

James K. Polk
Message on War with Mexico
May 11, 1846

To the Senate and House of Representatives:

The existing state of the relations between the United States and Mexico renders it proper that I should bring the subject to the consideration of Congress. . . .

. . . I had ordered an efficient military force to take a position "between the Nueces and the Del Norte." This had become necessary to meet a threatened invasion of Texas by the Mexican forces, for which extensive military preparations had been made. The invasion was threatened solely because Texas had determined, in accordance with a solemn resolution of the Congress of the United States, to annex herself to our Union, and under these circumstances it was plainly our duty to extend our protection over her citizens and soil.

This force was concentrated at Corpus Christi, and remained there until after I had received such information from Mexico as rendered it probable, if not certain, that the Mexican Government would refuse to receive our envoy.

Meantime Texas, by the final action of our Congress, had become an integral part of our Union. The Congress of Texas, by its act of December 19, 1836, had declared the Rio del Norte [note: this is the Rio Grande River] to be the boundary of that Republic. Its jurisdiction had been extended and exercised beyond the Nueces. The country between [the Nueces] and the Del Norte had been represented in the Congress and in the convention of Texas, had thus taken part in the act of annexation itself, and is now included within one of our Congressional districts. Our own Congress had, moreover, with great unanimity, by the act approved December 31, 1845, recognized the country beyond the Nueces as a part of our territory by including it within our own revenue system, and a revenue officer to reside within that district has been appointed by and with the advice and consent of the Senate. It became, therefore, of urgent necessity to provide for the defense of that portion of our country. Accordingly, on the 13th of January [1846] instructions were issued to the general in command of these troops to occupy the left bank of the Del Norte [the northern bank of the Rio Grande]. This river, which is the southwestern boundary of the State of Texas, is an exposed frontier.

The movement of the troops to the Del Norte was made by the commanding general under positive instructions to abstain from all aggressive acts toward Mexico or Mexican citizens and to regard the relations between that Republic and the United States as peaceful unless she should declare war or commit acts of hostility indicative of a state of war. . . .

The Mexican forces at Matamoras assumed a belligerent attitude, and on the 12th of April General Ampudia, then in command, notified General Taylor to break up his camp within twenty-four hours and to retire beyond the Nueces River, and in the event of his failure to comply with these demands announced that arms, and arms alone, must decide the question. But no open act of hostility was committed until the 24th of April. On that day General Arista, who had succeeded to the command of the Mexican forces, communicated to General Taylor that "he considered hostilities commenced and should prosecute them." A party of dragoons [cavalry; mounted soldiers] of 63 men and officers were on the same day dispatched from the American camp up the Rio del Norte, on its [northern] bank, to ascertain whether the Mexican

troops had crossed or were preparing to cross the river, "became engaged with a large body of these troops, and after a short affair, in which some 16 were killed and wounded, appear to have been surrounded and compelled to surrender." . . .

The cup of forbearance had been exhausted even before the recent information from the frontier of the Del Norte. But now, after reiterated menaces, Mexico has passed the boundary of the United States, has invaded our territory and shed American blood upon the American soil. She has proclaimed that hostilities have commenced, and that the two nations are now at war.

