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## TENNESSEE OPINION OF THE MEXICAN WAR AS REFLECTED IN THE STATE PRESS\*

By Billy H. Gilley

The annexation of Texas and the resulting Mexican War were of special interest to Tennesseans. Many of their friends and relatives had been among the early immigrants to the Texas territory and tales arising out of the Texan Revolution of 1835-36 engendered a deep hatred toward Mexico. This bitterness was increased by Mexico's refusal to recognize the independence of Texas. Also, President James K. Polk, a Tennessean, formulated the expansionist policy which in May, 1846, precipitated the United States into war with Mexico. Consequently, thousands of Tennesseans at the outbreak of hostilities volunteered to fight Mexico, earning for Tennessee the title of the "Volunteer State." However, the enthusiasm with which Tennesseans greeted the outbreak of war is in striking contrast to their subsequent opinion of the conflict.

The war came about when President Polk resolved to force Mexico to sell territory, especially California, to the United States and, in exchange for the assumption of Mexican debts owed to United States citizens, to agree to the Rio Grande as the boundary of Texas. He hoped that if war resulted Mexico would quickly sue for peace and make a settlement. He first sought to acquire these territories by peaceful negotiation; but when the Mexican government refused to negotiate, Polk ordered General Zachary Taylor to occupy the disputed territory between the Nueces and the Rio Grande. The Mexicans came across the Rio Grande and attacked Taylor's troops and thus hostilities began. But no quick peace ensued. Tennesseans, believing that the conflict would be short and easy, and not knowing the President's secret territorial designs, did not understand his dilatory tactics which were calculated to encourage Mexico to yield to his demands. As a result the popularity of the war waned when it was not vigorously prosecuted to an early conclusion and when battle casualties and sickness took a heavy toll of Tennessee troops.

The strong state Whig party, the result of a revolt against the political dictatorship of Andrew Jackson, exploited the unpopular aspects of the war to attack President Polk and the Democrats and win control of the state government in the gubernatorial campaign of 1847. The highly partisan Whig and Democratic state press followed the progress of the war. Their defense and criticism of the prosecution of the war reflect the views which Tennesseans held of the conflict.

Although Mexico belligerently objected to Texan annexation, Tennesseans endorsed annexation in the gubernatorial election of 1845. Two

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\*Read at a meeting of the East Tennessee Historical Society at Lawson McGhee Library, Knoxville, Tennessee, January 8, 1954.

factors led them to feel that there would be no war with Mexico over Texas. First, they believed Mexico to be militarily weak because of political instability. Tennesseans' long background of hatred for the regime of Santa Anna, the Mexican leader during the Texan Revolution, led them joyously to greet his overthrow late in 1844 and to consider it a further indication of the Mexican government's inability to oppose annexation or to foment a war.<sup>1</sup> Secondly, Tennesseans felt that Great Britain and France would restrain Mexico from attacking the United States. Indeed, Tennesseans feared European designs on Mexico more than they feared Mexico herself. Early in 1846 a rumor that Great Britain and Spain were backing France in an effort to place a son of her king, Louis Phillipe, on a Mexican throne aroused fears.<sup>2</sup> In March, 1845, General J. N. Almonte, the Mexican minister to Washington, protested congressional passage of the Texas annexation resolution and left the country. However, no significant Tennessee reaction was evinced until the Mexican government presented a circular of protest to the governments of England, France, and Spain. At this time the Democratic Nashville *Union* advised Polk to post an ample military force in the Gulf of Mexico and declared that Nashville's "Texas Volunteers" were always ready for war duty.<sup>3</sup>

Because of Mexico's internal instability, the Whig Memphis *American Eagle* until as late as April 25, 1846, discounted rumors of war and derided government defense preparations as an excuse to spend money for patronage.<sup>4</sup> Its Democratic rival, the *Appeal*, also felt that Mexico posed no threat to American security. The paper contended that the danger of war lessened each day and that England and France, because of their territorial designs, would prevent any Mexican aggression.<sup>5</sup> The possibility of war with Mexico was further overshadowed by the threat of hostilities with Great Britain over Oregon early in 1846. So weak did Tennesseans consider Mexico that they evinced little fear that she might independently take advantage of a war between the United States and Great Britain to engage in hostilities to regain Texas.

Throughout these troubled months there continued to be discussion of the possibility of war with Mexico. On June 4, 1845, one month before Texas was formally annexed, Tennessee's famous Whig editor, W. G. (Parson) Brownlow, carried the following quip on the advertisement page

<sup>1</sup>Jonesborough *Whig and Independent Journal*, January 22, 1845. Hereafter cited as Brownlow's *Whig*. Also see Memphis *Appeal*, January 21, July 8, 1845.

<sup>2</sup>Knoxville *Standard*, January 20, 1846; Memphis *Appeal*, May 16, July 26, 1845; January 31, 1846; Nashville *Union*, May 13, 1845. The *Union*, suspecting English influence, declared: "How does it happen that a government so weak that she has been utterly unable to reduce Texas, has suddenly become so powerful in her own estimation as to threaten the United States." *Ibid.*, May 8, 1845.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, April 20, 1845.

<sup>4</sup>Memphis *American Eagle*, April 25, 1846. Hereafter cited as Memphis *Eagle*.

<sup>5</sup>Memphis *Appeal*, August 12, 1845; Knoxville *Standard*, February 3, 1846.

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of his Jonesborough *Whig and Independent Journal*: "TEXICO AND MEXAS! WARS AND RUMORS OF WARS!! Walk in! BLANKS for sale here!"<sup>6</sup> On August 21 the *Appeal* published a New Orleans *Bee* account that ten thousand Mexican troops were within eight days' march of the forces of General Taylor.<sup>7</sup> Brownlow got the story two weeks later, and in a separate article, headed "War With Mexico," stated that "The signs are a little that way [toward war] at present."<sup>8</sup> On September 4 the *Appeal* praised the Administration's preparations for war,<sup>9</sup> and the *Eagle* greeted the news of a skirmish between an American patrol and some Mexican troops in glowing terms—referring to it as "glory-beaming intelligence."<sup>10</sup> However, the war fever subsided when General Taylor advised that there was no immediate threat of war.

