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THE TEXAN-SANTA FE EXPEDITION OF 1841

CHARLES R. MCCLURE

IN 1841 New Mexico was a frontier department plagued by foreign encroachments, Indian depredations, and unpatriotic citizens. At least this was the situation as seen by Governor and Commandant General Manuel Armijo. The Santa Fe Trail had brought not only substantial profits to New Mexico but also many foreigners who were constant trouble for the governor. The Navajo, Apache, Comanche, and Ute were virtually unchecked along the frontier, and there was widespread killing and huge property loss. Worse, there was the fear that many Mexicans were sympathetic to Texan and American schemes of annexation. In this maze of problems, Armijo in 1840 received reports of an impending invasion by the rebellious Texans. As governor of New Mexico, Armijo had the responsibility to defend and preserve the Department for Mexico.

Perhaps the best known account of the Texan-Santa Fe expedition is *Narrative of the Texan-Santa Fe Expedition* by George Wilkins Kendall, a journalist who accompanied it. His account and other personal recollections by Thomas Falconer, Franklin Combs, and Cayton Erhard are one-sided accounts exhibiting the well-known Anglo prejudice against the New Mexicans. Later relation of the expedition by such historians as Hubert Howe Bancroft, Ralph Emerson Twitchell, and William Binkley give more credible accounts employing both Mexican and Texan sources. In *The Texan Santa Fe Pioneers* Noel M. Loomis provides the most extensive account of the expedition. As the title indicates, however, Loomis concludes that the Texans were en-

gaged in a peaceful trade mission and that the New Mexicans were treacherous in their dealings with them.¹

Information contained in the Mexican Archives of New Mexico and the Huntington Library indicates that historians should re-evaluate the role that the New Mexicans played in the Texan-Santa Fe expedition. These sources show that Governor Manuel Armijo was not the bumbling incompetent despot that some writers have pictured. Rather, he was a pragmatic administrator caught amidst the ambitions of the United States and the Republic of Texas, an unconcerned national government in Mexico City, numerous hostile Indian tribes which periodically rampaged the Department, and financial instability that hamstrung all operations of government. In the face of these crises, Governor Armijo successfully defended the Department of New Mexico from the Texan invaders.

Little attempt at secrecy concerning the expedition was made by President Mirabeau B. Lamar of Texas. Newspapers in Austin and St. Louis carried accounts of the proposed journey. After months of hesitation, the expedition left Texas on June 20, 1841,² for the purpose of extending control over Texan domain as interpreted from the Treaty of Velasco of May 14, 1836. (Article 3 of which stated that Mexican control was to extend only to the area south of the Rio Grande del Norte, all lands north belonging to the Territory of Texas). Also—paradoxically—they hoped to establish peaceful commercial relations with the Mexicans. In preparing the expedition, Lamar previously had sent trader William G. Dryden to Santa Fe in 1840 to further Texan interests. On March 10, 1841, Dryden reported:

. . . every American, and more than two thirds of the Mexicans, and all of the Pueblo Indians are with us heart and soul; and whenever they have heard of your sending troops, there had been rejoicing; and indeed I have talked many times with the governor, and he says he would be glad to see the day of your arrival in this country, as he feels well-assured that no aid will be sent from below. . . .³

If the purpose of the expedition was to establish commercial relations⁴ it is interesting to note the emphasis placed on the sending of troops, not merchants. Dryden's observations appear to be more Texan exaggeration than fact. His statement that he had conferred many times with the governor is not substantiated by the governor's papers. Furthermore, while there was some discontent on the part of a few New Mexicans it was not as great as Dryden reported.⁵

Nonetheless, with false information such as this and with prospects of territorial and economic gain, this legally unauthorized expedition of three hundred and twenty men under the command of Colonel Hugh McLeod departed for Santa Fe. The actual journey was one of poor leadership and extreme hardship. Personal accounts of the trek thoroughly discuss the starvation, Indian raids, and undisciplined troops. The men in the expedition had little knowledge of the desert they were about to cross. The originally expected five hundred miles to Santa Fe became more than one thousand after backtracking and misdirection. The expedition left too late in the year to find adequate grass and water. This "merchant caravan"—as the newspapers termed it—included two hundred and seventy troops and approximately fifty merchants, along with one brass howitzer. The group had more men than necessary to fend off the Indians, yet too few to attack a foreign nation.⁶

Although New Mexico was removed from main communication lines, news of the invasion filtered in to Armijo. In March 1840 Armijo was informed that approximately five hundred Texans were on the way to Taos.⁷ While this report proved to be false, it does show that the governor had the necessary time to prepare for the Texans. In his correspondence with the Mexican Minister of War, Armijo gives an accurate account of the events leading to the actual arrival of the Texans in September and October of 1841.

