at dawn in order to give the greatest amount of daylight to the operation. Scott struck at 5:30 in the morning. The issue was in doubt only once from that point on. The assault stumbled at the walls because the scaling ladders were foolishly misplaced. Yet, in the end, Chapultepec was taken just as every other objective which Scott had moved against was taken.⁴⁹

The campaign from Vera Cruz to Mexico City was not without mistakes, but then it would be difficult to find a perfect campaign in the long history of war. What imperfections there were have a tendency toward magnification simply because they are blemishes on an otherwise smooth surface. It is quite likely that they would go relatively unnoticed on the generally scarred records of other captains, including many of prominence. Considering even the errors, however, Scott's generalship was one of consummate audacity and skill. In short, there never was a campaign like it in the military history of the United States. Ulysses S. Grant, a lieutenant during the war, criticized some of Scott's actions; but even so, he stated his conviction that the general's overall conduct of the war was almost flawless.⁵⁰

Undoubtedly, many other officers also took note of Scott's generalship. In addition to their admiration for his particular abilities, they also knew that his practices were a product of his "French school." By definition, that meant Scott's precepts were based on the principles of war as set down by Jomini. It is small wonder, indeed, that not only those who served under

⁴⁸Ibid., 193.

⁴⁹Ibid., 191-193; Smith, *The War with Mexico*, 153-158; Singletary, *The Mexican War*, 96.

⁵⁰*Personal Memoirs of U. S. Grant* (2 vols.; New York, 1885-1886), I, 166. He wrote, "General Scott's successes are an answer to all criticism."

him but also those who served in other theaters became convinced of the efficacy of the Jominian interpretation of the proper conduct of war. One historian has observed that the names of those officers who were veterans of the Mexican War seem "like a roll call of Civil War commanders."⁵¹ Obviously, Jomini and Scott had an influence on the Civil War too.

Among the earliest words that Jomini wrote when he began *The Art of War* were those which enumerated the prerequisites of a good general. First in position on the list in importance was the quality of "high moral courage, capable of great resolution." Next in importance was the virtue of "physical courage which takes no account of danger." Scott's entire military career amply demonstrated those attributes. Finally, Jomini wrote that there was still one more prerequisite for the truly great general. He would possess "a thorough knowledge of the principles of the art of war." With this phrase, he plainly described Scott, whose comprehension and practice of the art exceeded that of any of his colleagues. Perhaps this American soldier could have received no greater tribute than the one which came from the venerable strategist himself. Years later, when Jomini wrote his admittedly brief and incomplete observations on maritime operations, he admiringly noted that Winfield Scott had conducted in Mexico what the master lavishly praised as a "brilliant campaign."⁵²

⁵¹Singletery, *The Mexican War*, 4. The following is a partial listing of Mexican War veterans who became Civil War generals. U. S. Grant, R. E. Lee, J. E. Johnston, A. S. Johnston, P. G. T. Beauregard, J. Longstreet, T. J. Jackson, G. B. McClellan, G. Pillow, G. G. Meade, R. Patterson, S. Price, W. T. Sherman, B. Huger, J. B. Magruder, G. E. Pickett, D. H. Hill. Jefferson Davis, of course, became President of the Confederate States of America.

⁵²Jomini, *The Art of War*, 50 (quotations), 350.