Late in 1845 President Polk sent John Slidell to Mexico to negotiate a settlement that would solve the boundary question and satisfy his territorial demands. On April 21 the Democratic Knoxville *Standard* carried a New Orleans *Delta* account that discussed Mexico's reasons for not receiving Slidell. Commenting on the story the Knoxville editor said:

There are the usual number and variety of reports, of troops marching to and concentrating near the Rio Grande—we have heard them too often to be affrighted by them.<sup>11</sup>

But another aspect of the Slidell mission did bother Tennesseans. This was the rumor that Great Britain was influencing Mexico against receiving the American minister. Evidently Tennesseans expected the Mexicans to deal with Slidell. At any rate, they did not understand or respect the fact that forces within the Mexican government opposed and were insulted by the American territorial demands. This led Tennesseans to suspect foreign influence.<sup>12</sup>

News of the outbreak of hostilities was carried in the *Eagle* on May 7, 1846.<sup>13</sup> The East Tennessee papers had it by the twentieth. It was the Nashville *Union* that, in the light of subsequent developments, best reflected the reaction to the news of hostilities:

If it had been accompanied with any intimations that our State would be called on for volunteers, we are satisfied from the feeling manifested that it would have met a prompt and enthusiastic response.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>6</sup>Brownlow's *Whig*, June 4, 1845.

<sup>7</sup>Memphis *Appeal*, August 21, 1845.

<sup>8</sup>Brownlow's *Whig*, September 3, 1845.

<sup>9</sup>Memphis *Appeal*, September 4, 1845.

<sup>10</sup>Memphis *Eagle*, September 19, 1845.

<sup>11</sup>Knoxville *Standard*, April 21, 1846.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, January 20, February 3, April 28, 1846; Nashville *Republican Banner*, January 19, 1846.

<sup>13</sup>Memphis *Eagle*, May 7, 1846.

<sup>14</sup>Nashville *Union*, May 12, 1846.

With Mexico pictured as a ruthless invader, President Polk's message recommending war and Congress' authorization for its prosecution met wholehearted approval in Tennessee. Democrats and Whigs promoted war preparations, although the latter did not fail to blame the Administration for events leading to the outbreak of hostilities. Even the partisan Brownlow commended Congress for promptly enacting legislation for its prosecution and stated that "whether a just or unjust war, it is the duty of all good citizens and patriots, to engage heartily, in the defense of their country."<sup>15</sup> That partisan Whigs were not conscience-stricken over fighting "weak" Mexico is revealed in this statement:

Both Texas and the United States have endured much at her [Mexico's] hands. —No one of the great powers of the earth, amidst such wrongs, would have shown such forbearance.<sup>16</sup>

In Tennessee the outbreak of hostilities resulted in an unprecedented wave of volunteering. Reporting an early company organizing meeting at Memphis, the *Appeal* said: "Apportion them as he [the Governor] will, there will be drafting to decide who shall be *allowed* to go."<sup>17</sup> And the *Nashville Union*, noting the apportionment of troop quotas throughout the state, observed that "The singular process has been witnessed of *drafting* men out of service instead of the *drafting* them into service."<sup>18</sup>

The *Union* reported a May 9 meeting of the "Nashville Blues" in which they adopted resolutions tendering their services to Governor Aaron V. Brown "in the event an opportunity should be offered for enlisting volunteers to repel Mexican invasion." It stated that thousands stood ready to drive back the "perfidious invader,"—that they were willing to enter the enemy's country to chastise him.<sup>19</sup> At Memphis the *Eagle* reported the organizing of companies under Captains M. B. Cook and E. F. Ruth, who were unwilling to wait for a special call before beginning such activities.<sup>20</sup> Also, there was a meeting to consider the call of General Edmund Pendleton Gaines, the eccentric commander of the Western Geographical Division of the army, for volunteers. Five hundred citizens reportedly attended the meeting. Commenting on Gaines' call, the *Eagle* said:

All that is now wanting to set us in a perfect blaze, is a call from the Governor, and we fear that when it does come the quota at this place will be so small, that many a gallant spirit will find himself closed out—Middle and East Tenn. will claim their full proportions of 2400, and will rally ten times that number, eager to march to the

<sup>15</sup>Brownlow's *Whig*, May 20, 27, 1846. A similar view was expressed by the *Knoxville Standard*, May 19, 1846.

<sup>16</sup>Brownlow's *Whig*, May 27, 1846; *Nashville Republican Banner*, May 18, 1846.

<sup>17</sup>*Memphis Appeal*, May 14, 1846.

<sup>18</sup>*Knoxville Standard*, June 9, 1846, citing *Nashville Union*.

<sup>19</sup>*Nashville Union*, May 12, 1846.

<sup>20</sup>*Memphis Eagle*, May 15, 1846.

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field of battle—their prowess and spirit is unquenchable—and,  
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 mountain torrents.<sup>21</sup>

The *Standard* reported hearing that several counties in East Ten-  
 nessee were engaged in raising companies and that they "will no doubt be  
 successful wherever the attempt is made." In the same issue the paper  
 reported that First Lieutenant Samuel W. Bell had issued a call to the  
 "Knoxville Dragoons."<sup>22</sup>

Other volunteering activity was reported. On May 19 the *Union* re-  
 ported that, in addition to the "Harrison Guards" and "Texas Volunteers"  
 of Nashville, the following companies had notified the Governor that they  
 were ready for duty: the "Tenth Legion" and "Clay Guards," of Gallatin;  
 "Lincoln Guards," of Lincoln County; "Cedar Snags," of Wilson County;  
 "Texas Volunteers," of Franklin; and the "First Legion," of Columbia,  
 along with others. Later came reports of companies from Hickman, Law-  
 rence, and Smith counties and Shelbyville. At Jackson a company of  
 Irishman formed the "Jackson Greens" under the leadership of William  
 Dunne. A German company also was formed in West Tennessee. Following  
 a call to East Tennessee for four companies of infantry and three of  
 cavalry, the *Standard*, on June 2, announced that fifteen or twenty com-  
 panies will report "this week." The day before, the *Nashville Republican*  
*Banner* reported that between seventy and eighty companies numbering  
 more than six thousand men had offered their services to the Governor.<sup>23</sup>

The result of such avid volunteering was inevitable. So many com-  
 panies were organized that contention arose over their priority. Indeed, a  
 story from the *Standard* told of how this problem was solved in East  
 Tennessee by drawing names from a hat.<sup>24</sup> Following Governor Brown's  
 call for 2,800 volunteers, the *Eagle*, ever ready to exploit the war for  
 political purposes, mirrored the anxiety of West Tennesseans for action  
 when it criticized Governor Brown for not encouraging the organization of  
 volunteer companies sooner—by this time they could have been on the Rio  
 Grande.<sup>25</sup>

Apparently there were few examples of opposition to the preparations  
 for war, and what criticisms there were seemingly rose out of partisan  
 political arguments. Brownlow, reporting the failure of a meeting at Jones-  
 borough to raise a company for Washington County, denied a Democratic  
 charge that it failed because it was placed on a party basis. He replied

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, May 16, 1846.

<sup>22</sup>Knoxville *Standard*, May 26, 1846.

<sup>23</sup>Nashville *Union*, May 19, 1846; Knoxville *Standard*, June 2, 9, 1846; Memphis  
*Appeal*, May 19, 1846; Memphis *Eagle*, May 22, 1846; Nashville *Republican Banner*,  
 June 1, 1846.