Armijo's concern over the expected invasion is clearly evident. By June 1840 he had become alarmed by the attitude of some New Mexicans: "Many of the people expect better conditions from the

Texans and thus refuse to help defend this land.”⁸ Perhaps he overstated his position in order to receive aid from the central government, but he did have definite cause for concern. Since the opening of trade with the United States in 1821, the people had looked more to the north for goods and supplies, than to the south.⁹

The constant theme running through Armijo’s letters to the Minister of War was the need for more troops. When it became apparent that troops would not be sent simply because of a *threatened* Texan attack, Armijo resorted to forwarding reports about revolutionaries in the Department and Indian attacks in the surrounding areas. In July 1840 Armijo reported that he had just concluded an unfavorable treaty with the Navajo because he could not make war against them with so few troops.¹⁰ In another letter, dated July 12, Armijo reported that only the priests could be trusted to be patriotic.¹¹ Although there doubtless was dissatisfaction in New Mexico, Armijo’s contention that the populace was ready to rebel is not substantiated by other documents for that year. A better explanation might be that the governor was using all possible methods to obtain troops. At worst the inhabitants were apathetic, not rebellious.

It is true that the troops under Armijo’s command were not in good condition. The presidio in Santa Fe could list but 107 men in March 1840, and the militia was in worse shape. Records show that many men who on paper were in the militia actually did not serve. Within the jurisdiction of Santa Fe, the muster rolls show 526 men as part of the militia. Of this number only thirty-four were categorized as *con armas en mano* (with arms in hand). This condition was the rule for other jurisdictions such as San Juan, Río Abajo, Albuquerque, and Cochiti. Although the army appeared quite powerful on paper, it had little actual strength.¹²

The military suffered from paucity of supplies and poor equipment. After Mexican Independence, the Spanish system for supplying the troops had been maintained. With payments one month to one year behind schedule, scant financial assistance from Mexico City, and inadequate training of the soldiers, it is a wonder that

the troops performed as well as they did.¹³ The arrangement by which the soldiers had to maintain their equipment at their own expense made effective armament difficult. Armijo tried to maintain frequent inspections, to no avail.¹⁴ A typical reply concerning payment of troops from the Minister of War to Armijo was that sufficient funds had been provided, and he was to fight the barbarians and to make do with what he had.¹⁵ The official must have become somewhat piqued at Armijo's constant requests, for the following day he wrote that less correspondence from Armijo would save paper and considerable expense to the government.¹⁶

Losing hope of receiving assistance from Mexico City, while reports concerning the Texan invasion continued, Armijo was forced to rally his people to the defense of the country. In a proclamation on July 16, 1840, the governor warned the citizens of the approaching Texan rebels. He asked whether the people were willing to be reduced to slavery, whether they would allow the destruction of their religion, and whether they would fight for their beloved country. Following this appeal to patriotism he ordered the following:

1. Any man over sixteen years of age, upon hearing news of an attack on the departmental frontiers is immediately ordered to report to the nearest political or military authority with his arms.
2. No person shall leave the department for the area held by the enemy for any reason whatsoever.
3. No person is to supply the enemy with articles of war or give any form of aid to them.
4. Foreigners who are naturalized citizens have the same obligations as Mexicans of natural birth. Foreigners not naturalized shall observe complete neutrality.
5. Those persons who fail to observe these declared ordinances of the law will be punished to the full extent of the law without remission.¹⁷

In this proclamation the governor's tone was both patriotic and

forceful. He could not fight a war without support from his countrymen, and it was his duty as governor and commandant general to rally the people to the defense of New Mexico.

Although, with the passing of September 1840, Armijo realized that a Texan expedition would not arrive that year, he became more convinced that Texan conspirators were already in New Mexico. During October 1840 a plot to assassinate Armijo was discovered in Santa Fe. Nothing of substance was proved in the trial of Julián García and Tomás Valencia except that they strongly disliked the policies of Armijo and wanted to kill him. Judging from the questions that the civil authorities asked these two men, it appears that the court thought they were in the service of Texas, but nothing was proved except their guilt.¹⁸

In the early months of 1841 Armijo continued his efforts to strengthen his troops and to organize the militia. Recent reports from the Comanche Indians told of having seen the Tejanos and indicated that they would arrive in Santa Fe in the autumn. Armijo was much alarmed fearing that the Texans would make an alliance with the Comanche against the Mexicans. On June 3 he notified the Minister of War that he needed troops and ammunition, hinting that the chance of a Comanche-Texan alliance was now a definite possibility.¹⁹ By this time the Minister of War had received similar reports from other sources and promised help.

