

MEXICAN WAR

DONIPHAN EXPEDITION - FALL OF SANTA FE

1846



Dated "Sand Creek Camp August 22, 1846" from a member of the Doniphan Expedition. Santa Fe fell on August 18, less than a week before this letter was written. It was carried by military courier back up the Trail and was in the first mail out of the occupied capital of New Mexico.

After describing Bents Fort on the Arkansas River (the last white settlement prior to crossing over the Mexican border), he also reported on a major loss of horses there:

"...On the 28 of July we camped about 10 miles below the fort at the mouth of the picket wire [Purgatoire River] a considerable stream which rises in the spanish mountains about 100 miles from where it empties into the arkansaw. It was here that a great many had the misfortune to loose their horses and among that number was myself. We arrived there early in the day and the horses about 1500 in number were turned loose in a bend in the river and a guard placed around them to keep them from rambling but owing to their carelessness a few that were permitted to get outside of the guard frightened the others and about 400 broke, helter skelter and scattered in almost every direction, some across the arkansaw, some across the picket wire and some to the plains. Almost every man in the camp was seen running to and fro, in a state bordering on

distraction for to loose a horse that distance from home, with but little chance of getting another, compelled to keep up with the army or left to the tender mercies of the savages, was enough to distract almost any man..."

The actual capture of the town seemed almost an anticlimax:

"...Another days travel brought us to the Bagas [Las Vegas?] a small town situated between high mountains containing about 200 inhabitants. We were here informed that the spaniards had collected a force of 1500 men to oppose us but they dispersed before we reached the place. After pasing several little towns all of which swore allegiance to our government we came to the pass in the mexican cadilleras where Armitheho the gov of santafee had collected a force of 4 or 5000 men but upon hearing of our near approach they dispersed also. The next day we took peaceable possession of santafee..."

the southeast through a parched plain where there was scarcely any grass and the dust and wind flying so that not ten men out of the two regiments could be seen at time by a spectator. We camped for two successive nights where there was scarcely any grass and but little water and that very salt. The 3d or 4th day we reached the picket wire near the mountains where we had excellent water, but little grass. I have said that the appearance of the country was a monotonous one which up to this place had been the case, but here the appearance of the country was very much altered. we were in full view of the spanish peaks and snowy mountains as they are called which are spurs of the rocky mountains, extending to a great distance to the eastward appeared like an interminable range of hills and mountains. I must here remark that I was never more deceived as respects distance than at this place. The Rattoon peak the highest of the snowy mountains appeared here at sunset to be at the distance of about two miles and owing to the purity of the atmosphere appeared with as much distinctness as it had been at that distance. Its real distance was about 20 miles and it was not until twelve of the 2d day that we passed the foot of the rattoon peak. We were then several hundred feet higher than the picket wire but the rattoon peak appeared stretching its bold head several hundred feet higher than where we were. The spanish peaks appeared at great distance to the right covered with snow which could be seen distinctly through the openings of the clouds which hung around its summit. I crossing the snowy mountains we passed up a narrow valley, in many places that mountains not more than 200 yards from summit to summit on each side. The distance of 15 miles in the ascent and about the same distance in the descent at the foot of which one of the howard men was buried. After traveling the distance of 60 or 70 miles through a valley or plain we crossed another low range of mountains and entered the valley of Mori (?) a beautiful and picturesque valley covered with flocks and herds. Another days travel brought us to the Bagus a small town situated between high mountains containing about 200 inhabitants. We were here informed that the spaniards had collected a force of 1500 men to oppose us but they dispersed before we reached the place. After passing several little towns all of which swore allegiance to our government we came to the pass in the mexican cadilleras where Armeteo the gov of santafee had collected a force of 4 or 5000 men but upon hearing of our near approach they dispersed also. The next day we took peaceable possession of santafee. The companies are now divided for the purpose of grazing. One half of the men remain at santafee. The other half about 20 miles south with the horses. I have many other things I could write but my limits will not permit. Adeson Smith desires you to let his parents know that he is well and doing well. E. W. Carpenter was well when I left him the other day at santafee. Write the first opportunity and let me know how all are doing at home how fathers crops are doing and how Sarah and Martha are getting along and whether little William has forgotten me or not; give me all the general news. What is the feelings of the people towards the expedition and last but not least of all how the girls of my acquaintance are doing.

We are now about 2000 strong and have taken the cannon which Armejo hid in a little town about two miles from where we are grazing together with the ammunition. It is not yet known whether we will return this winter or not but the supposition is that we will remain here until peace is made with mexico, or in the surrounding country.

P.S, I had forgotten to tell you that I purchased a horse at bentsfort for which I paid 70 dollars. There is also a rumor afloat that we leave in ten days for the south alpasso and from there to new orleans and home.

If you have any small works in pamphlet form that would amuse or benefit me please to send them as I am often lonesome and desirous of having something to relieve my mind.