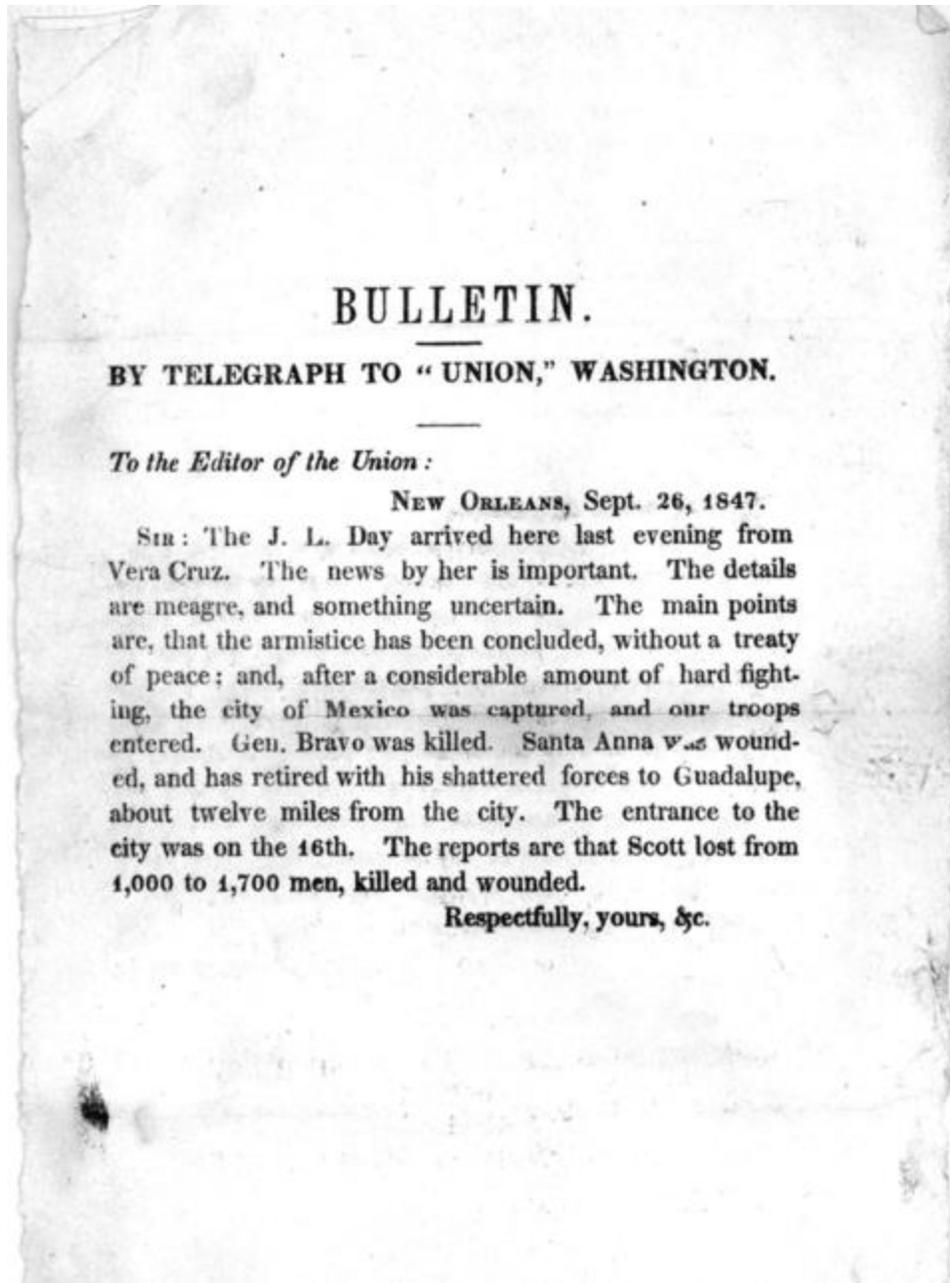
As war exists, and, notwithstanding all our efforts to avoid it, exists by the act of Mexico herself, we are called upon by every consideration of duty and patriotism to vindicate with decision the honor, the rights, and the interests of our country. . . .

In further vindication of our rights and defense of our territory, I invoke the prompt action of Congress to recognize the existence of the war, and to place at the disposition of the Executive the means of prosecuting the war with vigor, and thus hastening the restoration of peace. . . .

Polk, James K. *James K. Polk Papers: Series 5: Messages and Speeches, 1833 -1849; 1846; May 11 , hostilities by Mexico*. 1846. Manuscript/Mixed Material. <https://www.loc.gov/item/mss365090072/>.