Orders came from Mexico City telling Armijo to defend New Mexico at all costs. More important, troops and money would be sent to him for use as he saw fit. Finally, a well-organized plan of defense against the Texans was drawn up. Armijo would maintain his forces along the eastern frontier, guarding against Indian unrest and advance parties from Texas. Francisco García Conde governor of Chihuahua, would bring fresh troops and ammunition as soon as possible. The Minister of War wrote that it would be best to meet the Texans before they entered any populated areas, inasmuch as the patriotism of the people was still in question. Above all, Armijo was not to enter into any relations or agreements with the Texan rebels but was to obtain their immediate surrender.²⁰

While authorities organized policy outside the department, Armijo was not idle in establishing a plan within New Mexico. Trusted friends and officials were given specific duties: Antonio Sandoval was to watch for Indian trouble in the north; Vicar Juan Ortiz was to arouse public spirit in support of the government; Mariano Chávez was ordered to command the militia in Santa Fe; and scouting parties under Damasio Salazar and Santiago Ulibarrí were to guard the eastern frontier. In addition, one hundred pesos were offered to any person supplying definite information about the location of the Texans.²¹

Further complications developed when Armijo received reports impugning the loyalty of two of his most trusted militia captains, Juan Andrés Archuleta and Felipe Sena. On August 5 these men were investigated on suspicion of having knowledge of the enemy. Although Archuleta was second in command of the departmental armies, proceedings were initiated. Both defendants denied any connection with the Texans or knowledge of their whereabouts. Archuleta and Sena were exonerated, and Archuleta went to Taos to command the militia.²²

Many foreigners in Santa Fe became concerned for their lives and property in the event of an actual battle. In a letter to the governor, dated September 14, Manuel Álvarez, United States consul, demanded that foreigners in New Mexico be treated as neutrals and that their property be respected.²³ Armijo replied, "Citizens of countries friendly to Mexico will be protected and respected in accordance with treaties in effect."²⁴ Nevertheless, when Armijo left the capital on September 16 to fight the Texans, some irate Mexicans entered the Álvarez home and gave him a severe beating. Guadalupe Miranda, secretary to the governor, dispersed the rabble and apologized to Álvarez.²⁵

By September 1841 Armijo was prepared. Citizens and spies were on constant watch for the invaders, the militia had been organized in Taos under Juan Archuleta, and, on September 16, Antonio Sandoval arrived in Santa Fe to act as head of state while Armijo led his forces to San Miguel. Half-starved, ragged and weak, the Texans were in no shape to fight a war.

Owing to the poor condition of many of the men in the expedition, on August 30, Colonel McLeod, at Camp Resolution, had been obliged to divide the command:

However impolitic it may be considered to divide a command, in this instance such a course could not be avoided. We were completely lost, and without power of moving forward; our provisions . . . were now almost entirely exhausted, with only poor beef enough each day to support nature; and in addition we were surrounded by a large and powerful tribe of well-mounted Indians.²⁶

Captain William Cooke, with approximately one hundred of the strongest men carrying provisions for only five days, was to march ahead to San Miguel with the best animals. Colonel McLeod would remain behind with the rest of the command and continue as best he could. The five-day journey to San Miguel turned into a two-week battle against starvation and Indians.

On September 16 an advance party of five Texans, including George Kendall, was captured by Captain Damasio Salazar and his command of sixty-eight Mexicans. Salazar later reported that upon meeting the Texans he told them they could not enter the Department without first removing their arms. After some consultation the Texans complied. Two of the captives, probably George Kendall and William Lewis, demanded to see the governor, but Salazar informed them that this could not be arranged at that time. After conferring with his officers, Salazar decided that the Texans were spies and should be executed. Had not Gregorio Vigil interceded and argued that only Governor Armijo had authority to execute prisoners, all five Texans most certainly would have been shot.²⁷

Kendall's version is similar to Salazar's except for the personal slurs against the Mexicans.²⁸ He did exaggerate the strength of Salazar's force, which he places at over one hundred men. He also wrote that Salazar was a most ignorant man, unable to read or write.²⁹ This is impossible, for Salazar wrote complete reports to Armijo.

