H-Net Reviews
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Lawrence R. Clayton, Joseph E. Chance, eds. *The March to Monterrey: The Diary of Lt. Rankin Dilworth, U.S. Army: a Narrative of Troop Movements and Observations on Daily Life with General Zachary Taylor's Army during the Invasion of Mexico.* El Paso: Texas Western Press, 1996. xxv + 119 pp. $12.50 (paper), ISBN 978-0-87404-198-9.

Reviewed by Adrian G. Traas (U.S. Army Center of Military History)
Published on H-War (November, 1996)

A Mexican War Diary

The publication of this small diary provides an account by a young army officer, 2d Lt. Rankin Dilworth, of daily events during the early period of the Mexican War, sometimes referred to as the Mexican-American War. Dilworth, a recent graduate from the United States Military Academy (Class of 1844), wrote his first entry on April 28, 1846, at Jefferson Barracks, Missouri. His last entry was made at Monterrey, Mexico, on September 19, 1846. Unfortunately, the infantry lieutenant's observations of the war and daily events ended abruptly on September 19, the day General Zachary Taylor's army approached Monterrey. Dilworth was mortally wounded on September 21 when his regiment made a diversionary attack on the fortresses scattered along the eastern side of the city. He died six days later at the age of twenty-four.

His transit to the war zone was typical of the soldiers deploying from various regions of the United States. Dilworth recorded his steamship voyage down the Mississippi River, from St. Louis, with a stop at Vicksburg, to New Orleans. He then traveled by Gulf steamer to Brazos Santiago, where he disembarked on May 12, several days after the battles of Palo Alto and Resaca de la Palma. Dilworth joined General Taylor's army at Matamoros and soon found himself taking part in the long, hot trek overland to Monterrey. Along the way he inserted remarks about the terrain, trees and plants, and the houses and inhabitants of the regions traversed. Stops took place at Reynosa and Camargo, where Taylor assembled his army for the final leg of the march to Monterrey. Like many men who had volunteered for service in Mexico, Dilworth had high expectations of glory. Also typically, however, he experienced sickness, fatigue, privation, and early death.

Although his diary was primarily a military chronicle, it reveals the mid-nineteenth-century cultural values of a young man. He referred to the girl he left behind, and like most romantically inclined young men of his time he was intrigued with the beauty of Mexican women. For example, during the march to Matamoros he observed:

"At our camping ground there was a senorita who was by far the hansomest female that I had seen since I parted with E[mily] M.M. She was dressed in a loose white dress and walked like a queen. One of my sleeve buttons came off, and she volunteered to sew it on. When she had finished it, she drew my arm towards her mouth. I modestly held back when I saw a pair of lips that could not be surpassed approaching my hand, but she only wanted to bite off the thread" (May 23, 1846, p. 19).

As for military observations, Lt. Dilworth's comments provide insights of military life and combat during his era. His last entry on 19 September 1846 notes the move and early action outside Monterrey:

"… We were about three miles from the city. In about two miles we came to a halt and found the advance returning to encamp in the rear for there was no water to be found in the front except under the guns of the city.… We were then told that the Texas Rangers who had joined us yesterday were in advance and had passed up and had a skirmish with some Lancers and General Taylor was a short distance in the rear of the Rangers. After seeing that there was no water, he turned with his staff to return when a battery opened on them. A twelve pound ball struck the ground a short distance from them and bouncing came about ten feet from the General. I saw the ball. It was iron. They had got out of copper. Some twelve shots were fired at the Rangers when they ceased. We encampted in a woods of pecan trees about three miles from the city" (p. 67).

Dilworth's small diary, which measures about six by eight inches, was discovered by a descendant in materials belonging to his sister who had received his personal effects after his death. The editors intruded as little

as possible on Dilworth's composition, using standarized spelling or brackets to ease understanding.

The diary portion of the book is a short 68 pages, with the introduction, conclusion, notes, index, and bibliography taking up the rest. The introduction provides contextual background, and the notes provide information including an outline of the curriculum at the United States Military Academy, explanations of geographic names, short biographical notes on individuals mentioned in the diary, and descriptions of other items peculiar to the time. There is also a five-page bibilography. The two maps give an idea of the route Dilworth followed. Unfortunately, there apparently is no portrait of Dilworth. The drawings depict some scenes showing the uniforms of the period.

The publication of such a diary is appropriate. It adds to a number of published personal reminiscences, diaries, reports, and letters by participants of the Mexican War. These include the letters of George G. Meade, report and memoirs of John C. Fremont, reminiscences of P.G.T. Beauregard, and the recollections and drawings of Samuel Chamberlain. After all, this is the 150th anniversary of the beginning of a war (and Dilworth's death) that had a major impact on the United States and Mexico.

Copyright (c) 1996 by H-Net, all rights reserved. This work may be copied for non-profit educational use if proper credit is given to the author and the list. For other permission, please contact H-Net@h-net.msu.edu.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the list discussion logs at:
http://h-net.msu.edu/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl.

Citation: Adrian G. Traas. Review of Clayton, Lawrence R.; Chance, Joseph E., eds., *The March to Monterrey: The Diary of Lt. Rankin Dilworth, U.S. Army: a Narrative of Troop Movements and Observations on Daily Life with General Zachary Taylor's Army during the Invasion of Mexico.* H-War, H-Net Reviews. November, 1996.
URL: http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=681

Copyright © 1996 by H-Net, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the Reviews editorial staff at hbooks@mail.h-net.msu.edu.