

# **South Carolina in the Mexican War**

**A History of the  
Palmetto Regiment  
of Volunteers  
1846-1917**

A large, stylized handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Jack Allen Meyer". The signature is written in a cursive style with long, sweeping lines.

**Jack Allen Meyer**



Suttlng was a risky business, for military pay was frequently in arrears, and desertion cut into profits. The positions, however, were popular. On 22 December, as the Palmetto Regiment was preparing to leave Charleston, a Mr. H. B. Gleason sent a letter to Colonel Butler soliciting the position of sutler to the regiment. Gleason included a list of names supporting his request and expressed the hope that “perhaps [my] having a large family to support may have some comparative influence with the ‘Council of Appointment’ in reaching their decision.”<sup>22</sup> The outcome of Gleason’s request is not known, but on 29 May 1847, Lieutenant Colonel Dickinson, Major Gladden, and Captain Dunovant were appointed as a Council of Administration to “take such action on the death” of sutler “M[arshall] R. Smith as shall to them seem proper.” The Council was to elect another sutler and arrange for the collection of money owed Smith to restore “to the State fund the amount borrowed”—presumably by Smith.<sup>23</sup>

The sutlers accompanying General Scott’s army were an inventive lot. According to one source, they even managed to arrive on the beach at Vera Cruz *before* the army landed; they set up shop and met the troops as they came ashore. Scott grumbled that the navy carpenters were ignoring “the pressing military business” because the sutlers had the carpenters working for them.<sup>24</sup>

As might be expected of a large body of men, many away from home for the first time, the volunteers’ mood was often boisterous, and their behavior sometimes led to strained relations with the good—and not-so-good—citizens of Charleston. The *Pendleton Messenger*, quoting the *Camden Journal*, said “the Volunteers did not receive from the people of Charleston, either that hospitality, kindness or attention, which they had a right to expect;” and it went on to say this was a subject on which the Charleston papers were “mum.”<sup>25</sup>

Actions of the volunteers, however, must sometimes have sorely tried the patience of the authorities. According to Lieutenant Joseph B. Kershaw of the DeKalb Guards—the company from Kershaw District—about forty men were given leave to go into town on 17 December. They were required to return by 2 o’clock, but only four or five reported back on time. Some of the stragglers were at the “house” of Nicholas Varney, where they were getting liquor. When Varney refused to give them more, a dispute arose, with Varney and a Thomas Cobb, alias Hill, trading accusations—Varney claiming Hill had tried to shoot him and had failed only because his pistol had misfired, and Hill claiming Varney had pulled a pistol on *him*. Shortly afterwards, the tardy volunteers—all from the Kershaw Company—were standing in Elliott Street near the Baltimore House, holding five or six bottles of liquor. There, a group of sailors accosted them, and a fight broke out. In the course of the fight, someone fired a pistol. The shot killed a sailor named Michael Grace, and six members of the DeKalb Guards were arrested. The next day, they, with a number of others, were brought before

the “jury of inquest.” Nicholas Varney said the man who fired the pistol was tall, had smooth, light brown hair, and was wearing a frock coat and a white hat. George Garrett, a citizen, agreed. Lieutenant Kershaw said at least twenty-five men in his company matched Varney’s description and a dozen of those wore white hats. John William Hitchfeldt, who was staying at Furst’s Store on Elliott Street, testified that sailors and loafers were following the volunteers and throwing brickbats at them. Henry Bahntze, a citizen, said the fight lasted about an hour, and the volunteers got the worst of it. He saw three or four lying in the street, and he also saw the deceased throw a large brick at the volunteers just before he was shot.

The volunteers said little. William Hunter told the jury he was with Ransom Logan and Eli Brewer, both short men, but he was “very drunk” and recalled nothing until he woke up in the Guard House. Pleasant McManus said he left camp with the others but he, too, was so drunk he remembered nothing. Benjamin F. Spears told the jury he was intoxicated, but he “supposed” he was arrested by a police officer. Thomas Cobb, alias Hill, said he saw no pistol among the volunteers but declined to tell the jury if he had one. He also remembered nothing of the fight. Seaman William Lawrence said only that he came upon the fight as he was going to work; he heard the shot but did not see who fired it.