While the five Texan captives marched to San Miguel, Armijo passed them going in the opposite direction. Armijo paused long enough to express his need for an interpreter. William Lewis stepped forward to offer his services and went back with Armijo to meet the remainder of the Texans. On September 17 Salazar and Lewis found the remainder of the Cooke party at Antón Chico. Lewis told Captain Cooke that it would be futile to fight. Armijo with three thousand men was only twelve hours away. After Lewis pledged his Masonic word of honor that his fellow Texans would not be taken prisoners, that they would receive food and be well-treated, Cooke ordered his men to lay down their arms. They were immediately tied up and their property confiscated. The next morning Armijo arrived with fifteen hundred men and held a council of war to decide their fate. Franklin Combs, one of the captives, later stated that the council decided by one vote not to execute the prisoners. Within the next week the Cooke portion of the expedition had begun its long, tedious march to Mexico City.³⁰

Armijo then made his headquarters at Las Vegas and planned his strategy for the capture of the McLeod party—still out on the prairie. He ordered Juan Andrés Archuleta and a small reconnaissance party to search for the Texans. Archuleta found them at Laguna Colorada on October 4. He demanded immediate surrender, but McLeod asked for time to consult his companions. He promised to reply at nine o'clock the next morning. During the night Archuleta, who was well entrenched near the Texans, was reinforced by sixty *rurales* from Taos. This brought his total strength to 233 men. The Texans were now completely surrounded. McLeod had little choice and surrendered his command of 172 weak, starved, and scurvy-ridden men. On October 6 Archuleta took the captives' cannon and arms, and the next day these Texans also began their long march to Mexico City.³¹

Armijo's success prompted public celebrations throughout New Mexico. Proclamations offering Texan annexation of New Mexico were burned. In an official proclamation to the inhabitants of the Department, Armijo saluted and congratulated them for their prowess in defeating the Texan bandits:

You hesitated not one moment in taking arms when the country called you to its defense. . . . The enemies of our national integrity, who today by some mistake occupy the fertile territory of Texas, and who tried to extend from there the limits of that territory . . . , have met with the intrepid and bellicose nature of the New Mexicans. Be assured that with the perserverance and valor that you have given our nation, no enemy will accomplish such depraved plots as this.³²

While the hapless Texans marched some two thousand miles to Mexico City, there to be imprisoned,³³ Armijo was praised by the federal government for a job well done.

In spite of the complete failure of the Santa Fe expedition of 1841, talk in the Lone Star Republic of expansionistic expeditions continued. Once the captives returned to Texas in 1842, plans were made to retaliate against the so-called treachery of Armijo, Salazar, and Lewis. In 1843 an expedition under the command of Jacob Snively was commissioned for "intercepting and capturing the property of the Mexican traders who may pass through the territory of the Republic to and from Santa Fe."³⁴ Some raids were made, but the majority of the expedition returned to Texas when Captain Philip St. George Cooke of the United States Army disarmed the band after they had crossed into United States territory.³⁵

Manuel Armijo viewed these Texans as enemies of the Mexican nation. It would be unrealistic to conclude that the Mexican government had any other policy toward Texas at this time. Circulars issued by the Mexican government to the diplomatic corps in Mexico City reminded them of the state of war between Texas and Mexico.³⁶ While apologists for the Texan-Santa Fe expedition may argue that New Mexico was part of Texas because of the Treaty of Velasco, the Mexicans entertained no such belief. When Governor Manuel Armijo found an armed body of Texans approaching New Mexico, he treated them as an invading army and preserved the Department of New Mexico for the national government.

NOTES

1. George Wilkins Kendall, *Narrative of the Texan Santa Fe Expedition* (Chicago, 1929); Thomas Falconer, *Letters and Notes on the Texan Santa Fe Expedition 1841-1842* (Chicago, 1963); Franklin Combs, "Combs' Narrative of the Santa Fe Expedition in 1841," *NMHR*, vol. 5 (1930), pp. 305-14; Cayton Erhard, "Cayton Erhard's Reminiscences of the Texan Santa Fe Expedition, 1841," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, vol. 66 (1963), pp. 424-56, 547-68. A more scholarly dealing with the expedition can be found in Hubert Howe Bancroft, *History of the North Mexican States and Texas* (San Francisco, 1889), vol. 2, pp. 332-37; Ralph Emerson Twitchell, *The Leading Facts of New Mexican History* (Cedar Rapids, 1911), vol. 2, pp. 74-89; William Campbell Binkley, "New Mexico and the Texan Santa Fe Expedition," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, vol. 27 (1923); and Noel M. Loomis, *The Texan-Santa Fe Pioneers* (Norman, 1958).