<sup>24</sup>Knoxville *Standard*, July 14, 1846.

<sup>25</sup>Memphis *Eagle*, June 12, 1846.

tauntingly that Democrats could not be swayed by party influence: "To be serious, gentlemen, don't pretend that the Whigs prevented your party from volunteering. When did the Whigs acquire such influence over your party?"<sup>26</sup>

The Democratic press, in order to discredit southern Whigs, pointed out that northern Whigs opposed the war and were branding the United States an aggressor. They were laboring to "damp the ardor" of the volunteers, they said. The *Standard* carried a letter from a person in Jefferson County which claimed that there were some Whigs who were not in favor of Texas and the war. He went on to tell of the views of what he claimed to be a Whig:

I had hoped that we had none such in patriotic Tennessee; but I have been mistaken. How many we have thus destitute of principle, I am not able to say, but certain [*sic*] we have some, and rabid ones too,—one declared in conversation with me the other day, that he did not believe an inch of Texas legally belonged to the United States—that the annexation of Texas was got up purposely [*sic*] to knock up a difference between us and Mexico—. . . that our army were the invaders—that if we persisted in the prosecution of the war . . . he would enlist under their [Mexico's] banner and help whip them [United States' army] out.<sup>27</sup>

But Tennessee Whigs denied such charges. Indeed, they boastfully claimed to be supplying more volunteers than the Democrats. Brownlow hurled this charge at the "Polk, Dallas and Texas" crowd: "Come, Democrats don't be behind the Whigs in defend[ing] the lives of your countrymen, and the honor of your country."<sup>28</sup>

Tennessee's volunteers rendezvoused at Memphis where they boarded boats for the trip down the Mississippi River to New Orleans. Some trekked across the state. Their journey was marked by rousing celebrations at towns through which they passed. A soldier in Captain William R. Caswell's Knoxville company, which marched across the state, wrote of their reception at Pulaski: "A general ransacking of cellars took place, and the 'generous wine' was dragged forth to destruction. Abundance of mea[t] and drink was set before us."

Further describing the approbation their crusade received, he said:

The people here [Pulaski] are whole-souled, thorough-going men. They met us as brethren, as friends, and assured us that fires were kindled on the watch-towers of Tennessee to guide our footsteps through the desert wilds and wilderness of Mexico.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>26</sup>Brownlow's *Whig*, June 3, 1846.

<sup>27</sup>Knoxville *Standard*, July 7, 1846.

<sup>28</sup>Brownlow's *Whig*, May 27, 1846.

<sup>29</sup>According to the letter, similar celebrations were held at Lewisburg and Cornersville. Knoxville *Standard*, July 7, 1846.

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Others travelled to the West Tennessee port of embarkation by river boat. Their departures were significantly observed. At Nashville, crowds gathered at the wharf to see the first departure of troops—the “Blues” and “Harrison Guards” and also the “Tenth Legion,” of Sumner County—by boat. A flag was presented to them by the Nashville Female Academy.<sup>30</sup> Flag presentation ceremonies were held for many companies as they completed their organization.

War with Mexico did not cause Tennesseans to forget the possibility of hostilities with Great Britain over Oregon, especially during the early stages of the war. Indeed, the *Union* interpreted the patriotic spirit of Tennesseans in volunteering for the war with Mexico as a warning to the English.<sup>31</sup> A rumor in some Southern newspapers that British troops had landed in Canada led the *Standard*, on June 9, to comment that if a call for volunteers had come at the time, five thousand men could have been raised in East Tennessee in five days.<sup>32</sup>

Earlier it was mentioned that political dissention in Mexico led Tennesseans to believe that Mexico was weak and that war with her was not imminent. Following the outbreak of hostilities this feeling shifted to a belief that the war would be short. This was especially true after England announced that she would not interfere in the conflict, and the United States, on June 18, ratified the treaty providing for the partition of Oregon. A *Standard* reprint from the Washington *Union* expressed the belief that the war would be speedily terminated and that only half of the original requisition of troops would be called.<sup>33</sup> Correspondence from an observer in Washington further predicted that Mexican President Mariano Paredes would shortly be overthrown and that Tennessee soldiers would not be needed. However, he was quick to observe that it was good to know that they would be available in case of a future war with any “strong power.”<sup>34</sup> Early in August the *Standard* carried this confident and boastful statement:

The latest news which we have here is, that Gen. Taylor is only waiting for the Cavalry from Kentucky and Tennessee to arrive before he invades Mexico—takes the Capitol—plants the Stars and Stripes upon the ramparts of the city—and then dictate [*sic*] peace upon our terms.<sup>35</sup>

Not all Tennesseans were so optimistic. At Nashville the *Republican Banner* enumerated the practical hardships—the war was being fought in enemy country which was unfamiliar to Americans.<sup>36</sup> And the *Eagle*, late in Sep-

<sup>30</sup>Nashville *Union*, June 6, 1846.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, June 4, 1846.

<sup>32</sup>Knoxville *Standard*, June 9, 1846.

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*, May 26, 1846.

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*, June 16, 1846.

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*, August 4, 1846; Memphis *Eagle*, June 2, 1846.

<sup>36</sup>Nashville *Republican Banner*, May 27, 1846.



tember, expressed concern over American troops marching on Monterey.<sup>37</sup>

During the period of inactivity following Taylor's initial victories at Palo Alto and Resaca de la Palma, Tennessee newspapers began to reflect rising discontent with the lax prosecution of hostilities.<sup>38</sup> But it was not until General Taylor agreed to an eight-weeks' armistice following the Battle of Monterey that serious dissatisfaction appeared. Tennesseans were not happy when again long-delayed hostilities were stalled. Both Whig and Democratic papers reflected this dissatisfaction by demanding more vigorous prosecution of the war. Even the explanation that Taylor was forced to grant the armistice for lack of men and materiel did not satisfy them.<sup>39</sup> Why did General Taylor not have supplies? The Whig press answered this question by accusing the Administration of negligence and went on to point out rising dissatisfaction with the conduct of the war. The *Eagle* recalled that the general-in-chief of the army, Winfield Scott, had been ridiculed by the Administration early in the conflict when he advised more adequate preparation for the Mexican campaign.<sup>40</sup> The *Republican Banner* added that everywhere people were dissatisfied with the Administration's conduct of the war.<sup>41</sup> Even the Democratic press acknowledged the existence of discontent by defending the President against certain letter writers who complained that he was not promoting hostilities.<sup>42</sup>

Striking testimony to the desire for pushing the war was evidenced when the resumption of hostilities following Monterey led to a new call for troops. Why, it was asked, had the President jeopardized the war effort by waiting so late to call more volunteers. It was reiterated that many volunteers were refused earlier when Taylor needed troops.<sup>43</sup> Although these charges came from Whig organs, they reflect the readiness of Tennesseans to do all that was necessary to fight the war vigorously to a successful end.

