

Experiences of a Civil Engineer Under Gen.

Walker.

To the Editor of the New-York Daily Times:

Knowing the deep interest felt by the public at the present time in matters connected with Nicaragua and the movements and probable success of General WALKER, and further, that your paper thus far has given to the public the earliest and most accurate information upon these matters, I have written up an account of my personal experiences and observation in Nicaragua, which I trust will prove acceptable to your columns. The major part of the statements appearing in the public prints have proceeded from interested and prejudiced parties, some of whom never saw Nicaragua, and from soldiers of General WALKER, who, in their zeal for his interests have blinded their eyes to the real facts of the case, or disaffected soldiery who have not hesitated to place upon the public the most unblushing and atrocious falsehoods.

I have not been a soldier under General WALKER, although I have seen "some service" under him, but in the capacity I have filled in Nicaragua—that of Civil Engineer—I have had abundant opportunity of familiarizing myself with the country in all its features and details, and thoroughly posting myself as to the present position and resources of General WALKER and the probable destiny that awaits him in his present strife for dominion over Nicaragua. What I wish is more particularly to lay before your readers some of my experiences and observations as Civil Engineer, embracing an account of hostile attacks made upon the corps to which I was attached, and our straits in consequence and "hair breadth 'scapes" of which no account has been published. The details of battles fought in Nicaragua during my sojourn there—although in some of the latter battles a participant—I shall not essay to give, as they have already been published in the TIMES with careful and extended—and I may add—correct minuteness. In addition to my own experiences, all I wish to give is a brief statement of General WALKER's present position in Nicaragua, the number and strength of his army—the number and efficiency of the allied forces, and the probable crowning result of the present struggle in that country.

I left New-York in December, 1855, and arrived in San Francisco in the month of June succeeding. In San Francisco I formed the acquaintance of Captain BELL, who was getting up a company of recruits to go to Nicaragua. The Captain desired me to accompany him to Nicaragua, and promised a position for me in the engineer corps, under the employ of the Government. I accordingly embarked with him and his company—the latter numbering sixty three recruits—on the 5th of August, on board the steamer *Sierra Nevada*, for San Juan del Sur, at which place I arrived on the 19th of the same month. In the course of a few days I received an appointment as an assistant in the engineer department at Rivas. In this department there were ten in all, five in the engineering corps, and five in the hacienda department. They were all young men, and all good jolly fellows. The haciendas which that department were engaged to survey, were some twenty-five in all, ranging from 100 to 1,000 acres. We were located on the outskirts of Rivas, at the Melancho hacienda. We remained in quiet possession of this hacienda, pursuing unmolested, our surveys about three weeks. Having enough to eat, tolerable shelter and tolerable beds, with prompt payment for our services, and a liking for good jokes and good aguadaiente, to say nothing of the delicious climate, the time passed very swift and merry with us. At the end of three weeks a friendly native informed us that a marauding party of Chamoristas were intending to attack us. We heeded the warning by saddling our horses and posting a strong guard. About 8 o'clock on the evening of the day we received the warning we suddenly heard the sound of loud and continued firing. Judging from the direction from which the sound proceeded we concluded that it must be an attack on the Aguadiente Mill, a mile and a half distant from us. This mill was a large building erected for the manufacture of aguadaiente by CHAMORRE, the leader of the Chamorista party. At this time it was in the possession of Gen. WALKER, under the immediate direction of Messrs. TENBROCK and BRITS, who still continued the manufacture there of aguadaiente from which was supplied all the aguadaiente used in WALKER's army. From the number of shots fired we concluded that there must be a large attacking party, and prepared ourselves at once to leave. Additional celerity was given to our movements upon receiving shortly afterwards the positive announcement from the mantedor of the hacienda that a body of soldiers had assembled in town and were intending to attack us. We jumped into our saddles and took, as it fortunately proved afterwards, the only street that was free from the advancing enemy. Proceeding to the beach, some ten miles below St George's landing, finding ourselves unpursued we there encamped during the night. Meanwhile, to put the attacking party on the wrong scent, we left two horses saddled on the hacienda among the plantains to give the impression that they had been just left there and that we had taken ourselves to the bushes for concealment.

In the morning, for the purpose of learning what had been done by the marauding party, we proceeded to St. George for the purpose of gaining this information. On arriving about a quarter of a mile from the landing, at a turn in the road, we met a party of lancers, some forty in number. They at once attempted to surround us, and were so sure of effecting their object that they did not stop to unslung their guns from their backs. We at once put for the beach and they pushed after us pell-moll. Seeing that they were not going to get around us as easy as they supposed, they unslung their guns and commenced firing at us, but, luckily, without effect.