2. Loomis, p. 18.

3. Dryden to Lamar, Santa Fe, Mar. 10, 1841, in A. K. Christian, "Mirabeau Bonapart Lamar," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, vol. 24 (1920), p. 111.

4. In a letter from Houston to President Santa Anna after the capture of the expedition, Houston argued that the prisoners should be released because they had gone to Santa Fe only for purposes of trade and commerce. Twitchell, p. 71.

5. Mexican Archives of New Mexico, 1821-1846, State of New Mexico Records Center, Santa Fe (MANM), Governor's Papers, 1840, 1841.

6. Bancroft, vol. 2, p. 333. *See also* Loomis, p. 9.

7. Armijo to Minister of War, Santa Fe, Mar. 17, 1840, Governor's Papers. MANM.

8. *Id.* to *id.*, June 12, 1840. *Ibid.*

9. Josiah Gregg, *The Commerce of the Prairies* (Dallas, 1933), p. 322.

10. Armijo to Minister of War, Santa Fe, July 31, 1840, Governor's Papers. MANM.

11. *Id.* to *id.*, July 12, 1840. *Ibid.*

12. Military and Company Records for 1840, Santa Fe. MANM.

13. Sidney B. Brinckerhoff and Odie B. Faulk, *Lancers for the King* (Phoenix, 1965).

14. Orders of Armijo, Military and Company Records for 1841, July 14, 1841, Santa Fe. MANM.

15. Minister of War to Armijo, Mexico, Oct. 30, 1839, Governor's Papers. MANM.

16. *Id.* to *id.*, Oct. 30, 1839, *Ibid.*

17. Proclamation of Armijo to the inhabitants of New Mexico, Santa Fe, July 16, 1840. MANM.
18. Proceedings against Julián García and Tomás Valencia, Military and Company Records, 1840, Santa Fe, Oct. 17, 1840. MANM.
19. Armijo to Minister of War, Santa Fe, June 3, 1841, Governor's Papers. MANM.
20. Antonio López de Santa Anna to Armijo, Mexico, July 12, 1841; Minister of War to Armijo, Santa Fe, July 12, 1841. *Ibid.*
21. Armijo to Conde, Santa Fe, Sept. 22, 1841, Governor's Papers. MANM.
22. Proceedings against Juan Andrés Archuleta and Felipe Sena, Military and Company Records, 1841, Santa Fe, Aug. 5, 1841. MANM.
23. Álvarez to Armijo, Santa Fe, Sept. 12, 1841, Governor's Papers. MANM.
24. Armijo to Álvarez, Santa Fe, Sept. 12, 1841. *Ibid.*
25. Miranda to Álvarez, Santa Fe, Sept. 17, 1841. *Ibid.*
26. Kendall, p. 279.
27. Diary of Damasio Salazar, Sept. 11-15, 1841 (William G. Ritch Collection, Huntington Library, San Marino, California.)
28. Kendall, p. 377.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 379.
30. Combs, pp. 307-09.
31. Diary of Juan Andrés Archuleta, Sept. 30-Oct. 9, 1841, Governor's Papers. MANM.
32. Proclamation of Armijo to the inhabitants of New Mexico, Santa Fe, Nov. 10, 1841. *Ibid.*
33. For diplomatic correspondence concerning the Texan prisoners while in Mexico see *United States Senate Documents No. 325*, 27th Cong., 2nd Sess., Serial no. 398.
34. Commission of Jacob Snively, Feb. 16, 1843, in William E. Connelley ed., "A Journal of the Santa Fe Trail," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, vol. 12 (1925), pp. 228-29.
35. Stephen B. Oates, ed., "Hugh F. Young's Account of the Snively Expedition as Told to John S. Ford," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, vol. 70 (1966). See also H. Bailey Carroll, "Steward A. Miller and the Snively Expedition of 1843," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, vol. 54 (1951).
36. A good example is Circular to diplomatic corps from Mexican Minister of Foreign Affairs, in Waddy Thompson, *Recollections of Mexico* (New York, 1846), pp. 285-86.