

THE BATTLE OF MONTERREY

Urban Operations During the Mexican War

When picturing urban operations, tanks, large cities, and tight quarters may come to mind. Although urban operations are prevalent in modern warfare, the U.S. Army actually received a glimpse of operations in this type of environment 163 years ago during the Mexican War.

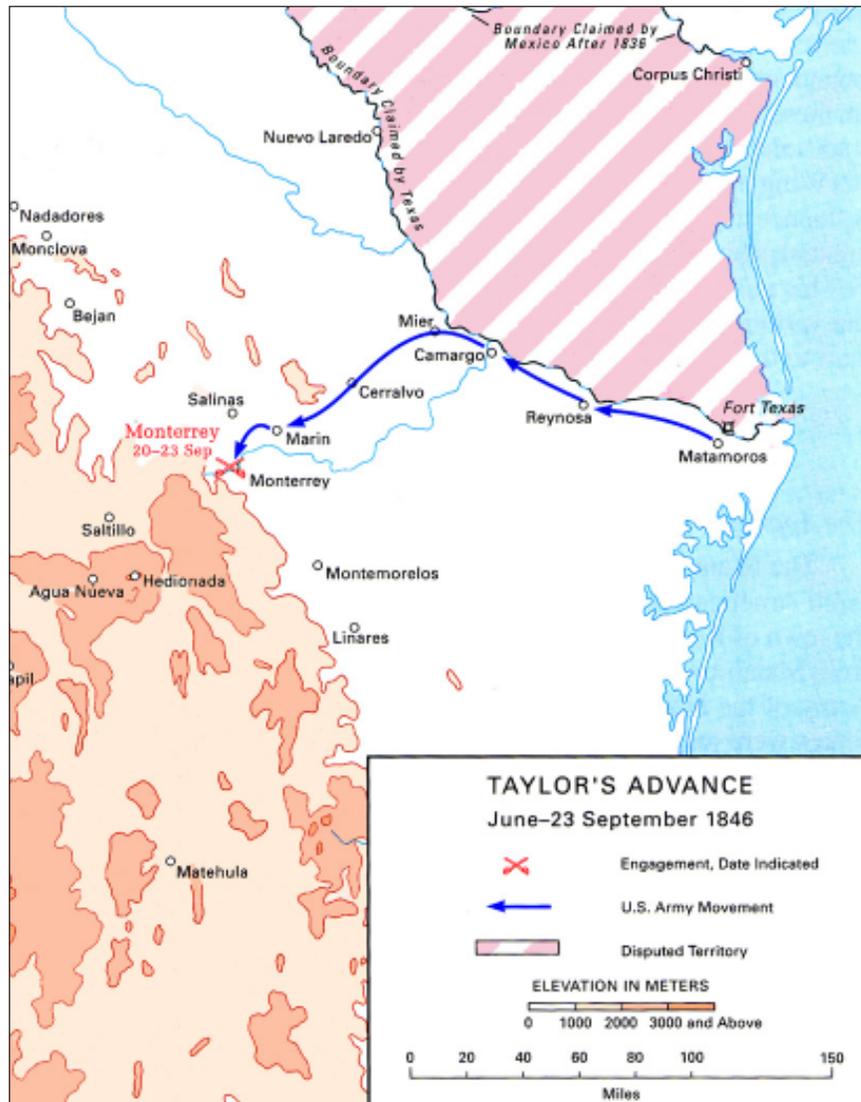
The battle of Monterrey, which occurred 19-24 September 1846 gave U.S. forces a taste of city fighting and allowed them to develop tactics which would be used in future conflicts.

General Zachary Taylor, the future 12th President of the United States, led an Army of 6,000 Soldiers on a trek to Monterrey, starting in Matamoros in June 1846. Accompanied by Texas Rangers, the group used the Rio Grande for part of the journey with most of the infantry “sent to Camargo via steamers, while the artillery and dragoons traveled overland,” wrote Stephen A. Carney, in his U.S. Army Center for Military History brochure *Gateway South, The Campaign for Monterrey*. In all, it took three months for the U.S. forces to reach Monterrey.

“The city of Monterrey was a veritable fortress. Its buildings were made of stone, with flat-topped roofs and straight streets, making each house a strongpoint,” stated John S.D. Eisenhower in his book *So Far From God*. In addition, the city had numerous fortifications at critical points around town. The largest was “an uncompleted cathedral, known to the Americans as the Citadel or the Black Fort because of its dark, thirty-foot-high stone walls ...,” wrote Carney, who also noted that it could hold 400 Mexican soldiers and about 30 guns. In all, Carney estimated that more than 7,300 Mexicans manned positions around the city.

When they reached the outskirts of the city, the Army was split into two sections: General William Worth would lead half into the western sector of Monterrey, and General Taylor would lead the rest into the eastern sector.

Worth’s forces were the first to be engaged as they clashed with the Mexican cavalry in the western end of the city on 21 September. Some of the American forces took up a defensive position behind a fence, which proved to be a winning tactic in the battle. Worth’s men defeated the 200-men Mexican cavalry in



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only 20 minutes and went on to take Federation Hill with few casualties.

Things didn’t go as easily for Taylor’s group on the eastern front that day. In order to reach the city from that side, the Americans had to cross about 500 yards of open ground where they would be exposed to artillery from the Citadel and another fortification, La Teneria (tannery).

“In one concerted effort, the regiments rushed across the level ground toward the city. Exposed to artillery fire the entire time, they broke into smaller groups to avoid taking heavy casualties,” wrote Carney. “Once inside the city, the units became further isolated and lost all semblance of cohesion.”