We directed our course down the beach towards Virgin Bay. Finding that the lancers were fast gaining upon us, we were obliged to leave our horses and take to the woods. By the aid of the thick bushes we managed so effectually to conceal ourselves that the enemy were unable to find us. We lay in our concealment all night. Several times during the night we heard them near us, cursing at their ill luck in not finding us. We expected every moment to be discovered and captured. When morning arrived we saw nothing, however, of the enemy, and issued forth from our concealment, and began to look up the river for a suitable fording place. We met a native and inquired who had possession of Virgin Bay. In the reply of the native we mistook the Spanish word *amigo* (friend) for *enemigo*, (enemy,) and supposed, therefore, that Virgin was in the possession of the enemy. At this time we knew that it was daily expected that the Costa Ricans would take possession of the Transit.

Owing to this fact, and our mistaking the reply of the native, we did not go to Virgin Bay but headed about for the Half-way House, as it is called, located about midway between Virgin Bay and San Juan del Sur. On our arrival at the Half way House, we were informed that General HORNSBY, with the First Infantry, had returned the morning previous to Virgin Bay, and was then in possession of the town.

At the Half-way House we were regaled with the sight and taste of food, which our stomachs relished inwardly after a fast of over fifty hours. We rested here about eight hours, which we found very comforting after our wearisome walk of over twenty miles, through thick brushwood and cactus hedges. With our feet irritated and swollen from the attacks of jiggers, our clothes and flesh torn by the sharp cactus thorns, and, having had no refreshing sleep or food during the time mentioned, the condition in which we found ourselves was very far from enviable or consoling. For all this, however, added to the loss of our horses and surveying instruments, we were quite a jolly party subsequent to our repast. After resting ourselves, we set out in good spirits for Virgin Bay. Upon arriving within about a mile and a half of the town of Virgin, we observed ahead of us some half a dozen natives with guns. From their appearance, we supposed that wrong information had been given to us, at the Half-way House, as to Virgin being in possession of General HORNSBY. We took to the bushes for concealment, and lay there all night. In the morning we espied a party of Americans coming along the road, and ascertained from them that the original information imparted to us at the Half-way House was correct, and that Gen. HORNSBY was then in Virgin with a force under his command. Upon this information we immediately went to Virgin Bay, where most of our surplus surveying instruments had been previously left. At Virgin we found Gen. HORNSBY, with about 150 men. We were furnished with comfortable quarters, and in compliance with instructions from the head of the Hacienda department, entered upon a series of surveys. We continued these surveys without interruption for two or three months. The provisions furnished us by the Government lacked the variety and ample quantity and solidity of that we had been accustomed to in the States, but still as we were much better supplied

than the regular soldiers during most of this time, we did not much complain. Having completed our surveys here we were ordered to report ourselves at Gen. WALKER'S head-quarters at St. George. We remained at the latter place until Gen. WALKER moved his head quarters to Rivas. Shortly after our arrival at Rivas our engineering corps was disbanded. The disbandment was ordered because General WALKER had no occasion to bring our services into requisition at Rivas, and because, as shown by our previous experience, it was dangerous for us to extend surveys into the country from the liability of attacks from marauding parties.

It is proper to mention here that upon our return to Rivas we learned from the monador of the hacienda we had previously occupied and so suitably vacated, that the sound of our horses' hoofs had scarcely died away before the hacienda was completely surrounded with a force of about three hundred horsemen. These horsemen took two streets leading to the hacienda, completely blockading them, and had it not been for our good fortune in choosing to hit upon the other street as our avenue of escape, we should unquestionably have been captured and butchered. We were told that their special object was to waylay and slaughter us, supposing that in our capacity as engineers under WALKER, we were not only his most important abettors in the erection of barricades and fortifications, but that we were also giving away the lands of the country to soldiers and others emigrating there. Subsequent to the disbanding of the engineer corps there was nothing special to induce me to continue my sojourn in Nicaragua. My associates in the corps, without a single exception, as also myself, set ourselves about getting away as soon as possible. We found this not so easily effected as we imagined, Gen. WALKER was not backward in letting us know that he considered his claims upon our services not terminated. The large arrears remaining at this time unpaid to us for our services as engineers, with the discovery of the fact that there was no likelihood of their being squared up, formed an inducement with a view to avoid further engagement in the service of a man who could not pay promptly. The inability to pay we knew arose from his means having been crippled, inasmuch as we were all paid up promptly at first. For myself I felt no inclination to enter WALKER'S army, and did not, although, before getting my passport and leaving Rivas, I fought as volunteer in two or three engagements. I got my passport on the 2d of last March, and left Rivas on the same day for San Juan del Sur, leaving the latter place in the steamer *Sierra Nevada* for Panama, on my return again to my friends and my native State. Some of my fellow engineers I am fortunate in getting passports, still remain in Nicaragua. One, whose disgust and daring had reached a corresponding attitude, tried desertion and was successful.

