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BLACKSTON McDANNEL TO ANDREW JOHNSON:
AN EAST TENNESSEAN IN THE MEXICAN WAR

Edited by

LEROY P. GRAF AND RALPH W. HASKINS

Tennessee's claim to the title of "The Volunteer State," apparently originating in the War of 1812,¹ was further validated by her role in the Mexican War. In response to the federal government's call for 3,000 men, Tennessee immediately responded with nearly 30,000.² Yet not all Tennesseans rushed pellmell into volunteering; among those who delayed were Andrew Johnson's close personal and political friends in Greeneville, Samuel Milligan and Blackston McDannel. These men hoped, through the influence of Congressman Johnson, to secure commissions in regiments to be raised in East Tennessee. Johnson, for his part, was very much dissatisfied with the way in which his fellow-Tennessean, President Polk, was handling the patronage, both civil and military. Of the former he remarked, "Take Polk's appointments all and all and they are the most *damnable* set that were even [*sic*] made by any president since the government was organized, out of Tennessee as well as in it."³ As late as February, 1847, Johnson was attempting to obtain favorable positions for his friends in the new companies about to be raised in East Tennessee.⁴ Though Milligan eventually became a captain, McDannel drew only a sergeancy in the commissary department of one of the volunteer companies. While thus serving, he recounted his experiences in several letters to Johnson; only one of these seems to have been preserved and is here printed.

Blackston McDannel (January 15, 1811-July 27, 1888), born and reared in Knoxville,⁵ was one of a small number of close friends with

¹ Robert H. White, "The Volunteer State," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly*, XV (March, 1956), 53-56.

² Justin H. Smith, *The War with Mexico*, 2 vols. (New York, 1919), I, 195.

³ Johnson to [Blackston McDannel?], Washington, July 22, 1846, Johnson Papers, Library of Congress. This and all letters subsequently cited are to be found as paper facsimiles in the files of the Andrew Johnson Project, University of Tennessee Library, Knoxville, Tennessee, and have been used in this form by the editors.

⁴ Johnson to D. T. Patterson, Washington, February 28, 1847, *ibid.*

⁵ Mrs. LeRoy Brown, "Old Greeneville Cemetery," in Jeannette Tillotson Acklen and others (comps.), *Tennessee Records, Tombstone Inscriptions and Manuscripts, Historical and Biographical* (Nashville, 1933), 134; B. McDannel to Johnson, Greeneville, March 15, 1861, Johnson Papers.

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whom Johnson felt at ease and with whom he exchanged some of the most revealing letters to be found in the Johnson Papers. Contemporaries described him as "Andy Johnson's only intimate."⁶ The Census of 1850 listed a "B. McDaniel" (a common misspelling, even by subsequent Johnson biographers) as a plasterer, with real property to the value of \$800. He was a widower with four children, three of whom were in school.⁷ It would appear that he did not confine his activities to plastering. Soon after Johnson entered Congress in 1843, McDannel enlisted his aid in presenting and validating a number of pension claims against the government.⁸ Even in the months just before the outbreak of the Civil War, he was still bombarding his friend with letters relating to claims.⁹ Meanwhile, he seems to have been speculating in land warrants.¹⁰ During the first months of 1861, when Johnson was widely regarded as the chief patronage dispenser of the Lincoln administration in Tennessee,¹¹ McDannel became a successful candidate for the office of United States marshal for East Tennessee.¹²

The Mexican War years were the occasion for the exchange of several letters between Johnson and "Old Mac." Soon after McDannel and Milligan went off to war, Johnson wrote a long, gossipy letter—¹³ a letter which regaled them in lively fashion with news of Greeneville and reflected the warmth of friendship which existed among the three men. Of Greeneville he reported that five schools were operating, wryly remarking "what a place this is becoming to be for literature and profound learning—." That the town also sheltered activities on a somewhat lower cultural level, he made clear.

⁶ Robert W. Winston, *Andrew Johnson, Plebeian and Patriot* (New York, 1928), 17.

⁷ United States, Seventh Census (1850), Original Schedules (Microfilm), Population, Tennessee, Greene County, Greeneville, 278.

⁸ McDannel to Johnson, Greeneville, December 23, 1844, and Johnson to McDannel, Jonesboro, Tenn., April 6, 1845, Johnson Papers.