The prosecution of the war became the leading issue in the Tennessee gubernatorial campaign of 1847 between the Browns of Pulaski—Democratic incumbent Aaron V. Brown, a close friend of President Polk, and the Whig nominee, Neill S. Brown.<sup>44</sup> The Democratic candidate attempted to

<sup>37</sup>Memphis *Eagle*, September 29, 1846.

<sup>38</sup>Nashville *Union*, September 8, 1846.

<sup>39</sup>*Ibid.*, October 24, 1846; Memphis *Eagle*, October 26, 1846. The *Union* urged vigorous prosecution of hostilities at this time, feeling that Santa Anna was merely playing for time. Nashville *Union*, October 6, 1846.

<sup>40</sup>Memphis *Eagle*, November 14, 1846.

<sup>41</sup>Nashville *Republican Banner*, November 20, 1846.

<sup>42</sup>Knoxville *Standard*, November 24, 1846.

<sup>43</sup>Memphis *Eagle*, November 28, 1846; January 15, 1847; Nashville *Republican Banner*, November 25, 1846.

<sup>44</sup>Describing the gubernatorial canvass in East Tennessee, the *Standard* said: "It was not to hear a discussion of the old issues of Bank, Tariff and Distribution.—These had lost nearly all their interest. It was the Mexican war that absorbed all other subjects. Its origin—its justice—its constitutionality—whether it was a war of necessary self-defence on our part, or one of aggression and plunder against a weak and innocent nation—were all questions of the deepest solicitude [sic] . . . ." Knoxville *Standard*, June 1, 1847.

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defend Polk and the Administration's conduct of the war. But several of Polk's actions roused the ire of Tennesseans, and Neill Brown and the Whigs exploited them to win the election. Believing that Santa Anna, the former Mexican president living in exile in Cuba, favored a settlement with the United States, Polk allowed him to pass the American naval blockade at Vera Cruz in August, 1846, and return to Mexico. With the pronounced evidence of discontent over the dilatory prosecution of the war, it is easy to picture the reaction of Tennesseans to the return of the hated Santa Anna, especially when he refused to conclude the peace that had been rumored. When the hope of a settlement vanished, Neill Brown and Tennessee Whigs accused Polk of betraying the nation by allowing the Mexican general to regain power and direct Mexican resistance. Brownlow did not overlook the opportunity to point out that the Mexican leader, following the armistice, purportedly was raising an army of thirty thousand men to march against the American forces.<sup>45</sup> In Nashville, on April 4, 1847, Neill Brown claimed that American blood was spilled at Buena Vista because the Mexican general was allowed to return.<sup>46</sup>

Related to Polk's effort to acquire a peace by allowing Santa Anna to return was his request in August, 1846, for two million dollars to be used in negotiating a boundary settlement between the two countries. Neill Brown and the Whigs charged that this was a move to purchase a peace. Such a move, it was claimed, disavowed the purpose of the conflict and made the nation appear to be fighting a dishonorable war of conquest. This charge also was applied to Polk's request for three million dollars in January, 1847. Speaking at Springfield, the Whig nominee reportedly described the latter bill as an effort to bribe Mexican soldiers—"to buy a peace!" Ridiculing Polk and the Democrats, he said:

Why, you said you could conquer that! I am for millions, so far as necessary to prosecute the war; but not for a single dollar, not a cent, for the purpose of base bribery.<sup>47</sup>

Serious discussion of the issue of war responsibility did not appear until late in 1846 and in the months prior to the gubernatorial campaign.

<sup>45</sup>Brownlow's *Whig*, November 25, 1846; *Memphis Eagle*, January 19, 1847.

<sup>46</sup>Nashville *Republican Banner*, April 7, 1847.

<sup>47</sup>Brownlow's *Whig*, July 7, 1847, citing the *Nashville Republican Banner*. Examples of the malicious attacks on Polk regarding his request for \$2,000,000 and the return of Santa Anna are the following excerpts from the *Memphis Eagle*: "Was it not most disgraceful and degrading to our country, that its president should ask for two millions to bribe this expatriated tyrant and enable him to go home and turn traitor to his country?" November 6, 1846. Three days later this outburst appeared: "And what must the whole world think of American chivalry, when its President attempts to conquer a weak and pusillanimous nation, by bribing one of its expatriated monster-tyrants, whom she had driven from her soil on account of his inhuman and execrable barbarities and thirst for human gore, and aiding him to return home, and with two millions of American money, to betray his country . . . !", November 9, 1846.

It was stressed at this time because of popular objection to the conduct of the war. Indications are that at the outbreak of hostilities Tennesseans, as a whole, neither objected to the war nor questioned the constitutionality of Polk's action in bringing it about. Early Whig objection was limited merely to demands for more vigorous prosecution of the conflict and to pointing out that Henry Clay's prediction of war with annexation had come true.

Early in the canvass, at Franklin, Neill Brown questioned the constitutionality of Polk's ordering troops from Corpus Christi, on the Nueces, to the Rio Grande. The President, he said, had no right to send American forces into an area which did not belong to the United States. And he brought the accusation that it was a predetermined executive action calculated to involve the nation in a war without the consent of Congress.<sup>48</sup> The Whig candidate repeated these charges at Knoxville and Maryville. At the latter town, according to the *Standard*, the object of his speech was

to show that the war was an error of the President—that he had erred in the first instance when he ordered the troops from Corpus Christi to the Rio Grande—that he has erred in the prosecution of the war.<sup>49</sup>

But probably more meaningful to Tennesseans was Governor Brown's reply that Santa Anna, following the Battle of San Jacinto, agreed to the Rio Grande as the Texas boundary. Since this was the boundary claimed by Texas when she entered the Union, the President was obligated to defend it as an American border, he argued.<sup>50</sup> Undoubtedly this was an acceptable view to Tennesseans since they had played such a significant role in the Texan War. The Governor reiterated this argument throughout the canvass.

Another of Polk's actions which angered Tennesseans was his departure from the custom of allowing volunteer companies to select their leaders. Instead, he appointed Democratic friends to many of these positions. This aroused considerable resentment and led to charges of patronage from the Whigs—that he was seeking to allow Democrats to acquire honor and glory from the war to better their chances for political preferment. Also, there were complaints that Polk had especially wronged certain dominantly Whig companies by naming Democrats to lead them. Polk's action led Brownlow, in September, 1846, to claim that

<sup>48</sup>Nashville *Union*, April 14, 1847.

<sup>49</sup>Knoxville *Standard*, May 4, 1847. Also see Nashville *Union*, May 13, 1847.