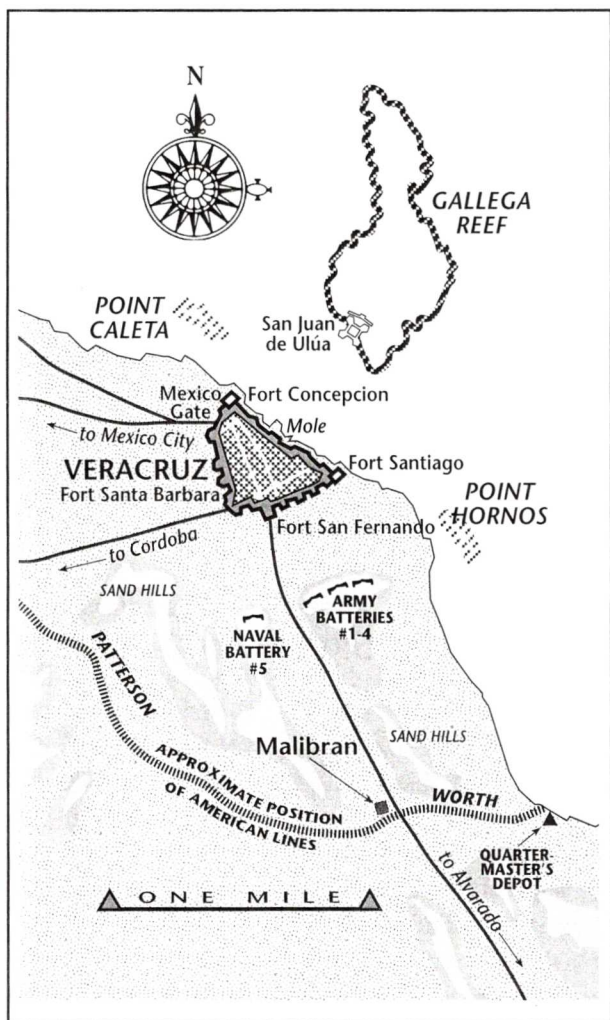
After some deliberation, the jury concluded that Michael Grace was killed between 3 and 4 o’clock on the afternoon of 17 December “by some person to the Jurors unknown, whilst deceased was engaged in a riot and after he had just thrown a brick.” They went on to charge that the “aforesaid unknown person . . . feloniously did kill [Michael Grace] against the peace [and] dignity of the same State aforesaid.” The matter was still under investigation when the volunteers left Charleston.\*

## **Over land and sea to Vera Cruz**

On 18 December Adjutant General Jones sent Colonel Butler orders for the regiment to proceed as quickly as possible to Point Isabel, Texas, by way of Montgomery and Mobile, Alabama. Because the situation was urgent, the companies were to leave as rapidly as they could, “without waiting until the entire regiment

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\*William Hunter, Benjamin Spears, and Eli Brewer survived the rigors of the campaign and returned with the regiment in 1848. Thomas [Cobb] Hill and Pleasant McManus deserted on 24 January 1847 in Mobile, Alabama. Ransom Logan appears on the list of the DeKalb Guards published by the *Camden Journal* on 30 December but does not appear on any of the official rolls. He may not have been mustered into service. The account of this event, which was published in the 23 December edition of the *Camden Journal*, was extracted from the Charleston *Evening News*. The *Camden Journal*, 23, 30 December 1846.



