

The Diary of James K. Polk during his Presidency, 1845 to 1849 (vol. 2, pp. 180-185)
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SUNDAY, 11th October, 1846. —

[181] About dark Capt. Eaton of the U. S. Army called in company with the Secretary of War & the Adjutant General. Capt. Eaton was the bearer of despatches from Gen'l Taylor, having left Monterey on the evening of the 25th ultimo. These despatches announced that a battle had been fought between the two armies at Monterey commencing on the evening of the 20th ultimo & continuing for between three and four days. The result was a capitulation by which the American army were left in possession of the City, and the Mexican army permitted to retire with their arms, except the larger part of their ordinance & munitions of war which were delivered over to the American forces. An armistice was also agreed upon to continue for eight weeks. In agreeing to this armistice Gen'l Taylor violated his express orders & I regret that I cannot approve his course. He had the enemy in his power & should have taken them prisoners, deprived them of their arms, discharged them on their parole of honour, and preserved the advantage which he had obtained by pushing on without delay further into the country, if the force at his command justified it. Our troops fought well, though with some loss of officers & men. It was a great mistake in Gen'l Taylor to agree to an armistice. It will only enable the Mexican army to reorganize and recruit so as to make another stand.

Besides Capt. Eaton, the adjutant Gen'l & Secretary [182] of War, the Secretary of the Navy, the Post Master General, Maj'r Graham of Tennessee, & my Private Secretary were present in my office while the official report from Gen'l Taylor was reading. Some opinions were expressed, but disapproving of the armistice I remained silent and was careful to express no opinion, except to regret the loss of the brave officers and men who had fallen and to say that

they had fought bravely. The Adjutant Gen'l seemed anxious to justify Gen'l Taylor for having entered into the armistice. I expressed my disapprobation of it to the Secretary of War aside, & he agreed with me. Mr. Ritchie came in after the papers were read. When the Gentlemen were retiring I requested the members of the Cabinet to meet me at my office on to-morrow at 11 O'Clock at which hour a special meeting of the Cabinet I informed them would be held.

After they had retired Mr. Buchanan called, & condemned Gen'l Taylor in strong terms for having entered into the armistice. I informed him that there would be a meeting of the Cabinet on to-morrow at 11 O'Clock.

[183] MONDAY, 12th October, 1846. -- I gave orders to my porter this morning that I would see no company to-day. . . .

Gen'l Taylor's despatches from Monterey received last night were read in Cabinet. They were fully considered and discussed. The Cabinet were unanimous in the opinion, judging from all the information which Gen'l Taylor had communicated, that he had committed a great error in granting the terms of capitulation to the enemy which he had, and in agreeing to an armistice for the term of 8 weeks. But two reasons could have justified the terms granted to the enemy in the capitulation. The first is, if he believed that he could not capture them; & the 2nd. is, that Gen'l Ampudia may have induced him to believe that in consequence of the recent change of rulers in Mexico that Government was disposed to make peace. If the first reason existed Gen'l Taylor has not stated it in his despatches, and we have no information to justify the existence of this reason, though it may have existed. If the second reason was the one upon which he acted, then Gen'l Ampudia has overreached & deceived him. From all that appears in Gen'l Taylor's despatches it would seem that the U. S. Army had been successful during more than three days

fighting, and had taken & held nearly all the strong positions of [184] the enemy, and by prosecuting their successes a little longer might have captured the whole Mexican army. Gen'l Taylor in his despatches states nothing of what Gen'l Ampudia had assured him of the dispositions of the Mexican Government for peace, but makes a general allusion to that point. The Cabinet were united in the opinion that the reasons assigned by Gen'l Taylor (as far as any reasons are assigned) for granting the terms of capitulation he did and for granting the armistice of eight weeks, are not satisfactory. Further information and explanations may be hereafter given by him. The Cabinet were united in the opinion that if Gen'l Taylor had captured the Mexican army, deprived them of their arms, and discharged them upon their parole of honour not to bear arms during the war or until they were regularly exchanged, that it would have probably ended the war with Mexico. As it is, he has permitted them to retire from Monterey, each officer and soldier with his arms, and with 6 pieces of artillery, not as prisoners of war on parole, but at perfect liberty to reorganize and renew the war at their own time and place, and by granting the armistice has given them 8 weeks to effect this object.

It was agreed unanimously that orders should be forthwith sent to Gen'l Taylor to terminate the armistice to which he had agreed, and to prosecute the war with energy and vigor. It was agreed that this should be done in terms neither to approve or condemn his conduct in granting the capitulation and the armistice. All agreed that the officers & men had fought gallantly and deserved the thanks [185] of the country, but regretted that the victory had not been crowned by the capture of the enemy's army. All agreed also that at the same time that the Secretary of War in his letter should not express approbation of Gen'l Taylor's course, he should not condemn it. This question was reserved until further information or explanations were received from Gen'l

Taylor. From the order to terminate the armistice Gen'l T. will of course infer that that part of his course is not approved.