If you knew how difficult a matter it was to write on rumpled paper on the ground an old hat or a wagon tongue in a hurry too, amid the confusion of the camp interrupted half a dozen times, while writing you would be ready to excuse the deficiencies of this and also of my former one. Yours affectionately

James H. Finley

(1)

Sand Creek Camp August 22 1846

Dear Brother

As the mail leaves ^{our camp} to day, for Santafee I embrace the present opportunity of writing to you. We arrived at Santafee on the 18th inst after a tedious march of 51 days. I wrote you at walnut creek I believe since that time we have lain by but very little. Our journey has been one of a very monotonous character since leaving walnut creek we traveled about 300 miles up the Arkansas to Bent's fort. It is situated in about the same latitude as fort Leavenworth distant about 400 miles. It is built pretty much in the form of the Arsenal near Liberty, of unburnt brick ~~and~~ the walls being much lower, there is also an additional wall covering about half an acre for the purpose of keeping their stock during the night or from being stolen by the indians. A Spaniard is always in attendance herding the stock and the moment ~~they~~ an enemy is discovered they are driven rapidly into the enclosure and the gate barred so that unless they are sufficiently strong to take the fort they are secure. On the 27 of July we camped about 10 miles below the fort at mouth of the Picket wire a considerable stream which rises in the Spanish mountains

about 100 miles from where it empties into the
arkansaw. It was here that a great many had
the misfortune to loose their horses and among
that number was myself. we arrived there
early in the day and the horses about fifteen
hundred in number were turned loose in
a bend of the river and a guard placed
around them to keep them from rambling
but owing to their carelessness a few that
were permitted to get outside of the guard frightened
the others and about 200 broke, better shelter
and scattered in almost every direction some across
the arkansaw some across the picket wire and some
to the plains, almost every man in the camp
was seen running to and fro, in a state bordering
on distraction for to loose a horse that distance
from home, with but little chance of getting
another, compelled to keep up with the army
or left to the kinder mercies of the savages,
was enough to distract almost any man not
fortified by former trials, but the different
companies were perhaps more united by a
common sense of their loss than at any other
time, and every exertion was made to bring them
back to camp, no one stopped to ask whose horse
but caught all that he could, some went so
far that they did not return that night
whilst others were constantly returning
with horses until late in the night.

which kept the camp in a commotion during
most of the night. The next morning the roll
was called when it was found that some
ten or twelve were yet missing, ^{from our Co} a detail of
ten men was then made from our company
(and from others also, to go in search of them)
after we had drawn our provisions we started
in a southeast direction across the picket wire
the run being about one hour and a half high
we traveled about two degrees to the right of the
main trail about two o'clock our route lay over a
sandy plain, almost destitute of vegetation,
with but few undulations, and no water except
a little stagnant water in one place, which almost
vomited us, we crossed and recrossed during the
day several times the tracks of horses but did
not see any although we went about 30 miles
and owing to levelness of the plains could
see to the distance of several miles farther.
you may judge of the feelings of some of us
about the time we changed our direction
for the camp for my own part I felt
pretty much as I suppose a mariner would
when cast off in the broad ocean with
no vessel in sight compelled to buffet the
waves to support his existence, and indeed
our situation was in some respects not very
dissimilar for we were in an ocean
of sand almost as level as the ocean

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without any ~~real~~ ~~in sight~~ ~~seeing~~ thing in sight
except the mirable antelope which caused a
feeling of loneliness and of impotence and
a sort of melancholy I never experienced
before and I hope I never shall again I gazed
around me for a long time until my head became
dizzy but could see nothing to enliven us except
an appearance very much resembling water in the
distance, which reminded me of the sufferings
of Robins and made me ~~at last~~ ashamed of my
own we then turned our course towards the
picket wire at the nearest point which we
reached about sundown twelve miles above
the camp After picketing our tired horses
we proceeded to cook our supper, when we
espied men coming across the plains in the same
direction in which we came after they had
come within 400 yards they halted when we
stepped out and made signs for them to approach
which they did, It proved to be a party that
had been out hunting horses also, they informed
us that they had been about 20 miles ^{farther} up the
picket wire and that they had seen 5 horses
one of which answered the description of mine
so well that I became satisfied I should
never see little roan again

Williams has forgotten me or not, give me all the general news
 what is the feelings of the people towards this expedition and last but
 not least of all how the girls of my acquaintance are doing &c

P.S. I had forgotten to tell you that
 I purchased a horse at Bent's fort for
 which I paid 70 dollars there is also
 a rumor afloat that we leave in ten
 days for the south al paso and from
 thence to new orleans and home

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Discover Bent's fort & trip
 to Santa Fe
 1846 expedition to Santa Fe

R. W. G. Finley
 Liberty Clay Co



150-
 98-
 100-

I have been very much interested in
 the small number of men who have
 been sent on the expedition and
 how they are getting on. I have
 heard that they are all well and
 that they are making good progress.
 I have also heard that they are
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 that they are all well and that they
 are making good progress.

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she had stood the journey remarkably well
 and was full of fire and could take a
 Buffalo as quick as any animal in the
 regiment, one of which I had the the pleasure
 of killing about a hundred miles
 below Bent's fort, while riding her under
 full tilt. After leaving Bent's fort we
 traveled one days journey up the Arkansas
 and changed our direction to the southeast
 through a parched plain where there was
 scarcely any grass and the dust and sand
 flying so that not ten men out of the two
 regiments could be seen at times by a
 spectator, we camped for two successive
 nights where there was scarcely any grass
 and but little water, and that very night
 the 30 or 40th day we reached the picket wire
 near the mountains where we had excellent
 water, but little grass. I have said that
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