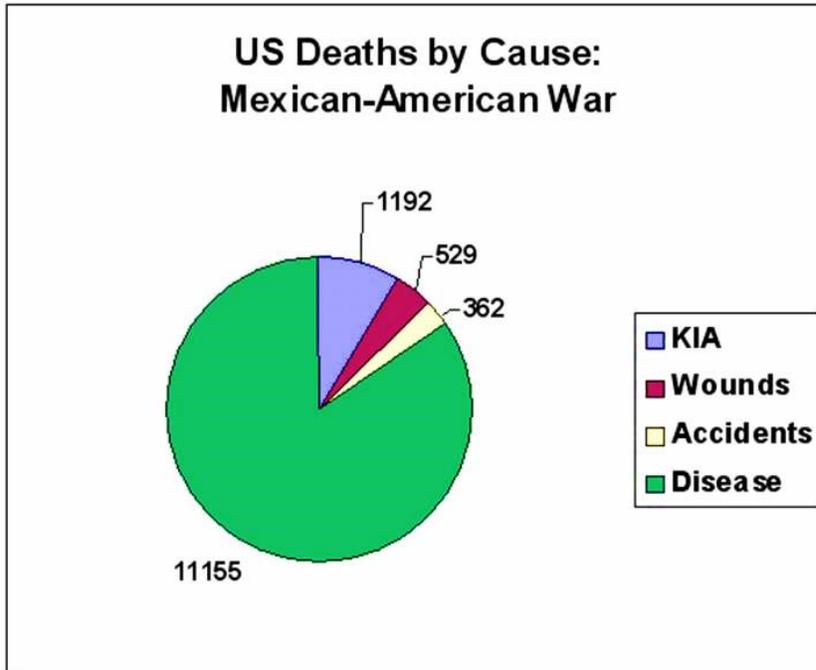
**Bulletin by telegraph to Washington Union newspaper in
Washington, D.C.**

Sent from New Orleans, Sept. 26, 1847.



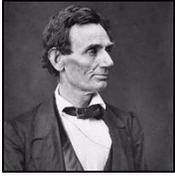
Bulletin by telegraph to "Union," Washington. To the editor of the Union: New Orleans, Sept. 26: The J. L. Day arrived here last evening from Vera Cruz. The news by her is important. The details are meagre, and something uncertain. The. Washington, 1847. Telegram. <https://www.loc.gov/item/rbpe.19802800/>.

Graph: US Deaths by Cause in the Mexican War



KIA = 1192
Wounds = 529
Accidents = 362
Disease = 11,155

Tschanz, David W. "U.S. Deaths by Cause: Mexican-American War." *Yellow Fever and The Strategy of The Mexican-American War*. Insects, Disease and History. Accessed November 12, 2019. <http://www.montana.edu/historybug/mexwar.html>.



Abraham Lincoln Speech Before the U.S. House of Representatives 22 December 1847

Whereas the President of the United States . . . has declared that "the Mexican Government not only refused to receive [the envoy of the United States], or listen to his propositions, but, after a long-continued series of menaces, has at last invaded *our territory* and shed the blood of our fellow-citizens on our *own soil*:"

...And whereas this House is desirous to obtain a full knowledge of all the facts which go to establish whether the particular spot on which the blood of our citizens was so shed was or was not at that time *our own soil*: Therefore,

Resolved By the House of Representatives, that the President of the United States be respectfully requested to inform this House --

1st. Whether the spot on which the blood of our citizens was shed . . . was or was not within the territory of Spain, at least after the treaty of 1819, until the Mexican revolution.

2d. Whether that spot is or is not within the territory which was wrested from Spain by the revolutionary Government of Mexico.

3d. Whether that spot is or is not within a settlement of people [which] has existed . . . since long before the Texas revolution, and until its inhabitants fled before the approach of the United States army.

4th. Whether that settlement is or is not isolated from any and all other settlements by the Gulf and the Rio Grande on the south and west, and by wide uninhabited regions on the north and east.