<sup>50</sup>Knoxville *Standard*, May 4, June 1, 1847. "It is unfortunate that there is the slightest difference of opinion on this great question of war.— . . . There was no cause for the slightest difference of opinion, and nothing but a deep rooted hatred to Mr. Polk could have induced men to denounce the war." *Ibid.*, July 20, 1847.

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The like never was heard of before, in this or any other country. And why? Because a highminded and honorable man, would scorn, knowingly to exercise a power not delegated to him, at least by custom.<sup>61</sup>

Later, during the canvass at Jackson, Neill Brown discussed Polk's favoritism toward General William O. Butler, a military appointee.<sup>62</sup> The nature of this attack is revealed in an earlier discussion of the issue by the *Eagle* which condemned Polk for giving Butler a command independent from General Taylor:

Already is Gen. Butler's command pronounced to be *independent* of Gen. Taylor's, and the disposition assigned Gen. Butler's such as to afford him the most favorable position to *win laurels*.<sup>63</sup>

When the war showed signs of continuing indefinitely, its expense began to be more seriously considered. The *Banner* claimed that the Democratic press was attempting to suppress this fact by appealing to the idealistic and patriotic spirit of the people.<sup>64</sup> In November, 1846, articles appeared referring to the increase in the national debt. Frequently reprinted from other papers and exploited by the Whigs was a prediction that the national debt would be \$120,000,000 in another year.<sup>65</sup> East Tennesseans were especially interested in the way the war affected the domestic situation. Brownlow reported that at Newport Neill Brown compared present conditions with those two years before, pointing out that the increased national debt might have been avoided and that the war might have been averted by a purchase of the disputed territory. The Whig editor stated that this discussion made a distinct impression on the audience.<sup>66</sup> Governor Brown countered the economic arguments of his opponent by stating that Tennesseans did not worry about expense when the country was invaded and the national honor questioned. Also, he claimed that, for the sake of the soldier dead, the war should not be branded as unjust.<sup>67</sup> Such references led Brownlow to ask:

... if the people are in favor of it, and it is a popular war, as the orators of Locofocoism contend—why do they twist, and screw, and shift and lie so, in reference to the expenses of the war?<sup>68</sup>

<sup>61</sup>Brownlow's *Whig*, September 9, 1846. The same idea had been stated by the *Memphis Eagle*, July 11, 1846.

<sup>62</sup>*Ibid.*, June 30, 1847, July 15, 22, 1846.

<sup>63</sup>*Ibid.*, September 19, 1846.

<sup>64</sup>*Nashville Republican Banner*, August 28, 1846.

<sup>65</sup>Brownlow's *Whig*, November 11, 25, 1846, July 7, 1847. The *Eagle* also played up the expense of the war: "Sixty-one Millions were appropriated at the recent session of Congress, and nearly an equal sum will be required to 'conquer a peace' with Mexico. What shall we get for our money? Honor cannot be derived from conquering a weak country like Mexico. We shall get nothing but the privilege of additional taxation and paying for it." *Memphis Eagle*, September 8, 1846; also see September 10, 1847.

<sup>66</sup>Brownlow's *Whig*, May 12, 1847.

<sup>67</sup>*Knoxville Standard*, May 11, 18, 1847.

<sup>68</sup>Brownlow's *Whig*, July 7, 1847.

President Polk was forced to conduct the war with Whig generals—a politically dangerous expedient in that it allowed them to build reputations that could be used to promote their political ambitions. This became especially apparent as the war progressed and General Zachary Taylor was boomed for the Whig presidential nomination in the coming national convention of 1848. His military accomplishments were glorified by the Tennessee Whig press. Early in the conflict Polk attempted to get a bill through Congress authorizing the appointment of two major generals. It was denounced and defeated as a move to supercede Whig generals.<sup>60</sup> An effort to create the position of lieutenant general had a similar fate. As a result, Polk was accused of playing party politics at the expense of the prosecution of the war. The Democratic press reflected Taylor's popularity by strongly denying such charges; to the contrary, they insisted, Polk raised Taylor from colonel to brevet brigadier general.<sup>61</sup>

Campaign meetings at Murfreesboro and other towns in Middle Tennessee raised objections to Polk's interference with General Taylor and asserted that this interference was hindering the war. In addition to charging Polk with attempting to supercede Taylor, Neill Brown argued that the Administration made the General's task difficult by forcing him to have to fight Santa Anna.<sup>62</sup> Apparently he had in mind the narrow American victory at Buena Vista. Governor Brown even capitalized on the General's popularity by claiming that Polk had not ordered the troops to the Rio Grande until after Taylor had advised him to do so.<sup>63</sup> At Athens the Governor paid tribute to the sterling leadership of the General, asserting that he was ably serving the Administration.<sup>64</sup> Neill Brown denounced such remarks as an attempt to make Taylor the scapegoat for the beginning of hostilities.<sup>65</sup>

Late in the campaign the Whig *Memphis Enquirer*, probably repeating Neill Brown's charges, criticised the Administration both for failing to enable General Taylor to follow up his initial victories on the Rio Grande and for accusing the General of bad leadership for not doing so.<sup>66</sup> It will be remembered that Taylor was censured for granting an armistice following the Battle of Monterey and for his questionable tactics at the Battle of Buena Vista. Also indicative of state admiration of Taylor was Neill Brown's advocacy of him as the Whig nominee for president. The Governor and the Democrats admitted the General's popularity with the voters when they

<sup>60</sup>*Memphis Eagle*, June 29, 1846, January 19, 1847; *Nashville Republican Banner*, January 27, 1847; *Brownlow's Whig*, June 10, 1846.

<sup>61</sup>*Knoxville Standard*, March 9, 1847; *Nashville Republican Banner*, April 12, 1847; *Brownlow's Whig*, June 10, 1846.

<sup>62</sup>*Nashville Republican Banner*, May 7, 1847.

<sup>63</sup>*Brownlow's Whig*, April 28, 1847.

<sup>64</sup>*Nashville Union*, May 4, 1847.

<sup>65</sup>*Ibid.*, May 10, 1847; *Brownlow's Whig*, April 28, 1847.

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accused Neill Brown of attempting to "ride" the General to victory—that he was championing Taylor in order to win the race for governor.<sup>66</sup>

Tennesseans did not share the expansionist ambitions of the North and free West for the annexation of all Mexico. They considered territorial acquisition only in terms of territorial indemnity—what the Mexican government owed United States' citizens through arbitration awards prior to the war and the expense of the conflict itself. Probably one reason why Tennesseans did not advocate extensive expansion was their fear that slavery could not flourish in Catholic Mexico, which, if annexed, would constitute potential free states that would swing the balance of political power to the North. Also, Mexico was geographically unlike the United States and was inhabited by an alien people.