⁹ McDannel to Johnson, Greeneville, March 26, April 4, May 19, and June 6, 1860, *ibid.*

¹⁰ "I wrote to Bob [Robert Johnson], to enquire the price of Land warrants at Washington and to drop me a line, with a view of disposing of them through him— Please jog his memory— I am opposed to the homestead, until I sell off my warrants, and then I dont care a damn.— Will it pass soon?" McDannel to Johnson, Greeneville, June 6, 1860, *ibid.*

¹¹ J. Milton Henry, "The Revolution in Tennessee, February, 1861, to June, 1861," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly*, XVIII (June, 1959), 99-119.

¹² McDannel to Johnson, Greeneville, March 15, 1861, Johnson Papers; Winston, *Andrew Johnson*, 187.

¹³ Johnson to McDannel, Greeneville, October 19, 1847, Johnson Papers.

Carter Johnson who you know recently opened a dead fall¹⁴ at the west end of town; was indicted by Williams for trading with his negro[e]s with an infraudulent [*sic*] intent, &c also returned in some two cases by the grand jury,— After these moves were made Carter became alarmed and has fled to parts unknown, perhaps you may meet with him some where in Mexico doing battle in his countries [*sic*] cause—.¹⁵

Johnson closed the letter in a more serious vein:

You will both accept assurances of my high esteem and sincere friendship, and further, my most devoute [*sic*] prayer, that the divine arm of a protecting providence may be extended over you, and that the *aegis* of american liberty, be thrown around you, the one to preserve you from the diseas[e] of a destructive climate—the other to shield you from the assaults of a perfidious and dastardly foe—

At the time McDannel wrote the letter which follows, he was stationed with the "army of occupation" in Jalapa, having recently made the trip from Vera Cruz. The bulk of the letter is devoted to a detailed and at times vivid description of the country through which he travelled, and particularly to the exciting events of the American march into the interior of Mexico during the previous year. He was especially interested in the places associated with the Battle of Cerro Gordo, which had taken place April 17-18, 1847. Like so many Americans who took part in the Mexican War, McDannel, impressed by the agricultural possibilities of the country and animated by a feeling of racial condescension, believed that the United States should retain possession. One can also observe in him something of the pedagogue, for he was at pains to provide Johnson with accurate phonetic spellings of Mexican places and terms.

This letter is of interest since relatively few Mexican War letters written by Tennesseans have been printed, and the majority of these are concerned with the actual military campaigns rather than with the "mopping up" operations which accompanied and followed the conflict. Moreover, McDannel was a rather literate enlisted man whose comments reveal both an enthusiasm for colorful military events and an interest in existing local conditions.

Jalapa, Mexico

Jan. 28th 1848

Friend Johnson

A few days ago I wrote you a hasty letter relative to some money, and

¹⁴ A low drinking or gambling saloon.

¹⁵ Elsewhere in the letter, he assured his friends: "The health of the town is good, Scandal in abundance in all sorts. I presume a fair proportion of whoring is carried on by way of variety &c—"

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enclosed it to my wife,¹⁶ with directions for her to send it to you from Green[e]ville provided she failed in getting \$100 from Daniel Britton,¹⁷ to whom I had previously written to let her have that amount by way of a loan, as it was impracticable for me to send her any funds from here, and very uncertain from Vera Cruz. If you get that letter I hope you will find it convenient to send her that amount— If she gets the money, from Daniel, she may not send you the letter; but I hope she will, as it contained a short sketch of my late trip from Vera Cruz to the Robbers Bridge Enroute for Jalapa (Ha-lap-a)—I could say no more then as the mail for Vera Cruz would have closed before I could have written what I intend to write now; but I promised to resume my narrative in my next which I now proceed to do. Well, in consequence of the attack made by the Guerrillas (Gur-ee-ye-rose) upon the rear of the train, we lay at the Robbers Bridge from the evening of the 4th, until the morning of the 6th, inst.— In the meantime several companies of Dragoons and Infantry were sent back from camp, some 12 miles, to bring up the rear, and to pursue and recover the captured property, consisting of 300 Pack mules belonging to Mexican Merchants, with valuable Packs, worth between 2 and 300 thousand Dollars. About midnight of the 5th the last of the discomfited rear came up and encamped for the night— The night of the 4th, and the whole of the 5th was spent in scouring and reconnoitering the neighboring Heights and adjacent country by numerous detachments of troops, who burned down nearly all the Ranches in the neighborhood, and occupied all the approaches to our camp— It was very evident that Lieut. Col. Miles¹⁸ apprehended a serious attack— But the whole passed off without even seeing an Enemy, save about 300 who captured the mules and put to the route [*sic*] the little command of Lieut. Walker consisting of 45 Dragoons, 3 of whom it is said were killed and 2 or 3 wounded— At the time of the little brush, I was 12 miles in the advance, with the advance guard, and knew nothing of it until after the advance had pitched their tents for the night at the Robbers Bridge— The first news that came from the rear was, that upwards of 50 of our men had been killed, the rest put to flight, and that the Mexicans had captured 900 Pack miles [*sic*]—You may guess what excitement this intelligence created— It would have done you good to see our b'hoys starting from camps with a prospect of a fight before them, with the Guerrillas, whose numbers were represented to be about 2000.