5th. Whether the people of that settlement . . . have ever submitted themselves to the government or laws of Texas or the United States, by consent or compulsion, either by accepting office, or voting at elections, or paying tax, or serving on juries, or having process served upon them, or in any other way.

6th. Whether the people of that settlement did or did not flee from the approach of the United States army, leaving unprotected their homes and their growing crops, *before* the blood was shed . . . and whether the first blood, so shed, was or was not shed within the enclosure of one of the people who had thus fled from it.

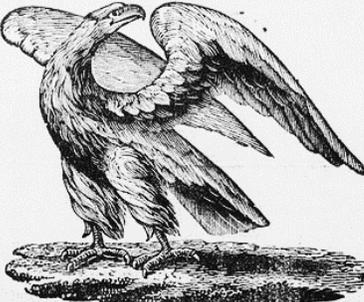
7th. Whether our *citizens*, whose blood was shed . . . were or were not, at that time, armed officers and soldiers, sent into that settlement by the military order of the President, through the Secretary of War.

8th. Whether the military force of the United States was or was not sent into that settlement after General Taylor had more than once intimated [advised, informed] to the War Department that, in his opinion, no such movement was necessary to the defense or protection of Texas.
Recruiting poster, 1847

Lincoln, Abraham. "Spot Resolutions, 1847." Speech, December 22, 1847. *Abraham Lincoln papers: Series 1. General Correspondence. 1833 to 1916: Abraham Lincoln Printed Resolutions and Preamble on Mexican War*: Manuscript/Mixed Material. <https://www.loc.gov/item/mal0007000/>.

**Recruitment Poster
February 1, 1847**

To Arms! To Arms!



100 Men for the United States Army!

TO THE PATRIOTIC CITIZENS OF HOLMES COUNTY, WHO ARE WILLING TO FIGHT FOR THEIR COUNTRY; AND PARTICULARLY TO THE MEMBERS OF THE "HOLMES COUNTY VOLUNTEER" COMPANY, WHO PLEDGED THEMSELVES TO BE IN READINESS TO MARCH WHEN THE COMPANY WOULD BE ACCEPTED:

FELLOW-CITIZENS AND SOLDIERS:

We are extremely gratified to be able to announce to you, that we have obtained permission from the President of the United States, to organize our company, and also his assurance that when it is reported to him filled and fully organized, that we will be "Promptly ordered on to the seat of war without the possible intervention of any authority."

So that you see that justice, although sometimes slow is nevertheless sure. Now then, let there be a general rally, to the standard of our beloved country; heed not the insidious whisperings and prophecies of the enemies of Liberty. Let every good, brave and patriotic Citizen, assist in this work; and the ark of American rights will move gloriously forward.

A Recruiting

Rendezvous, has been opened, according to instructions, at the Law Office, of Messrs. Tanneyhill & Given, in the town of Millersburg; where any able-bodied citizen of good character, can enrol his name, and "Go where glory awaits him."

Let there be a Grand

Rally of the strong arms and stout hearts at this Depot, on SATURDAY next, the 6th inst., at 10 o'clock A. M. when the conditions of the enlistment will be made known.

February 1, 1847.  T. L. HART, Recruiting Officer.

MEANS, PRINTER, MILLERSBURG

Hart, T.L. "To Arms! To Arms! 100 Men for the United States Army." Poster. Millersburg, Ohio: February 1, 1847. Special Collections Division, The University of Texas Libraries, Arlington, Texas. Accessed November 11, 2019. https://library.uta.edu/usmexicowar/collections/image/usmw-GO28_18470201_001.jpg

Excerpt from *Life and adventures of Col. L.A. Norton*

Lewis Adelbert Norton (b. 1819) grew up in Canada and western New York. Norton settled in Illinois, where he raised a regiment for the Mexican War. He served near Tampico on the east coast in the state of Veracruz, and at one point traveled inland about 25 miles. His squad was camped near the Panuca River when Norton had time to sit and reflect.

