The Walker Expedition

I wonder how many men are living of the party numbering about 250 adventurous young Americans, who left New Orleans late in December 1856 on the Steam Ship “Texas” to join Genl. Wm. Walker’s forces then operating in Nicaragua. Of the party on the vessel I recall the names of Maj. Bob Ellis, who had been acting as recruiting officer for the Expedition with office on St. Charles near Common Streets, N.O. Col. Mancosas; Capt Berrington, commanding a company I think from Kentucky with Lieutenant A. R. Coleman, Capt Reynolds & 1st Lieutenant Bentley & company from Mobile. Capt Kingwell & company from Arkansas, Capt Bob Harris with company, raised in & about New Orleans. With this company I was identified as 1st Lieutenant. There were a number of young man in there [sic] companies from other states, besides those mentioned. I recall the names of Levi T. Jennings, from Indiana, Marshall Taylor; -- Wilmot from Indiana or Illinois, Drayton & Morse from Ohio, Wm. H. Wilkins; Jim Williams from some point in La. All anxious to secure, some of the milk & honey; mineral wealth &c &c; with which the land was said to be overstocked. All of this come after the termination of the struggle to secure a good & stable government; for the success of which, struggle, we were led to believe a large number of the natives were engaged with Walker to secure. At this time Genl. Walker has been opperating [sic] in the country for about a year, with varying prospects & a few weeks before our part of the Expedition left New Orleans he had been cut off from the States & his base of supplies; being left on the Pacific side of the country & the Enemy occupying the Fortified places in possession of the Transit Line of Steamers on the San Juan River between Genl. Walker & Greytown. We arrived at Greytown early in January 1857 during the rainy season. Our vessel entered the mouth of the San Juan River, passing a number of British war vessels, mostly 20 Gun Sloops, anchored in & about the mouth of the River—with the 3 Decker Orion anchored several miles out at sea. On our arrival at Greytown, we were joined by Col. Sam Lockridge & Capt [Julius] De Brissott (called the Comodore) [sic] Col. Lockridge assumed command of our party & continued in command until the Expedition closed. I have been informed that Col. Lockridge was killed at Val Verde in Arizona during our Civil War. For fear of wearing you readers, I will dwell briefly on the main features of our Expedition, trusting this article may catch the eye of some who participated in it. Our first emancipation after landing was on Punta Arenas; opposite Greytown & across the mouth river; where the Transit Co. of New York had some work shops to look after the repair of their steamers, transporting passengers via the isthmus to California— During our sojourn there, we resurrected a sunken & abandoned sheet iron hull of one of the little steamers of the Transit Co & by means of facilities afforded by their shops & cast off material found there we restored the little steamer to service & called her the “Rescue.” We had some accessions to our party from New York & New Orleans about every 30 days—we also had some interviews with the British officers, whose duty was to discourage the business in which we were engaged & offered us free passage to any of us who were disappointed & wanted to return to the United States.