Well while all this was going on as I have described it, what do you think I was doing? You may perhaps imagine [*sic*] that I was with some of the scouring parties, musket in hand, seeking the Enemy in the thick, thorny chapar[r]al, or standing upon some peak of the surrounding heights, looking cautiously around and into the deep valleys and gorges below for the murdering bands of Mexican Robbers— But in all this you would be very much mistaken—for I was

¹⁶ McDannel's first wife, Elizabeth, born April 9, 1811, died May 22, 1848. It is not clear whether her husband had returned to Greeneville prior to her death. Brown, "Old Greeneville Cemetery," 134. Even before he received this letter, Johnson, in response to the earlier "hasty" letter of January 23 to which McDannel here refers, had paid one hundred dollars to Mrs. McDannel. Johnson to McDannel, Washington, March 24, 1848, Johnson Papers.

¹⁷ According to the census of 1850, Daniel Britton was a fifty-three year-old farmer possessing \$2,500 in real property. Compared with other holdings in this rural area, he was relatively prosperous. Seventh Census, Pop., Tenn., Greene, Ninth Div., E. District, 610.

¹⁸ D. H. Miles, as captain of a regiment in the Seventh Infantry, participated in Taylor's early campaigns in the lower Rio Grande. He was the officer who took possession of the town of Camargo in July, 1846, and during the fall of that year rendered signal service in the battle of Monterey. Robert Selph Henry, *The Story of the Mexican War* (Indianapolis, 1950), 147; Smith, *War with Mexico*, I, 209-10, 245.

quietly sitting on the Bank of the little river that flows by our camp with cigar in mouth, and hook and line in hand catchaing [*sic*] a fine mess of catfish and looking at some Mexican women who were bathing in the stream above me. The latter was a delightful *Ass peck* in that dreary region.

Before day on the morning of the 6th, we paid our respects to our catfish breakfast in the most handsome stile [*sic*], to say nothing of a bottle of good old French brandy that lay in the way, and by sun up we had struck our tents, packed up, and mounted our fine Kentucky Gray's and was upon the great National road, in battle line, for the National Bridge, our third Encampment.—It was a glorious sight to stand upon some lofty eminence over which the road passed, and look to the right and to the left upon a Train 12 miles long, consisting of 5 or 600 Wagons, 900 Pack mules and 1500 armed men with polished Sabers and glittering muskets and Bayonets, all in battle order and ready and eager to meet the Enemy without regard to numbers— Before leaving Vera Cruz, it was reported that 3000 Guerrillas were waiting for us at the mountain Pass of Plan Del Rio and that in all probability we would have a battle— The attack on the morning of the 4th seemed to strengthen the probabilities of a fight at Plan Del Rio, and as this place was to be our fourth encampment, of course we began to be on the lookout— The advance arrived at the National Bridge about 1 o'clock and about 9 in the evening the last of the Rear came up— We found the place occupied by a Battallion [*sic*] of Georgia and other troops— You may be sure I paid particular attention to the localities of this celebrated Pass—¹⁹ I cannot describe it as I wish, but will try to give you a feint [*sic*] idea of this "Gate of the Nation" relying more upon the accompanying Pencil marks, than upon words— Approaching the Pass and fortifications, you descend about one mile from a high, broken, and rocky country covered with Chapar[r]jal, down into the Gorge through which the road passes in a Northerly direction— Where the slope terminates, a splendid bridge, supported by 5 arches is thrown across a small stream— farther on and at the butt of a fortified height to the left, commences the great National Bridge thrown over the Antigua River and supported by 7 arches— To the right, before crossing the main Bridge, is the river, which sweeps under the bridge and washes the base of another fortified height on the same side, and runs in a southerly direction first— then uniting with the waters of the small stream first crossed, winds to the left around the Butt of the height to the right and is lost to the view among the thousands of mountain heights to the East— The fortifications on the heights, separated by the road and river, are almost within musket shot of each other, and commands both bridges and the approaches to them from either side, either by the road or over the high lands through the Chapar[r]jal— It was from the Heights to the right & left of the Bridges that the Mexicans poured down their murderous fire of musketry upon Maj. Lally's²⁰ command, last spring, as they were crossing the bridges— Some 80 or 90 fell before the command reached the ascending ground beyond the