. . . Everywhere . . . were large masses of broken pottery ware; statuary of men, quadrupeds, and fowls, all broken and ruined, yet giving evidences of the skill and taste of the race who had some day peopled that lovely place. The statuary and figures seemed to have been attached to the buildings, standing out in bold relief, sustaining cornices and projections; although this is not universal, as in some instances the rock has been chiseled away, leaving human and other forms in bas-relief upon columns that someday had undoubtedly sustained magnificent structures. But what was more remarkable, the countenances of the faces on the columns and statuary were wholly unlike the present race inhabiting Mexico, or the Indian tribes of that country, but were rather of a Grecian type.

It was difficult to say whether the ruined city was confined to the river as a port, or whether its commercial advantages also connected it with the lake; there was one thing very evident, that there had been many massive and elegant buildings on the lake shore, and I think they compared favorably with the ruins on the river.

Night was now closing in on us, and we returned to the river, where we had established our base of operations. After supper, I seated myself on a fallen column of granite and sank into profound meditation. It was hard to realize that, where I sat at the time, more than a thousand years ago a mighty city, which now lay in ruins at my feet, had teemed with commerce, life, and action; its busy streets had one day swarmed with thousands of human beings, whose impulses and feelings probably differed but little from our own. There, had mingled the man of business, the devotee, the pleasure-seeker, the layman and the clergy; men of wealth and station, with rank and power; and vice and squalid misery had alike swarmed in the thoroughfares of this once mighty emporium. But who were they? Where did they come from, and whither did they go? What great devastating power or destructive calamity had overtaken them? Were these the works of the Toltecas nation, who invaded Mexico, coming from the Rocky Mountains in 648? Or were they the conquerors of this city, and in their turn exterminated by the Chickemecas, four hundred years afterwards. I would have given much could I, that night, have called forth the ghost of one of those unknown departed, that I might have interviewed him upon the character and fate of the now dead city. . . . We Americans, with the nations of Europe, flock to the old world, and there exhaust the brightest intellects and spend untold millions of dollars hunting for the last records and hidden treasures . . . to relocate the lost site of a Babylon; to hunt for hidden manuscripts in the catacombs. . . or hunt hieroglyphics among the pyramids of Egypt; when upon our own continent lies, unexplored and unnoticed, the richest fields in the world for the antiquarian. But I must not dwell longer upon my reflections or midnight speculations. I turned in and was soon lost to all external objects.

U.S.-Mexican War Swords



This model cutlass was one of the principle swords issued to the U. S. Navy beginning in 1841 and continued in use through the U.S.-Mexican War.