30 March.<sup>2</sup> The men marched along the beach for several hours, then camped at a small village near a brackish stream. At daybreak, after a breakfast of coffee and crackers, they filled their canteens, crossed the stream, and set out across country. The trees and shrubs soon gave way to a “vast, level, shrubless plain, covered with coarse grass and grazing herds of wild cattle.” The brigade marched until sundown, “exhausted and famished” and unable to stop because it found no water along the route. Finally, the brigade reached a muddy pond. In the “general rush” for water, the pond was soon “perfectly thick with mud, so much so, that the horses which came up last, although nearly famished from thirst, positively refused to drink it.” Many of the men, overcome with exhaustion, slept through the night with-

out food or water. For those who ate, the supper of salt pork and crackers only made their thirst worse.

The next morning the brigade marched on under the “heating rays of a tropical sun,” quickly exhausting the water supply. Mirages deluded some of the thirsty soldiers into believing they saw “a most beautiful lake of clear water” nearby, but disappointment came quickly when the “lake” disappeared as they neared it. That afternoon, the brigade reached another muddy pond, but the water there made some men “deathly sick,” and H. Judge Moore noticed a dead alligator in it. By evening, the men had reached a palmetto grove near the beach. They dug holes and found no water, but they were able to supplement their depleted rations with a few wild cattle—contrary to orders—because “necessity knows no law, and we were all hungry as grayhounds, and in for a mess of beef.”

Overnight, some salty, brackish water rose in the holes they had dug, but, as Moore noted, “it was hard to tell which was its predominating quality, to quench or excite thirst.” The next day—Friday, 2 April—was equally grueling, but the men found temporary relief when they reached Alvarado about 4 o’clock.

Unfortunately, three days earlier Alvarado had been warned of the approaching attack, for on the 30th, Lieutenant Charles G. Hunter of the steamer *Scourge* had fired on the fort guarding the entrance to the river and compounded his error by occupying the town the next day. The defenders had responded by scuttling the Mexican ships, driving the horses and cattle into the hills, and destroying what they could not evacuate.\* Quitman’s brigade remained in Alvarado for two days, where, according to Moore, they enjoyed the “hospitalities of the city.” On one occasion, Moore and some companions were served “an excellent supper” of hot cakes, chili soup, and chocolate. A young girl, who was “a perfect paragon of beauty, untrammelled by art, unadorned by fashion, a child of nature, possessing all the loveliness of unconscious and original beauty” served the hot cakes. Later, Moore wrote a poem about this “Baker Girl of Alvarado,” which he set to the tune “Johnson’s Wife of Louisiana.” The poem was apparently lost in transit home.<sup>3</sup>

On 4 April, Quitman’s weary troops began the march back to Vera Cruz. Of the 150 sick Palmettos, sixty were ill enough to be evacuated by sea, including Private Goodlett, who rejoiced in the prospect of a short voyage back to Vera Cruz on a steamer instead of “3 or 4 days hard marching.”<sup>4</sup> After another forced march, the other Palmettos, along with the rest of the brigade, reached Vera Cruz on the afternoon of 6 April—just one day after those who traveled by steamer.\*\* Physically unable to accompany Scott’s departing army, the brigade missed the Battle of Cerro Gordo.

## **Disease and doctoring**

The march to Alvarado was unnecessary and accomplished nothing. If the brigade had been moved by water—as it just as easily could have been—the expedition undoubtedly would have enjoyed greater success and been far less

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\*Hunter was later court-martialled but acquitted. The case excited considerable interest in the newspapers, and most supported Hunter.

\*\*Some of the sick, including Private Johnson, had been left behind in Vera Cruz when Quitman left for Alvarado. Johnson’s diary for 31 March is a litany of self-pity. “Alas for human ingenuity, for human hopes! Alas! for my poor Shoes that were once new and beautiful but are so no more—like unto Sin[n]ers, their Soles are in a Sad condition—nay almost hopeless—yet I think they will linger out some days of usefulness in ad[d]ition to the many they have already served me—Valuable as a Sample of good workmanship and the gift of a much respected friend—poor shoes! poor me—” Johnson, 210–11.