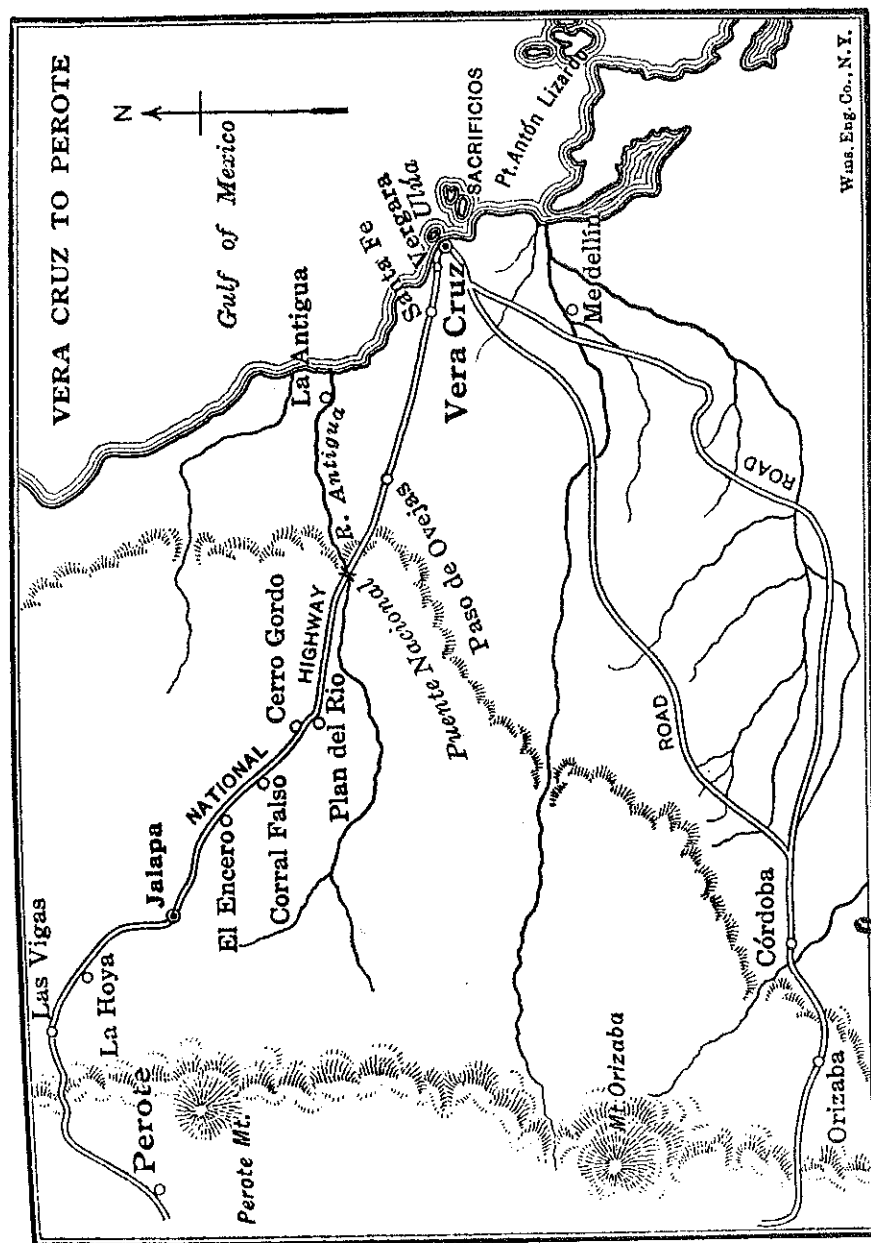
¹⁹ A reference to Cerro Gordo, the scene of the battle of the previous year. The accompanying maps show both the route travelled by the Americans and the immediate environs of Cerro Gordo.