After several weeks of preparation, we started up the river, with all of our force & material that the Rescue would carry safely; with the purpose of reopening communication with & rejoining Genl. Walker— we established a camp & called it Camp Anderson (after Col. Frank Anderson of New York) on the river just below Fort Sarapiqui; said to be occupied with about 700 of the enemy, and the 1st place with which we had to contend. We had to make several trips with the Rescue to get all our forces & materials up to Camp Anderson. Then after some preparation, we advanced to the attack of Fort Serapiqui, situated in the triangle of the Serapiqui & San Juan rivers with only low guardians guarding 2 sides for defenses— We were repulaid there & were forced to retire carrying some of our wounded in blankets suspended from poles. Among those was Col Rudler, who afterwards recovered; I was present with Genl Walker in his land expedition to that country, when captured & shot by the Hondurans. After our retreat we returned to the river & struck camp. While the rain was pouring down, first around the bend in the river, below the Fork. Here we rested about one week & during this time recovered & buried the bodies of Lieutenant Homan & others who were killed in our first attack on the Fort & made it so hot for the Enemy, that all this and posts were called in & compelled them all to stay very close, within the limit of this entrenchment. At the end of this week under cover of night our force was divided a small number under Maj Bob Wheat, with several pieces of small cannon were moved up & occupied a prominent hill, across the San Juan river from the Fort. The balance of our force were crossed over the San Juan river & moved up & occupied positions from mouth of Serapiqui River up & along the river, opposite this beneath works of logs??? Filled with earth & debris. The river as I remember it was about 200 feet wide. We opened the ball at crack of dawn, our force taking advantage of trees, logs, stumps, & every thing that would afford shelter from the enemy bullets. One exchange of comtions continued until about good dark & we slept on one guard, intending to renew it in the morning. During the night the enemy pulled out & we entered the Fort the following morning in grand shape. We made a prompt move on Fort Castillo some 20 or more miles above on the river & captured it leaving a small Garrison under Col Titus (a recent arrival) to hold it. The balance of our force returned to Fort Serapiqui our new base while we were awaiting reinforcements & making the preparations, the Enemy returned against Fort Castillo in sure force as to surprise Col Titus & his small garrison & compelled them to evacuate the place & so the enemy got possession again. After several weeks of preparation & with the arrival of a Hundred or more fresh men from the States, we went up against Fort Castillo again—In the meantime, the enemy had not been slow in gathering together a goodly force & strengthening every weak point in their line of defenses. With a force of about 250 to 300 men on our two boats, we went up & were disembarked at Machuca rapids, a few miles below the Fort & moved out with guides to get in their rear. We got so close to the Enemy, we could not only see him, but hear them shouting defiance behind their barricades. We were halted for a rest & final preparations before the assault should begin. It was at this juncture that news of Walker & the remnant of his force, being taken on board for the US Sloop of War Saratoga on the Pacific Coast & being then on their way to the U States reached us from the rear, via Greytown. For the while only our most prominent leaders were made cognizant of the news—and why we drawn off from the prospect of a most lovely fight & countermarched back to Machuca.

We didn’t learn until later & After a consultation of our superior officers & we were informed by them of the situation & the importance of shedding all superfluous weight & getting out of the country as soon as possible; as the enemy, being relieved of Walker, would concentrate all his attention on us & he was so numerous & so well equipped (By Gt Britain) that we would hardly afford him a square meal. Of our race down the Rivers “The blowing up of the J. N. Scott,” killing & wounding about 65 men of our small party, a few miles above Fort Serapiqui which we had abandoned, not having force sufficient to leave a garrison. Of our reoccupation after that Fort, hurried preparations for burning our dead, caring for our wounded, & getting out of the river to Greytown with only the ??? before the enemy should be on us. At Greytown where we had left a number of British Sloops of War, we had reasonable hope of being protected from complete annihilation which we knew the Enemy would visit upon us, if not restrained by a superior force. We beat them out only a few hours and reoccupied Punta Arenas as this was thought best by our Commanding Officers. It came out about as we had piqued, but for the action of the British officers, backed up by a goodly force of marines, none of our party would have lived to tell this story. Here, at Punta Arenas, we were without supplies either of medicine or provisions only for a few hours. Here again our British cousins came to the rescue. While they took special occation [sic] to let us know; that we were no better than pirates & not entitled to any sympathy &c &c. They furnished us some provision & medicine for our sick & wounded & not forgetting a goodly amt of soup & told us if we would wash up & cut our hair & shave, that they would manage in some way to start us back to our own country in a few days. Some of our sick & wounded, as well as some of our officers, took refuge in Greytown & were left there. The balance of us numbering about 250 men were divided between two British Sloops of War, the Cossack & the Tartar & taken over to Aspinwall where our British cousins expected to find American Steam Ships, upon which to send us home. They did find one “The Grenada,” bound for New York via Havana, Cuba who agreed to take the party of us, brought over by the Cossack., but would not consent to take any more. I was of the party on the Cossack & was transferred at Aspinwall to the Grenada to make the trip on her to Havana, Cuba. There our party were divided again. We were told that all who wanted to go to New York, could continue on the Grenada & those who wanted to go to New Orleans could transfer then & there to the “Empire City” bound for New Orleans. I came back home on this latter vessel and I need not tell your readers, that it was a most happy return for many hearts. The British vessel the Tartar