Palmetto Regiment Document Book contains a number of courts martial records from the period. Private William F. Hunter of the Kershaw Company visited Mexico City on 28 December 1847 in violation of Brigade Order No. 57 and received a sentence that deprived him of one month's pay and imposed on him four hours extra drill each day for five days. Private Duncan Cameron of the Charleston Company received the same sentence for making one trip to the city on the first of January 1848 and another trip the next day. Private James D. Wright, also of the Charleston Company, showed more ambition—he went into Mexico City on 1 January and was brought back—no doubt unwillingly—by the first sergeant on the 4th. He lost a month's pay and incurred an extra twenty hours of drill. Private Joseph Williams, another Charleston man, was gone from 23 January to 27 January. He, too, lost one month's pay and received three extra tours of guard duty.<sup>14</sup>

There was also simmering discontent. Second Lieutenant Jonathon R. Davis of the Fairfield Company was brought before a court martial in February 1848 for neglect of duty. On 19 January while he was "Lieutenant of the Guard," Davis had left his post, and in his absence, "a riot occurred between the volunteers stationed at San Angel." No other record of this "riot" appears in the Palmetto Regiment documents, and Lieutenant Davis was acquitted, but the charge indicates a less than tranquil camp. H. Judge Moore reported a more serious affray in an 8 April 1848 letter to the *Greenville Mountaineer*:

Quite an unfortunate affair happened, a few evenings since, in the quarters of the Palmetto Regiment; private STANFORD, of Company H, and formerly of Greenville District, killed private BENDER, of Company F, by shooting him through the bowels with a pistol. The difficulty grew out of a bet on Monte, which the latter claimed but the former would not pay. BENDER died in about 30 minutes after receiving the wound, and STANFORD is in irons, awaiting his trial; he will evidently be hung, the case is so clear, that I think no human agency can save him.\*

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\*According to the roster of casualties for Company F (PRB 269–70) Private W. J. Bender was "killed accidentally at San Angel" on 4 April 1848. The roster for the company in the South Carolina Historical Society collection merely says he was "killed." According to the 30 June 1848 Muster Roll of Company H (Military Department Papers, SCDAH) Private John D. Stanford enlisted at Jalapa on 6 May 1847 and deserted at San Angel 30 April 1848. Stanford does not appear on any other official roll. He is listed as being slightly wounded at Churubusco (*Charleston Courier*, 22 September 1847).

## **ORGANIZATION OF THE PALMETTO REGIMENT—December 1846**

Colonel—Pierce M. Butler

Lt. Colonel—James P. Dickinson

Major—Adley H. Gladden

### **THE COMPANIES**

Co. A—Sumter Dist., “The Sumters,” Capt. Francis Sumter

Co. B—Chester Dist., Capt. R. G. M. Dunovant

Co. C—Kershaw Dist., “The DeKalb Guards,” Capt. Keith Moffatt

Co. D—Edgefield Dist., “Old 96 Boys,” Capt. Preston S. Brooks

Co. E—Abbeville Dist., “The McDuffie Guards,” Capt. J. Foster Marshall

Co. F—Charleston Dist., Capt. William Blanding

Co. G—Fairfield Dist., Capt. Joseph Kennedy

Co. H—Richland Dist., Capt. W. D. DeSaussure

Co. I—Lancaster Dist., Capt. Leroy Secrest

Co. K—Barnwell Dist., Capt. N. G. Walker

Co. L—Newberry Dist., Capt. James Williams

### **ABBREVIATIONS USED**

#### **Sources**

CHRL - Rosters in the SC Historical Society collection.

EL - Published broadside for the Chester Company.

ML - Published 1853 medal list.

NCd - There is no card on file at SCDAH.

NR - Newspaper roll. See the introduction for the appropriate newspaper.

PRB - Rosters bound into the Palmetto Regiment Document Book.

SH - *Roll of the Palmetto Regiment at the Siege of Vera Cruz*, Caroliniana Library [Deserters and those dishonorably discharged are assumed not to be on this scroll. Exceptions will be noted. Usually called the “Scroll of Honor”].