Detail of navy sword, above



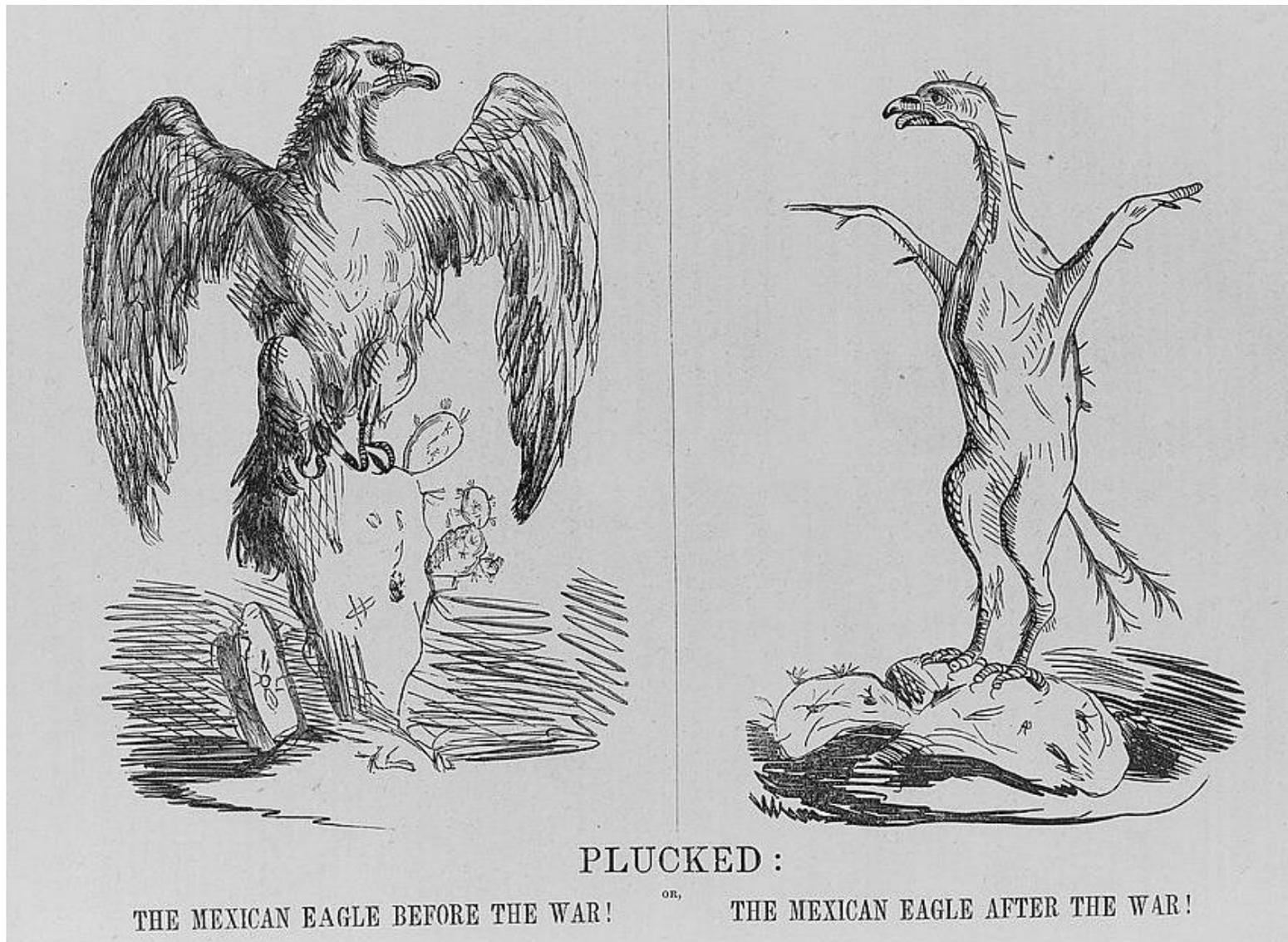
This Mexican saber is unique in that it is engraved on one side with the phrase "No me sacres son razon" (Do not draw me without reason) and on the other side with the words "No me envainar sin honor" (Do no sheath me without honor).



Detail of Mexican saber, above

These two swords represent both sides of the conflict. The U.S. model cutlass was one of the principle swords issued to the U. S. Navy beginning in 1841 and continued to be used through the U.S.-Mexican War. The navy played a key role during the war by leading the U.S. attack on Mexico through the Gulf of Mexico. The Mexican Cuirassier saber was a sword carried by the Mexican army's heavy cavalry, mounted soldiers who bore the brunt of the initial attack. These soldiers wore metal breastplates and metal helmets.

Wood Engraving: Plucked
May 15, 1847



Title: Plucked or, The Mexican eagle before the war! The Mexican eagle after the war!

Date
Created/Published:
1847 May 15.

Medium: 1 print :
wood engraving.

Summary: Two scenes, an eagle perched on a cactus, and a scrawny plucked eagle on a withered cactus.

Repository: Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division
Washington, D.C.
20540 USA

Notes: Illus. in:
Yankee Doodle, v. 2,
no. 32 (1847 May 15), p. 55.