²⁰ F. T. Lally was one of a number of officers engaged in supplying Scott in central Mexico. McDannel is probably referring to the expedition of early August, 1847, when Lally left the coast with more than one thousand soldiers, two 6-pounders, and sixty-four wagons. In the course of the journey to the interior, he suffered nearly one hundred casualties, though he was able to get all of his merchandise through. Appointed from civil life, he was regarded as an ineffectual commander, not only in the field but in maintaining discipline among his troops, so that during the time they were stationed in Jalapa, his men were described as "a scourge." *Ibid.*, II, 171-72, 224, 422.

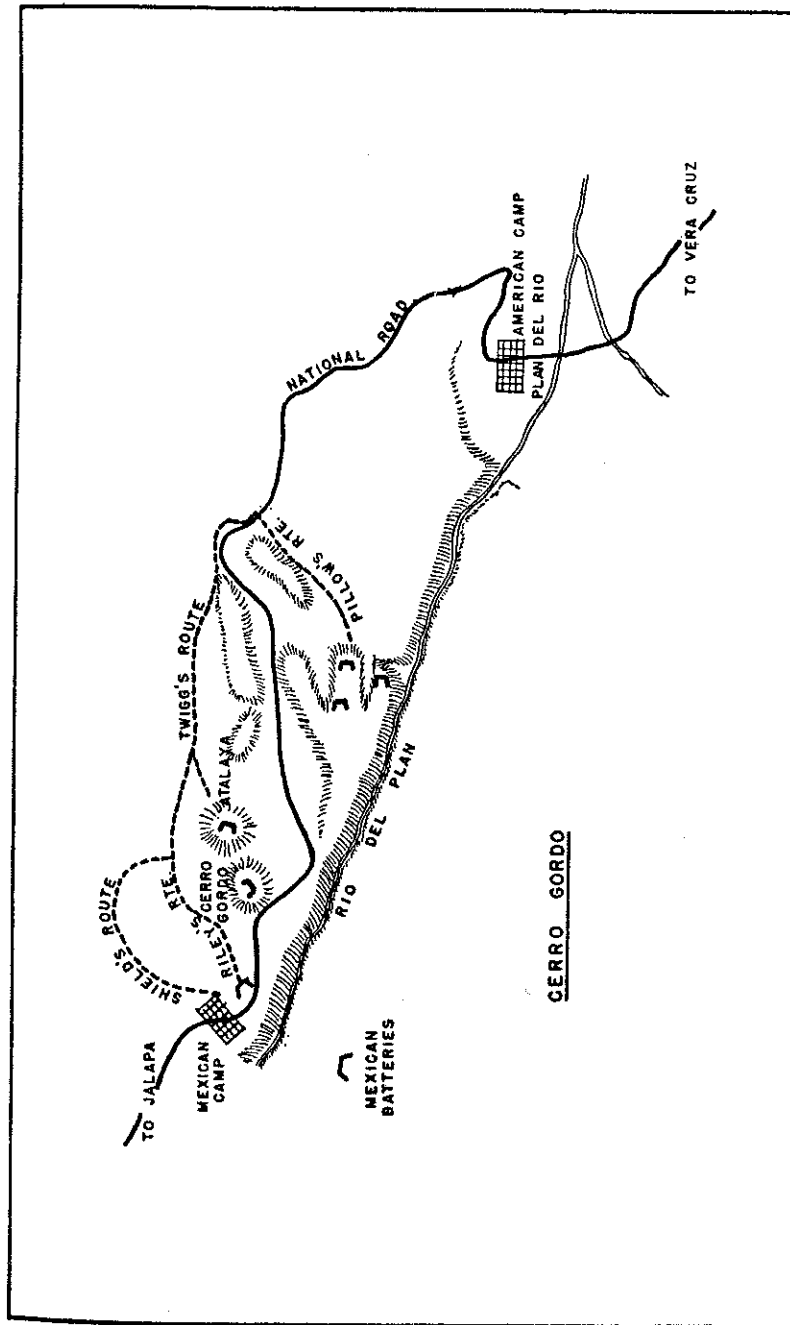
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From Smith, *War With Mexico*, II, 39.



From Henry, *Story of the Mexican War*, 281. Courtesy of Bobbs-Merrill Co.