Gen. WALKER had at Rivas, when I left there, 800 effective fighting men, and 150 sick and wounded. Half of the latter, in case of emergency, were able to bear arms. His cavalry numbered 300 men. There was abundance of arms and ammunition, and in case of a failure of the latter, a large supply of saltpetre, charcoal and other ingredients and all the facilities requisite for the manufacture of gunpowder. The artillery comprised three six-pounders, one Spanish six-pounder, one Spanish four-pounder, two twelve-pound howitzers, and four six-inch mortars. A steam engine and machinery for the manufacture of armaments of war was put in the arsenal department a few days before I left, so that there will be no difficulty in keeping up an adequate supply of cannon, gun balls, &c., for any additions Gen. WALKER may have to his present command. As I came away they had commenced making a 12 $\frac{1}{2}$ inch mortar. The force under Col. LOCKRIDGE, on the river, was reported at Rivas as being between 1000 and 1500 men. This I am satisfied was an over-estimate, and that the actual number of efficient men under Colonel LOCKRIDGE does not exceed 600 men.

Gen. WALKER'S whole force, therefore, when I left was about 1,500 men, all told. As for the sympathy of the native population, it is unquestioned that it has very materially diminished towards Gen. WALKER since the burning of Granada, owing to the unnecessary destruction of property at that time. Events may occur to turn their sympathy towards General WALKER again. It is certain that the allied forces cannot count on their aid further than what results from their impressment into their service. The total allied forces in the field did not count over 3,000 men when I left—half of whom were at St. George and the other half on the river. By a statement brought by a courier to San Juan del Sur a few hours previous to the departure of the steamer *Sierra Nevada*, this force had been diminished about 500 men in an attack upon Rivas. As for the arms and ammunition at the command of the allies, I can make no positive statement. I can say this, however, that a major part of them do not know how to use their arms to the best advantage, and that a force of fresh men under General WALKER of one-fifth their number would serve completely to rout them in an open engagement.

I have stated that I was at Rivas, General WALKER'S head-quarters, some four months before leaving Nicaragua. I never enjoyed better health in my life than during my stay there, on this as also the previous occasion referred to. Rivas is situated on a fine piece of table land, and from its elevated position free from the sickness to which those living in towns on the low lands are exposed. The houses at Rivas are mostly one-story high, and built of adobes, manufactured from straw and clay. Those of any pretensions have spacious courts, and are separately fortified with extended barricades. General WALKER occupies the house formerly occupied by President MORA. It is nearly in the centre of the town, and commands the best view of the place. Gen. WALKER is very affable to the men under his charge, privates as well as officers. The soldiers are drilled twice a day and generally under his personal supervision. Only on one occasion while I was at Rivas did the General make a formal speech to his soldiers. There was no special occasion calling for the speech, only that he was apparently seized with a humor to speak, and did so. He assured his men that their prospects for the future were in his view eminently encouraging. That they would ultimately vanquish their enemies he pronounced sure, and that they would let fly the Nicaragua flag from the walls of San Jose and Guatemala, it was only necessary to be firm in the cause in which they had embarked, and wait a fitting time to strike their blows. He alluded to the occasional desertions, and attributed it to the fact that the men had not enough fighting to do to suit them. He promised that he would give them plenty of active service when the proper time came. He also told them that he should soon be in receipt of all the additional recruits he needed and an unfailing supply of provisions, and last, but not least, plenty of funds to keep them promptly paid.

Altogether, the army at Rivas were in the best of spirits when I left, and, excepting a few who were disaffected, expressed a determination to stick by General WALKER. The latter and his officers were full of enthusiasm and hope. The only essential drawback was a slight falling off in the supply of provisions and clothing, but this was expected to be only temporary. The certainty of a "good time coming," was undoubted, and it was looked for to arrive speedily, when they would have all they wanted—men, money, provisions, and all the needed sinews of an offensive war, to vanquish at once their enemies, and establish themselves glorious victors over a most glorious country. Buoyed up with this expectancy, the more enthusiastic officers and privates I parted with there, were enjoying themselves and their camp life hugely; there were drills and martial music to keep the blood stirring and give a spur to ambition: there was music and dancing for pastime; jolly stories and jolly songs; quiet strolls and quiet reading, and crowning all superb days with a cloudless sky, the temperature none too warm, and none too cold, but a glorious medium diffusing exultant comfort and spirits, and such nights, cool, balmy, and inducing to refreshing repose.

No intended engagement against the allied forces by Gen. WALKER'S army was talked of before I came away. Gen. WALKER is waiting the arrival of an addition to his forces, before he intends making any decisive move. His plan of future operations I was told is already marked out, and that the same will be carried into execution as soon as he gets the needed means and men. His immediate advisers have only been apprised of this plan. Individually, I have great faith in WALKER, and think he is bound to succeed. While he fights his battles under a golden sky I prefer, however, to fight my "life battle" under a sky where there is more of clouds and less of strife and uncertainty. I am most respectfully yours, &c.,

THEODORE C. STRYKER.