SL - The 1899 list of survivors compiled by Private Cantwell.

**Other**

‡ - Indicates the Palmetto Regiment medal is known to exist.

PO - Post Office

CH - Court House



Huffman, John W. Pvt, Co. E

Died 1 May 1847 on the road from Vera Cruz to Jalapa.

Huggins, Benjamin. Pvt, Co. I 116

Died [probably before 1 Jul 1847] at Jalapa.

Huggins, Thadeus. Pvt, Co. I

Survived, transferred to Co. C, from Alabama.

Hughs see Humphress

\*Humphress, E. Pvt, Co. I

Survived, Elisha Humphries on CHRL & NR, transferred to Co. C,  
Drummer Elisha Hughs on CHRL list for Co. C.

\*Hunt, Elisha. Pvt, Co. A

Survived.

Hunt, W. H. Pvt, Co. H 219

Died 4 Sep 1847 at Puebla, Wm on card & SH.

Hunter, Wm F. Pvt, Co. C

Survived.

Hussey, Shields E. Sergt, Co. H

Survived, 3rd Sgt, 2nd Cpl on card and SH, E. Hussy Shilds on card.

Hutcheson, William. Pvt, Co. L 341

Died 1 May 1847 at Vera Cruz, Hutchinson on PRB, SH & CHRL.

Hutchinson, B. B. Pvt, Co. H

Survived.

Hyllsted see Hillestead

Ingram, Charles A. Pvt, Co. I 117

Discharged 21 Dec 1847 in Mexico for disability, died on return,  
transferred to Co B.

Ingram, John E. Pvt, Co. I 252

Died 21 Aug 1847 at Puebla, transferred to Co. C.

Isenhower, Noah. Pvt, Co. B 145

Died 10 Jul 1847 at Perote, Isenhour on card & SH, Icenhower on NR &  
EL.

Jackson, Henry M. Pvt, Co. K

Survived.

\*Jackson, Pinckney J. Pvt, Co. L 344

Died 23 Jun 1847 at Puebla, J. P. on card & SH.

## COMPANY C-DEKALB GUARDS

Kershaw District, Captain Kieth Moffatt .

Baker, George W. Pvt	Gibbons, H. R. Pvt
Ballard, Francis M. Pvt	Gillman, George W. Pvt
Ballard, Thos Corpl	Harrall, John Pvt
Baskins, Benjamin F. Pvt	Harrison, Richard B. Pvt
Belcher, M. P. Sergt	Heron, James Pvt
Bennett, James C. Pvt	Hill, Jackson Pvt
Berry, Benjamin F. Pvt	Hill, Thomas Pvt
Blanchard, Z. H. Pvt	Holmes, Jonah R. Sergt
Bounds, James W. Pvt	Hopkins, William Pvt
Bradley, Jackson Pvt	Howell, Joseph H. Pvt
Bradley, Levy Pvt	Hunter, Wm F. Pvt
Brewer, Charles K. Pvt	Johnson, Jackson Pvt
Brewer, Eli B. Pvt	Jordan, John Pvt
*Bright, Ludwick B. Pvt	Kershaw, Joseph B. Lieut
Brodinax, John Pvt	Kirk, George R. Pvt
Cain, John Pvt	Love, Alfred Pvt
*Cantey, Jas. W. Lieut	Lucy, Samuel J. Pvt
Catoe, John M. Pvt	Malone, Wiley Pvt
Ciples, Peter Pvt	Marshall, James R. Pvt
Clanton, William R. Corpl	*McCaskell, Allen Pvt
Collins, Alexander Pvt	McCaskill, Finley Lieut
*Corkle, George M. Sergt	McCrenon, Benj F. Pvt
Creighton, J. A. Pvt	McFarland, Wm Pvt
Darby, Charles F. Pvt	McManus, Albert Pvt
*Dean, Joseph Pvt	McManus, Pleasant Pvt
Douglas, Charles Pvt	Meggs, Stephen Pvt
Dunlap, James Pvt	Miller, Alexander Pvt
Dunlap, John Pvt	Moffatt, Keith S. Major
Durdin, Elisha B. Pvt	Moorefield, Charles H. Pvt
Durdin, James M. Pvt	Moosely, Amos Pvt
Dyson, John Pvt	Moosely, Marshall Pvt
Fitsimmons, Thos Pvt	Nelson, William Pvt
Ford, R. Pvt	Nettles, Jackson Pvt
Gay, John M. Corpl	Page, Wm Pvt