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Bridge, out of the reach of Mexican bullets— Every man at one piece of Artillery was shot down upon the Bridge, save one officer and one private, the latter of whom (an Irishman named Foster) is our cook and tells many thrilling incidents connected with that disaster—both of these brave fellows, stuck to their Gun amid showers of bullets, notwit[h]standing they were severely wounded, and continued loading and firing and retreating until they were out of reach of the Enemies musketry—and in the mean time repelled the attack of 6 Lanceros who came down into the road to take their cannon, 4 of whom they killed, the other two vamosed— Previous to the bloody tragedy, Major Lally with a small Escort rode down into the Pass to reconnoitre, but seeing no sign of an Enemy rode back and ordered his command forward— The Mexicans in the mean time did not show themselves upon the heights until the whole command were upon the Bridges below, when they commenced their murderous fire of musketry into the ranks of our countrymen, 5000 resolute men stationed upon these heights, properly officered and posted, with the necessary fortifications, Guns, Ammunition &c, could defend the Pass against the approaches and attacks of 50000 of the best troops in the world.

Well after crossing the last Bridge we ascended a long sloping hill some 4 or 500 yards to the Hacienda of one Don Antonio Lopez De Santa Anna,²¹ and pitched our Tent under its high walls where we spent a pleasant night— It is hardly worth while to describe this mansion.— It is however a splendid concern for this country, situated upon the South side of the road near the summit of the ascent and upon a Bluff overlooking the Antigua which runs directly East until it passes through the arches of the Bridge, when it turns short to the south passing the two bridges, then around the butt of a mountain to the left and Eastward as before described—

Here we received intelligence that 4000 Mexicans were collecting and waiting for the Train at the Pass of Plan Del Rio, our fourth Encampment, where we would certainly have a fight— So great was the apprehension of an attack at that place or at Cerro Gordo 5 miles further on, that an order was issued to arm all who applied for arms— The Maj. had a Six barrell shooting iron, and a Pen Knife only— I also had a six shooter and *that Knife* (which by the by, felt the heart of at least one mexican before leaving Vera Cruz by a Missi[ssi]ppian to whom I had loaned it on two or three night expeditions after the Guerrilleras in the vicinity of Vera Cruz) Well, in addition to these small arms the Major and myself armed ourselves with a brace of Horseman Pistols each, and a bottle of good *old* whisky to cheer us in the hour of danger, after which we mounted our Grays and pushed ahead until we overtook the advance Guard where we marched until our arrival at the much talked of Plan Del Rio, a similar pass to that of the National Bridge— You may imagine how much *we* were disappointed at not finding 4000 Guerrilleras to receive us at Plan Del Rio—I Shall not attempt to describe my *disappointment*.

Here we soon Pitched our tents and passed a very pleasant night in the midst of dead mens bones and dead Horses. Previous to our arrival at Plan Del Rio and a few miles Eastward of that place, we were met by 3 companies of Dragoons who had been dispatched from this place by Gov. Hughes²² to our

²¹ El Encero was the name of the Mexican leader's hacienda, eight miles below Jalapa and just beyond the pass of Cerro Gordo. *Ibid.*, II, 42.

²² Colonel George W. Hughes (1806-1870), at this time the governor of Jalapa, after attending West Point, had pursued a career as civil engineer prior to entering the army in 1838. As a member of a troop of Maryland and District of Columbia volunteers, he had been a surveyor on the staff of General John E. Wool in northern Mexico during

assistance, having heard of the attack upon the train between Vera Cruz and Robbers Bridge and the gathering of the Guerrillas to the number of 4000 in the vicinity of Cerro Gordo—Hughes' plan of surprising the Guerrillas was admirable—After pushing the three companies of Dragoons by the Cerro Gordo Pass, he posted some 12 or 1500 men on the side of the pass next Jalapa—intending, as Col. Miles advanced from the East, to close in from the west and hem the Mexicans in such a manner as to leave no avenue to escape—As to this arrangement and reinforcement, we were all ignorant, except some of the officers; we knew nothing of it, until we passed the memorable spot where Santa Anna lost his wooden Leg—²³ On the morning of the 7th, bright and early, the whole camp was in motion preparing for the day's march, and the fight at Cerro Gordo only 5 or 6 miles distant—By Sun up we were on the road that led up the steep side of a Big Ridge and over to Cerro Gordo—leaving behind us the dilapidated [*sic*] Hacienda and Ranches—the blown up bridge and frightful heights and precipices of Plan Del Rio,—in high spirits and ready for any thing that might present itself in the shape of a Mexican—Well, we marched on and on over a fine road and broken ground, and about 9 or 10 o'clock entered the deep and narrow gorge of Cerro Gordo with steep and rugged heights on either side, ascending in a straight line about one and a half miles up to the Ditch and fortified works thrown up by Santa Anna last spring, and immediately upon the brow of high bluffs overlooking a broad, deep ravine toward the S. West through which flowed the same river that sweeps by our late encampment at Plan Del Rio—Immediately at the point where the road strikes the ditch, it turns short to the right, running N. West around the base of the main Cerro Gordo height situated on the right of the road East—This celebrated height is higher than all the rest of the heights in the neighborhood, and can be seen many miles as you approach it from Vera Cruz—Its base on the South western side terminates at the Ditch already mentioned—the road up the pass sweeps its base to the south—On the North it terminate[s] on the plain—To the East it is a continuation of high, broken ridges—The whole of these heights on each side of the road was fortified and crowded with from 15 to 20 thousand Mexican troops—It seems impossible that these positions could be