From the advent of hostilities Tennesseans expected the acquisition of some Mexican territory, especially California. The *Union* acknowledged this expectation when it heralded the presidential administration of Polk:

... Mr. Polk's administration promises to be the most eventful one during the present century. Texas is probably fully in the Union—Oregon will certainly be ours, and our laws will soon be extended to the Pacific—and last, though not least, the signs are that California too will soon form a part of our glorious republic!<sup>67</sup>

Shortly after the war began the *Appeal* suspiciously opined that "The volunteers are raised for the invasion of Mexico, of this we are assured."<sup>68</sup> At Jackson, Lieutenant Thomas Ewell raised a company to join Colonel John C. Fremont's command in California.<sup>69</sup>

On May 28, 1846, the *Union* proposed that enough land be "embraced" from Mexico to settle "old scores" and that California be allowed to annex herself to the Union. At the same time the paper called for vigorous prosecution of the war to achieve these goals.<sup>70</sup> The day before, the *Republican Banner*, also urging the vigorous prosecution of hostilities, admitted:

... but we are satisfied that public opinion demands that hostilities should not be of a merely defensive character, and that all means should be forthwith employed—even to the seizing of portions of the Mexican territory, and overrunning others—in order to put a speedy end to the contest.<sup>71</sup>

At Knoxville the *Standard* of May 26 stated that the conflict should not be merely defensive on the part of the United States—peace should not be

<sup>66</sup>Nashville *Union*, April 20, 27, 1847; Knoxville *Standard*, May 4, 1847; also see Brownlow's *Whig*, April 28, 1847.

<sup>67</sup>Knoxville *Standard*, January 6, 1846, citing the Nashville *Union*.

<sup>68</sup>Memphis *Appeal*, June 12, 1846.

<sup>69</sup>Memphis *Eagle*, June 30, 1846.

<sup>70</sup>Nashville *Union*, May 28, 1846.

<sup>71</sup>Nashville *Banner*, May 27, 1846.

accepted without payment for injuries and insults.<sup>72</sup> Three weeks later it reiterated this opinion, urging that American forces drive into Mexico and make a settlement that would provide a permanent peace and reparations for the past.<sup>73</sup> In August, feeling that the Administration was seeking a peace that would involve a cession of territory to the United States, the *Union* declared:

We have no idea that the President has any desire to prosecute the war a day longer than it shall be necessary to secure an honorable peace and full indemnity for all injuries—he will not hesitate to listen to honest propositions for peace, but at the same time he will take no steps for suspending the war, until such terms are actually proposed as may be satisfactory.<sup>74</sup>

And commenting on the President's request for the two million dollar appropriation, the *Eagle* said:

We think it a fair inference from the tone of the message that some overtures have been received from Mexico.—Possibly we are to get Upper California, and pay the amount of the appropriation asked, and assume the debt due from Mexico to our citizens.<sup>75</sup>

Late in 1846 it was announced that governments had been established for the conquered provinces of New Mexico and California. Brownlow, in his *Whig*, immediately claimed that people were indignant over the proclaiming of the "fundamental law" for these conquered areas and the giving of rights to "half-civilized Mexicans."<sup>76</sup> The *Union* voiced a similar view. Commenting on northern agitation to incorporate all of Mexico into the United States, it claimed that Mexico was not ready "for the enjoyment of national freedom under our system of government."<sup>77</sup>

Evidently there were no serious demands in Tennessee for additional Mexican territory as the war lengthened. Election meetings prior to and during the gubernatorial canvass reflect only a continued demand for "ample indemnity" for "our just claims" and the recognition of the United States' claim to the disputed area between the Rio Grande and the Nueces.<sup>78</sup> Even late in the war Democratic campaign meetings were still demanding only territorial indemnity. A group in Bradley County resolved:

... it is therefore the opinion of this meeting that, in any treaty which may be made between the two governments, the President

<sup>72</sup>Knoxville *Standard*, May 26, 1846.

<sup>73</sup>*Ibid.*, June 16, 1846.

<sup>74</sup>Nashville *Union*, August 18, 1846.

<sup>75</sup>Memphis *Eagle*, August 22, 1846.

<sup>76</sup>Brownlow's *Whig*, January 6, 1847.

<sup>77</sup>Nashville *Union*, October 23, 1846.

<sup>78</sup>*Ibid.*, March 11, 1847.

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<sup>79</sup>*Ibid.*, L

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of the United States ought to demand of and receive from, Mexico territorial indemnity: and that he ought, at all hazards, to retain the Californias.<sup>79</sup>

However, as revealed in the preceding quotation, some Tennesseans demanded Lower as well as Upper California. Apparently they felt that this sparsely populated area, isolated from Mexico proper, could become slave territory. However, the demand for Lower California apparently was not manifested until late in the war when expansionist sentiment was rampant in New York and the free West. Even in December, 1847, the *Union* remarked that "no considerable body of men in the country advocate the annexation of any portion of Mexico, except Upper California and New Mexico."<sup>80</sup>

Mexico's stubborn and unreasonable resistance made the war more costly and difficult than Tennesseans had anticipated. Belatedly, they realized that, unlike the Texan conflict and Tennesseans' limited campaigns against the British and Indians in 1813-1814, this was a full-scale war that called for the costly invasion of a foreign country where the enemy stubbornly defended his homeland. When Mexico refused to surrender following the American victories at Buena Vista and Vera Cruz, stories began to appear which reflect growing concern over the Administration's failure to bring the war to a close. Early in May, 1847, Brownlow observed that his exchange papers expressed a longing for the ending of the war.<sup>81</sup>

Reports of peace negotiations stimulated hopes and demands for ending the conflict. The *Union* saw fit to reprint an article on peace from the *Washington Union*, "Believing that no other subject possesses greater interest with our readers at this time . . ."<sup>82</sup> Late in September the *Eagle* said that many people were asking the paper if there was any possibility for a settlement.<sup>83</sup> In January, 1848, the *Union* reported that people were inquiring every day when a peace would be concluded.<sup>84</sup> Following the signing of the treaty in February, the *Eagle* predicted that peace would be made immediately because the country was tired of war.<sup>85</sup> Even the *Union* later indicated such feeling when it expressed concern over Mexico's slowness in ratifying the peace treaty.<sup>86</sup>

Sickness took a heavy toll of Tennesseans engaged in the war and contributed to the state's war-weariness. Dysentery, measles, and fevers took hundreds of American lives, especially during the early stages of the

<sup>79</sup>*Ibid.*, December 28, 1847.

<sup>80</sup>*Ibid.*, December 10, 1847.

<sup>81</sup>Brownlow's *Whig*, May 5, February 3, 1847.

<sup>82</sup>Nashville *Union*, September 2, 1847.

<sup>83</sup>Memphis *Eagle*, September 24, 1847.