The city’s narrow streets were difficult to navigate, and Mexican infantrymen fired down at the Americans from notches cut into the buildings’ flat roofs. Hearing the gunfire, Taylor sent in more



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A painting depicts the fighting that occurred on the third day of the battle.

reinforcements, and the U.S. forces were able to clear La Teneria.

The next day, Worth's forces continued pushing into the city and cleared Independence Hill and Obispado (Bishop's Palace) while Taylor's forces rested and planned their next attack, according to Carney.

On 23 September, house-to-house sweeps of Monterrey started. Using lessons

learned from the first day of fighting, the soldiers avoided the streets and maneuvered through the houses. explosion would wipe out what Mexican troops were on the bottom floor ... and the troops would then rush up the steps to the rooftop."

Although it took a lot of time to clear each building this way, the tactic worked well, according to Carney, and Mexican soldiers retreated towards the city's central plaza. Mexican General Pedro de Ampudia then realized he had no escape route and

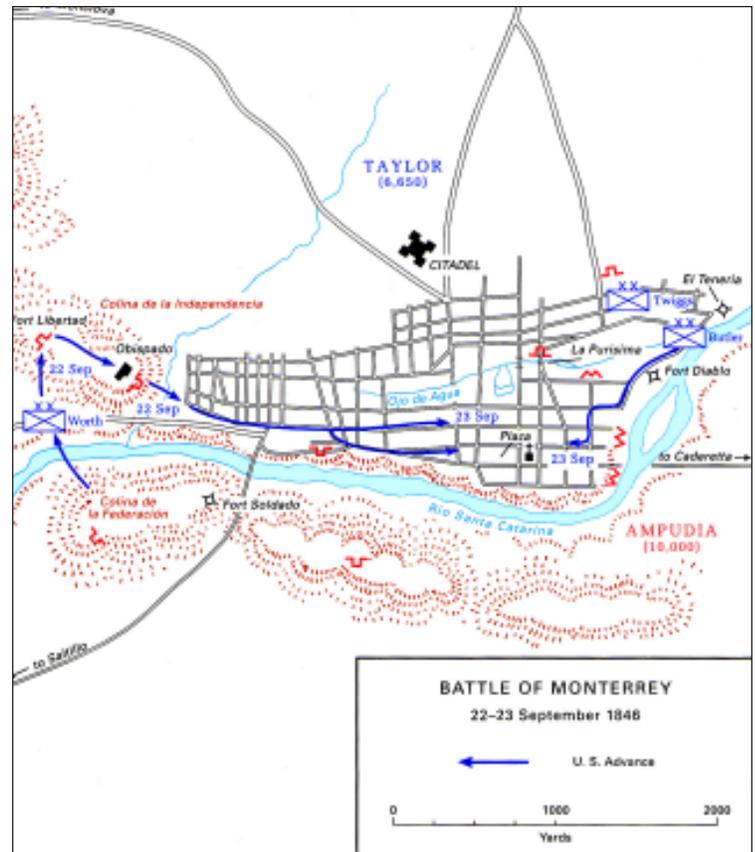
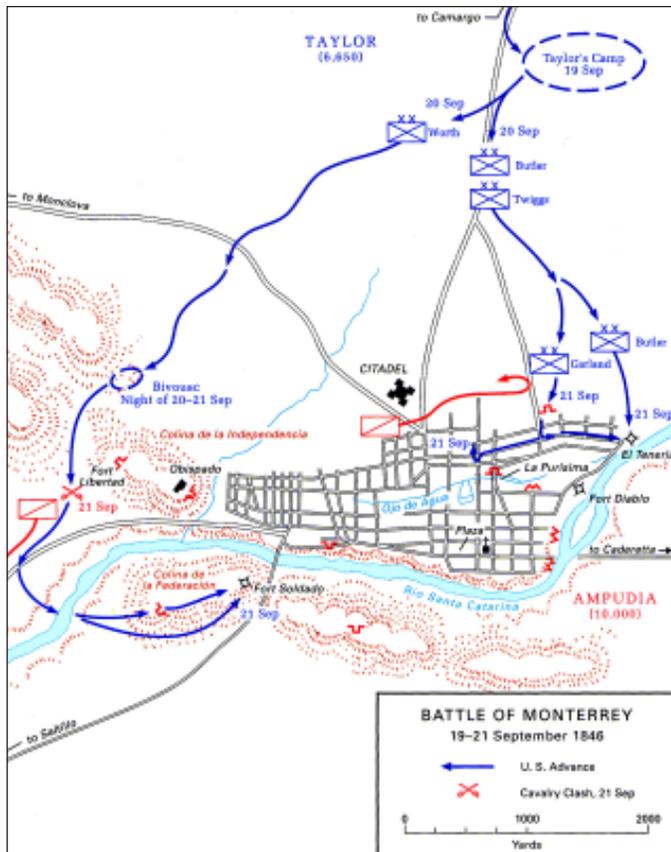
began proposing terms for a surrender.

In the three days of fighting, casualties on both sides were high; the U.S. forces lost an estimated 120 killed, 368 wounded, and 43 missing while the Mexicans had 367 killed and wounded.

Despite the high casualties, the battle was a great success for the U.S. Army, according to Carney.

"For the third time in four months, it had faced a numerically superior enemy fighting from well-established defensive positions, only to emerge victorious," he wrote. "The battle at Monterrey also provided practical experience in urban combat. As the war progressed, more operations would occur in heavily populated areas. The need to avoid street by street advances and instead to burrow through the walls of buildings would become principles that U.S. forces would resort to again later in this and future conflicts."

Chris Hudgison, an editorial intern with *Infantry Magazine* from Columbus State University in Columbus, Ga., contributed to this article.



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