the first months of the war. After seeing service at Cerro Gordo, he became military governor of the province of Jalapa, in which post he kept in hand the Mexican banditti and maintained iron discipline among his troops, at the same time that he preserved friendly relations with the leading clergy. Hughes believed that Mexico should be kept under the control of the United States and should in the course of time become an outlying province. Subsequently, he resigned from the army, spent some time in surveying a route for a prospective railroad across the Isthmus of Panama, and became president of the Baltimore and Susquehanna Railroad in 1854. From 1859 to 1861, as a member of Congress from Maryland, he advocated the right of secession. Curtis W. Garrison, "George Wurtz Hughes," *Dictionary of American Biography*, 22 vols. and index (New York, 1928-1958), IX, 348-49; Henry, *Mexican War*, 182, 313; Smith, *War with Mexico*, II, 224-25, 230; Captain George W. Hughes, *Memoir . . . of March . . . of General Wool*, Senate Ex. Doc. 32, 31 Cong., 1 Sess.

²³ In the course of the "War of the Pastries" between Mexico and the French fleet attacking Vera Cruz in 1838, Santa Anna received a wound which required the amputation of his leg. After he resumed the presidency, the amputated leg was brought to Mexico City, and, "with vast pomp and ceremony, reinterred . . . in a magnificent mausoleum, specially constructed to receive it." Later, during riots which accompanied his political eclipse, "his amputated leg was torn from its mausoleum and dragged through the streets by the mob. . . ." Henry, *Mexican War*, 102-03. Following the Battle of Cerro Gordo, the Americans counted among the spoils, which included a large amount of ammunition and \$11,791.19 in cash, a wooden leg which they presumed to be Santa Anna's artificial appendage. Subsequently, the leg was on display in the Illinois state capitol at Springfield. Smith, *War with Mexico*, I, 49, II, 354.

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taken; yet Scott, Twiggs, and Shields²⁴ did the work in little less than no time—I was told that Gen. Twiggs with his column charged down the road from where you see his Leg in front of the ditch in the face of a destructive fire of grape and musketry, routed the enemy and hurled them over the Bluffs, mentioned, pell mell into the deep ravine below killing hundreds, all in 15 minutes— For the localities of this place I refer you to the pencil marks here-with enclosed which will give you a feint idea of Cerro Gordo— I picked up a grape shot near the Ditch which I intend to take home with me as a memento of this justly celebrated spot— Well, while we were looking at the curiosities around, we of course kept one eye out for the 4000 Guerrilleras so much talked of, but, as at Plan Del Rio were again somewhat disappointed in our expectations— Knowing that we had passed all the dangerous defiles, and having an open country before us, we passed on to En Cerro [*sic*] the Hacienda of Santa Anna, 9 miles East of Jalapa, our fifth encampment, where we pitched our tents in a lovely valley of green grass $\frac{1}{4}$ of a mile from the Hacienda— Here Milligan left us and proceeded to Jalapa with a small train and escort accompanying the Paymaster and his money wagons. Next morning by daylight Bloomfield (2nd Clerk) and myself mounted our horses and rode up to Santa Anna's Hacienda, which was in times gone by, his principal residence—now it is abandoned and a perfect wreck— The situation is beautiful, overlooking an extensive valley toward the East— After satisfying ourselves at the Hacienda we left the train and rode on to Jalapa where we arrived about 10 oclock— Two days afterwards, Milligan took possession of the Commissary Dept. and we have been busy feeding the B'hoys ever since— Our average issues of Bread alone is 2000 lbs per day.—other articles in proportion—The Sick at the Hospitals *eat more than all the rest*— How long we will stay here, I cannot tell, but presume it will be to the end of the War if we choose to stay that long— For my part I only intend to carry out my original plan of remaining in Mexico 12 months— If Page²⁵ should be elected I will return home next spring— I received a letter from Mr. Page sometime since proposing to make me his Clerk in the event he should be elected, which proposition I accepted— From you I have received but one letter— I have received no answers whatever, to any letters written from Mexico. I hope though to receive about one bushel by the next train from Vera Cruz— Jalapa is an open City, with a population of 8 or 10 thousand.—It has no fortifications whatever save the buildings and natural defences of the surrounding country— There is nothing to prevent 1000 or 1500 Guerrilleras from galloping into town at any moment— The 1000 troops stationed here could not prevent the Guerrilleras from effecting a safe lodgement in the heart of the city, if they were so disposed—but as there is nothing to be gained by such a measure, I presume they will not undertake it— Their principal object now, is to rob the trains and private individuals on the road— There ought to be one full Regiment detailed, or newly raised for the purpose of scouring the country between Mexico & Vera Cruz and it should be their special business to hang every murdering, robbing Devil they could lay their hands upon— As to Peace I am *Teetotally* opposed to any such thing— Our Government ought never entertain the idea for a single moment of giving back so fine a country as this