Hoyt, Otis, 61.  
Huamantla, 104.  
Hudson, Jacob W., 124.  
Huger, Benjamin, 95; and Aztec Club,  
176, 177; sword for, 168; sword of, 170.  
Hunter, Charles G., 59, 59n.  
Hunter, William, 37, 37n.  
Hunter, William F., 116.  
Hutchinson, T. L., 29, 149, 174.

## I

Illinois, 7.  
Illinois regiments, 65n.  
Independent Fire Engine Company, 166.  
Indiana, 7.  
Ingraham, Duncan Nathaniel: sword for,  
168–169.  
Ingraham, Nathaniel, 168.  
Inspector of seacoast batteries for South  
Carolina, 137.  
Isla de Sacrificios, 48.  
Ixtlaccihuatl, 73.

## J

Jackson, Andrew: presentation vase of,  
134, 138, 148, 184.  
Jackson, Henry M., 187.  
Jalapa, 42, 53, 63–65, 69, 70, 117; garrison  
at, 66, 69.  
Jamieson, Milton, 61–62.  
Jesup, Thomas S., 57.  
Jewell, William, 102n.  
Johnson, Governor David, 29, 39, 118,  
126n, 134n, 174; and medal, 143–144.  
Johnson, L. C., 111–112.  
Johnson, P. M., 132.  
Johnson, Private, 112–113, 114, 117.  
Johnson, William S., 43, 47, 50n, 59n, 66,  
67, 67n, 70–72, 71n, 72, 73, 81n, 84, 89, 91.  
Johnston, Joseph E., 48, 97.  
Johnston, William B., 13.  
Jones, Adjutant General, 37.  
Jones, James, 17n, 131.  
Jones, Joseph A., 187.

## K

Kearny's Army of the West, 18.  
Keenan, William J., 122, 145, 145–146.  
Kenaday, Alexander, 179–180, 181, 181n,  
182.  
Kendall, Mr., 69n.  
Kendell, George W., 69.  
Kennedy, J., 118n.  
Kennedy, Joseph, 75n, 113, 191.  
Kennerly, Jack, 127n.  
Kentucky, 7.  
Kentucky companies, 65n.  
Kershaw Company, 13n, 39n, 70.  
Kershaw, Joseph Brevard, 36–37, 137, 138.  
Kershaw Troop, 27.  
Kershaw's Brigade, 137.  
King, William S., 9.  
Kirk, A., 76n.  
Kirk, George, 76n.  
Knight, John W., 187.  
Koszta, Martin, 169.

## L

La Fayette Artillery, 126n.  
La Piedad, 94.  
Laffite, Pierre, 4n.  
Lafitte, Jean, 4n.  
Lake Chalco, 80, 81.  
Lake Chalcothe, 80.  
Lake Texcoco, 80.  
Lake Xochimilco, 80, 81, 82.  
Lally, Folliot T., 104, 104n.  
Lamar, Mirabeau Buonaparte, 5.  
Lancaster Company, 22n, 39n, 70.  
Lancaster Volunteers, 27. *See also*  
Lancaster Company.  
Landro, José Juan, 52, 66.  
Lane, Joseph, 104–105.  
Las Vigas, 66.  
Lawrence, William, 37.  
Lee, Robert E., 48, 81, 83, 84, 88n, 95.  
Leonard, Patrick, 123, 151.  
Levy, Orlando L., 187.  
Lexington Company, 13n, 22n.