<sup>84</sup>Nashville *Union*, January 18, 1848.

<sup>85</sup>Memphis *Eagle*, March 15, 1848.

<sup>86</sup>Nashville *Union*, March 30, 1848.



conflict when troops were stationed in the low-lying coastal areas. Crude sanitation and contaminated water also contributed to this. By August the First Tennessee Regiment of 1,040 men was reduced to less than half that number because of illness. About one hundred died and three hundred others were discharged because they were too sick to fight.<sup>87</sup>

In July, 1846, the *Standard* reprinted an account from the New Orleans *Delta* which discussed the health of the army. It noted that measles had appeared among the troops.<sup>88</sup> Reflecting the concern of the people, the Knoxville paper in September predicted that in the coming election the Whigs would capitalize on army hardships as evidenced by sickness among the volunteers.<sup>89</sup> On October 1 the *Union* published a letter from Colonel S. R. Anderson which told of sickness at Camargo.<sup>90</sup> The *Standard* got the news from the New Orleans *Delta* which reported that six hundred soldiers were ill and that many Tennesseans were included in the number.<sup>91</sup> Indicative of Tennessee concern was a movement in Nashville to care for returning sick and destitute volunteers.<sup>92</sup>

True to the *Standard's* prediction, illness among the troops was a topic of discussion in the gubernatorial canvass, indicating that Tennesseans questioned the care of their sons and husbands. An account of the meeting at Trenton reported that Governor Brown was only able pathetically to regret this hardship, and that he became very angry over the Whig candidate's reply in which the latter apparently blamed Polk and the Democratic Administration for troop illness.<sup>93</sup> Even late in the war the *Republican Banner* reflected continued concern when it urged the speedy return of the volunteers before summer diseases set in.<sup>94</sup>

Severe battle casualties among Tennessee's volunteers created even more concern back home. Unlike the practice of modern warfare, each state fought as a unit. When one of these units bore the brunt of a battle or attack, it often suffered unusually heavy casualties. On several occasions this happened to Tennessee units. The state's first significant casualties were incurred at Monterey. In that encounter Colonel William B. Campbell's First Tennessee Regiment suffered severe losses. When news of the casualties finally came in October, the *Eagle* expressed sorrow over the large number of killed and wounded.<sup>95</sup> The *Republican Banner*, in reporting a Nashville meeting to honor Tennesseans killed in the engagement, said: "The

<sup>87</sup>Robert Selph Henry, *The Story of the Mexican War* (New York, 1950), 139.

<sup>88</sup>Knoxville *Standard*, July 14, 1846.

<sup>89</sup>*Ibid.*, September 15, 1846.

<sup>90</sup>Nashville *Union*, October 1, 1846.

<sup>91</sup>Knoxville *Standard*, October 6, 1846.

<sup>92</sup>Nashville *Union*, October 10, 1846.

<sup>93</sup>Nashville *Republican Banner*, July 7, 1847.

<sup>94</sup>*Ibid.*, March 6, 1848.

<sup>95</sup>Memphis *Eagle*, October 29, 1846.

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meeting was numerously attended—thus showing, to some extent, the feeling and sympathy which pervades every heart.”<sup>96</sup>

Late in 1846 there was another call for volunteers. Significantly, Brownlow challenged the request by stating that Secretary of War William L. Marcy had declared that no more soldiers would be needed for the war. Said Brownlow: “More precious lives are to be lost!” In the same issue of the paper, noting the recent Whig election victories in the East, he asked Tennesseans this question: “Would you reject [Henry] Clay and go for annexation again?”<sup>97</sup> At Nashville the *Republican Banner* made a similar observation regarding the new call for troops and was immediately criticised by its Democratic neighbor the *Union*.<sup>98</sup> Apparently the drain on Tennessee manpower was beginning to tell.

The account of the funeral of William B. Allen, a Lawrence County volunteer killed at Monterey, is revealing. The body of the soldier had been returned home for burial. According to the account, about one thousand persons attended the funeral, many of whom, nine months before, had been on hand to see him depart for the war. Two volunteers, each of whom had lost an arm at Monterey, were there: “We have never attended any funeral where there was such general and deep sorrow depicted in the countenances of the spectators.”<sup>99</sup>

Early in May, 1847, the *Eagle* carried the news of the American victory at Cerro Gordo—and the deaths of Lieutenant Fred B. Nelson and a Lieutenant Gill of Memphis.<sup>100</sup> The heavy casualties suffered by Colonel William T. Haskell's regiment in this engagement set off a bitter controversy which reveals the concern in Tennessee over losses in battle. The regiment was a part of General Gideon J. Pillow's command. This officer had been appointed by President Polk. Following the battle a number of officers, including Haskell, accused Pillow of bad leadership during the engagement. The Whig press immediately took up the cry, publishing the testimony of Haskell (who was a Whig) and others who questioned Pillow's actions. The *Eagle* blamed the General for the “terrible carnage” among the Tennessee boys.<sup>101</sup> Brownlow printed the report of the seventeen Tennessee officers (Whigs and Democrats, he claimed) against General Pillow, who, in the report, was charged with mismanagement and cowardice.<sup>102</sup> Late in June the Whig editor, commenting on the heavy casualties, noted that at that time only 350 of the one thousand men from Campbell's regiment had returned

<sup>96</sup>Nashville *Republican Banner*, October 28, 1846.

<sup>97</sup>Brownlow's *Whig*, November 25, 1846.

<sup>98</sup>Nashville *Union*, November 26, 1846.

<sup>99</sup>Knoxville *Standard*, April 6, 1847, citing the Lawrenceburg *Times*, March 18, 1847.

<sup>100</sup>Memphis *Eagle*, May 5, 1847.

<sup>101</sup>*Ibid.*, June 7, 1847.

<sup>102</sup>Brownlow's *Whig*, June 16, 1847.

and that only 360 of Haskell's command had arrived back in Tennessee.<sup>103</sup> In September Brownlow stated that high casualties at Mexico City had led many people to realize that the war was not what it was "cracked up" to be, and he noted the reluctance of men to volunteer for a company which Washington County was raising at that time.<sup>104</sup>

Even before this there had appeared a reluctance on the part of Tennesseans to volunteer for war duty, indicating that subsequent calls for volunteers were not greeted with the original enthusiasm. Early in 1847 men were urged to fill companies, and the \$100 in script and 160 acres of land, granted to volunteers, was significantly mentioned as an inducement.<sup>105</sup> In September the *Appeal* claimed that the two regiments requested from the state at that time would be promptly supplied, despite the "unpopularity of the war"—a slur at the Whigs.<sup>106</sup> The eventual filling of new companies in August and September prompted the paper, with overweening confidence, to boast that there had been no hesitancy among Tennesseans to answer the new call for troops.<sup>107</sup> At this time the *Standard* reflected some concern—although it was confident that the new requisitions would be met.<sup>108</sup>

Reaction to and opinion of the peace negotiations are limited. The papers did little more than reprint the peace proposals and negotiations from out-of-state news organs. This neglect resulted from long expectation of the territorial cessions and disgust with the war. Eventual Mexican acceptance of the treaty proposals was a foregone conclusion. Also, pre-convention presidential nomination struggles now absorbed public attention.