²⁴ Generals Winfield Scott, David E. Twiggs, and James Shields.

²⁵ The Rev. J. Page, a Virginia-born Methodist minister, was running for county court clerk against the aged incumbent, Valentine Sevier. McDannel was destined to be disappointed, inasmuch as Sevier won the election. Seventh Census, Pop., Tenn., Greene, Ninth Div., E. District, 292; Johnson to McDannel, October 19, 1847, Greeneville, Johnson Papers.

to these Lousy, Lazy mexicans & Indians— Our Policy should be to remove them, like we did the Cherokees & other tribes in the U. S.— With the right kind of Population there could be no finer country than this— The soil on the Hills in this vicinity is as black, loose and fertile as the Chucky Bottoms²⁶ and produces every thing desirable—

Jalapa is situated on the Eastern slope of the Pe-ro-tee mountain in the midst of undulating ground— The gardens, Hills, and Valleys in and around the City are covered with Green grass, vegetables, and fruit— The orange groves look delightful, and the trees are all loaded with ripe yellow oranges— Corn is from 6 to 12 inches high and remind[s] me of Spring at home— As to water it is excellent— I could say a thousand and one things about these Mexicans, Spaniards & Indians, their manners and customs, and mode of Worship, but will defer it for the present as I presume you will think this Epistle is lengthy enough for one chapter[.]

We have numerous reports as to Peace, and war[.]²⁷ One report is that Gen. Scott says the army will be disbanded and sent home about the 1st of May— Another is that the Mexican Congress has appointed and sent 3 Commissioners to Washington to accept the propositions of Mr. Trist and to offer in addition Ten Millions for a Peace— Another is that the City of San Luis has sent Delegates to Gen. Scott inviting him to come and take possession of that much talked of city—

Every day we have reports of attacks upon the trains by the Guerrilleras and of murders & Robberies— It is quite a common thing to find an American soldier in the suburbs [*sic*] of the City with his throat cut— Every drunk soldier they catch out of the City they kill him[.] These mexican scoundrels would kill a man for the shirt on his back—and yet if an American kills one of the *peaceable* and *unoffending* Mexicans he is tied up to a Wagon wheel in the main Plaza and publicly [*sic*] whipt [*sic*] upon his bare back, his head is shaved and he is sent to the to the [*sic*] Castle of San Juan (San Wan) at Vera Cruz and to wear an iron collar and chain until the end of the war—²⁸

I hope you have received the letters I sent you from Vera Cruz and that you have mailed the papers asked for[.]

Let me hear from you soon
Direct to Jalapa Mexico

As usual
Your friend
B McDannel

Hon. A. Johnson
Washington City
D C

²⁶ A reference to the Nolichucky River Valley.

²⁷ It is not surprising that these conflicting rumors circulated among the army of occupation, since large-scale fighting had for all practical purposes ceased and the treaty negotiations were remarkably confused. Ultimately, Nicholas P. Trist concluded the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo at a time when he lacked official authority to do so. Thomas A. Bailey, *A Diplomatic History of the American People*, 6th ed. (New York, 1958), 261-65.

²⁸ McDannel reflects the common soldier's impatience with the efforts of Governor Hughes and others to maintain discipline among the occupying forces.