Peace was expected when it was known that Scott was approaching Mexico City. It was felt that Nicholas P. Trist, Polk's peace commissioner, would now be able to reach a settlement with the Mexicans. Late in September the *Eagle* observed that he had received three sets of instructions and that with this apparent leeway he might be able to reach a settlement.<sup>109</sup> But as negotiations dragged on into December, the paper reflected growing discouragement, expressing a belief that the Mexicans were still "loyal" to their government and that they were determined not to yield to American demands.<sup>110</sup> Because they expected nothing to come from the peace efforts, Tennessee newspapers devoted little attention to subsequent negotiations.

<sup>103</sup>*Ibid.*, June 30, 1847.

<sup>104</sup>*Ibid.*, September 22, 29, 1847.

<sup>105</sup>Memphis *Appeal*, February 26, 1847. Brownlow stated that the war might drag on until a draft became necessary. Brownlow's *Whig*, April 7, 1847.

<sup>106</sup>Memphis *Appeal*, September 8, 1847.

<sup>107</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>108</sup>Knoxville *Standard*, September 14, 1847. In November, Brownlow denounced Greene County for not supplying its quota. Also, he claimed that several old companies in Washington County failed to report. Brownlow's *Whig*, November 24, 1847.

<sup>109</sup>Memphis *Eagle*, September 28, 1847.

<sup>110</sup>*Ibid.*, December 3, 1847.

Late in February the *Eagle* commented on the treaty negotiations.

The signing of the treaty with seeming haste, but there was no real proceedings in the matter. "We think it a ratification by the people of the accomplishment."

Thus by the time of the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, Tennessee had apparently done what other states had done years before.

Opinion initially was that the conflict would end with the volunteer army. Also reflected in the Tennessee press was the feeling that the Tennessee

Tennessee was contrary, the people were concerned about the war and French annexation. As a result of the war to annexation.

With a view to why Tennessee was against the war, the initial popular character of the hostilities. In each party

Tennessee did arise a

<sup>111</sup>*Ibid.*, February 26, 1847.

<sup>112</sup>Memphis *Appeal*, February 26, 1847.

<sup>113</sup>Knoxville *Standard*, September 14, 1847.

<sup>114</sup>Brownlow's *Whig*, November 24, 1847.

<sup>115</sup>Memphis *Eagle*, September 28, 1847.

back in Tennessee.<sup>108</sup> Mexico City had led s "cracked up" to be, company which Wash-

nce on the part of subsequent calls for a. Early in 1847 men d 160 acres of land, an inducement.<sup>109</sup> In requested from the e the "unpopularity g of new companies rweening confidence, sseans to answer the eted some concern— d be met.<sup>108</sup>

as are limited. The als and negotiations om long expectation Eventual Mexican nclusion. Also, pre- ed public attention.

tt was approaching peace commissioner, icans. Late in Sep- sets of instructions reach a settlement.<sup>109</sup> r reflected growing vere still "loyal" to yield to American n the peace efforts, equent negotiations.

at the war might drag 47.

Brownlow denounced that several old com- y, November 24, 1847.

Late in February, 1848, when it was announced that a peace had been signed, the *Eagle* confessed that too little public attention had been given to the treaty negotiations.<sup>111</sup>

The signing of the treaty evoked little comment. The *Appeal* did discuss it with seeming approval.<sup>112</sup> The news came to Knoxville late in February but there was no significant reaction.<sup>113</sup> In reporting the final ratification proceedings in the United States Senate, Brownlow merely commented that "We think it likely that a treaty of peace has been effected."<sup>114</sup> Upon ratification by the United States, the Memphis papers merely reported the accomplishment of the act.<sup>115</sup>

Thus by the time the Mexican government ratified the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo on May 25, 1848, the war was a worn out issue in Tennessee. Severe losses in battle, troop sickness and protracted hostilities apparently dimmed the military ardor that had been so prevalent two years before.

Opinion reflected in the state press reveals that the Mexican War initially was popular with Tennesseans, but they became dissatisfied when the conflict was not vigorously prosecuted to an early conclusion and when the volunteers suffered severe casualties in battle and through sickness. Also reflected in the accounts of the war is the extreme partisanship of the Tennessee press.

Tennesseans neither expected nor feared a war with Mexico. To the contrary, they considered her weak and too torn by internal strife to be concerned about the United States' annexation of Texas. It was English and French ambitions in Mexico that Tennesseans suspected and distrusted. As a result they attributed to European influence early Mexican objection to annexation and her refusal to negotiate a settlement with John Slidell.

With a background of enmity toward Mexico, it is understandable why Tennesseans, with a vindictive spirit, so avidly volunteered to retaliate against the invasion of what they believed was American territory. The initial popularity of the war was so great that the Whig press, although characteristically blaming Polk for the war, did not hesitate to promote hostilities. Indeed, the war met such universal approval in Tennessee that each party claimed to be outdoing the other in supporting it.

Tennesseans did not demand the annexation of all Mexico. Early there did arise agitation for the acquisition of California and New Mexico as

<sup>111</sup>*Ibid.*, February 26, 1848.

<sup>112</sup>*Memphis Appeal*, February 23, 1848.

<sup>113</sup>*Knoxville Standard*, February 29, 1848.

<sup>114</sup>*Brownlow's Whig*, March 1, 8, 1848.

<sup>115</sup>*Memphis Eagle*, March 18, 22, 1848; *Memphis Appeal*, March 22, 1848.

payment for Mexican debts to American citizens and for the expense of the war. Late in the conflict there seems to have been some demand for Lower California also.

Believing that the war would be short, Tennesseans did not understand or approve of Polk's dilatory tactics which were designed to encourage Mexico to sign an early peace and sell territory to the United States. The Whigs exploited this dissatisfaction with the prosecution of the war to win the gubernatorial election of 1847. They claimed that Polk had begun an unnecessary war. Why had it been necessary militarily to defend the disputed boundary area if the President was going to buy it as they asserted was his purpose in demanding the appropriations of two million and three million dollars? He was using the war to aggrandize himself politically, they claimed, and pointed out how he gave positions of military leadership to Democratic friends.

Disgust mounted when the news of battle casualties arrived back home. Even earlier, reports of devastating sickness caused discouragement. Tennesseans longed for the final peace. The war had been long and costly and they were tired.

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